

Washington Examiner

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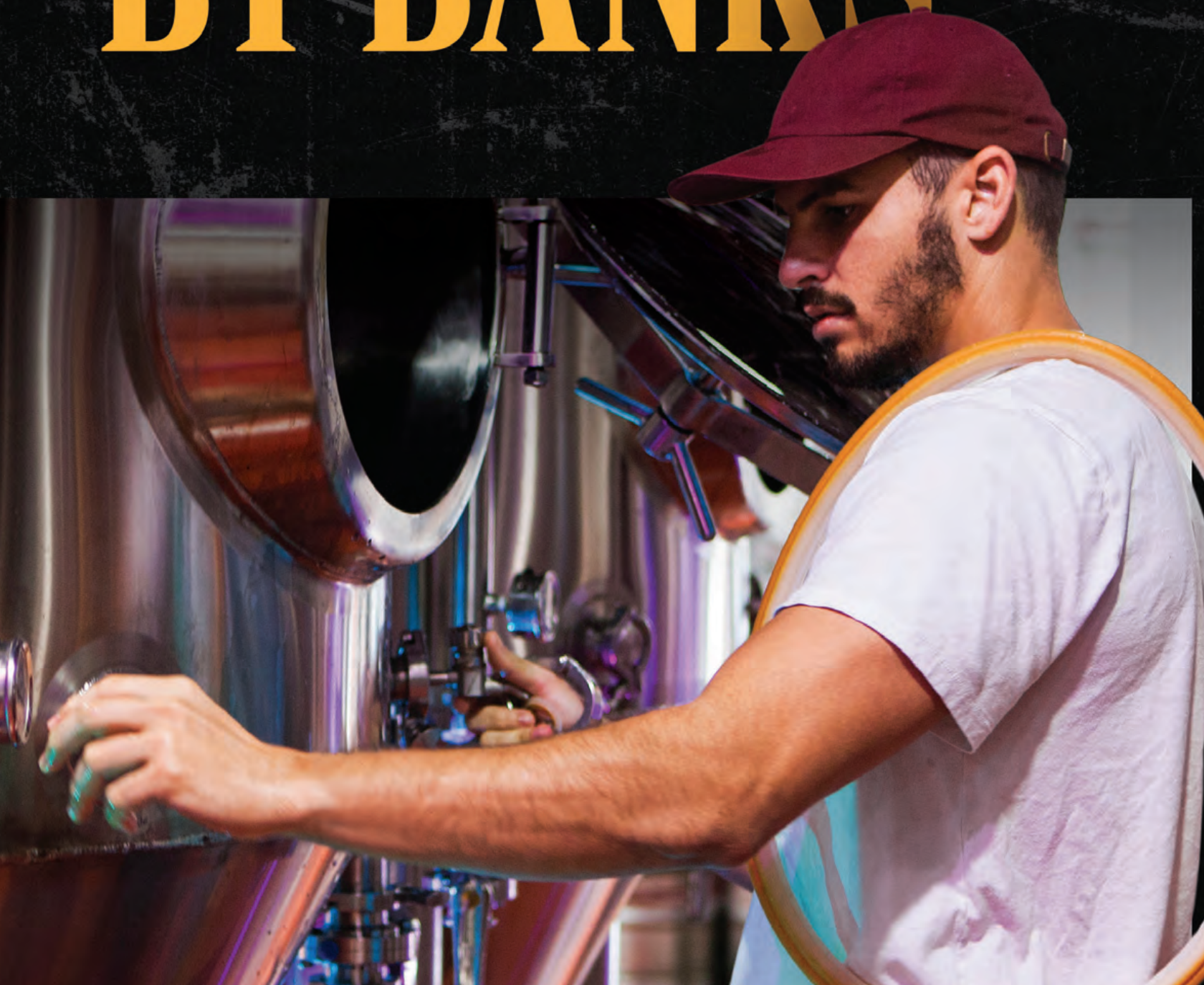
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Zelensky risks US aid over Ukraine corruption law

Ukrainian resistance to Russia's brutal invasion deserves strong international support, but it cannot be unconditional. A new law signed by President Volodymyr Zelensky to undermine the country's anti-corruption efforts weakens the strong case he has made in other respects for support of Ukraine.

Ukrainians deserve immense credit for the courageous defense of their freedom. They have lost 100,000 of their brothers and sisters since Russian President Vladimir Putin's onslaught began in February 2022.

But a free and open society requires protection not simply from foreign invaders but also from internal enemies. And since Ukraine's restoration of sovereignty in 1991, its foremost internal enemy has been corruption.

Too many Ukrainian politicians have spent decades raiding state accounts and cultivating relationships with business interests that trade government contracts for lucrative kickbacks. Unfortunately, Zelensky's record and that of his predecessor,

Petro Poroshenko, are weak on confronting this scourge. Until today, Zelensky has focused his anti-corruption efforts on placating Ukraine's international supporters with occasional flashy actions. Now, however, he is backtracking on even limited anti-corruption steps.

On July 22, Ukraine's parliament, in which Zelensky's "Servant of the People" party has a majority, passed a bill eliminating the independent law enforcement agency and a prosecutorial office tasked with high-level corruption investigations. Zelensky signed the bill quickly so anti-corruption units fell under his attorney general, whom he appointed.

Zelensky said the law is necessary to root out Russian infiltrators. But evidence for this is scant, and it appears to be an excuse that is both absurd and, in the context of Ukraine's war, immoral. No credible evidence links Zelensky to corrupt activities, but most observers believe the new law is designed to protect his political allies from prosecution. The anti-corruption units targeted have been investigating former

defense minister and close Zelensky ally Oleksii Reznikov, for example.

Ukrainians don't believe Zelensky's thin justifications. They have taken to the streets to protest in tens of thousands, demanding that the law be scrapped. After the horrific losses in three years of war, they don't want their democracy slowly stolen from within. What happens next may be crucial in determining Ukraine's future.

Facing growing protests, Zelensky appeared to backtrack on July 23. Without offering much detail, he now says he will introduce a new bill to strengthen the independence of the two units. The Trump administration and its European allies should exert all necessary pressure to see that he does so. How to exert that pressure?

First, Trump should issue a joint statement with European leaders warning that the international community will not provide funding or political cover for a government that puts its own narrow interests before the interests of its people. A G7 statement expressing concern is grossly inadequate. Second, if Zelensky refuses to budge, the United States should persuade its allies to suspend financial loans and aid to Ukraine until the law is overturned. Zelensky is a courageous but arrogant and obstinate leader. He must be made to understand that he will not win this argument without a terrible cost to his own interests.

If necessary, Trump should make clear that he will renege on his recent commitment to provide Ukraine with more weapons. Alone or alongside the Europeans, that threat will snap Zelensky to attention. He knows that if Trump takes this heavy step, domestic political pressure on the Ukrainian president will grow toward the breaking point. Imagine the fury of the Ukrainian people if their president insists on protecting his cronies from corruption, even if it costs troops on the front lines the weapons to defend themselves and their homeland.

Until now, Ukraine has deserved robust Western support to face down Putin's imperialist effort to shred its borders and democratic authority. But Zelensky must understand that if he turns against his people and the rule of law, Western support will be withheld until Ukrainians find a more responsible leader to take his place. ★



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Russiagate mastermind John Brennan must be held accountable

Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard's recent document dumps expose the determined and persistent campaign of former CIA Director John Brennan to use and abuse his office for the political aim of defeating Donald Trump's presidential campaign in 2016, trying to undermine Trump after he won, and weakening or derailing Trump's presidency before it even began in 2017. Lying to Congress is just the beginning of Brennan's malfeasance, and he must be held accountable.

Brennan admitted that he became obsessed with keeping Trump out of the White House in July 2016. He gathered every scrap of information and dirt he could find, regardless of its source or validity, to make the case that Russian President Vladimir Putin was determined to help Trump win the 2016 election. By September 2016, two months after WikiLeaks published hacked Democratic National Committee emails, Brennan was already on Capitol Hill, selling his Russiagate narrative to lawmakers. Republicans were rightly suspicious of the CIA director's obviously partisan efforts to use the intelligence community to undercut the Republican nominee's campaign.

As Brennan prosecuted his anti-Trump crusade, the FBI and Department of Homeland Security separately began warning state and local elections officials that Russian actors were probing online election information systems for weaknesses. That same month, an intelligence community assessment was published. It concluded that while "many adversaries are capable of detectable, disruptive cyberattacks against computer-enabled U.S. election infrastructure, it is most likely beyond the means of our adversaries to use cyberattacks to affect a covert and widespread shift of the recorded votes to deci-

sively favor a particular candidate during the 2016 U.S. presidential election."

That same report went on to conclude "that Russian intelligence services were behind the compromises of the DNC and DCCC networks," but it noted that the FBI and National Security Agency had only "low confidence" in the assessment that Russia was behind the leaking of that data. The September assessment did not assert that Putin preferred either candidate to win the election.

Instead, the report found "that Russia is motivated to exploit the period surrounding the U.S. presidential election either to try to shape the U.S. political environment or to advance other Russian interests. For example, Putin may simply wish to make the U.S. electoral process appear illegitimate, or to undermine the legitimacy of the president-elect, in order to strengthen Moscow's hand."

A subsequent draft intelligence community assessment was scheduled to be released in early December but was pulled before publication. It found "that foreign adversaries did not use cyberattacks on election infrastructure to alter the U.S. presidential election outcome this year" and "no evidence of cyber manipulation of election infrastructure intended to alter results." The draft assessment did note that the "U.S. intelligence community has high confidence in its attribution" of the DNC hack to "the Russian government," and "most IC agencies assess with moderate confidence that Russian services probably orchestrated at least some of the disclosures of U.S. political information." No motive was determined in the assessment.

While the intelligence agencies worked on the December assessment, senior intelligence community officials, most likely Brennan, pushed the unfounded narrative that Russia's express purpose in hacking the DNC and releasing the information

was to help Trump win. The intelligence services did not know this. It was Brennan's fable. Former President Barack Obama ordered former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper to produce a new broader assessment of the 2016 election, including an answer to the question, "Why did Moscow direct these activities?"

Even before this assessment was produced, indeed even before it was started, there were intelligence community leaks, one could suspect from Brennan, to news media, asserting that Russia's aim was to help Trump. According to a June 2025 memo composed by the CIA's Directorate of Analysis, there were "multiple procedural anomalies in the preparation" of the subsequent Jan. 6, 2017, assessment, including "stringent compartmentation," "excessive involvement of agency heads," and "departures from standard practices."

Behind all of these "departures from standard practices" was Brennan, who was determined that the end product must conclude that Russia intended to help Trump specifically. To reach this predetermined conclusion, Brennan insisted on using faulty information, including from the Steele dossier, a fact he later lied about under oath to Congress. An email from the CIA's deputy director for analysis warned Brennan at the time that the inclusion of the Steele dossier risked "the credibility of the entire paper." Brennan ignored these warnings and forged ahead with his political escapade, and in direct contravention of his sworn duty.

Once Brennan had the assessment with his predetermined Russia motives published, he and his allies in the Democratic Party and the press used it to push the false narrative that Trump colluded with Russia to interfere in the 2016 election, thus seeking to undermine the legitimacy of Trump's presidency, and successfully hobbling it for four years. This is exactly what Russia hoped to accomplish all along. It wanted public faith in America's democratic system undermined, and it achieved this with the help of malicious actors such as Brennan and others of his ilk.

Brennan abused his office and lied to the public and Congress, and the Department of Justice must hold him accountable. ★

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Obama, Brennan, and the 'collusion' lie

The recent release of documents on the Donald Trump-Russia hoax makes plainer than ever the damage former President Barack Obama has inflicted on our democracy.

Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard referred the matter to the Justice Department for possible criminal prosecutions because, she says, "there is irrefutable evidence that details how President Obama and his national security team directed the creation of an intelligence community assessment that they knew was false."

John Brennan, then the director of the CIA, knowingly and aggressively used flimsy intelligence against Trump and hid exculpatory evidence to push a false narrative, first to try to defeat then-candidate Trump in 2016, and then to hog-tie him for four years once he had moved into the White House. It was a deliberate effort to thwart the will of citizens using malicious lies and to present this as a vital defense of democracy.

Although Brennan seems clearly to have been the most dastardly agent in the whole affair, Obama's fingerprints are all over it as well. On Dec. 9, 2016, after Trump had won the election, the president ordered an intelligence assessment on how, not whether, Moscow influenced the election.

That very day, before any new assessment could even begin, the Obama administration began leaking stories to its media handmaidens, such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, which published major stories for which there was no evidence about President Vladimir Putin working with the intention of helping Trump.

From there, the collusion narrative took off. And because there was nothing solid to support it, Brennan knowingly used the concocted evidence in the Steele dossier. His underlings advised him not to do so, as it was evidently a malicious fairytale, but he went ahead anyway and spread its filth to bespatter Trump and his administration. The fiction was that Trump colluded with the tyrant in the Kremlin.

It was that Dec. 9 meeting, which included all Obama's senior advisers, that changed the direction and sharply increased the darkness of the story Americans were told about the man they had chosen as their next president. That was the pivotal moment, after which Trump was hounded relentlessly and dishonestly by the Democratic establishment, including the legacy news media, the permanent bureaucracy, the intelligence community, the deep state, and whatever else you want to call it.

It may be that Obama did nothing more after first directing fearsome federal powers against Trump. If so, he will be protected by presidential immunity, for his request for a new, if biased, intelligence assessment was clearly an official act for which he cannot be prosecuted.

But that protection does not extend to those underlings who heard the Dec. 9 presidential order as the starting gun for the relentless pursuit of the legitimately elected president.

Even if he will not face any legal consequences, Obama deserves to suffer reputational damage. He is supremely capable of presenting himself as a suave, sophisticated, and cerebral leader — an "articulate and bright and clean and nice-looking guy," as former President Joe Biden once notoriously put it, but beneath the glossy carapace is a down-and-dirty knife fighter.

Others may end up getting punished for what they put the country through, as they should be. But Obama was the eminence who made it possible, and that should never be forgotten. ★

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Your Land



Crack Addict Spends Three Hours Blaming Everyone Else For His Problems

The most sober a crack addict ever sounds is when he's talking about the science of, well, crack. Amid three hours of screaming about George Clooney, the illegal immigrants responsible for cleaning his post-bender hotel rooms, the "f***ing dictator thug"

Donald Trump, and his father's entire campaign staff, Hunter Biden only finally found peace when he initiated an extended chemistry lesson on the differences between crack cocaine and powder cocaine.

"The only difference between crack cocaine and cocaine is sodium bicar-

bonate and water and heat, literally," the former first son said during a freewheeling podcast interview with YouTube host Andrew Callaghan. "People think of crack being dirty — it's the exact opposite. When you make crack, what you're doing is you're burning off all the impurities so that it combines with the sodium bicarbonate, which makes it smokable, that's all."

Biden, whose storied career of marathon drug and alcohol abuse began with a 1988 drug possession charge when he was still a teenager, is indeed in his element waxing poetic on the beauty of getting blitzed. Alas, he seethes and rages about everything else, especially as it

pertains to his father's aborted failure of a presidential reelection bid.

Clooney, who waited until after Joe Biden infamously imploded during his 2024 debate against Trump to admit what everyone saw onstage, is "not a f***ing actor," according to the younger Biden, but a "brand." According to Hunter Biden, "James Carville hasn't won a race in 40 f***ing years," and David Axelrod and the *Pod Save America* bros are grifters "who have been dining out on the relationship with [Barack Obama], making millions."

It's not that this analysis is wrong, but rather that it's dead right, if only because if there's anyone on the planet who understands mediocre "white millionaires" who have spent their entire lives riding the coattails of another politician's success, it's Hunter Biden.

Despite the ravages of addiction evident on his once-handsome face, from the blur of an iPhone, Biden looks like his father and sounds like him, too, both in the tenor of his voice and what he's actually saying. Acting as a cipher for the whole Biden patriarchy, he is telling us that, in the world according to his family, the Bidens are never at fault, never have agency, and are constantly the victims of nefarious actors. He blames Joe Biden's debate night debacle on an ominous "they" who allegedly gave the then-president too much Ambien to perform. The

collapse of the world order under his father could be blamed on Mossad, which Hunter baselessly claimed knew about the impending Oct. 7, 2023, massacre and allowed it to go ahead. Republicans are now to blame for deporting the illegal immigrants whom Hunter Biden graciously says are responsible for the "food on your f***ing table" and washing your dishes.

For nearly a year now, Democrats have been wandering through the wilderness in pursuit of an escape from the dark shadow of Biden's failed presidency. Keen to ignore the concrete ideological causes of inflationary fiscal policy and a foreign policy that opened the southern border and destabilized the world, Democrats have begun to delude themselves into believing their problem is one of branding, not principles. With "brat summer" dead and gone, some left-wing strategists have leaned into "dark woke," urging politicians to grow out grizzly beards and drop more f-bombs.

Hunter Biden's media tour, laden with profanity and rage and utterly devoid of self-reflection, is a good test case of how well this strategy to avoid dealing with the substance of the party's problems will actually work. By any indication, it simply won't, at least not for anyone without the name Biden.

—By Tiana Lowe Doescher

The Married Athlete Advantage

Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts may already be the reigning Super Bowl Most Valuable Player, but according to *Good Morning Football* host Kyle Brandt, his next season just might be his best — all because Hurts was one of many NFL athletes who got married this offseason.

"So many players got married this offseason," said Brandt, a former Princeton University running back. "In fact, I can't remember seeing so many announcements of players getting married."

"And in an era where we measure everything about athletes," Brandt continued, "can we possibly measure the effect that getting married has on those athletes on the field? I say this as a guy who has been married 15 years this fall: Getting married can change your psyche, your sense of self, your sense of responsibility. But can it change you as a professional football player?"

Brandt then showed that the answer is a definitive yes.

San Francisco 49ers tight end George Kittle, Brandt tells us, married his wife, Claire, after spending eight months in the friend zone when they first met at the University of Iowa. He played football for the Hawkeyes while she played basketball. After two years playing in the NFL, George and Claire walked into an Iowa City, Iowa, jewelry store together and tied the knot, right then and there. The very next season, Kittle became a first-team All-Pro, beating out Travis Kelce of the Kansas City Chiefs, while racking up career highs in receptions per game and reception percentage.

Brandt highlighted half a dozen other players who made significant leaps in their careers the season after they got married, including defensive end Maxx Crosby of the Las Vegas Raiders who posted career highs in sacks and tackles for loss after he married his wife, Rachel, and former Eagles tight end Zach Ertz, who posted career highs in touchdowns while being selected to his first pro-bowl and winning the Super Bowl in the season after he got married.





Philadelphia Eagles' quarterback Jalen Hurts hugs his then-fiance Bry Burrows after the Eagles defeated the Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl LIX at Caesars Superdome in New Orleans on Feb. 9.

Not to be outdone, his wife, Julie, won the FIFA Women's World Cup after they got married and was named soccer's Female Player of the Year that same season.

As fun as these anecdotes are, there are actually some academic studies that support the premise that married athletes outperform their single counterparts. One study examined NBA players between the 2004 and 2015 seasons. Using an "efficiency" rating incorporating points, rebounds, assists, steals, blocks, shooting percentage, and turnovers, researchers found that married players performed 16% better than their unmarried counterparts of the same age — age was found to decrease a player's efficiency over time, which is expected in a physical pursuit such as professional sports.

Why might married athletes perform better than their single counterparts? Brandt already touched on some possibilities. "Getting married can change your psyche, your sense of self, your sense of responsibility," as he said. But

maybe having that spouse with you every day also just makes you a better person. When you are married, you are part of a new team. And you do not want to let your teammate down. Your wife becomes the reason you push yourself harder and train longer. And she is also there to be your most honest critic and fiercest fan.

So don't bet against the newly married Hurts this season — unless he happens to be playing against Green Bay Packers quarterback Jordan Love, who also got married this offseason.

—By Conn Carroll

California Will Punish Businesses for Being Robbed

California is not exactly a shining beacon of how the criminal justice system should operate. Believe it or not, the state can always come up with

ways to make things worse.

The California legislature is pushing ahead with a bill that would allow cities to fine businesses up to \$650 for the return of shopping carts that are stolen from those businesses. Current law permits only a \$50 fine, which is considered a charge for the city locating and keeping custody of the cart. Adding \$600 in possible fines and charges has been requested by San Jose, the new mayor of which has some good ideas for dealing with homelessness, but also has a budget crisis that these charges would likely go to addressing.

Businesses will have three days after being notified to pick up their recovered shopping carts or face the massive new fine. For context on what these businesses are dealing with in cities with rampant homelessness, one Safeway in nearby San Francisco once had 160 shopping carts stolen in one month. San Jose sees some 2,000 shopping carts go missing every year.

Needless to say, fining businesses hundreds of dollars for being stolen from is not a particularly healthy way to view the criminal justice system. This can't even be blamed solely on California Democrats, as all 10 Republicans in the state Senate voted to pass this bill alongside 29 Democrats. The bill has since been pushed along by the Local Govern-

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ment Committee in the state Assembly.

This has actually been standard procedure in California, though. In 2022, San Francisco resumed its policy of fining businesses for being graffiti-covered. Those businesses were forced to pay to have the graffiti covered up or pay the hundreds in fines the city would levy. In Oakland, Chinatown businesses were being hit with thousands of dollars in fines for being the victims of graffiti, as recently as even a few months ago.

This new shopping cart change serves the same function as those graffiti regulations. Let Democrat-run cities, poorly run with high taxes and even higher spending, bleed businesses for even more money for being the victims of crime that those cities refuse to prosecute (or the state of California and its “criminal justice reform” prevents them from being seriously prosecuted).

The result, as always, is a worse experience for Californians. Just as when deodorants and shampoos were locked up in businesses while California permitted rampant shoplifting, businesses will not heavily restrict the use of their shopping carts. They may offer fewer carts or limit where they are used. Some may use those fancy carts with wheels that lock up when pushed too far, which often triggers when shoppers are trying to push the cart to their car in the parking lot. The change may even add to

California’s rising cost of living, causing a little more inflation in California’s grocery prices.

California cities could simply throw the book at shopping cart thieves and stop wasting money so they have to rely on shopping cart retrieval fees, but that would be too difficult. Instead, California wants to punish the victims of crime further because that is the California way.

—By Zachary Faria

Bro Time

Before the sexual-assault claims against Justice Brett Kavanaugh totally fell apart, one of the knocks on him, wielded almost as evidence of his guilt, was that he went to an all-boys school.

When NPR set out last decade to define a “bro” (“a specific kind of fratty masculinity”), one of the criteria was a tendency to hang out with other dudes.

If you paid attention to the past 20 years, you noticed that the news media found something odd, even unsavory, about the sight of men hanging out with men. It’s exclusionary. It’s discrimination. It’s probably cultivating toxic masculinity, or something.

When an all-boys charter school

opened in Washington, D.C., the American Civil Liberties Union tried to block it. In recent years, the Boy Scouts, in the name of exclusivity, started taking in girls.

“These kids are exactly the same; they just happen to have ponytails,” one scout leader proclaimed.

Of course, girls are not exactly the same, and nobody believes that girls are exactly the same, which is why the Girl Scouts still exist as an all-girls organization.

Yet this double-standard has seeped into our culture: It’s good and necessary for women and girls to socialize, gather, learn, work, and play in single-sex groups, but it’s exclusionary and sexist for men and boys to do so.

Women and Democrats, particularly

Democratic women, believe that all-female groups are good for society, but don’t believe the same about all-

male groups.

Two-thirds of Democratic women in a recent Pew Research Center survey agreed that “all-female social groups have a positive impact on society,” while only one-third of these women believed the same about all-male groups.”

The self-contradiction here is dizzying: There’s no valid reason for men to exclude women (implying there’s no significant difference between men and women), and yet the rules about single-sex socializing are different for men and women (implying there is a fundamental difference between men and women).

The standard liberal argument in these contexts is about power differentials. But in social life and in education, women are not the oppressed minority. Women make up most college students, girls do better in high school than boys, and women have healthier social lives in their 30s and beyond than men.

Male loneliness is a crisis, and one root cause is surely the lack of guys’ nights, rounds of golf, and regular pickup games with the fellas. Too many millennial men absorbed a light sort of feminism and our culture’s over-developed fear of “discrimination,” so the idea of a book club for the guys seems somehow verboten.

Hopefully that’s changing. Hopefully, guys will realize they need guys and a little time away from the ladies.

—By Timothy P. Carney



The Anti-ICE Rioters Don't Speak For Hispanic Americans

Fighting against assimilation and Latino success

By David Harsanyi

As brick-throwing radicals clash with police in Los Angeles, a masked man on a motorcycle rides into the picture, waving a Mexican flag as large plumes of black smoke billow in the background. This is likely to be the defining image of the 2025 anti-Immigration and Customs Enforcement riots.

It's unfortunate, and not merely because political violence has frequently taken hold of our cities' streets in recent years. The scene simply isn't emblematic of the Hispanic American. Indeed, all it does is foster anti-Latino and anti-immigrant sentiment around the country.

The immigrant experience is far better encapsulated by the Latino working in the Los Angeles Police Department or one who stood among the 2,000 National Guard members deployed by President Donald Trump to suppress the unrest. It might shock some people to learn that approximately 50% of our Border Patrol and about 25% of our ICE officers are of Hispanic descent.

Then again, unlike would-be Marxist insurrectionists who dream of Reconquista, Hispanic Americans tend to be patriotic. Latinos make up 27% of active-duty Marines. That percentage has

been growing. There are nearly a million Latino veterans of the two Gulf Wars.

It's not the average Latino American who advocates and funds anti-ICE protests. As with trendy leftist movements like "Free Palestine" and Black Lives Matter, progressive groups not only agitate for violence but bankroll it. Those "F*** ICE" packs filled with tactical gear and phone numbers for "jail support" that were handed out to "protesters" on a nightly basis in Los Angeles weren't paid for by the East Los Angeles family working to break into the middle class.

It's groups like the Service Employees International Union, ostensibly here to champion the plight of the American worker, that joined "allies" in the "Summer of Resistance." Now, let there be no confusion. The largest public sector union in the nation isn't merely resisting the law this summer; it is resisting the idea that borders or citizenship should matter. The recent Los Angeles riots, in fact, started after the arrest of David Huerta, the president of the California SEIU, who attempted to block a police vehicle that was entering a property to round up those who were breaking the law. He rallied the crowd to defy the police.

It's curious that activists who con-

flate legal and illegal immigrants seem only to care about one of those groups. Rioting and looting often took place in predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods within Los Angeles. Leftist organizations spur these inorganic uprisings because there's little public support for chaos.

Indeed, the Latino position on illegal immigration is getting more conservative, not less. A recent Ipsos-Telemundo poll, reflecting the trends seen in other surveys, found that 42% of Latinos support building a wall or fence along the entirety of the southern United States border. That position has jumped by 12 points since 2021. Thirty-eight percent of Latinos support sending every illegal immigrant back to his or her country of origin. That number has jumped 10 points since 2021. In addition, 64% of Latinos believe the president should be allowed to shut down the border unilaterally if there are too many immigrants attempting to cross it.

Those numbers aren't terribly far from the national average. Obviously, polls often don't tell the entire story, yet the trend is clear. There are likely numerous reasons why Latino attitudes are changing. Surely, none is less prominent than the fact that from 2021 to 2025, Democrats incentivized wave after

wave of migrants to overrun the border. Hispanic families bear the brunt of the trafficking, drugs, and gang violence that often accompany a porous border.

Moreover, newcomers who take the time and effort to slog through the process of becoming a citizen, which is no easy task, probably don't appreciate that others take shortcuts. I've met numerous legal immigrants over the years who vehemently opposed illegal immigration for that reason. And they have every reason to be angered.

Finally, there's an acceleration of Latino assimilation, which means a declining attachment to the old country. Hispanic Americans increasingly act like any other minority, primarily concerned about the future here at home.

Most evidence points to Latino immigrants assimilating more or less at the same pace as previous large groups of newcomers. Hispanic identity fades generationally. Millions of second- and third-generation immigrants from Latin America don't self-identify as Hispanic anymore. Latinos also tend to marry other ethnicities at high rates. Considering how the U.S. government has allowed, oftentimes incentivized, millions of illegal immigrants to overload Hispanic neighborhoods, undermining the prospects of integration, it's impressive.

Now, it should be noted that it's misleading to treat Latinos as a monolith, considering the wide ethnic diversity that exists within that designation. The Dominican and Mexican experience, for instance, is widely divergent. Yet one of the biggest miscalculations of the Left was to assume that all Hispanics would be in favor of border chaos and criminality solely due to their minority status. This kind of thinking is symptomatic of a party that's obsessed with skin color.

Years ago, President Ronald Reagan claimed that "Latinos are Republicans, they just don't know it yet." And in a few years, the Latino vote might well be up for grabs. The Associated Press found that Trump, who, mind you, made no secret of his position on the border or deportations, won 43% of the Latino vote (48% of men), which was an 8-point increase from the last presidential election in 2020. This shift was most pronounced in red states like Texas and Florida. If a similar movement takes hold in blue America, it could prove disastrous for Democrats.

Assessing this trend, political analysts like to contend that Latinos are the

ones "drifting" in a more conservative direction. It is far more likely that Latinos are abandoning Democrats because they're the ones drifting into an insanely progressive direction. Going "woke" hasn't proved particularly appealing to the "Latinx" community, as it were, who are predominantly Catholic (with a growing minority of evangelical Protestants) and generally hold normie views on the notions of family and gender.

Perhaps there is more to it as well. I'm not going to sit here and tell you that the average Latino is an adherent of Milton Friedman, but surely the socialistic turn of the American Left will often remind immigrants of the corrupt Third World leftist regimes they just escaped.

One thing we can quantify with some certainty is economic success. There is no place on the planet where Hispanics do better. It's not even close. Sure, it's become something of a creaky stereotype, but that's the reason millions of people often risk their lives to cross the border every year. Measured on their own, American Latinos rank as the fifth-largest economy in the world, growing at a faster rate than both India and China. According to a 2021 McKinsey and Company study, Latino wealth has grown by an average of about 7% annually for the past two decades, which is more than twice the rate of non-Latino growth. In recent years, Latinos have started more businesses per capita than any other racial or ethnic group in the country. In 2023, they created 36% of new businesses, though they are about 19% of the population.

You know who's not creating anything? The entitled socialist lunatics who are throwing Molotov cocktails at

the police.

Economic success is predicated on assimilation. We are the only country in the modern world to have assimilated a wide range of immigrants successfully on such a massive scale in a way that is beneficial for both newcomer and host. Latinos share the values that make it possible. Not everyone does. We would be achieving this goal even faster if the southern border were under control. It certainly won't be achieved by discarding the law or galvanizing people to break in or eliminating expectations that those who do come adopt our norms. That is a position shared by rioters and the mainstream Left.

Now, obviously, voting Republican isn't a requirement for loving your country. Flying a Mexican flag to protest the upholding of the law, on the other hand, is almost surely a sign that you do not. One shouldn't need to explain why the prevalence of foreign flags among rampaging radicals is problematic. It's one thing to fly the flag of the nation of your ancestors along with the American flag, celebrating a unique friendship with this country, and quite another to use the Mexican flag as the emblem of an invasion. And an unregulated, illegal mass migration that corrodes the sovereignty of a nation is, by definition, an invasion.

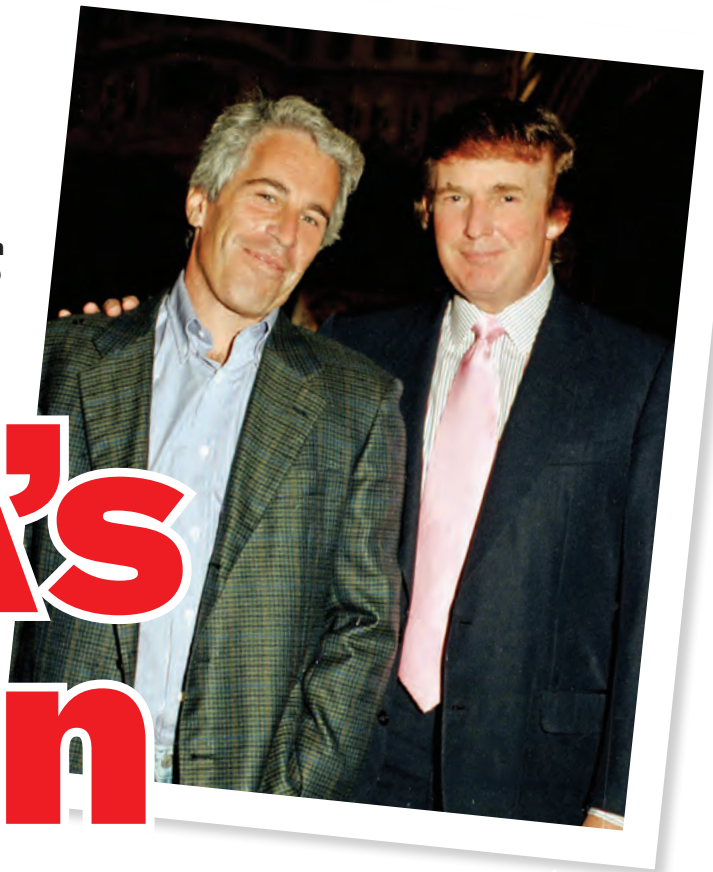
That is the goal of the Los Angeles rioter and his apologist. It's not the goal of the average American Latino. Let's make sure not to confuse the two. ★

David Harsanyi is a senior writer at the Washington Examiner.



ILLUSTRATION BY THOMAS FLUHARTY

Financier Jeffrey Epstein and Donald Trump at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, 1997.



MAGA's Epstein Stress Test

Tensions arise in the movement Trump leads

By Daniel Ross Goodman

The July heat wrapped Mar-a-Lago in a sultry haze, palm trees sagging under the weight of a Florida evening. Inside a briefing room, President Donald Trump faced screens flashing with X posts and cable news tickers, all dominated by the relentless specter of Jeffrey Epstein. Newly unsealed documents — birthday letters, '90s photos, and whispers of a "client list" — set the MAGA base ablaze. Loyalists cried deep-state sabotage, while others, spurred by Charlie Kirk's fiery calls for transparency, demanded answers, some casting wary glances at Trump himself. The uproar hasn't just been about Epstein. It has collided with raw anger over Trump's other bold moves,

such as bombing Iran's nuclear sites and resuming arms transfers to Ukraine.

The MAGA coalition, once an unbreakable force, is showing cracks. Can Trump hold it together? Or is this the prelude to a fracture that could reshape the movement's future?

Over the past few months, I've been covering the saga of Trump's second term, chronicling how his sportsman swagger has helped him defy impossible odds. He's an indefatigable fighter, spinning scandals into rallies with a maestro's touch. But this moment feels heavier. The persistence of Epstein's ghost, tangled with Trump's foreign policy pivots, has tested the limits of his charisma. MAGA's loyalty to him has been fierce, but this moment is proving that it may not be invincible. The question isn't just whether Trump can

navigate this storm — it's whether the coalition he's forged can survive beyond his presidency.

EPSTEIN'S GHOST AND KIRK'S CRUSADE

The Epstein saga is the story of a ghost that refuses to go away. His 2019 death in a Manhattan cell has sparked endless theories: It was ruled a suicide, but charges of murder and elite cover-up are never far behind. In 2025, with Trump's second term in full swing, new documents have landed like thunderbolts. The *Wall Street Journal* claims it has unearthed old Trump-Epstein ties, casual notes and shared "secrets" from Palm Beach's glitzy circuit, causing X to erupt in a frenzy. Trump, ever nimble, fired back: "Epstein was a creep. Banned him from Mar-a-Lago. No 'list' exists — fake



Pressing President Donald Trump for full disclosure: From left, Turning Point USA founder Charlie Kirk, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), and former Trump political adviser Steve Bannon.

news!” His Justice Department, led by Attorney General Pam Bondi, released a memo debunking the mythical client list. But the fire was already raging.

Charlie Kirk, the Turning Point USA founder and MAGA megaphone, poured fuel on it. On his podcast and in other media appearances, he has been demanding the release of all Epstein grand jury testimony, framing it as a test of “America First” principles. “Trump’s got to come clean on Epstein. We need every document out there, no excuses,” he said, rallying MAGA supporters who are hungry for truth. Insiders have whispered that Kirk’s pressure, amplified by online skeptics, pushed Trump to order the DOJ’s document dump, a move that briefly quieted critics but has sparked even more questions. Laura Loomer has doubled down, demanding that “we deserve the full files!” Steve Bannon, from his *War Room*, has called it a “mask-off moment.” Tucker Carlson has mused about possible cover-ups on his show. The base appears to have split, with the sides framing themselves as loyalists versus truth-seekers, with Kirk’s and Carlson’s crusades driving the wedge.

Trump’s past with Epstein undoubtedly muddled the waters. He’d partied with the financier decades ago, but he’d also cooperated with early investigations, unlike certain Democrats who were known to be regular passengers on the Lolita Express. His base knew this, yet doubts persisted. Though they may trust Trump,

they’ve also been wondering why Trump hasn’t released *all* of the Epstein files — unless he’s had something to hide? Because of these concerns, podcaster Brian Allen has warned of a “full-blown MAGA mutiny” if transparency falters.

Meanwhile, the legacy media have been feasting on the discord. The *Financial Times* reported a “split in Trump’s MAGA base.” *Politico* called it a “rebellion metastasizing.” The *New York Times* podcast claimed Trump has lost control of the narrative. They aren’t wrong to sense tension, but they’re overplaying its depth. Trump’s counter, doubling down on transparency while dismissing conspiracies, has shown he’s still in the

“**Legacy media have been feasting on the discord. The *Financial Times* reported a ‘split in Trump’s MAGA base.’ *Politico* called it a ‘rebellion metastasizing.’ The *New York Times* podcast claimed Trump has lost control of the narrative.**

fight. Kirk’s role, though, has added complexity: If even loyalists aren’t satisfied with Trump’s handling of the Epstein files controversy, how strong is Trump’s grip on his own movement?

FOREIGN POLICY FIRESTORMS

Epstein’s ghost merged with two seismic foreign policy moves. First, Iran. In June, Trump ordered B-2 bombers to level nuclear sites at Fordow and Natanz. “Obliterated,” he boasted on social media, casting it as a decisive blow to a rogue regime. Hawks like Mark Levin cheered: “Trump’s keeping America safe!” But the isolationist wing, the backbone of MAGA’s “America First” ethos, recoiled. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) called it a betrayal of anti-war promises: “Iran? Really? Thought we were done with this.” Bannon warned of a “quagmire.” A Trump voter quoted in *Politico* summed it up: “I’m with Trump, but bombing Iran feels like we’re back to 2003. Where’s the America First in that?”

The media amplified the divide. CNN noted a “MAGA split” over the strikes. *Axios* quipped that Trump was giving his base “whiplash.” But context mattered: Trump had warned Iran for months. His strikes were surgical. No ground troops were involved. He wasn’t George W. Bush or Joe Biden, blundering into endless wars. Still, the grumbling persisted, especially among purists who saw any foreign action as a betrayal of “America First” principles.

Then came Ukraine. Trump flipped the script, resuming arms shipments to Ukraine through NATO, funded by allies rather than U.S. taxpayers. He paired it with a threat — tariffs on Russia if President Vladimir Putin doesn't negotiate peace in 50 days. It's classic Trump: using leverage in lieu of simply giving handouts. But purists have cried foul. "Ukraine's a mess we didn't sign up for," Greene complained. "Trump's gotta keep America First, not fund foreign wars." Within MAGA circles, criticism is growing more vocal every day. "We're about to arm people we have literally no control over," Bannon railed on his podcast. "This is old-fashioned, grinding war in the bloodlands of Europe — and we're being dragged into it." Yet polls show Trump voters warming to the aid, especially since it isn't on America's dime. As Michaela Montgomery, a conservative activist, said at an Atlanta campaign event: "If it's not costing American taxpayers, I can live with it. But Trump better keep his promise — no more endless wars."

The media have loved the chaos, framing MAGA as a house divided. But Trump isn't just reacting — he's rewriting the story. He's forcing Europe to foot Ukraine's bill while pressuring Russia economically. It's a high-stakes gamble, and he's playing it with swagger. Still, the dissent, amplified by Kirk's push for transparency, is revealing a coalition under strain.

CRACKS OR GROWING PAINS?

The divide is palpable. Kirk has pressed hard on his podcast: "Trump's got to come clean on Epstein. We need every document out there, no excuses." Online, the tension has stretched. Dinesh D'Souza, a staunch Trump ally, has admitted on X that "the Epstein questions aren't going away. We need clarity, even if it's messy." Kirk's influence looms large, his calls for truth rallying skeptics while testing Trump's patience. The president, undaunted, told an Ohio crowd, "We're draining the swamp, not adding to it." The cheers had been loud, but not universal. Carlson, speaking at Turning Point USA's Student Action Summit, reflected the unease: "The fact that the U.S. government, the one that I voted for, refused to take my question seriously and instead said, 'Case closed. Shut up, conspiracy theorist,' was too much for me."

The cracks are real. Epstein's saga, fueled by Kirk, is exposing ideological rifts. "America First" purists — anti-elite, anti-intervention — are clashing with prag-

matists who trusted Trump's instincts. Iran and Ukraine deepened the divide, alienating isolationists who'd powered Trump's 2016 rise. The media have been piling on. ABC News asked why MAGA obsessed over Epstein. CNN called it a "loyalty test." They're half-right: Kirk's crusade risks alienating centrists who want results, not conspiracies. Foreign policy frayed the coalition's edges, with some voters feeling that Trump had drifted from the promises that drew them.

But Trump can't be counted out. His charisma, his ability to spin setbacks into victories, has held MAGA together. He's



Podcaster Tucker Carlson also called for Trump to make public all Epstein-related files.

the sportsman in chief, dodging punches like a UFC champ. Trump seems to have done enough to mollify his base — for now. His supporters have "largely rallied," the *Washington Post* conceded. Megyn Kelly nailed it: "MAGA fights Trump, then moves on." Like a married couple that has been deeply in love for years, they may have fights from time to time, even serious ones, but they never stay mad at each other forever.

THE FUTURE: UNITY OR FRACTURE?

Trump's sui generis personality has been a shield like no other. It's helped him survive impeachments, indictments, convictions, and assassination attempts. His battle-tested base has thrived on his defiance. But 2025 isn't 2016, or even 2024. Kirk's transparency push, coupled with foreign policy fights, signals

trouble. Epstein's ghost could continue to haunt Trump's term, especially if no "list" emerges. Isolationists, riled by Iran and Ukraine, might drift to new voices — Greene, Bannon, and even Carlson — if Trump leans too globalist and continues to be perceived as not coming clean on the full nature of his ties to Epstein.

Post-2028, without Trump, the coalition faces real peril. "America First" purists, those who backed Trump the Isolationist, energized by unanswered questions about Epstein, could split from pragmatists who backed Trump the Deal-maker. Possible heirs, such as Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, might struggle to bridge that gap. Trump's unique personality and his underestimated political instincts have held MAGA together. But without him, it risks fracturing into tribes — populists versus hawks, truth-seekers versus deal-makers. And without a way to banish Epstein's ghost from the White House, the movement could splinter for good. As Jack Posobiec warned at Turning Point USA's summit: "I will not rest until we go full Jan. 6 committee on the Epstein files. Every single client involved should have an FBI agent at their door."

Even House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), who typically marches in lock-step with Trump, echoed Kirk's calls for full disclosure: "It's a very delicate subject, but you should put everything out there, let the people decide it." Johnson has so far held off lawmakers seeking to preempt the administration and force the release of Epstein-related documents, but pressure is set to resume after recess.

Epstein, Iran, and Ukraine — these aren't just headlines. They're stress tests for a movement at a crossroads. Trump's coalition, built on distrust of elites, is facing a reckoning. Kirk's crusade and foreign policy fights are exposing fault lines that could widen. For now, Trump's charisma is holding the MAGA movement together, however tenuously.

For the moment, he's still the maestro, conducting a movement that thrives on his defiance. But the future? It's being forged in that fire, destined to unite behind Trump's chosen successor or splinter when his shadow fades. ★

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.

Colonial Ghosts and Arctic Dreams

Trump's interest and Greenland's hard choices

By Daniel Allott and Bethany Williams

President Donald Trump wants to buy Greenland again. Since returning to the White House, he has revived talk of purchasing or annexing the world's largest island from Denmark and refused to rule out using force to "get it one way or the other." He argues Greenland is vital to U.S. security.

Greenland may feel like an icy curiosity to most Americans, but who controls it could reshape Arctic shipping, missile defense, and power in the north. For all the criticism Trump's plan gets, the island is emerging as the next frontier in the contest with China and Russia.

The Trump administration is doing more than talking. In May, U.S. officials began exploring a Compact of Free Association with Greenland, a sweeping deal that could grant Washington expanded military access in exchange for economic aid and visa-free travel for Greenlanders. In June, the Defense Department announced that U.S. Northern Command would take over operational



Independence backer Kuno Fencker, a member of Greenland's parliament, in Nuuk, May 2025.

control of Greenland, a striking realignment Trump ordered.

These moves mark the most serious effort yet of the United States to formalize its Arctic influence. In Greenland, they've triggered not panic but calculation.

"We need to act," said Kuno Fencker,

a member of Greenland's parliament, the Inatsisartut, when we met him at a cafe in Nuuk. "We need to start the negotiations [for independence from Denmark] so we won't be annexed by another country."

Fencker's pro-independence Naleraq party won 25% of the vote in the elections this spring, finishing just behind Demokraatit, the center-right party now leading the governing coalition. Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen supports a slower path. "We don't want independence tomorrow," he said. "We want a good foundation."

Fencker fears that timeline will have Greenland inching toward freedom at the pace of its glaciers.

To him, Trump's provocations aren't threats but reminders: Greenland can't keep delaying hard choices. He's open to partnerships with the U.S., Denmark, China, and even Russia — as long as Greenland sets the terms. "We're the smallest player here," he said. "But we've got to be quick."

A semi-autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, Greenland has had the legal right to declare independence since 2009. But over half a bil-

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Our cab driver in Nuuk told us visitor numbers have surged. While most are welcome, he joked he'd charge us double if we'd voted for Trump.



Greenland's capital, Nuuk, where a third of the population lives, May 2025.

lion dollars in Danish subsidies, about \$10,000 per citizen, have kept that option theoretical. Fencker calls it “the fentanyl injection we get from Denmark.” Breaking free would mean weaning off it.

He knows the costs. Greenland has no military, little infrastructure, and a shrinking population. “It’s utopia to think Greenland can be fully independent,” he said. “We need partners. The only thing Greenland wants is sovereignty.”

As Greenland emerges as a strategic prize, its people find themselves pulled in conflicting directions. While much of the global focus is on Washington or Copenhagen, far less attention is being paid to what Greenlanders themselves want.

So we went to ask them.

Over nearly two weeks, we spoke with dozens of people, from politicians to polar bear hunters. We heard their thoughts on Trump’s provocations, their fraught colonial history with Denmark, and the painful trade-offs independence

could demand. But what stood out most was Greenlanders’ fierce determination to make their own choices without obligation or coercion.

OLD WOUNDS AND NEW VOICES

All travel in Greenland comes with a caveat: weather permitting. A sudden storm might ground a flight or freeze a harbor — both things we’d experience.

We arrived in Nuuk via propeller plane from Iceland. “Do you have any real shoes?” was our cab driver’s first question to Daniel, eyeing his cross-trainers. Navigating Nuuk’s frozen streets would be our first challenge — but at least not in darkness: The Arctic sun always lingered past midnight.

Our cab driver told us visitor numbers have surged this year. While most are welcome, he joked he’d charge us double if we’d voted for Trump.

Trump’s name sparked more mockery than anger. The next day, young

Greenlandic women working at a hotel noted the tourism surge from the new airport and said the attention was mostly good, “as long as Trump doesn’t get us,” one laughed.

“No, I don’t think he will,” she added. “Most people here don’t like him.”

Others were less amused. In March, hundreds marched through Nuuk to protest a Trump takeover. Outgoing Prime Minister Mute B. Egede and Nielsen led them to the U.S. Consulate. Protesters carried Greenlandic flags and signs reading, “Make America Go Away.”

Fencker thinks that’s the wrong approach. “If I was going to meet Trump, I would learn how to play golf and maybe not beat him, you know?” he told us. “That’s how you do diplomacy. It’s certainly not by protesting here in the streets.”

Fencker attended Trump’s inauguration in Washington and caught flak for it. “People came up to me, saying, ‘What are you doing to our country?’” he recalled.

Others reacted with bemusement. The U.S. already enjoys near-unfettered access — militarily, economically, and diplomatically. The Pentagon has Pituffik Space Base, the U.S. has steered Chinese investment away, and Denmark funds Greenland's budget while giving Washington influence without ownership.

Greenland has considerable autonomy. Its residents are Danish citizens, and many study or work in Denmark, as Fencker did. About 88% of the population is Inuit, and Danish Greenlanders comprise about 7%.

Fencker's grievances reflect the legacy of being grafted onto Denmark's family tree. "My family on my dad's side are colonizers to this country and stayed in the highest-ranking positions," he said. "The Danish elite control everything. I have nothing against Danish people, but I have something against the political system. The cooperation is unequal."

Like others, Fencker recounted a scandal from the 1960s and '70s in which Danish doctors inserted IUDs into thousands of Inuit girls and women, some without consent. He estimated Greenland's population would be far larger today. "It's basically genocide," he said.

Yet for all his wariness of outside influence, Fencker sees immigration as essential to Greenland's future. Nearly 1,000 Filipinos, its largest immigrant group, live here. Thais are also well represented.

On our second day in Nuuk, Bethany met a Filipino family while photographing icebergs. A young woman named Anabel said she'd moved to Greenland when her husband was hired there. At first, she felt like an outsider. "They tell you, 'Go back to your country, you don't speak Greenlandic,'" she said. She also sensed some resentment toward immigrants for working harder than locals.

But the coldness thawed as she assimilated. "I used to hate Greenlanders," she laughed. "But because I tried to learn the culture and attitude, now I feel different. I think they are good people. Of course, this is their place."

Greenlandic, or Kalaallisut, is more than a language: It's a marker of sovereignty and pride.

Over coffee, Sofie Amondson, a seamstress and tanner of traditional sealskin clothing, told Bethany she was proud her culture had endured, especially compared to other Inuit populations. "People are surprised we still speak our mother

“The Danish elite control everything. I have nothing against Danish people, but I have something against the political system. The cooperation is unequal.”

—Kuno Fencker, member of Greenland's parliament

language," she said, recalling a trip to Nunavut in northern Canada.

When talk turned to politics, Sofie didn't pick sides. "Of course, we can take benefits from outside," she said. "But we have to build Greenland from our own perspective."

TRUMP'S GREENLANDIC DISCIPLE

In recent months, Greenland has been swarmed with foreign journalists. Before we arrived, we saw signs of saturation — local fixers charged steep fees, sometimes \$700 per interview.

On the "Internationals in Nuuk" Facebook page, journalists from Estonia, Japan, and Italy asked for help. One local responded: "Everyone's a bit fatigued with orange man bad talk. ... Greenland needs a break from foreign media."

Still, we pressed on without a fixer.

One of our first interviews was with Jorgen Boassen, a 51-year-old bricklayer-turned-MAGA influencer. Whatever Trump's impact on Greenland, it's been a clear boon for Boassen.

He asked to meet at A Hereford Beefstouw, one of Nuuk's priciest restaurants. Over steaks and wine, Boassen argued for a clean break from Denmark and closer ties with the U.S. under Trump. He had canvassed for Trump in Pennsylvania, attended Trump's 2025 inauguration with Fencker, and welcomed Donald Trump Jr. to Nuuk earlier this year, parlaying that loyalty into a job with American Daybreak, a MAGA-aligned group promoting U.S.-Greenland ties.

Even Boassen stopped short of call-



Sofie Amondson teaches sealskin tanning and sewing workshops in Kittat, Greenland, May 2025.



ing for Greenland to become America's 51st state. "We've been colonized here," he said. "People don't want to hear that rhetoric about controlling."

As dessert arrived, a fixer walked in with a Japanese journalist. We exchanged pleasantries, and when they left, Boassen revealed he had changed his approach to interview requests.

"I was kinder before," he confessed. "But when I heard about the fixers getting \$700 for an interview, I changed." Now he tries to score a free meal at least. Boassen estimated giving more than 200 interviews since October, including to *Politico*

and the *New York Times*. During our meal, he took two media calls. Not all interviews happen over steak. He sometimes invites reporters to his favorite sauna.

Like Fencker, Boassen resents Danish influence. He believes Denmark has mismanaged the island and can't defend Greenland's interests. He said Trump's push isn't just bravado — it's a reminder that Europe's hold on the Arctic depends on U.S. power, money, and a willingness to call Denmark's bluff.

Boassen's MAGA allegiance has come at a cost. He has received death threats and was hospitalized after being

punched at a bar. In past interviews, he has called Trump "daddy" and himself "Trump's Greenlandic son." With us, the messianic tone escalated.

"I see Trump and me just as Jesus," he said, sipping his second glass of wine. "Jesus was a rebel. And was killed. Just like the Romans occupied Judea, the Pharisees are like the Danish here. ... Sometimes, I feel I'm executed by the people."

We thanked him and stood to leave, but he wasn't done. On the way out, he asked if we could buy him a concert ticket. We politely declined.

THE SARFAQ ITTUK

More than a third of Greenlanders live in Nuuk, so it's the natural base for visiting journalists. But we wanted to see more. That meant boarding the Sarfaq Ittuk, a state-run ferry tracing Greenland's southwest coast once a week.

The Ittuk connects 12 towns and settlements between Qaqortoq and Ilulissat, 350 miles north of Nuuk. For many communities, it's a lifeline. At every port, people crowded the docks to greet or send off loved ones.

Among the 200 or so passengers, we didn't meet any other Americans. Most were Inuit or Danish. A French film crew was also on board.

Over breakfast, we chatted with Christian, a Danish intern traveling with his partner. He had worried about tension between Danes and Greenlanders, given rising U.S. interest. But he was surprised: "If anything," he said, "the America stuff brought us closer."

That afternoon, we crossed the Arctic Circle and briefly docked in Sisimiut, Greenland's second-largest town. Sisimiut was the most beautiful town we visited, ringed by jagged mountains and blanketed in snow. We saw the only tree of our trip, and scores of huskies chained to rocks, howling into the wind.

Back aboard, we learned the French film crew was shooting *Banquise*, a thriller about a missing woman and a pass-



Reporter Daniel Allott sailing north on the Arctic Umiaq line, May 2025.

port that resurfaces in Greenland. They needed extras, so we volunteered.

That night, the ship shuddered through ice. The hull groaned as it forced a path north — the ferry's first journey of the season. Bethany woke at 1:30 a.m. and stepped onto the deck. For the first time since arriving, she saw darkness. The lights illuminated shards of ice breaking against the bow, flakes slicing through black water.

By morning, it was time to film. We played tourists admiring icebergs calved from the Sermeq Kujalleq glacier. We nailed the scene, but the director asked us to stick around in case the perfect iceberg drifted into frame.

While waiting, we spoke with two other extras — a Danish woman visiting her daughter, who now lives in Greenland. The mother recited a litany of old wounds: the coerced IUD program, the "Little Danes" experiment that sent 22 Inuit children to live with Danish families in the 1950s, and modern-day "parenting competency" tests that critics say unfairly target Greenlandic families.

Still, she spoke warmly of the bond between the nations. Denmark would welcome Greenlandic independence, she said, but doubted Greenland could negotiate with the U.S. "I think they will be cheated," she added, with a faint note of condescension.

As we neared Ilulissat, the director called us for a final take. We told

the mother and daughter that we were American journalists reporting on Greenland's future.

"F*** you!" the mother gasped, feigning outrage. "You're not from Fox News, are you?"

ILULISSAT: DOGS, FISH, AND THE DISSONANCE OF INDEPENDENCE

Ilulissat is famous for its icefjord and towering icebergs. When we arrived, the harbor looked like a nautical graveyard, frozen water trapping boats in place.

Tourism drives much of the town's economy now, but halibut fishing remains Greenland's top export after mining.

At the dock, a fisherman prepared lines while his colleague chopped up the morning's catch. He asked where we were from. We told him and then asked if he'd noticed more Americans lately. He nodded.

"Is that a good thing?" we asked. He tilted his head side to side, indicating ambivalence: "Yes ... and no."

Across the harbor, a fisherman showed us a halibut. "The fish is big, but I'm small," he grinned. "I need to sell it and buy a beer." Then, laughing, he asked Bethany, "Will you marry me?"

He handed a smaller fish to an old man nearby. "This is my old fishing friend," he said. Asked if they fish together, both replied, "We fish alone."

The next morning, three fishermen let us join them at sea. Bror Madsen cap-

“
One woman recited a litany of old wounds, including a scandal from the 1960s and '70s in which Danish doctors inserted IUDs into thousands of Inuit girls and women, some without consent, and modern-day 'parenting competency' tests that critics say unfairly target Greenlandic families.

tained the *Madsen*, his namesake boat. A former builder, he had taken up fishing for the freedom it offered. He also keeps sled dogs for winter hunts.

Communication was limited — our Greenlandic was nonexistent — but the crew welcomed us warmly, offering coffee (declined) and whiskey (also declined, but with a laugh).

In high season, they spend many days at sea catching halibut with gillnets. That day's haul was modest: a few dozen fish and hours spent untangling their net from another boat's.

Madsen waved off talk of a Trump takeover. He trusted Denmark to keep Greenland safe and saw no need to choose between allies.

"My mom and dad and sister are in Denmark now," he said, underscoring the familial bond. "We have family there." Why not work with both Denmark and the U.S., he wondered.

But not everyone we met shared that optimism.

We dined with Ole Kristiansen, a seasoned hunter of seals, narwhals, and polar bears from near Qaanaaq, one of the world's northernmost towns.

He began hunting at 13. Polar bears aren't dangerous, he said — not if your dogs are trained to circle the bear and give you a clean shot.

Kristiansen supported independence and dismissed Trump's taunts. "The Greenland-Denmark relationship is strong," he said, "from Ilulissat to the south."

He didn't explain what happens north of that line. But when your days are spent driving dogs across sea ice and sharing polar bear meat with neighbors, Danish politics may feel like someone else's business.

DELAYED DEPARTURES AND SOVEREIGN DREAMS

We flew back to Nuuk to catch our departing flights. A storm canceled Daniel's flight home, letting him join Bethany for a local ritual: Nuuk's polar plunge. Each week, a few dozen mostly Danish professionals gather on the capital's southern shore to submerge themselves in icy water — an invigorating, near-spiritual rite.

As we arrived, a man slipped into the sea, crouching between ice chunks in a pose like lotus prayer. Others followed, some fully naked, submerging for minutes. We lasted about 30 seconds before scrambling to shore.

Afterward, everyone trudged to a



Halibut fishermen in Disko Bay, May 2025.

nearby cafe, where one of the plungers, a middle-aged Danish woman, asked Daniel where he was from. He told her and said Americans would probably like Greenland. "Just don't take us over," she smiled.

Most of the plungers were on short-term contracts, such as at the Greenlandic parliament, the European Union's Nuuk office, or the Danish Joint Arctic Command. Some were visiting children. They spoke warmly of Greenland, but one woman, Charlotte, voiced the old Danish trope that Greenlanders spend their paychecks recklessly and lack discipline.

All the polar plungers seemed to agree Trump's provocations had inadvertently spurred something positive: renewed Danish attention to Greenland's needs.

In January, Copenhagen abruptly scrapped its "parental competency" tests on Greenlandic families. King Frederik X was set to visit Nuuk the day after our departure, which one of the women said was "because of Trump."

Then, more snow.

Bethany's flight was canceled and then rescheduled for two hours later. She packed quickly and rushed to the airport, joining a terminal full of anxious travelers. When a Copenhagen-bound plane landed, the room erupted in applause.

"If you get too hopeful, you're gonna jinx it!" a Danish teenager muttered.

Then came another announcement: canceled. A Danish family had reached their limit. It was their first trip to Green-

land. Asked if they would return, the father hesitated. "Probably not," he said. His son jumped in: "No."

It took Daniel two more days to reach the U.S. Bethany, heading to Europe, returned to the airport the next morning to find the same weary faces. The snow was still falling. Everyone was subdued, perhaps feeling chatter would only hurt their chances of escape.

Eventually, passengers walked across the tarmac, hair caked in snow. The cabin doors sealed, and the plane lifted off.

As it made its way to Denmark, the pilot pointed out the Faroe Islands drifting by on the right. Landing in Copenhagen, Bethany spotted trees outside the window, and the ice-bound world in which they barely exist melted away.

In the end, Greenland's path to sovereignty may stay as unpredictable as its weather. But one thing feels certain: For all the mockery Trump's Greenland dream gets, it reveals a simple truth — the Arctic is emerging as the next frontier in the contest with China and Russia. And Europe's last colonial hold is more fragile than it looks. ★

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A B-2 bomber arrives at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri on June 22, after returning from a massive strike on Iranian nuclear sites on Saturday.

Washington Examiner



THE FALLOUT FROM IRANIAN NUCLEAR FACILITIES STRIKES

Operation Midnight Hammer offers both promise and peril

By Sean Durns

The Middle East was but a “sideshow” of a great power war, the legendary World War I British officer T.E. Lawrence, “Lawrence of Arabia,” indirectly admitted nearly a decade after the Great War’s end. Yet Lawrence himself had been drawn mothlike to the region’s flame, optimistically — some might say foolishly — projecting his hopes and vision toward an area that his contemporary Winston Churchill called “one of the hardest-hearted areas of the world.” For decades, Western policymakers have been drawn to its quicksand, expending untold blood and treasure in the process.

But once again, the Trump administration may have bucked both the trend and conventional wisdom.

The recent strikes against Iran’s nuclear program have been that rare thing: an American success story in the Middle East. Early returns suggest the administration and its key ally, Israel, succeed-

ed in severely degrading, perhaps even ending, Tehran’s rush to the bomb. In so doing, the White House may have just demonstrated it is possible to carry out limited military action in the Middle East. This is no small thing.

The Trump administration may have shown a path toward achieving clear-cut objectives without getting overtaken and bogged down in a region that, in recent memory, has plagued scores of presidents, prime ministers, and other policymakers. In many respects, the region is America’s bad penny — it keeps turning up, proving that, to paraphrase Leon Trotsky, “you might not take an interest in the Middle East, but it takes an interest in you.”

Indeed, the aftermath of what the Defense Department dubbed Operation Midnight Hammer offers promise and peril. And the dust is far from settled.

On June 21, the United States attacked three facilities in Iran that were critical to the Islamic Republic’s nuclear program. A strike package of seven B-2 bombers and dozens of Tomahawk cruise missiles

struck the uranium enrichment sites of Fordow and Natanz and another facility at Isfahan. President Donald Trump called the strikes a “spectacular military success.” He’s right, and the details hint at how remarkable the mission was.

In a June 22 press conference at the Pentagon, Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, noted that Midnight Hammer “was planned and executed across multiple domains and theaters with coordination that reflects our ability to project power globally with speed and precision at the time and place of our nation’s choosing.” A large B-2 strike package was launched from the U.S., with portions of the package proceeding to the West and into the Pacific “as a decoy.” Simultaneously, seven B-2 bombers headed east while largely maintaining radio silence. During the 18-hour flight into the target area, multiple in-flight refuelings occurred. And “once over the land, the B-2s linked up with escort and support aircraft in a complex, tightly timed maneuver requiring exact synchronization across multiple

DAVID SMITH/AP

platforms in a narrow piece of airspace.” This was all done, Caine noted, “with minimal communications.”

Shortly before the strike package entered Iranian airspace, a U.S. submarine launched more than two dozen Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles against key surface infrastructure targets in Isfahan. At nearly the same time, American warfighters “employed several deception tactics, including decoys,” and as the strike package approached Fordow and Natanz, the U.S. deployed “high-speed suppression weapons to ensure safe passage of the strike package with fighter assets employing preemptive suppressing fires against any potential Iranian surface-to-air threats.”

Less than two hours after the Tomahawk missiles were fired, the lead B-2 bomber dropped the first Massive Ordnance Penetrator weapon at Fordow. Within less than half an hour, subsequent bombers dropped their payloads, with more than a dozen MOPs deployed. The strike package then left Iranian airspace to return to the continental U.S. As Caine pointed out, “Throughout the mission, we retained the element of surprise.” Indeed, “Iran’s fighters did not fly, and it appears that Iran’s surface-to-air missile systems did not see us.”

This merits emphasis: A significant U.S. military force left the U.S., flew a nearly two-day flight with massive ordnance, dropped more than 75 precision-guided weapons, and returned to America — not only without the loss of a single pilot or plane, but seemingly

“American fighting men and women took out massive, highly fortified nuclear enrichment sites located in the heart of the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism and, with a two-day turnaround, returned to have a well-deserved breakfast in Missouri.”



Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, discusses the mission details of a strike on Iran during a news conference at the Pentagon on June 22. President Donald Trump gave an address to the nation the previous night after three Iranian nuclear facilities were struck by the U.S. military.

without significant detection or interference by Iran, heretofore a threshold nuclear power. By any standard, this is remarkable. It was, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth highlighted, “the longest B-2 Spirit bomber mission since 2001 and the first operational employment of the MOP, a massive ordnance penetrator.” As Trump noted, “No military in the world could have done what we did tonight, not even close.”

American fighting men and women took out massive, highly fortified nuclear enrichment sites located in the heart of the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism and, with a two-day turnaround, returned to have a well-deserved breakfast in Missouri. Such an accomplishment should be heralded. The president is correct: No other nation could have conducted a military operation on that scale without loss of life or equipment.

The operation’s success was the result of America’s peerless military power, keenly demonstrating Washington’s edge in equipment, personnel, and training. And it was carried out without a hitch thanks to levels of operational security that are completely at odds with the salacious reporting that preceded Midnight Hammer. Previously, some news accounts had presented both the administration and the Pentagon as being riven with rivalries, infighting, and incompetence. This is the usual Washington reporting. And, as usual, it was wholly incorrect. Indeed, the opposite is

clearly true. The Pentagon is as lethal as it is efficient. Just ask Iran.

The results speak for themselves, but some remain wedded to their preexisting narratives.

Accordingly, it was unsurprising when some news outlets latched on to a preliminary intelligence assessment from the Defense Intelligence Agency asserting that the strikes set Iran’s nuclear program back by mere months, if at all. “Early U.S. intel assessment suggests strikes on Iran did not destroy nuclear sites, sources say,” one CNN headline blared. The usual suspects — the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and others — duly echoed these claims. But as usual, the sourcing was both anonymous and replete with omissions.

Regrettably, this isn’t the only instance of politicized intelligence relating to Iran’s nuclear program. For example, a 2007 National Intelligence Estimate asserted that Iran had ceased its bid to obtain nuclear weapons. Portions of that NIE were selectively leaked, and despite skepticism of its claims, it was widely cited by both the press and those policymakers who supported rapprochement with the regime. Yet the 2007 NIE was debunked when, in 2018, Israeli operatives carried out a daring mission in Iran, taking off with thousands of documents, later authenticated by the U.S., showing that Iran had not only lied about its nuclear program but was hiding it during

negotiations with the U.S. and others. An analysis of those documents by the Institute for Science and International Security found that “Iran’s nuclear weaponization efforts did not stop after 2003.” Iran’s nuclear program, the documents revealed, “carried on in a more research-oriented fashion after 2003, aimed at eliminating scientific and engineering bottlenecks in developing nuclear weapons, increasing know-how about them, and maintaining valuable expertise.” The NIE’s 2007 assessment, the institute observed, was inaccurate.

Many news reports also failed to note that the DIA’s leaked battle damage assessment was wholly at odds with other intelligence assessments. Indeed, by its own admission, it was a “low confidence” assessment. Retired Adm. Mark Montgomery pointed out that the battle damage assessment was but one of three that usually follow strikes, with an analysis delivered after 24 hours, 96 hours, and then two to three months. “Ninety percent of the time,” Montgomery noted, the initial assessment is labeled “low-confidence,” and “that low-confidence report is exactly that.” In short, many in the media were deeply irresponsible in regurgitating a leaked top-secret document without providing this missing context. As Cliff May, the founder and president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank, argued, by running with the leaked DIA report, the media were “attempting to establish the narrative” that the strikes “didn’t work out.” But that narrative has fallen short.

In fact, subsequent analysis, and much of the available evidence, indicates that the strikes likely set Iran’s nuclear program back by two years or more. This might not seem like much, but some reports indicate Tehran was mere weeks away from weaponization. This takes on added significance given that the Islamic Republic is the leading state sponsor of terrorism, with numerous links to U.S.-designated terrorist groups, many of which would love to have a so-called dirty bomb.

Utilizing commercial satellite photography, David Albright and Spencer Faragasso, noted experts on Iran and nuclear proliferation, concluded that the operation caused “massive damage” that set the country’s program back “significantly.” Meanwhile, Israel’s Atomic Energy Commission assessed that “the American strikes on Iran’s nuclear fa-



Trump speaks from the East Room of the White House on June 21 after the U.S. military struck three Iranian nuclear and military sites, directly joining Israel’s effort to decapitate the country’s nuclear program, as Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth listen.

cilities, combined with Israeli strikes on other elements of Iran’s military nuclear program, has set back Iran’s ability to develop nuclear weapons by many years.” While the full scope of the damage is, and may remain, unknown, it seems clear that it was substantial. Indeed, were it otherwise, “the clerical dictatorship that runs Iran would be staging guided tours of their nuclear facilities,” as Mark Schneider, a senior analyst with the National Institute for Public Policy, pointed out.

For years — long before he was on the campaign trail, much less in the Oval Office — Trump has been clear that Iran

can’t be permitted to have nuclear weapons. American actions now substantiate his words.

Moreover, Tehran will face significant hurdles should it attempt to rebuild. Estimates vary as to how much Iran has spent in its bid for nuclear weapons, but some experts, such as Karim Sadjadpour, believe that the regime has expended hundreds of billions of dollars while also facing sanctions and international opprobrium for its ambitions. These are now sunk costs, and the ruling mullahs must now reckon with the wrecking of their crown jewel, which they foolishly linked to both their own legitimacy and national prestige.

It is entirely possible that Iran could decide to end the foolhardy and costly pursuit. After all, the government of Bashar Assad, Syria’s former dictator, never restarted its nuclear weapons program after Israeli strikes on the reactor in Deir el Zour in September 2007. Iraq, however, offers a different case study. Israel took out Saddam Hussein’s nuclear program in 1981, but the Iraqi dictator never fully gave up his ambition of obtaining nuclear weapons. Some analysts, such as Seth Cropsey of the Yorktown Institute, have warned that, absent U.S. leadership, Iran’s rulers will rebuild their program. These warnings should be heeded. In a July 3 statement, Iran’s deputy foreign minister told NBC News: “Our policy has not changed on enrichment.”

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For years — long before he was on the campaign trail, much less in the Oval Office — Trump has been clear that Iran can’t be permitted to have nuclear weapons. American actions now substantiate his words.

The U.S. and its allies currently have an advantage and should press it, Cropsey argued in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Indeed, Iran's top military commanders are dead, and the country's leadership is decaying and in disarray. Thanks to Israeli efforts that preceded Midnight Hammer, the regime's air defenses have been obliterated. The U.S. and Israel have the leverage — and decisively so. Both nations can carry out additional strikes inside Iran. They've demonstrated the capability and the will to do so. By contrast, Tehran's responses so far have been limited to face-saving measures, including a signaled attack at a U.S. base in Qatar and imprecise, albeit deadly, launches from what is, by all accounts, a dwindling supply of ballistic missiles.

Midnight Hammer is a win for America and its allies. The U.S. has restored deterrence to the Middle East while signaling to other foes that this is a president unafraid to use military power to achieve concrete foreign policy objectives. This has the bonus of reassuring key regional partners, such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, and others, that Washington shares their concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions and, more importantly, is willing to do something about it.

Moreover, by standing with a key ally like Israel, the U.S. has helped advance peace in the region. Midnight Hammer and its aftereffects, to include declining Iranian power, will likely make it easier for the Trump administration to broaden initiatives such as the Abraham Accords. The Trump administration was able to achieve previous agreements between the Jewish state and its Muslim and Arab neighbors by recognizing that a close and strong U.S.-Israel relationship was essential to peace. This stands in stark contrast to the approach of the Obama administration, which believed that “daylight” between the two nations was ideal. That approach was tried and found wanting. By fully supporting Jerusalem, Washington signals both Israel's permanence and the permanence of the alliance. To many foreign observers, the U.S. has shown that it will back its allies in their time of need. This will shore up alliances far beyond the Middle East, including Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

Indeed, the strikes can be used to America's advantage in other theaters. The Pentagon considers Beijing to be its “sole pacing challenge” and peer competitor and is rightly worried about China invading Taiwan. The Trump ad-

ministration seeks to prevent this. Many top policymakers are concerned that expending munitions in other arenas, be it in Ukraine or the Middle East, could detract from the means to deter China. Such concerns are not misplaced. America's defense industrial base is in crisis, and there is a severe shortage of key arms. In fact, China's increased support for both Russia and Iran can be seen as part of a strategy to distract the U.S. and deplete its munitions. This helps explain why China recently sent missile fuel material to Iran, its foremost regional ally.

Yet the strikes can give the U.S. and its own foremost regional ally, Israel, leverage that can be used in the Indo-Pacific and elsewhere. China is heavily reliant on Iran for its energy needs. By some estimates, an astounding 90% of Iran's oil is imported into China. Iran's lack of air defenses and its precarious security situation mean that Washington, via its capable allies, now holds some extra cards to deter Chinese aggression in East Asia and beyond. Importantly, for years, Iran has also been supplying Russia with drones and other weapons for its invasion of Ukraine. Iran might find itself more unwilling, or unable, to fulfill future orders to the same degree.

With Iranian power declining, others will fill the vacuum. Fortunately for the U.S., Israel will be one of the powers stepping into the void. Another will be Turkey, a NATO member with a complicated history with the U.S. Ankara's economic and military power has been growing over the past two decades, and

“**It took Operation Desert Storm, another successful U.S. undertaking with limited objectives, to restore American confidence. Midnight Hammer might do the same for a nation still contending with the unsatisfactory conclusions to Afghanistan and Iraq.**”

Turkey has become more assertive of its own interests. The U.S. will have to find ways to deal with a country that can be useful in countering China, Russia, and Iran but that has also hosted Hamas and other designated terrorist groups. This will be no easy task and will require skillful statesmanship. Few problems will be more vexing for American policymakers confronting a changing Middle East.

As importantly, both the limited nature and success of the strikes may help exorcise America's ghosts in the region. For years after Vietnam, American policymakers were haunted by its aftermath. Numerous administrations declined to use hard power and carry out expanded military operations, fearing they would be bogged down in another protracted and unpopular conflict. It took Operation Desert Storm, another successful U.S. undertaking with limited objectives, to restore American confidence. Midnight Hammer might do the same for a nation still contending with the unsatisfactory conclusions to Afghanistan and Iraq.

In the run-up to the second Iraq War, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell had what he called his “pottery barn rule” — if you break it, you buy it. This notion preceded nearly two decades of failed state-building, and its residue has imposed constraints on U.S. policymakers, with both a public and a military that are war-weary. It could very well be that the recent strikes put a decisive end to such thinking. You might just be able to break it and leave it in shards. Maybe.

Henry Kissinger famously observed that statesmen often face choices, not between good and evil but between bad and less bad. Trade-offs are par for the course in national security, and anyone saying otherwise is selling fantasies, not a sustainable foreign policy. The aftereffects of Midnight Hammer present American policymakers with both problems and opportunities. The trick, as always, is seeing through the sandstorm and discerning what is a mirage and what isn't. And the history of American foreign policy, in the Middle East and elsewhere, illustrates that this is easier said than done. But in a war with many battles and few clear-cut victories, this is, unambiguously, a win. ★

Sean Durns is a senior research analyst for CAMERA, the 65,000-member, Boston-based Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis.

Succeeding Youngkin

Winsome Earle-Sears tries to recreate the GOP surge in Virginia

By Mabinty Quarshie

Four years ago, Glenn Youngkin, a political upstart, flipped the Virginia governor's mansion red for the first time since 2009, foreshadowing Republican gains in the 2022 and 2024 cycles.

His running mate at the time, Winsome Earle-Sears, became the state's first woman lieutenant governor. Four years later, Earle-Sears is betting she can recreate the same grassroots campaign that could propel her not just to being Virginia's first woman governor but the nation's first black woman governor as well.

Yet this second go-around will be much harder.

Earle-Sears is running for governor under Republican President Donald Trump instead of under Democratic former President Joe Biden.

The policies Trump has enacted in Washington have a direct impact on Virginians, who will be among the first group of voters to render judgment on Trump during the November off-year elections.

Yet Earle-Sears is undaunted. In a sit-down interview with the *Washington Ex-*



This is where I believe my opponent, Abigail Spanberger, is going to get tripped up, because the people like what we've done.'

—Winsome Earle-Sears

aminer last month, she claimed she could succeed Youngkin as his political heir.

"Our ticket is going to win because we bring commonsense ideas. My opponent and her crew are about nonsense," Earle-Sears said. "She wants to grow government, which means you're going to have to take money from the people in order to do that, and I want to grow jobs, which means you have to make sure that you have an environment that is conducive for businesses to want to come here."

The lieutenant governor also claimed

polling is on her side. "The polls are telling us, and the people are telling us, that they want what we're doing to continue," Earle-Sears said. "And this is where I believe my opponent, Abigail Spanberger, is going to get tripped up, because the people like what we've done."

The polls, however, paint a more complicated picture.

According to a recent poll from Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, Spanberger leads Earle-Sears by 12 percentage points, 49% to 37%.

A May poll from Roanoke College shows Spanberger leading the lieutenant governor by 17 points, 43% to 26%. A June poll from Founders Insight, however, showed a closer battle: 46% of likely general election voters surveyed would cast a ballot for the Democratic gubernatorial nominee, compared to 43% who would vote for the Republican nominee and 9% who said they were undecided.

Brian Kirwin, a Virginia political consultant with over 20 years of experience, dismissed the VCU poll, arguing that polls relying on likely voters provide a more accurate picture of the race. "Many registered voters won't be voting this year. It's usually

around a 50% turnout. So registered voter polls don't tell you a lot," he said.

Looming over the race is the Trump administration's efforts to slash the federal bureaucracy through the Department of Government Efficiency, which has affected thousands of Virginians. The Old Dominion is home to more than 224,000 federal workers who could play an outsized role in the election.

Earle-Sears told the *Washington Examiner* that Virginia has adapted to help workers seeking new employment.

"We are going to make sure that if we expand the employer base, if we attract even more businesses to Virginia, then that way we can keep taxes low," she said.

"And by the way, we've created over 250,000 new jobs in Virginia, and we have created 15,000 business startups, never existed, small businesses, because we know how to do this," she continued. "We've told the people, you have an idea, come to us and we'll be the real *Shark Tank*, and we'll fund you up to a certain point. And we are hosting job fairs for those on the federal level who are no longer working there."

At a campaign stop last month with the entire Democratic ticket, Spanberger, a former Virginia representative, reiterated a frequent line of attack against the GOP.

"I'm running for governor now because we need a hell of a lot more governing than grandstanding," she said at a stop in Fairfax, Virginia. "And at a time when we have more than 320,000 federal employees who call Virginia home, and their jobs, their livelihood, and our state's economy are under threat, we need a governor who will stand up for them and stand up for Virginia."

It's in sharp contrast to when Youngkin and Earle-Sears ran on political backlash to Biden's efforts in handling COVID-19 by galvanizing the parental rights movement.

Unlike former Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe's 2021 campaign, Spanberger is a candidate who has won multiple races as a centrist willing to buck Democratic leadership.

Yet if Earle-Sears can receive a Trump endorsement, it could also help bring excitement to her campaign, although Trump never won the Old Dominion in his three presidential campaigns.

"She really needs Trump to give her an endorsement," said David Richards, a political science professor at the University of Lynchburg. "It would help people who are reluctant, who are Trump supporters



who are reluctant to maybe go out and vote for her, or maybe look at her and John Reid on the same ticket and say, 'Look, I'm just going to sit this one out.'"

But timing will be key, Richards said. If a Trump endorsement hasn't come by September and early voting has started, an endorsement may not come at all. This is a sharp contrast from when Youngkin flipped the governor's mansion in 2021 by keeping Trump at a distance on the campaign trail.

The president has not yet weighed in on the campaign, although Earle-Sears sounded confident she has his support.

"Do you think our president wants me to win? Of course, he does. He likes

to win, and so do we, and he will come when it is time," she said. "And until then, we will continue to do the work. We're not flinching. We're not afraid of hard work."

Kirwin, the GOP strategist, pointed to the work she has done to recreate a broader GOP base after avoiding any serious challenges for the GOP nomination. "Without having a primary to deal with, she's really focused her time on broadening the base — her numbers with minority communities and trying to make sure that she has a strong contingent of reaching women voters," he said. "It looks like she's going to save the base appeal into the closing weeks."

Adding to the complications Virginia

Republicans are facing this year are the tensions between Earle-Sears and John Reid, the GOP nominee for lieutenant governor. It wasn't until a July 1 unity event with Youngkin that the two candidates appeared together. They also went eight weeks without speaking until late June.

"Everybody has to run their own race because the lieutenant governor slot is not chosen by the governor," Earle-Sears said when asked about the GOP ticket uniting. "So we're going to have that unity, and at the same time, we're going to make sure that everybody knows who we are."

Tensions snapped earlier this year after Youngkin asked Reid to step away from the ticket following revelations that explicit photos on social media were linked to Reid.

Reid adamantly refused to step away from the ticket and claimed he was being targeted as the first openly gay man running for statewide office.

"I'm not going to continue to answer a never-ending parade of questions and false accusations from people who we now know are solely motivated to stage a coup against a gay man whom they didn't want to be their nominee but didn't have the guts to run against," Reid said in a video posted on X in late April.

Democrats subtly mocked the GOP ticket during their statewide tour.

"I'm gonna let you guys in on a little secret. We actually like each other. We actually talk to each other. We travel on a bus together. I can't say the same for

“Tensions snapped earlier this year after Gov. Glenn Youngkin (R-VA) asked Reid to step away from the ticket following revelations that explicit photos on social media were linked to Reid. Reid instead claimed he was being targeted as the first openly gay man running for statewide office.”



From left: Winsome Earle-Sears with Virginia state Del. Delores Oates (R), Gov. Glenn Youngkin, and GOP lieutenant governor nominee John Reid, July 1, 2025.

the other side, but what you have is a united front putting people first here in Virginia," said Jay Jones, the Democratic nominee for attorney general, during a stop in Fairfax.

But with the GOP ticket finally appearing together, the attacks have lost some of their bite.

Youngkin, Earle-Sears, Attorney General Jason Miyares, and Reid united for a campaign appearance on July 1 at the Vienna Volunteer Fire Department.

"I am all in for the Republican ticket," Reid told the supportive crowd. "Because the Republicans have the right policies to save the state of Virginia."

In another reminder that the GOP is attempting to repeat its 2021 success, Youngkin asked the crowd, "It must be winning time again! Are you ready to sweep?"

Earle-Sears said part of the work in campaigning with the governor is that she and Youngkin are elected officials.

"The governor and I have been together as much as possible, and sometimes our schedules don't align because, you know, well, he's a sitting governor and I'm the sitting lieutenant governor. And where he can't be, there are places that I am, and vice versa," she said.

Earle-Sears is also facing a financial deficit against Spanberger. The Democratic National Committee is pouring \$1.5 million into the Virginia off-year elections. In mid-July, Spanberger announced she raised more than \$10.7

million in the second quarter of this year, with \$15.2 million cash on hand. In contrast, Earle-Sears brought in \$5.9 million during that same period and has \$4.5 million cash on hand.

Richards, the political science professor, questioned how Spanberger's campaign would spend the money in its final months.

"If the Democrats are going to put millions of dollars and then spend it in northern Virginia, where they've already got that advantage, then they're kind of wasting that money," he said. "They need to spend it, I would think, trying to push into areas where there's more of a margin."

"We laugh at the Spanberger campaign spending gazillions of dollars on video ads when most people are enjoying their summers, and it's months away from anybody being able to cast a vote," Kirwin added. "But I guess Democrats campaign the way they govern — spend, spend, spend."

The lieutenant governor, however, said her campaign can recreate the 2021 era that saw her rise to statewide office despite the disadvantages she faces.

"Everything I've been given, I've had to work very hard for it," she told the *Washington Examiner*. "We didn't come this far to be crying that we're victims." ★

Mabinty Quarshie is a national political correspondent for the Washington Examiner.

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Washington Briefing

CONGRESS

Congress passes spending cuts

But the small savings may make for bigger budgeting troubles

By Kevin R. Kosar



Republicans are promising to bring additional spending cut bills to a vote.

Something remarkable occurred on Capitol Hill this month: Congress and the president partnered to make a law that cut the budgets of a few federal entities. A rescission of funds has not occurred since

1999, when former President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, struck a deal with the Republican-held House and Senate.

This legislation cuts various international aid programs run by the Department of State, such as Migration and Refugee Assistance and Bilateral

Economic Assistance, Assistance for Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia. These programs have been on the chopping block since late winter, when the Department of Government Efficiency took aim at foreign aid.

The law also eliminates funding for

two quasi-governmental entities: the U.S. Institute for Peace and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Neither of them is standard executive branch bureaucracy. USIP and CPB are congressionally chartered not-for-profit agencies — part of the administrative state that the Trump administration has vowed to vanquish. USIP will lose about one-quarter of its current budget. CPB, which gives funds to National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting System, had its previously approved funding for the next two years canceled.

Completing the rescissions process was not easy. By law, Congress has 45 days to agree to a president's request to cancel spending. Both chambers have been busy with other pressing matters, including the Senate voting on presidential nominees for important executive branch jobs and, along with the House, passing resolutions to strike down regulations.

And unlike the bipartisan-supported cuts enacted under Clinton during an era of divided government, the White House and congressional Republicans decided to go it alone. That meant House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) and Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD) had to assemble cuts from President Donald Trump's list that nearly every Republican would support.

The House's rescission bill was passed by the House on June 4, one day after Trump submitted it. Its slate of cuts could not get 51 votes in the Senate, and GOP legislators began bargaining with the White House behind closed doors. For example, Sen. Mike Rounds (R-SD) did not want cuts to CPB to reduce broadcasts to remote rural areas and tribal lands. Other Republican senators fought to spare the State Department funding to curb the spread of AIDS in Africa.

A deal was struck, and one day before the 45-day deadline expired, the Senate passed its rescission bill by a vote of 51 to 48, and the House promptly voted to approve it by a 216-213 vote. No Democrats in either chamber supported the action.



Office of Management and Budget Director Russell Vought wants to send Congress at least one more rescission bill.

Johnson crowed after the legislative win.

"The Republican Party and President Trump and everybody that works on our side have promised fiscal responsibility and fiscal discipline, and we're delivering on those promises again," he said. "I'm delighted to send that over to the president's desk for signature, and he'll sign that quickly."

For all the late-night work, the savings are exceedingly meager. They amount to about \$9 billion. The federal government has already spent \$5.45 trillion this year and is on course to exceed last year's \$6.75 trillion.

Republicans acknowledge the rescission did not amount to much, but they are promising to bring additional spending cut bills to a vote. Office of Management and Budget Director Russell Vought said he would like to send



How are we supposed to negotiate a bipartisan deal if Republicans will turn around and put it through the shredder in a partisan vote?

—Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA)

Congress at least one more rescission bill. He also told a group of reporters that "the appropriations process has to be less bipartisan" to produce real fiscal improvement.

Those comments were not well-received on Capitol Hill. Democrats warn Republicans against any additional attempts to cut appropriated funds. They argue that talk of additional rescission bills undermines the negotiations for next year's spending.

"How are we supposed to negotiate a bipartisan deal if Republicans will turn around and put it through the shredder in a partisan vote?" asked Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), the ranking member of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK), who chairs the House Appropriations Committee, admitted that using rescissions too often can "destroy a certain amount of goodwill that I think costs you down the road if you do it too much." Thune acknowledged Republicans will need Democrats' support to reach the 60 votes needed to pass the spending bills, which means they cannot alienate them.

Ten GOP senators also sent a letter to Vought protesting the administration's pause on funding for some summer education programs, which were not in the rescissions bill. Democrats in 24 states previously filed lawsuits after the funds were not released to grantees on July 1.

The House and Senate need to agree on spending bills before midnight on Sept. 30. There is a long way to go, and time is beginning to run short. The House has passed only two of the 12 appropriations bills (defense and veterans' affairs), and the Senate has moved none of them. Failure to agree will produce either a government shutdown or a continuing resolution, which would effectively keep the nation at the levels set during former President Joe Biden's last year in office. ★

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The Crane Clean Energy Center, formerly Three Mile Island, in Londonderry Township, Pennsylvania

WHITE HOUSE

Trump administration aims to bolster nuclear energy production, starting in a familiar if surprising place

Longstanding public concerns about the technology have eased in recent years

By Callie Patteson

Londonderry Township, PENNSYLVANIA — Three Mile Island, the 1979 partial nuclear reactor meltdown site, harkens back to the troubled times of Jimmy Carter's presidency, along with soaring gas prices, persistent stagflation in the economy, the Iranian hostage crisis, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Forty-six years since the worst commercial nuclear accident in U.S. history, the Three Mile Island Generating Station has a much more positive glow — and not the threatening kind usually associated with radiation. Efforts to restart Unit One of the nuclear plant, near the state capital of Harrisburg, align closely with President Donald Trump's growing interest in carbon-free

energy. Trump and his energy team are turning to nuclear as a reliable and cost-effective source of power in tandem with the administration's embrace of fossil fuels to secure energy security.

It's an ironic turn of events at Three Mile Island, as the March 28, 1979, cooling failure in the plant's second unit heavily contributed to growing suspicions of nuclear power in the United States. Doubt was already etched deep into the American psyche by the theatrical release 12 days earlier of *The China Syndrome*. The movie, starring Jane Fonda, Jack Lemmon, and Michael Douglas, depicts a television reporter and her cameraman who discover safety cover-ups at a nuclear power plant.

That life-imitates-art series of events spurred enduring public concerns about nuclear energy, which were compounded by the 1986 accident at the Ukrainian Chernobyl nuclear plant and the major 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan.

Broad concerns about nuclear power plant development have only eased in recent years, with advances in safety testing and scientific research as well as a growing desire to lower carbon emissions in the en-

ergy sector.

The Trump administration touts nuclear energy as an attractive solution to satiating growing U.S. energy demands. Through executive orders, agency action, and advocacy before Congress, it has begun to pave the way for a federally backed domestic nuclear renaissance.

In the administration's view, it couldn't happen soon enough since American energy consumption is set to soar by the end of the decade largely due to power-hungry data centers and the artificial intelligence technologies they store.

In early July, the Department of Energy estimated that peak-hour energy supply demand will rise by at least 100 gigawatts by 2030, roughly equivalent to the same amount of energy needed to power more than 80 million homes. Out of this, at least 50 gigawatts of demand will be directly attributed to data centers.

To meet this demand and support AI technologies, the administration has been adamant about securing reliable and stable electricity to pump into the grid.

Trump has long supported baseload sources such as coal and natural gas,

touting them as much more reliable than greener alternatives such as wind and solar. However, these fossil fuels are far from the most reliable energy source in the U.S., as nuclear sits at the top of the list.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration reports that nuclear power has a capacity factor of 92.5%, meaning that nuclear power plants produce maximum electricity 92.5% of the time during the year. Natural gas, on the other hand, has a capacity factor of 56%, and coal is around 40%.

This reliability, combined with the fact that nuclear is also a carbon-free power source, has made it an extremely attractive resource to both the administration and Big Tech looking to fuel their AI advancements.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S SUPPORT

The Trump administration has voiced its support for the rapid deployment of nuclear energy for months, with Energy Secretary Chris Wright vowing to “unleash commercial nuclear power” in the U.S. just two days after his confirmation in February.

In late May, Trump signed multiple executive orders aimed at jumpstarting the construction of domestic nuclear reactors over the next four years. These orders also called for simplifying the nuclear regulatory process, increasing domestic mining and enrichment of uranium to reduce reliance on imports of nuclear fuel, and overhauling the independent Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Within the orders, Trump laid out his intention to quadruple domestic nuclear power production by 2050 through large traditional reactors and advanced nuclear projects, such as small modular reactors.

It is an ambitious timeline, as only two large reactors have been built from the ground up in the U.S. within the last 50 years, and only three SMRs are operational worldwide (none of which are in the U.S.).

As critics and industry advocates have long blamed overregulation for stymying industry growth, cutting red tape remains at the forefront of the administration's agenda.

“The goal of most efforts by the administration so far has been to remove real or perceived barriers to deployment of nuclear energy,” Adam Stein, director of nucle-



Regulatory assurance manager Craig Smith inside the control room.



ar energy innovation at the Breakthrough Institute, a Berkeley, California-based economic research center, told the *Washington Examiner*.

GETTING CONGRESS ON BOARD

Wright has been the most prominent vocal supporter of nuclear energy in the administration thus far, advocating carbon-free power at conferences, during interviews, and repeatedly during testimony before Congress.

In the weeks leading up to Trump's signature of his sweeping agenda proposal, his self-proclaimed “one big, beautiful bill,” after it cleared Congress, Wright appealed to Democratic and Republican Congress members to save existing tax credits for nuclear build-out, even though it generated from a key domestic achievement of former President Joe Biden's single term, the Inflation Reduction Act. He also urged the protection of his agency's ability to issue federal loans to the industry.

Wright notably advocated the agency's Loan Programs Office, which was used under the Biden administration to pri-

marily fund clean energy projects, and its ability to back the nuclear industry.

“It is really the most efficient tool we have in the department to help emerging energy technologies,” Wright said in May, urging Congress to keep funding for the office in the reconciliation bill.

The final legislation signed by Trump on Independence Day includes substantial cuts to unobligated funding for the office. Wright's pleas to save funding for nuclear did appear to make a difference.

The law creates a new Energy Dominance Financing program, capitalized with around a billion dollars for projects aimed at improving grid reliability or increasing grid capacity, such as fossil fuel or nuclear energy projects.

“I think the administration, from my perspective, did have a role in bringing that to bear,” Emmet Penney, a senior fellow with the Foundation for American Innovation, told the *Washington Examiner*. “I know for a fact [that] Chris Wright's testimony before Congress on the need for supporting nuclear was persuasive,” Penney said.

Others believe it was a joint effort from the administration and industry that helped get this federal backing in statute.

“I think the industry strongly lobbied Secretary Wright to support these publicly,” Stein said. “So the administration and Secretary Wright supporting them is also with the support of industry’s request. Nuclear energy is also the most bipartisan form of energy [at] this point in Congress.”

A senior Department of Energy official confirmed to the *Washington Examiner* that the secretary was involved in discussions regarding the provision and noted that it would be used for nuclear power projects as well as other base-load energy sources such as coal and natural gas.

WORKING ALONGSIDE THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Despite lingering tax credits and other provisions of law meant to help the nuclear energy industry, it shouldn’t solely rely on the federal government, according to the administration.

“As a career entrepreneur to really make nuclear energy work, the biggest thing we need, by far, is private capital, investment capital,” Wright said before Congress this spring. “Our goal is to bring in tens of billions of dollars during this administration in private capital to get reactors built, and I’m highly confident we will achieve that goal.”

In the months before Trump took office, private investments in the nuclear energy industry began to soar.

Several major tech companies announced their intention to fund advanced nuclear projects, with a similar desire to secure the energy needed for new data centers and AI. Others supported traditional nuclear projects, such as restarting decommissioned facilities.

For example, Microsoft is partnering with utility Constellation Energy to restart the shuttered Three Mile Island nuclear plant.

This partnership between Big Tech and the energy sector aims to bring Unit One of the facility, which has since been renamed the Crane Clean Energy Center, online as soon as 2027. This would be a major win for the administration, as most new projects are anticipated to be operational after



Part of the main generator inside the Crane Clean Energy Center.

Trump leaves office.

The *Washington Examiner* got an exclusive look inside the facility in late June. Nearly 400 full-time employees have already been hired to bring the plant back online.

Constellation Energy is seeking a loan guarantee of as much as \$1.6 billion from the federal government to help fund its restart efforts.

As the Department of Energy under Trump and Biden issued similar loans to other companies working to restart a nuclear plant, including Holtec International and the Palisades Nuclear Plant in Michigan, they will likely face little resistance.

“This is one area where both Republicans and Democrats have truly been handing off policy to each other quite smoothly,” Mark Nelson, managing director of Radiant Energy, told the *Washington Examiner*.

“And now that the tech industry is playing catch-up, and the Trump administration wants to go visibly even further

beyond what the Biden administration did, or make sure that they have plants starting under Trump’s watch, the urgency is truly there to get this done,” Nelson said.

While the private sector is interested, it has yet to be seen how much investors will trust the administration to support long-term projects. Some still worry over sweeping staff reductions at agencies such as the Energy Department and Trump’s efforts to overhaul the regulatory process.

However, many in the industry are still taking the administration, particularly Wright, at its word that it will support their impending nuclear energy renaissance.

“If anything, the administration is no longer any kind of holdup or problem,” Nelson said. “As far as I can see, it’s that states don’t know what they want. It’s that the industry doesn’t know what it wants.” ★

Callie Patteson is an energy and environment reporter for the Washington Examiner.

POLITICS

Trump's AI art affinity

It represents a kind of narrative-upset power the Right has been waiting to get its hand on for ages

By Dain Fitzgerald

President Donald Trump's administration's fondness for AI art, seen controversially in its depiction of Florida's "Alligator Alcatraz" migrant detention center and anime-fied targets of ICE, is well-known if not widely appreciated.

This visually arresting technology lurched onto the scene only about three years ago, but it has been glommed on to by upstarts on the Right at the same time it's been vilified by the art establishment and established artists. Big Hollywood, or rather just Hollywood, has sounded the alarm on AI's threat to the livelihoods of its constituent elements — even if it's being forced to grudgingly, gradually go along, as evidenced by recent Netflix adoption of AI in an Argentinian science-fiction series.

"If they're out of it", says the Right of what's been called "AI slop" by its detractors, "we're into it."

Just ask Dinesh D'Souza.

White House deputy chief of staff Dan Scavino, Trump's longtime social media guru going back to his first presidential campaign in 2016, is aggressively utilizing AI to continue taking jabs at critics. The communication team he presides over is positively brimming with snarky AI enthusiasts.

According to recent Trump ally Elon Musk's Grok chatbot, "The administration embraces AI to promote U.S. tech leadership via executive orders, create

viral political content, and mock opponents efficiently."

Spite and trolling are far from the whole of it, however. Though no hard data exists to make indisputable the claim that the Right loves AI art contra the Left, the attitudes of pop entertainment lovers and lay aesthetes, as seen in pushback to art galleries making moves to legitimize the technology, among other newsmaking items, offers anecdotal evidence that it's the right wing that is most giddy about this confounding new form of graphic synthesis.

The relationship between ideology or partisanship and artificial intelligence or automation would suggest the opposite of all this. In theory, conservatism and the concomitant aversion to upheavals of all kinds, artificial or not, make intuitive sense. Attitudes, for example, toward self-driving cars, despite what the antics of California rioters might suggest, do



If progressives are so consumed by fighting what they believe to be fake news, is it any wonder they're put off by fake imagery and video?



A May 2 AI-generated image of President Donald Trump dressed as the pope. Days later, Trump shared it on Truth Social, Instagram, and X. The White House reposted it on official Instagram and X accounts.



On June 28, the Department of Homeland Security posted AI generated art of Florida's "Alligator Alcatraz" on X (formerly Twitter).

skew more liberal-favorable, conservative-unfavorable. And little needs to be said about the politics surrounding reproductive technologies or the field of bioethics.

Of course, in America, what counts for conservatism is often a come-what-may embrace of dynamic change, as author and Milton Friedman biographer Jennifer Burns has pointed out. "The Right says not to worry about what the market does to tradition," she told Lex Fridman in an interview earlier this year. "In America, the market is our tradition."

Observations on AI art gleaned from social media such as Reddit suggest that the Left feels decidedly more negative about AI than everyone else, especially positive.

"Being pro-generative AI is not associated with any political position, but being anti-generative-AI on the other hand, seems to be practically, like, 95% aligned with being liberal," one user claimed. "Are there any anti-AI conservatives?"

Indeed, there are some anti-AI people on the right. *American Conservative* contributor J. Arthur Bloom told the *Washington Examiner* that "an old generation of tasteless and vulgar conservative patrons is being switched out for a new, even more tasteless and vulgar set from the tech world." Ouch.

If progressives are so consumed by fighting what they believe to be fake

news, is it any wonder they're put off by fake imagery and video? It's all enough to convince themselves they're holding the line of the "reality-based community" against the surrealism of the nationalist right and its virtually reality-delivering coterie of tech brethren.

University of Utah scholar Hollis Robbins places the AI enthusiasts in the pragmatic, business-oriented, albeit anti-intellectual camp, against the humanist aesthetes who wring their hands about what AI is doing to authenticity across various domains. In her schema, the efficient is synonymous with the imaginatively deficient, if not cognitively.

"Drawing on [Richard] Hofstadter's framework," she wrote, "the intellectuals (leaning toward abstractions, critical inquiry, skepticism, contemplation, and a devotion to the 'life of the mind,') would be the human-centered critics, AI safety & alignment researchers, skeptics & doubters, and de-growthers."

This equation of the moody, meandering, and abstract with the Left and the cheerful, productive, and technical with the Right has a long, unfair history. But it's not entirely off the mark. Nor is it unequivocally better to be intellectual yet perpetually unhappy or cynical.

One online forum poster by the name of RandomRanger claimed that, due to conservatives being essentially barred, if informally, from the world of the arts and very thin on the ground among graphic designers and adjacent professions, their zealous adoption of AI art is an opportunity too good to pass up. For them, AI video and imagery have no livelihood to threaten, though it may represent the beginning of one, as evidenced by X account "FloydAI."

"The left are the slow-moving established players," RandomRanger wrote. "The right are the disruptive start-ups, so they're always going to make more

use of new technology."

The intrinsic appeal of AI art, to the Right or Left aside, what it surely represents is a kind of narrative-upset power that the Right has been waiting to get its hand on for ages. Discourse around fake news, fake photos, or fake anything isn't particularly compelling if you believe you've been living with omnipresent lies for decades, as it is. There's perhaps a "but he's our son-of-a-b*****" factor at work.

A fed-up, arguably nihilist streak on the Right disregards popular concerns about AI because anything that threatens to subvert the Democratic-friendly media and "managerial" class is a positive, period, full stop.

Or even full slop. ★

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REMINDER

THIS IS A DOUBLE WEEK ISSUE

This week's *Washington Examiner* issue is a double issue, meaning that this issue covers next week as well. Don't worry when you don't receive a new issue next week — your next copy will arrive the following week.

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Washington Examiner



NATIONAL SECURITY

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill split along party lines over how much power to cede to the Pentagon

Democrats want a tighter rein. Republicans favor a longer leash

By Jamie McIntyre

Under the Constitution, of the three branches of government, the legislative, the executive, and the judicial, the legislative is the most powerful.

It is the only branch with the authority to declare war, levy taxes, remove people from elected or appointed office, and, importantly, wield the “power of the purse.”

Congress can dictate how money is raised and spent, and if lawmakers unite, they can act without the acquiescence of the president by overriding any presidential veto.

But now, in President Donald Trump’s second term, thanks partly to Supreme Court decisions that have granted him immunity for criminal prosecution for official acts and swept away lower court injunctions, he has amassed unprecedented presidential power. He can ignore the will of Congress or dictate terms that members of the slim Republican majority must accept or risk being “primaried” and losing their seat in the next election.



“It’s easier to ask forgiveness than to get permission,” the old saying goes, but Trump and his defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, often seek neither.

“It’s easier to ask forgiveness than to get permission,” the old saying goes, but Trump and his defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, often seek neither, running roughshod over long-standing norms, and, in some cases, boldly flouting the will of Congress.

In response, the Republican-led Congress has been largely supine, taking only the most tepid steps to exert its constitutional role to set policy.

There’s no greater example than this year’s debate surrounding the National Defense Authorization Act, which sets national defense policy and proscribes exactly what the Pentagon can and cannot do with the \$880 billion budget appropriated and authorized by Congress.

National security is the one matter that generally enjoys wide bipartisan support on Capitol Hill, and this year’s NDAA, as it’s known, was no exception. It sailed through both Armed Services Committees this month, 26-1 in the Senate and 55-2 in the House.

But the House Armed Services Committee, which marked up its version of the bill in public, provided a window into the stark divide between those who want to wrest control back from the Pentagon and those who would just as soon give the commander in chief a blank check.

Exhibit A is the debate over the \$400 million allocated to convert the “free” 17-year-old used 747 plane, which Trump pressured Qatar to gift him, into a temporary Air Force One. This, at best, creates a perception of impropriety and, at worst, is a flagrant violation of the Constitution’s emoluments clause.

“The constitutional prohibition in Article I, Section 9, Clause 8, bans any official from accepting gifts or emoluments from another government without the

approval of Congress. So, Congress hasn’t even come close to approving this gift,” said Rep. Joe Courtney (D-CT), who introduced an amendment that would block taxpayer funds from being used to retrofit the plane and block Trump from taking it with him when he leaves office.

“We’re being asked by the administration to overlook a unilateral decision without Congress’s approval, with no appropriation that has been lawfully given to the administration, to approve a third Air Force One aircraft,” Courtney said.

His amendment failed 27-30.

And so it went with almost all the amendments proposed by Democrats to force the Pentagon to stick to policies mandated by law in last year’s NDAA.

An amendment proposed by Rep. Sara Jacobs (D-CA) would bar the use of funds designated for military barracks and child development centers for operations at the southern border.

The measure was defeated after Chairman Mike Rogers (R-AL) argued that the amendment seeks to outlaw something that isn’t happening.

“Facilities sustainment money authorized and appropriated for barracks and childcare facilities is not being spent on border security, and it cannot be reprogrammed for those purposes without congressional approval,” he said.

Rogers was right on the law, but Democrats argued that he turned a blind eye to how the Pentagon under Trump consistently spends money without approval.

“Unfortunately, we’ve seen reports that the Army shifted \$1 billion, that’s right, \$1 billion, meant for barracks to instead fund its surge of troops to the southern border,” Jacobs said. “And even if this money were replenished, it should never have been taken ... in the first place.”

Another amendment, sponsored by Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ), would reinforce the 1878 Posse Comitatus Act, which prohibits the military from engaging in law enforcement while under federal command except in rare circumstances.

"The Posse Comitatus Act exists for a reason. To protect Americans and our servicemembers from having the military act as a police force," Sherrill said.

The committee rejected her amendment and instead adopted an amendment put forth by Rep. Derrick Van Orden (R-WI), a former Navy SEAL, that expands the law to allow for the military to support law enforcement agencies battling terrorists and drug cartels.

"What we want to do is make sure that our military can work in a whole-of-government approach to conduct counterterrorism operations and prevent transnational crime," Van Orden said. "It will codify the authority under Title 10, make it permanent, so that our folks know that we will continuously have their back."

"The Posse Comitatus Act rightly limits the military's role in domestic law enforcement to prevent misuse and abuse of the military against our own people. I believe that we should be strengthening that law," Jacobs said. "But this amendment blurs that line even more, even if you don't mean it to. This amendment is vague and ripe for abuse."

It passed easily by voice vote.

An amendment from Rep. Gabriel Vasquez (D-NM) that would bar the Pentagon from spending defense funds on new sections of border wall without a feasibility study was denounced by Rogers as "another political stunt intended to undermine President Trump and his successful border policies."

Democrats argued, given that Trump's "big, beautiful bill" includes a whopping \$170 billion for border security, there's no reason the Department of Homeland Security can't fund any necessary additional border wall without the Pentagon's help.

"They're grabbing a lot of Department of Defense assets to use in that effort and undermining our ability to meet our national security needs," said Rep.

Adam Smith (D-WA), a House Armed Services Committee ranking member and its former chairman when Democrats held the House majority.

Smith also proposed an amendment that would bar funding for any future effort by the United States to invade Canada, Greenland, or Panama.

It failed on a straight party-line vote, as Republicans wanted to keep Trump's options open.

Still, Democrats didn't get stuffed on every amendment.

They were particularly miffed that Hegseth used a ruse to violate the spirit of a law that stripped nine Army bases of their Confederate namesakes and barred the naming of any bases for Confederate officers.

Reps. Don Bacon (R-NE) and Derek Schmidt (R-KS) provided the key votes on an amendment that would restore the names selected by a bipartisan naming commission during former President Joe Biden's administration.

"Unfortunately, Secretary Hegseth and the Trump administration decided to troll the American public and discard the hard work of this committee and commission by reverting to base names. And they used the same ploy that the commission rejected, finding new servicemembers who

“Unfortunately, we’ve seen reports that the Army shifted \$1 billion, that’s right, \$1 billion, meant for barracks to instead fund its surge of troops to the southern border. And even if this money were replenished, it should never have been taken ... in the first place.”

—Rep. Sara Jacobs (D-CA)

shared the last names of these Confederate traitors,” said Rep. Marilyn Strickland (D-WA), the amendment's sponsor.

She added, “These servicemembers are heroes in their own right, and we don’t deny that, like Private Fitz Lee, a Buffalo soldier who was awarded the Medal of Honor. Yet Secretary Hegseth saw them as nothing more than convenient names.”

The Senate version of the NDAA contains a similar provision that applies to military bases in Virginia and requires a return to the new names while specifically barring Hegseth from changing them again.

It also expresses displeasure with the way Hegseth has fired senior officers with no explanation other than vague rumors that the people targeted, including the black chairman of the Joint Chiefs, were “too woke.”

The personnel actions have disproportionately affected women, including the recent announcement that the superintendent at the U.S. Naval Academy, a female three-star admiral, was being replaced by a Marine general and moved to a desk job at the Pentagon.

No explanation was given despite a law stipulating that the superintendent's term shall be “no less than three years,” and requiring a “statement of the reasons why” be provided to Congress.

The Senate bill also requires five days' notice to Congress if a military judge advocate general is being removed, along with an explanation and a formal reason for the removal of any member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff within five days. It also requires notification to Congress when military officers are removed from selection board reports and lists for reasons other than misconduct.

The two versions of the annual defense policy bill will have to be reconciled in a conference committee before being sent to Trump for his signature.

In 2020, Trump vetoed the measure because of the Army base renamings. However, because of the “must-pass” nature of the legislation, Congress overrode his veto. ★

Jamie McIntyre is the Washington Examiner's senior writer on national security.

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Business



FINANCE & ECONOMY

Trump administration tries to control the inflation narrative

Consumers think prices will remain relatively steady over the next year but fear long-term increases, surveys show

By Taylor Millard

President Donald Trump made lowering prices a key part of his successful 2024 campaign for a second, nonconsecutive term.

“Starting on Day One, we will end inflation and make America affordable again,” Trump swore last year during a Montana campaign event. “This election is about saving our economy.”

A bit over six months after Trump reassumed the presidency, the results are mixed.

Inflation is down sharply from the record 8% high during the administration of former President Joe Biden. Inflation, as measured by the producer price index, declined by three-tenths of a percentage point to 2.3% for the year ending in June.

But everyday costs continue to rise,

according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In May, prices were 2.4% higher than a year before. Shelter costs jumped 3.9%, and food nearly 3%, even as energy prices fell 3.5% — mostly due to massive drops in gasoline prices in March and May.

The Trump administration has attempted to control the narrative on prices.

GETTY IMAGES

When prices ticked up in February, Trump, posting on social media, blamed the Biden administration. A populist who argues inflation will fall as more jobs return to the United States, he described the price rise as a “period of transition” — even as financial markets grew uneasy about his widening global tariff war. Trump has repeatedly floated steep tariffs on imports, only to delay or scale them back.

Once inflation began slowing down, Trump declared victory.

“Consumers have been waiting for years to see pricing come down,” he said in May on Truth Social. “NO INFLATION ...”

The Federal Reserve’s long-term goal is 2% annual inflation, which it believes will keep the economy growing and prices stable.

Kurt Couchman, a senior fellow in fiscal policy for Americans for Prosperity, said Trump’s claims hold up, depending on the time frame.

“Inflation only seems high when looking at the last year, which includes many months of Biden-era policies like regulatory restrictions and the end-of-term spending geyser,” he told the *Washington Examiner*.

Other economists portray the economy as stable, albeit uncertain.

Jai Kedia, a Research Fellow with the Center for Monetary and Financial Alternatives at the Cato Institute, said the current inflation rate doesn’t raise alarm, but uncertainty over future policy clouds the outlook.

What troubled Kedia was what could happen to prices in the future, citing the unclear tariff situation. “It is hard to make any predictions,” he told the *Washington Examiner*, “because the administration keeps changing its tariff strategy.”

Surveys of consumers and business owners show a similar feeling.

Most people think prices will remain steady in the next year, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York on July 8. Business owners gave a similar opinion to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta.

There’s still concern about long-term inflation.

The New York Fed reports that people expect inflation to rise about 3% by 2028 and another 2.6% by 2030. A University of Michigan survey found most consumers aren’t preparing for the worst, but they do expect inflation to stay elevated and a mild economic slowdown.

The U.S. is concerned about tariff-related price hikes. Consumers told the University of Michigan that they expect the tariffs to cause them to pay slightly more for goods and services soon.

The Trump administration has attempted to ease those fears.

The administration used a White House economic report suggesting import prices fell 0.1% this year. Council of Economic Advisers Chairman Stephen Miran said whatever effect tariffs may have had on prices was overwhelmed by the administration’s push to repeal Biden-era rules.

Economists believe tariff-related price shocks will eventually hit the entire country. They’ve highlighted Trump’s tendency to announce tariffs and then delay their implementation. At the same time, Joseph Brusuelas at RSM noted that prices on canned vegetables have risen since Trump reimposed steel and aluminum tariffs earlier this year.

It’s not known how large the tariff price shocks will be. Donald Boudreaux, an economics professor at George Mason University, said tariffs might not significantly affect prices, but not because of Trump’s policy. He praised the large and dynamic U.S. economy.

This atmosphere of uncertainty may explain why the Fed hasn’t moved to lower interest rates to boost spending.

The Fed has held its benchmark rate at 4.50% since December 2024 in what Chairman Jerome Powell called a “holding pattern.” He told Congress in July that the Fed would wait for more data because he believes tariff-related inflation will happen “over the course of the coming months.”

That’s infuriated the Trump administration and congressional allies.

In a letter sent to Powell last month, the president demanded rates be lowered to at least 1.75% to match countries

like Denmark, Seychelles, and Thailand. Trump claimed that the delay cost the U.S. “hundreds of billions of dollars” and insisted there was “no inflation.”

He reinforced that message on July 11.

“He’s costing our country a lot of money,” he told reporters. “We should be No. 1, and we’re not. That’s because of Jerome Powell.”

There is some concern that the White House’s comments infringe on the Fed’s independence. However, it’s not unusual for a presidential administration to complain about interest rates. President Harry Truman tried, but failed, to get the Fed to lower interest rates during the 1950s. President Richard Nixon successfully lobbied then-Fed Chairman Arthur F. Burns to keep rates low before the 1972 presidential election. George H.W. Bush, as a former president, blamed his 1992 election loss on then-Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan not lowering interest rates.

The Trump administration believes Powell ignored inflation and waited too long to raise interest rates in 2021. They now believe he’s waiting too long to lower rates.

While Trump has no plans to renominate Powell for a new term as Fed chairman next year, some Republicans want Powell to exit sooner.

Sens. Bernie Moreno (R-OH), Rick Scott (R-FL), and Tommy Tuberville (R-AL) have all demanded Powell’s resignation. They want Trump to appoint a new chairman who will lower rates.

Echoing the president, Moreno claimed that Powell’s hesitance to lower interest rates cost the economy \$400 billion a year.

Economists believe the Fed is in a tough spot.

Kedia said Powell would love to lower rates to stimulate the economy and raise employment, but tariff uncertainty makes it too risky.

Boudreaux thinks the Fed needs to lower inflation as much as possible. “The Fed should rein in monetary growth by raising its interest rate,” he said. ★

Taylor Millard is a freelance journalist who lives in Virginia.

TIANA'S TAKE

In bringing business back home, the Trump agenda law is already paying off



Although President Donald Trump did not sign his sweeping agenda proposal into law until July 4, the White House maintains that the tax, spending, and immigration legislation is already paying policy dividends. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent is making the media rounds to boast of what he calls the “capex comeback,” touting benefits derived by the nation from Trump’s self-proclaimed One Big Beautiful Bill Act, even before he and Congress enacted it.

Capital expenditures, the spending a business invests in fixed assets such as improved factory equipment or a new building, were up nearly 17% in the first half of the year. Excluding the anomaly of the COVID-19 pandemic, that’s the largest two-quarter gain in capex in this century. But why is an Independence Day-enacted law responsible for increased domestic business spending in the first six months of this year?

A senior Treasury Department official said the Trump agenda law’s crucial

stipulation to make full expensing retroactive to the start of the year is to thank.

“So as long as you have confidence in the president and confidence in Secretary Bessent, his ability to work with the Congress to get it done, you think, ‘OK, this is going to get done, and whether it gets done July 4,’ seems pretty aggressive, but of course he did,” the official told the *Washington Examiner*.

The new law also dramatically expands the scope of business expensing relative to the original 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, Trump’s signature domestic achievement during his first, nonconsecutive term. While under the TCJA in its original form, expensing was limited and phased down completely by 2026, the new law makes expensing permanent and expands eligibility to new qualified production property.

“So that ‘one big, beautiful bill’ is more expansive because now it expenses even for plants,” the Treasury Department official said. “You build a plant, not just invest in a computer or software or whatever it might be, you actually build something, you get a full credit. But secondly, the tariffs as structured are going to encourage that capital to come in. This isn’t just lip service. Companies are incentivized now to come in, because they’re paying, in some areas, significantly high tariffs if they don’t want to bring their operations to the U.S. And again, the fact that the tax cuts from 2017 are now permanent, everything kind of reinforces each other, and we know from the tariffs we’re generating the revenue.”

Indeed, Trump’s unprecedented universal tariffs have generated some \$120 billion in new revenue for the year thus far, with June posting its first monthly fiscal surplus in 20 years. But business uncertainty over the tariffs has also proven a bit of a wildcard since the start of the second Trump administration.

Although Trump, reportedly at the behest of Bessent and the bond markets, agreed to walk back his sweeping “reciprocal” tariff schedule at the start of April and impose an extended pause to negotiate new bilateral trade deals while holding tariffs uniformly at 10%, the new trade deals announced in the run-up to the Aug. 1 deadline have been much more punitive than current levels.

Inflation data indicate that companies have been mostly capable of absorbing the cost of the 10% tariffs rather than passing them on to consumers. But new trade deals with Japan and the Philippines, which bring duties on our exports down to zero, will now charge Americans 19% to import goods from those countries.

The administration maintains that the naysayers are wrong, and alas, there is indeed reason to suspect the official narrative of financial experts. Tariffs did not have the inflationary effects many economists projected, and despite pessimism from the political commentariat, Trump’s public pledges that foreign companies will increase domestic investment have already begun to be fulfilled. The Japanese trade deal comes with a \$400 billion investment fund from Tokyo that Trump will be in charge of allocating.

So who is right? The Richmond Federal Reserve Manufacturing Index projects lowered capex in the next six months, and Goldman Sachs predicts that higher equipment costs because of tariffs will drive capex down.

But if the biggest hurdle corporate America has faced thus far is uncertainty, its worries might be over. The Trump agenda bill makes full expensing the law of the land. And like the Trump tariff regime or not, negotiations are about to come to a conclusion. ★

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



Life & Arts

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Also: Women painters in Paris ★ Lena Dunham in London ★ Virgil Abloh and identity politics ★ The urge to disobey



SCOTT A GARFITT/INVISION/AP

Rhian Teasdale of the band Wet Leg performs during the Glastonbury Festival on June 27.

“The music millennial stars produce is not always very good, but at least it can carry the weight of things greater than itself, and it is part of a culture rather than a mere product or a pose.”

Armin Rosen, P. 51



BOOKS

When They Let Women Paint

By Diane Scharper

Shoplifting, murder, acid-throwing, hammer blows, knives, guns, and nearly every kind of threat proliferated in Paris in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Yet Paris was called the City of Light. It was home to cultural bastions such as the Louvre and to artists like Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Cézanne. Even one or two women artists, such as Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot, resided there. But art, like poetry, was considered man's work.

Aspiring American artists flocked there. It was the place to be — at least for men. American men lived on pensions, but those did not welcome unchaperoned women. Better-known art schools such as the École des Beaux-Arts were off-limits to women, while others charged them double the tuition.

Grace Turnbull, from the Baltimore family with ties to Johns Hopkins University, studied art at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Turnbull went to Paris hoping to register for life-drawing classes. She stayed at the American Girls' Club. But she wasn't allowed to take courses that featured nude models. When she complained, her mother said it would kill her father if she took such a course. "Father's pious Presbyterian upbringing ... made him scent danger," she wrote in her autobiography.

That's the setting for Jennifer Dasal's



Reid Hall in Paris, originally known as the American Girls' Art Club, as seen in *Scribner's* magazine in 1887.

latest book, *The Club: Where American Women Artists Found Refuge in Belle Époque Paris*. Dasal, curator and host of the *ArtCurious* podcast, wrote an earlier book that ferreted out unfamiliar incidents in art history. This one digs up mostly forgotten artists and the little-known place where Turnbull and others lived as art students.



The Club: Where American Women Artists Found Refuge in Belle Époque Paris
By Jennifer Dasal
Bloomsbury Publishing
368 pages, \$32.99

The club, as it was painted by Anne Goldthwaite, one of the residents, provides Dasal's cover illustration. Located at 4 Rue du Cheveuse, it was built in 1750 as a private home. It underwent several incarnations, becoming a porcelain factory, an orthopedic office, a boarding school for boys, and a residence for women art students. Later, it was a Red Cross hospital, a social club, and an academic center.

The property eventually became Reid Hall, named after its founder, Elizabeth Mills Reid. Today, it stands as an exten-

sion of Columbia University, including graduate and undergraduate divisions of other American universities.

Dasal's book weaves details into a first-person narrative. Her writing is lighthearted and sprinkled with colorful anecdotes, but somewhat wordy, which makes her history engaging yet at times difficult to follow.

One of Dasal's most noteworthy chapters refers to the art historian Linda Nochlin, whose 1971 essay asked why there were no great women artists: "The fault lies not in our stars," she argues, "but in our institutions and in our education." Believing that women artists had been neglected, Nochlin started a debate that included everything from the meaning of the word "great" to a discussion about the lack of women chefs.

Dasal's book continues Nochlin's argument, focusing on the American Girls' Club and the women who stayed there. In America, Dasal writes, high-level artistic training was unavailable to women. Females had little access to salons and art exhibitions. Women were told that art should be their hobby, not their passion.

"This manner of thinking," Dasal says, "was not limited to the visual arts

but suffused many professional realms.” As Edith Wharton put it, “On her wedding day [the American woman] ceases in any open, frank, and recognized manner to be an influence in the lives of the men of the community.”

Reid, wife of the U.S. ambassador to Paris, believed that women had the right to study abroad. She understood parental safety concerns as did her friend, Helen Newell, wife of the Presbyterian minister at St. Luke’s Chapel, which abutted 4 Rue du Cheveuse.

The two women created a reading room on the property. They later added dormitories, a library, a chapel, a restaurant, a medical clinic, a painting studio, and an exhibition space.

Opening in 1893 on the Left Bank in Montparnasse, the American Girls’ Club provided artistic support and a home away from home replete with a matron who acted as a maternal stand-in, popping her head in its nightcap out the window when the bell clanged for night-time arrivals, as art student Emma Cranmer recalled. Closing in 1914 because of the outbreak of World War I, the club’s days as an artists’ residence have been partly forgotten. Most of the work of the artists residing there has been lost to history.

Dasal, though, helps to bring their memory alive through quotes from letters and memoirs. “We want to speak to an audience that asks simply,” painter Anne Goldthwaite writes, “‘is it good?’ Not ‘was it done by a woman?’” In a 1910 letter home, Alice Morgan Wright, sounding like today’s typical American child, says, “The work of Matisse is the most screamingly funny stuff that I have ever laid eyeball on.” My favorite quote, though, belongs to Helen Frankenthaler, who says, “...goddam it, I know how to paint just as well as the boys.”

The prevailing notion was that women artists were good as long as they painted like men. This particularly galled several club members and prompted them to become feminists. Ultimately, all were determined to pursue their vocations as artists. They believed that women could be great artists and should be encouraged to paint not like men or women, but like themselves.

Diane Scharper is a regular contributor to the Washington Examiner. She teaches the Memoir Seminar for the Johns Hopkins University Osher program.

BOOKS

Flattening Virgil Abloh

By Ross Anderson

If any modern fashion designer warrants an obsessive biography, it’s Virgil Abloh. Through the 2010s, he made some of the most iconic Nike sneakers, founded one of the most important new fashion brands, Off-White, and gave men’s luxury a whole new look as creative director of menswear at Louis Vuitton despite having no formal fashion training. His creative openness — giving talks on YouTube and filling Tumblr and Instagram with pictures of works in progress — inspired a whole generation of fashion-obsessed young men who followed everything he did. And it was contrasted with a notable silence about his broader personal views and his private life, including his cancer diagnosis. He was just 41 years old when he died in November 2021.

I had thus hoped for a definitive biography of Abloh, but Robin Givhan’s *Make It Ours: Crashing the Gates of Culture with Virgil Abloh* is not that book. Where a great biography brings you behind the curtain, *Make It Ours* was written firmly from the outside. In lieu of much original reporting on her subject, Givhan pads her book out with tangents and fluff, flattening him under the dull lens of modern race politics.

She brushes past his Louis Vuitton Air Force 1 collaboration, an authentic release of a fake Canal Street product that represented the ultimate triumph of his vision of high and low-brows coming together. But she has a full paragraph about George Floyd’s death and multiple arguments against colorblindness. Some of Abloh’s most famous items, such as the tape belt, are never mentioned, but there are sentences detailing the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Breonna Taylor. She writes,

“Abloh kept things; he kept unrealized ideas, doodles, hard drives, architectural models. They weren’t organized; but they were there.” But she doesn’t mention his huge archives, kept in storage units around the world, full of things he bought and made — let alone bring the reader inside them.

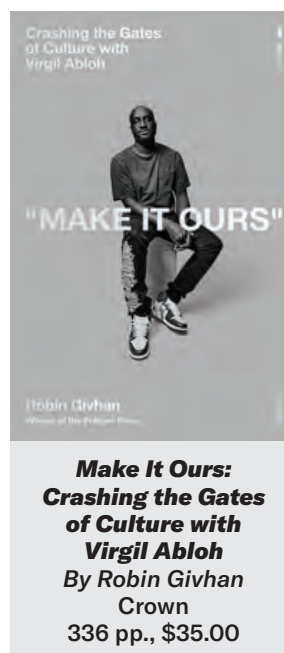
The chapter about his childhood says little new about it, but has extensive paragraphs on the demographic information and racial history of his hometown of Rockford, Illinois. Because Abloh said everything he did was “for the 17-year-old version of myself,” Givhan then goes through 1997’s cultural goings-on, even when obviously irrelevant. Most grievously: “It’s hard to imagine seventeen-year-old Abloh — soccer player, engineering student, skateboarder — as someone interested in British fairy tales and princesses, but Diana’s death was a cultural moment.” That preamble should have been a sign to delete the multiple paragraphs on Diana that follow.

Further, there are far too many embarrassing lines that should never have made it past an editor. Case in point: “He had a degree in architecture that allowed him to see his ideas in three dimensions.” Or “They weren’t trespassing. They were blazing a new trail.” Perhaps worst are her various sequences

of following “he” sentences: “He was thoughtful; he approached problems and possibilities in a considered manner. He was watchful and dutiful.” It’s all of a style that characterizes, rather than describes and explains. To wit: “He was an introvert, which is not to say that he was shy, because he was a talker.”

The book has high points, such as her dive into Abloh’s architectural influences, but even the interesting asides feel like a waste of time. A section on the restrictions on National Basketball Association fashion would

be welcomed in a 1000 plus page biography, but here feels like padding, as the 336 pages of *Make It Ours* leave so many basic biographical questions



Make It Ours:
Crashing the Gates
of Culture with
Virgil Abloh
By Robin Givhan
Crown
336 pp., \$35.00

unanswered. What were his religious views? What was his general political framework? What was his home life like? Givhan writes incessantly about how Abloh's friendly, nonconfrontational manner was a calibrated tool for navigating predominantly white spaces as a black man and something emergent from his middle-class, African-immigrant-parent background, but she never provides any answers about what he actually thought.

Givhan tries to write from a neutral god's-eye view, but you can often tell which few people she spoke with, and the many she didn't, so passages often feel thin. She interviewed his parents, Nee and Eunice Abloh, but there are no original quotes from his widow, Shannon Abloh, who isn't mentioned in the acknowledgements. The Arnault family is not quoted or thanked either.

The biggest gap is Kanye West. Abloh and Kanye were the closest creative collaborators, and you can't understand Abloh's story without talking at length about their brotherly, competitive relationship. Givhan doesn't give this nearly enough attention or detail. She only mentions West's self-appointed "Louis Vuitton Don" title as he hands that label to Abloh, and never mentions that West's dream job was Louis Vuitton's creative director, nor whether there were discussions about him taking that role. She never considers what Abloh contributed during West's more controversial periods, such as releasing Confederate Flag merchandise during the Yeezus tour, nor does she provide any insight into how their relationship frayed over time with envy and competition. She clearly didn't speak with West, which is understandable, but she never mentions why one wouldn't. Sean "Diddy" Combs is also mentioned throughout, and similarly, she never brings up what he's now most associated with.

In the most galling omission, their mutual associate, Tremaine Emory, said that West wasn't invited to Abloh's private funeral, and then was barred from speaking at the public memorial. There is no mention of this in *Make It Ours*.

With these huge gaps and minimal original reporting on Abloh, it's hard to understand why *Make It Ours* exists. If you want to appreciate his work, buy coffee table books such as *Louis Vuit-*

ton: Virgil Abloh or *Virgil Abloh. Nike. ICONS*. And if you're curious about the philosophy behind his work, just listen to Abloh's lectures, where he explains himself more clearly, succinctly, and interestingly than Givhan does. She occasionally provides a critical take on his approach, notably contrasting how he riffed on the works of others while also aggressively copyrighting his own signatures. But she pulls her punches even here. In 2021, the *New York Times* wrote an interactive feature on his trademark operation, called *The Off-White Papers*. Givhan moves on from this after a paragraph.

Perhaps the biggest problem, though, is that you get the strong suspicion that Givhan doesn't really like or truly understand Abloh's work and only values him as an agent of change. A racial lens simply doesn't work very well for Virgil Abloh. He was black, yes, but he was a cultural magpie, loving mediums born of cross-cultural collaboration, be that "street wear," hip-hop, DJing, Tumblr, or sneakers. Black Americans have heavily contributed to those, but equally so have the Japanese, French luxury houses, and big American corporations. And, most of Abloh's fans were young white guys.

Through the internet and our shared love of Abloh's work, I've met some collectors of his, who've each spent close to six figures buying his most important work — be they Abloh's Nike shoes, Louis jackets, or IKEA rugs. I asked these diehard collectors if they knew about this book, and they didn't. They asked if I would recommend it. I didn't.

Ross Anderson is the Life Editor at the Spectator World and a tech and culture contributor for the New York Sun.

BOOKS

How Catholicism Shaped the Culture Wars

By Art Tavana

Catholicism has become youth culture. As I write this, American youth are fetishizing the Catholic Church (what the *New York Times*

called "New York's Hottest Club"). Gen Zers are converting to Catholicism and posting about "sedevacantism," the fringe-traditionalist Catholic belief that the papacy has been illegitimate since Vatican II. A Harvard University study showed that more Gen Zers are identifying as Catholic (up 6% between 2022 and 2023) due to what the *New York Post* described as "an answer to loneliness, cultural drift and a search for purpose." And, I'd argue, due to the culture wars (fueled by cancel culture).

There's plenty of scholarly support for the post-secular pivot, but popular culture's role in the pivot is fresh scholarly terrain. Art, faith, sex, and "religious-inflected" controversies are the pillars of the post-secular origin story and subtitle of Paul Elie's latest book: *The Last Supper: Art, Faith, Sex, and Controversy in the '80s*, a near-500 page cultural history of the Reagan-era and the non-canonical works of art that defined its "crypto-religious" turn.

For example, that period saw Madonna's "Like a Prayer" video blurring the lines between adoration and "carnal devotion." Roberto de Mattei, an Italian Roman Catholic historian, described the video as "a blasphemy and insult" for showing "immorals inside a church." Secular feminists were aghast: Madonna was being too Catholic, horny, and objectified (her cleavage wasn't properly holstered). The Vatican censured the video and waged a mini-culture war in the wake of Vatican II, which had attempted to modernize Catholicism. "Twenty years after Vatican II de-emphasized Old World Catholic practices," writes Elie, "images from the left-behind Catholic ghetto were still alive and well in American popular culture."

When was the last time the Vatican condemned a pop star? When was the last time a pop star sexualized the act of worship? Lana Del Rey genuflecting in front of a John Wayne hologram in 2013's *Tropico*? The 1980s were a time when traditional Catholicism clashed with popular culture in ways we've never seen before or since. But why? This is the schismatic flashpoint Elie's book aims not only to explain but weave into today's culture wars. Elie, a Roman Catholic scholar and senior

fellow at Georgetown's Berkley Center of Religion, situates crypto-religiosity squarely in the '80s. He calls this period a "liminal space between belief and disbelief" that produced boundary-pushing art that confronted some of the dogmas of the day with "cryptical-ly" religious art. The dogmas include the Catholic Church declaring homosexuality a "disorder" in 1986 and its callousness toward AIDS — the dark cloud that hovers over every chapter of this book.

In answer, he provides a cultural history. But the real thesis of the book is an argument that everyone who approaches the past or the present of art without looking to religion is simply mistaken. "What's striking in retrospect isn't just that artists are making reference to religion in their work," writes Elie. "It is that they take the religious point of view seriously and personally. They aren't set against religious authority ... they aren't anti-religious or irreligious. They're crypto-religious."

The crypto-religious turn began, according to Elie, in 1979, with Bob Dylan's rebirth as an evangelical Christian on *Slow Train Coming*, which was followed by other examples of crypto-religiosity. These included Andres Serrano's "Piss Christ" photograph, Robert Mapplethorpe's "The Perfect Moment" (a retrospective of homoerotic S&M photography partially funded by the National Endowment of the Arts — a flashpoint in the culture wars), Andy Warhol's *Last Supper* series, Prince combining "music, sex, and the sacred," Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and Sinéad O'Connor ripping up a photo of Pope John Paul II on *Saturday Night Live* (1992).

These figures and others color Elie's subtextual arguments, including his belief that the "secret chord" of crypto-religiousness in popular art has been historically ignored by critics. Elie's implicit argument is that the cultural friction between the Catholic

Church (boosted by the Moral Majority's position that sex and religion shouldn't go together) and gay Catholics (e.g., Robert Mapplethorpe) produced transgressive art that ignited culture wars.

Last Supper thus excavates cultural history from a specific timeline: 1979 to 1992. The cultural commentary is mostly "cryptic" and purposefully siloed from the present. This leaves unanswered why the post-secular, crypto-religious revival today is not particularly controversial or shocking. Our own era, after all, has plenty of potentially controversy-igniting blasphemous cultural production that plays off of religious iconography: Lana Del Rey's "Say Yes to Heaven," Ethel Cain's Southern Gothic gaze, Justin Bieber and Hillsong, Honor Levy converting to Catholicism, Red Scare, MAGA Catholics, Dogma's sexually explicit cover of Madonna's "Like a Prayer."

Our collectively culture wars-addled brain begs Elie for more provocation and punditry — to take a strong position. Nearly 500 pages of culture wars history, and feminism is mentioned just once or twice, never critically. Why? Perhaps a tinge of self-censorship, as Elie knows his audience (and gatekeepers).

The Last Supper is, then, an imperfect cultural study that relies too often on "close reading." But Elie also accomplishes something remarkable and necessary: a cultural pilgrimage that foregrounds the extraordinary and ineffable in the popular arts, demonstrating how the "religious point of view" is deeply entwined with the artistic desires to make sense of the world, or subvert it. When Brian Wilson described mak-

ing music as hearing "God's voice," he might have been taken more seriously by people who mistakenly consider art to be a secular practice.

Art Tavana is the author of Goodbye, Guns N' Roses and a former columnist at L.A. Weekly and Playboy.



**The Last Supper:
Art, Faith, Sex,
and Controversy
in the 1980s**
By Paul Elie
Farrar, Straus and
Giroux
496 pp., \$33.00



FILM

Millennial in the Middle

By Derek Robertson

Too Much, the 10-episode Netflix series from Lena Dunham, invites a series of unflattering comparisons to the *Girls* auteur's earlier work.

There's the shared cast (Dunham, show-stealer Andrew Rannells, Rita Wilson, and beloved character actor Richard Grant all make reappearances); the rapid-fire, zeitgeisty dialogue (Dunham wrote or co-wrote every episode); the messy, socially dysfunctional, yet ultimately lovable heroine at the center of it all (Meg Stalter, the social-media comedic phenom and Dunham's on-screen avatar and somewhat eerie doppelgänger).

As Dunham's return to episodic confessional mythmaking, *Too Much* falters first and foremost when it comes to her usually preternatural ability to speak for, as she once famously said, "a generation," emphasis on the nondefinite article. Dunham's genius, and what made *Girls* a legitimate cultural event, was to meld heartfelt James L. Brooks-style melodrama with brutally honest reportage about millennial mores, desires, and deficits.

She still has the chops, as she demonstrated with 2022's aptly titled *Sharp Stick*, an icy, confrontational dramedy about domestic turmoil. But with *Too Much*, Dunham leans far too hard on the other end of the fulcrum, resulting in a heinously mushy, insincere romantic comedy with a sweaty cultural pastiche a million miles removed from the wry insight of *Girls*.

Considering the premise of the series is closely based on Dunham's own life, this lack of authenticity would seem unlikely: Bruised from a bad breakup (on-screen with a comically heinous Brooklynite not-so-"nice guy" who might as well be twirling his ironic mus-



Will Sharpe and
Megan Stalter
in *Too Much*.

tache, and in real life with pop mega-producer Jack Antonoff), Dunham's doppelganger moves to London and finds herself in a whirlwind romance with a foppishly handsome musician (a winning Will Sharpe and in real life the British songwriter Luis Felber, also a co-creator of the series).

Jessica, played by Stalter, responds to this affair with a type of young person's hyper-online hyper-self-consciousness that recalls more populist hackwork such as Netflix's *Emily In Paris* than the Emmy-nominated *Girls*. Jessica, with religious sincerity, searches the internet for guidance on romantic "red flags." Her coworkers caution her about "lovebombing." A key narrative device is a brutally contorted, Chekhov's finger-gun series of "private" Instagram videos, in which she monologues to her ex's new fiancée (portrayed, in quintessentially Dunhamesque so-clever-it's-stupid-it's-clever casting, by Emily Ratajkowski, the actual most famous supermodel in the world).

Perhaps with Dunham, underrated as an actress with her ability to simultaneously wink at the camera and convey the utmost sincerity, in the lead role, these perfunctory jibes might have worked. Unfortunately, Stalter, whose most notable credit to date is a supporting role on HBO's *Hacks*, does not share her writer-director's protean, unpredictable, Bugs-Bunny-with-an-MFA quality. Stalter's performance toggles back and forth between a smirking, manic, "pwease-don't-take-me-too-seriously" comic patter and a pained "serious" look that recalls the discomfort of the dentist's chair, whether

she's reminiscing about her ex, lamenting her creative woes, or getting rogered from behind.

It is hard to overstate how much this performance sinks the series, which is otherwise not without redeeming qualities. Dunham is writing her own life, and therefore the vast majority of the show's screen time is given over to Stalter's gratingly unfunny, emotionally inert performance, to the point where one starts to feel bad for an actor of her limited range being put in such a position. The feeling is especially palpable during the series' pivotal fifth episode "Pink Valentine," which, in a nod to the 2010 Derek Cianfrance film from which it adapts its name, tells the retroactive story of Jessica's doomed romance with her glib, two-dimensional manchild ex-boyfriend.

Jessica is meant to be roughly the same age as Dunham in real life, which invites the question of why Dunham didn't simply play a roughly autobiographical version of herself, as she did in *Girls*. One can easily conjure meta-narrative reasons for this, such as a writer-director hoping to move more assuredly into the next phase of her career behind the camera, or her not wanting to invite the absurd scrutiny of her personal life that accompanied *Girls*'s confessionalism.

But Occam's razor provides a simpler on-screen explanation: For whatever reason, this character is simply not as interesting as Dunham might have been. Where her *Girls* protagonist Hannah Horvath was self-assured, Jessica is retiring and apologetic; where Hannah voraciously

embraced the high- and low-brow in quintessential millennial fashion, Jessica one-dimensionally defends her love of Ke\$ha and *Vanderpump Rules* in patty-cake, out-of-date popmyst style; where Hannah had stormy, emotionally complex affairs with varied, offbeat avatars of masculinity as portrayed by Adam Driver or the underrated, uber-smarmy Jake Lacy, Jessica has a scoundrel and a white knight more suited to circa-2010 CW drama.

Did Netflix, famous for its inane "data-driven" studio notes, demand this level of "accessible" idiocy? Did Dunham simply want to make her version of a cheesy, feel-good Y2K-era rom-com? Can falling in love really just blunt your aesthetic sensibilities this much? *Too Much* still shows flashes of Dunham's shrewdness as a writer, especially the sly upstairs-downstairs sensibility she honed as a childhood observer of the Manhattan art world (her parents being the painter Carroll Dunham and photographer Laurie Simmons). Despite its foreshadowing of a treacly subplot about downward economic mobility, a scene where a volatile, coked-to-the-gills Grant awkwardly attempts to brawl with Jessica's beau inspires actual laughs, as does much of the repartee that happens between the ensemble cast while Stalter is otherwise occupied somewhere off-screen attempting to emote.

Ultimately, *Too Much* resembles nothing so much as one of those strange albums recorded during a fallow creative period in a pop artist's career, where there wasn't quite the right cultural fit, or they happened to pick up the wrong artistic tools — think Elvis Costello's schizophrenically synth-drenched 1984 misfire *Goodbye Cruel World*, or Bob Dylan's similar *Empire Burlesque*.

The talent is still, clearly, there, but the end result is misguided, disfigured, and simply no fun. Dunham remains a preeminent millennial voice, representing a generation that, if for no other reason than economic ones, will likely dominate American and global culture for decades to come. Hopefully, *Too Much* will stand one day as a similar odd, developmental beat in her wider oeuvre, and not a harbinger of a newly diminished creative phase.

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ON CULTURE

Pop Music in the Wilderness

By Armin Rosen

Pop music, like the rest of American society, has reached the exhausted endpoint of the taboo-litigation mania that's marred the past decade of our national life. Having reckoned with racism, sexism, and a host of other identitarian crimes, and then having decided the reckoning was too embarrassing in its overreach for us to continue or even to acknowledge, artists and fans have moved on to pedophilia as the final great faultline. Kendrick Lamar used February's Super Bowl halftime show to accuse Drake, a rival hip-hop megastar, of "lik[ing] them young." Like most rap diss tracks, "Not Like Us," Lamar's anti-Drake scorcher from the spring of 2024, contained not a single word of truth. It also had three long stints atop the *Billboard* Hot 100. Lamar's performance of his slanderous mambo was the only real moment of drama and tension amid the Philadelphia Eagles' unaesthetic beat-down of the Kansas City Chiefs.

Thank God for sex panics; "Not Like Us" is a colossal banger. But then a strange thing happened in the 18 months after its debut: nothing. Drake, at 81.5 million monthly Spotify listeners compared to Kendrick's 80.5, has retained almost all of his pre-feud stature. The Toronto croon-rapper's recent "What Did I Miss?" is now the No. 2 song in America. It seems the listening public enjoyed Lamar's thunderous insult anthem without accepting its dubious truth-claims. Earlier this summer, Sean Combs, one of the wealthiest and least talented of hip-hop's late '90s exploiters, beat a federal sex trafficking charge, becoming the last major alleged criminal to be prosecuted by former FBI Director James Comey's daughter.

The American mind-state, our moral assumptions and our basic relationship with ever-destabilizing reality, is encoded in the music we create and consume en masse. The *Billboard* Hot 100 contains vital information about who we are at a given moment. Reports are hardly encouraging these days. At a moment when the monsters appear

less monstrous, and sometimes even look like victims, it would be natural for popular tastes to reflect a new sense of liberation. Perhaps the airwaves would sound freer and more transgressive as the scolds and censors lost their grip on society. Instead, our confusion grows ever deeper. Libidinal hip-hop has vanished from the charts, now the province of artists who narrate their mental health struggles rather than their superhuman urges or tastes. Florida rapper Doecchi's "Anxiety" became the sonic wallpaper of the early summer ride-hailing app experience, each whiny and dour bar producing guilty moments of "WAP" nostalgia, while on his latest album, Justin Bieber followed Lamar's lead in including therapy session-like skitwork between songs. Often, it seems that no one, with the notable exception of the Puerto Rican pop savant Bad Bunny, has any confident idea of what they're supposed to be doing now.

Brat Summer, last year's abortive attempt to turn the screechy Charli XCX album of that name into a culture-spanning event, has given way to a season without name or form. The currently most ubiquitous pop star, 26-year-old Sabrina Carpenter, is the musical equivalent of a sex robot, more a sequence of AI-generated moans than a real human being, much less an artist. No one is convinced by her, including her — none of the feelings are real, none of the flings or boyfriends sound like they happened or exist. She's transcribing algorithmically generated imitations of passion into sounds and language incapable of rousing a single blood cell.

The same chill has descended upon the unimpeachably sincere end of the musical creative spectrum. Arcade Fire became the defining indie rock band of the late 2000s through hyperearnestness — the Texas-born Win Butler could access the walled-off fears and feelings of adolescence, even of childhood, and blow them up to arena size. The feelings outstripped all available language in his best numbers, quasi-orchestral works that often dissolved into wordless sing-alongs.

In August 2022, *Pitchfork*, the review website-turned-self-appointed music industry sex police, and the site that vaulted Arcade Fire to prominence nearly 20 years earlier, attempted a Me Too-type destruction of Butler, who was alleged to

have gone on a handful of sad-sounding dates with fans who later decided their hero was an awkward and unstable creep. In *Pink Elephant*, the band's full-length from May, you can sense how the ordeal has drained him. Lead single "The Year of the Snake" plods atop a funereal bass drum while Butler shrugs that it's the season of change, meaning it's probably fine to be confused by it all. Elsewhere on the album, he fantasizes about never having been a rock star and gives an uneasy instrumental track the unsubtle title of "Beyond Salvation." By the time Butler creates a real, vintage Arcade Fire moment, nearing a primal scream-like assessment of his own sundered life during a long buildup in "Stuck In My Head," the record is just minutes away from being over. This is the first Arcade Fire album free of all ecstasy, or even a countdown to it, and it comes in a time when defiant confidence would be just revenge against everything that tried to destroy the band. Instead, Butler has been beaten. He's a whimpering captive to forces he can barely understand. If his inner teenager still screams, he can no longer hear him behind the wall, and neither can we.

Butler is a victim of a sinister moral panic, one in which small and jealous spirits tore down the highest targets their stubby little souls could reach. He came into the summer at a huge disadvantage and with a shrunken fanbase — a couple of months ago, the *Pink Elephant* tour stopped at the Brooklyn Paramount, a 5,000-capacity room down the street from Arcade Fire's previous local headlining venue, the Barclays Center, which seats 18,000 people. *Pink Elephant*, a major label release, was the first Arcade Fire record to completely miss the *Billboard* 200. Wet Leg, the cheeky girl group from the Isle of Wight, had no such loss of momentum when it released *moisturizer*, its second album, in early July. It came into its sophomore effort as one of the most lauded and hyped rock bands of recent vintage, and the two official members are women with as-yet unexcavated romantic histories.

Wet Leg often seemed too lauded and too hyped. It's never been clear where exactly they came from. "Chaise Longue," an immaculately produced statement of jarringly clear artistic purpose, showed up on Spotify one day in June 2021, courtesy of Domino Records. Suddenly,



Miley Cyrus performs during the 66th annual Grammy Awards on Feb. 4, 2024, in Los Angeles.

everybody loved Wet Leg, both the band and its self-titled debut EP. They must be some kind of a psyop: Are we really to believe that Rhian Teasdale and Hester Chambers decided to form a band while riding a Ferris wheel? The population of the Isle of Wight is 140,000. How often do label goons even make it out there? But then pop music is really just endless cycles of unseen corporate overseers field-testing their hunches and schemes on a willing and unwitting public. The whole world-engine of American music consumption is one grand psyop, and it is churlish to complain about the existence of a lesser trans-Atlantic version of the game we all know.

The first Wet Leg album showcased a deliciously English clash of bawdiness and ambivalence, the same tug of lust and shame that gave the best work of the '90s Britpop rebels Pulp, the most obvious of Wet Leg's influences, an element of real, human complexity. From the tossed-off-sounding, sing-spoken vocals to the surrealist sex talk and the whipping sense of humor, *Wet Leg* set the pair up as the great modern inheritors of the simultaneously diffident and self-aware British alternative rock tradition. Girls could be horny and guilty too, and they could be fun enough for you to miss both attributes under the thumping bass and disco guitars.

Wetleg's sophomore effort, *moisturizer*, could be called a more human version of what Carpenter offers. "Mangetout" finds them sneering at the unevolved modern male with the same pity and scorn Carpenter tries to capture on "Manchild," her recent chart-topper, ex-

cept that the Wet Leg-style swing from a half-rapped, fully stoned delivery on their verses to high-flying rock choruses goes beyond anything Carpenter is likely to ever even try. Alas, the rest of *moisturizer* is serious, almost subdued, at least compared with its rollicking predecessor. The literary-quality mockery of frustrated male urges is much scarcer this time out — "Just take me shopping, buy me a rabbit, yeah?" is about as far as the taunts go. There's nothing nearly as good as "Chaise Longue," a song about the intricate psychic interplay between boredom and sex. Our girls have grown up too fast. They're now too evolved to see the possibilities of boredom or even of sex. Maybe expectations have rendered them timid, and they've become less interesting now that they think they're expected to represent something — women, rock musicians, the ever-shrinking Isle of Wight — other than themselves.

If we are an era where the mores, economic systems, and basic ethos of pop music is in a state of identity-erasing flux, rescue lies in those artists who have a strong connection to the former world, ones old enough to have lived and worked in the final days of the monoculture but young enough to still be creatively restless. Perhaps it is the millennials who will rekindle the ashes left in the wake of the early 2020s kulturkampf: Taylor Swift, Beyonce, Lana Del Rey, Lamar, Drake, and Tyler, the Creator all stand for something. They have a sound and an ethos that forms a discrete chapter in the creative life of humanity, but that is also identifiably theirs. The music they produce is not al-

ways very good, but at least it can carry the weight of things greater than itself, and it is part of a culture rather than a mere product or a pose.

The millennial luminary best positioned to thrive in the current vacuum is 32-year-old Miley Cyrus, the daughter of country singer Billy Ray Cyrus and former star of *Hannah Montana* on the Disney Channel. She is fabricated enough to soothe the algorithm gods but has the ineffable star power needed to vault beyond the mental and creative limits they impose on mortals such as Carpenter. She has a lower, raspier, more gravelly singing voice than her peers, one that could go in seemingly any direction she chooses to take it — she has celebrated covers of both Dolly Parton and The Cranberries. A country album or a straightforward rock record wouldn't be a huge shock by now. *Something Beautiful*, released in May, is a genuine departure for her, an attempt to see how far into disco, funk, and noise she can go without asking too much of a fanbase raised on "Party in the USA."

There is no wild leap into genius on *Something Beautiful*. What we hear is an artistic sensibility wondering how far and how high it's really capable of going. Cyrus either picked or approved the right roster of collaborators for this adventure: Cole Haden of the beloved indie noise band Model/Actriz contributes to the album's opening track, and two members of Alvvays, the best of the weepy millennial pop-rock bands, get songwriting credits on album highlight "The End of the World," maybe the best mass-market song of the entire summer. *Something Beautiful* is an album of soaring regret and fantasy, a pivot into the themes of late youth. "The End of the World" isn't jaded but immediate and enormous, bigger than any crying jag, a song that no bedroom can contain. Let's pretend it's not all over and destroyed, Cyrus booms over a straight-marching bassline and clarion synths. She can make the psychic churn of confidence and doom sound true to a real feeling and time, like an announcement of awesome possibility rather than of resignation and fatigue.

If we pretend along with her, we can get to whatever better things are in store.

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TV

Divided Loyalties

By Michael M. Rosen

The night Israel launched its stunning aerial campaign against Iran last month, incredible stories began emerging from Tehran of senior generals and nuclear scientists assassinated in their apartments, attack drones launched by Israel from warehouses inside Iran, explosions at nuclear facilities, and even Mossad agents in Tehran.

No matter how outlandish the rumors, they'd almost all been foretold in *Tehran*, the Apple TV+ series now in its third season. The series follows the daring exploits of Tamar Rabinyan, a highly-skilled Mossad agent dispatched to the Iranian capital to undermine the mullahs' burgeoning nuclear weapons program.

But even more compelling than the propulsive on-screen action and its eerie predictive power are the tortured psychological gymnastics performed by the key characters as they stretch and leap to reconcile the competing loyalties to family, to country, to humanity, pulling them in multiple directions.

Take Tamar, a 20-something Israeli operative and computer hacker extraordinaire who was born in Tehran and fled the regime by immigrating to the Jewish state with her family. Played by the steely yet vulnerable Israeli actress Niv Sultan, Tamar infiltrates her former country with ease and initially takes shelter in Tehran with her aunt, who had remained behind. Despite severely imperiling her family, Tamar relies on her aunt's protection for much of Season 1, no matter the consequences.

Along the way, she encounters, befriends, and, inevitably, falls in love with Milad, a brilliant young cyberhacker whose love for his people and their freedom is matched only by his hatred for the regime. Tamar doesn't exactly exploit Milad — their love is genuine, and their goals are mostly aligned — but circumstances frequently test their relationship, with uneven results.

Tamar's main antagonist in Season 1 is Faraz Kamali, the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps's counter-intelligence division. Spellbindingly depicted by the elegant Iranian-born

American actor Shaun Toub, Kamali ruthlessly hunts for Tamar and clashes with his own beloved wife, Nahid. As the first season climaxes, with Tamar and Milad struggling to shut down radar installations to enable an Israeli aerial attack and Kamali hot on their tail, all characters find themselves having to make painful sacrifices.

When Season 2 begins, we meet Marjan Montazeri, a widowed, American-born therapist in Tehran who, we later learn, works for the Mossad. She becomes Tamar's handler. Following the traumas of the previous season, Tamar herself contemplates escaping to Canada but ultimately finds herself drawn back to the fundamental mission, which now shifts toward eliminating a particularly loathsome IRGC general playing a pivotal role in the mullahs' nuclear weapons program.

Marjan, played chillingly by Glenn Close, has suffered her own losses and undertaken her own conciliations, and she steers Tamar toward doing the same. This time, however, Tamar aims to seduce the general's fabulously wealthy, secular, partygoing, supercar-driving, playboy son in an effort to get close to the father, a gambit that badly strains her bond with Milad. Meanwhile, Kamali faces his own painful choice between Nahid and his future place within the regime's hierarchy. When the smoke clears, success mixes with sorrow, and both Tamar and Kamali are once again mired in self-doubt over whether their choices, however necessary for the mission, have compromised their humanity.

By the time Season 3 begins, viewers have thus become accustomed to the divided loyalties afflicting the key characters. (And note: due to mysterious behind-the-scenes decisions made by Apple execs in the wake of the Oct. 7 attack, the latest season is currently available in the U.S. only via VPN and Israel's Kan 11 app.) Those contradictions become heightened as the Mossad targets key components recently delivered to Tehran that appear to enable the weaponization of the ayatollahs' enriched uranium.

Emblematic of these twists and turns is Eric Peterson, a South African weapons inspector for a fictional equivalent of the International Atomic Energy Agency, who seems to switch sides multiple times over the course of the season. Peterson, whose South African accent flows off the tongue of a compelling Hugh Laurie, has one north star: a love for Iran and its people.

Tamar, too, labors to reconcile her many impulses, much to the consternation of Yulia, her handler back in Tel Aviv, who occasionally frets that Tamar's "Iranian side" has triumphed over her Israeli one. "Remember who you are," Yulia chastises Tamar at one point, "and remember which side you're fighting for."

Yulia is right to worry: Early in Season 3, after defying another of Yulia's commands, the wily, magnetic Tamar wins over a key character who initially intends to do her harm. And shortly thereafter, Tamar confronts the wife of a nuclear scientist that the Mossad had previously



Glenn Close and Shila Omidi in *Tehran*.

eliminated, and who herself is now aiding the program. She has to choose between her mission and her ethical sensibilities, as the widow is raising a 9-year-old girl.

"The people [your husband] built the bomb for want to wipe us off the face of the earth," Tamar coolly reminds the widow, gun cocked and aimed. "My husband never got to see his daughter grow up because of you people!" the widow shoots back.

In a critical sequence, all of the characters must make an impossible choice involving grave nuclear peril. Tamar and Kamali, who again face Nahid's accusations of betrayal, find themselves, not for the first time, at loggerheads.

"I never doubted your love for Tehran," Tamar tells the IRGC man. "So don't you doubt *my* love."

"I choose Iran over everything," Kamali smugly retorts.

But ultimately, while *Tehran's* writers admirably entertain competing motivations and, in depicting the costs and benefits of adhering to the mission, transcend black-and-white moralizing with the nuance inherent in every conflict, they nevertheless make their choices clear. In other words, Tamar, Milad, Marjan, and their allies care deeply about the Iranian people, while Kamali, the general, and the other antagonists defend the Iranian regime.

It's undoubtedly true that Israel, the Iranian opposition, weapons inspectors, and the Western world in general make mistakes and sacrifices in furtherance of their mission. And sometimes the costs of those mistakes and sacrifices seem downright unbearable. But the mullahs and their enablers *intend* to bring about evil out of a misguided sense of love of country. While we must wring our hands over the unintended and often terrible consequences of our well-intentioned actions, we must never lose sight of the motivations of our adversaries. Accepting evil in the service of good always beats the alternative. This message resonates throughout *Tehran* over its brilliant five-year run, much as it has resonated in the actual Tehran over the last few months as life has imitated art.

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LONG LIFE

The Appeal of the Void

By Rob Long

I was halfway asleep on a very long plane ride when the flight attendant made a request. "Is there anyone on board," she asked into the plane's intercom, "who is a medical doctor?"

I suppose she's had enough experience with pompous academics with Ph.D.s that she felt the need to specify medical doctor. How many times, I wondered, did a passenger raise his hand after hearing that announcement to say, 'Yes, I am a doctor ... of ethnic dance and music folkways.' What she wanted was a real doctor, of course. There was a passenger in some kind of medical distress — I never did find out what it was — who needed help.

Here's the problem: For some reason, whenever I hear an announcement like that, I have an inexplicable and powerful urge to raise my hand and say, "I am a doctor. What seems to be the problem?"

Full disclosure: I am not a doctor. I barely passed my high school biology class. About the only thing I have in common with a real-life, certified medical professional is the belief that there's a pill for everything. So why do I have this desire to pretend to be one? Especially when I know that there would be terrible consequences to pay when I was discovered, which would happen in about three minutes.

For that matter, why do I need to walk to the very edge of a high cliff and peer over it? I can see the view from a safe and sound 2 feet back, but I never do. Cliffside, rooftop, it's always the same: I creep carefully to the edge and peer out and down and feel that shuddering butterfly feeling in my body as I look way, way down. I understand that boys exhibit this kind of behavior — I certainly did — but I am no longer a boy. I am a

60-year-old man who has been known to trip himself on a wall-to-wall carpet, so walking to the edge of a cliff or rooftop, or impersonating a doctor, is unwise behavior to say the least. The former can get you killed. The latter can land you in jail.

"Whatever you do, do not get out of the truck," our safari guide in Botswana said as we parked next to a pride of lions. At which point I had the (nearly) irresistible urge to hop down from the truck and wander over to them for an up-close photo. For some reason, when I hear "Don't do this," or "Don't get too close," or "Don't pretend to be a doctor," or "That thing is plugged into the wall," I have to fight the desire to do it, move toward it, pretend to be it, touch the sparking ends — you get the picture.

"Careful," the waiter will say, "the plate is very hot." The next move is preordained: I instantly touch the plate.

The French have a phrase for this kind of urge — I mean, of course they do. A country with 9,000 cheeses and 600 ways to prepare duck has a phrase for everything. They call it *l'appel du vide* — the call of the void. There is something about the cliff's edge that dares you to investigate, to peer over, to flirt with jumping. That may apply to high ledges, but there's nothing so dramatic about the slapstick outcome of a sitcom writer pretending to have a medical degree, or a hot plate of sizzling fajitas, that justifies such a lofty term. When I wanted to press the call button at my seat on KLM flight 592, I wasn't hearing the *appel of the vide*. I was just wondering what might happen if I violated such a foundational rule of civilization. I was fighting the urge to test authority.

There are probably lots of deep psychological reasons for this behavior, and I don't think I'm the only one with these impulses, but for me, I think it's ornery contrariness, what the English call *bloody-mindedness*. You tell me not to do something, and I immediately want to do it. But, of course, I never actually do. I chicken out at the last minute. I wonder if the French have a phrase for that?r if the French have a phrase for that?

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



SPORTS

Judges with Whistles

By Graham Hillard

The proper role of judges has been on many a mind in recent years. In summer 2020, *New York Times* resident race scold and professional hysteric Jamelle Bouie penned “Down With Judicial Supremacy!,” a column urging Democrats to challenge “the idea that the courts, and the courts alone, determine constitutional meaning.” In March, the *Federalist’s* John Daniel Davidson wrote a nearly identical case, lamenting “the fallacious notion that the federal judiciary has the exclusive power of constitutional interpretation.” Both men are opportunists, of course, and dislike mainly the “supremacy” of rulings with which they disagree — note: I’m no different, which is the point. Yet even staunch institutionalists are getting in on the game. In a much-discussed aside in last month’s *Trump v. CASA* decision, Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett zinged fellow Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson for “embracing an imperial Judiciary.”

Almost no one has had the energy to carry this quarrel onto the hardwood or gridiron. Nevertheless, the interaction of college sports and judges is already one of the defining athletic narratives of the decade. Later this year or next, the Universities of Miami and Wisconsin will square off in the toughest and least forgiving of competitive arenas: the American judicial system. The question, in part, is whether rival athletic programs may legally induce one another’s players to renege on their contracts. But also at stake is the willingness of judges to play referee as colleges vie for on-field advantage. Should Wisconsin’s tortious interference claim prevail, the threat of lawsuits will likely

shape player recruitment for the foreseeable future. One imagines the resultant Sportscenter cliché: “It’s not about the X’s and O’s. It’s about the gavels and robes.”

So furiously have epochal decisions followed one another that one has barely had time to survey each month’s new landscape, let alone complain that the courts have overreached. All the while, governance of college sports has leached steadily from the once-mighty NCAA to the people tasked with interpreting the law. Perhaps they will do the job well, and university athletics will flourish. What is certain is that, in the absence of meaningful congressional action, judges will be the ones carrying the metaphorical whistle.

The shift began with 2021’s *NCAA v. Alston* ruling, in which the Supreme Court declared the NCAA’s player compensation policies to be in violation of antitrust law. Though the majority decision encouraged the association to “seek [further] clarification” about “the scope of its authority,” Justice Brett Kavanaugh’s fiery concurrence said much about the NCAA’s chances. According to that document, “the NCAA’s business model would be flatly illegal in almost any other industry in America.” Thus chastened, the association has retreated to the locker room to draw up a new set of plays. This year’s *House v. NCAA* settlement, which opened the door to direct payments from universities to student-athletes, was merely a humiliating face-plant as the association stumbled off the field.

Other lawsuits further threaten the old college sports dispensation. *Braham v. NCAA*, filed in May, asks whether the association may limit the eligibility of junior college transfers, a question already before the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals thanks to Vanderbilt quarterback Diego Pavia, 24, who is looking to play his sixth season. *Johnson v. NCAA*, which may well come before the Supreme Court, considers whether student-athletes are employees of universities. As of this writing, President Donald Trump is reportedly considering an executive order on the subject. If issued, it would likely wind up before a judge.

Conferences, too, are hopping aboard the litigation train. *PAC-12 v. Mountain West* concerns the legality of

“poaching fees,” typically paid by one conference to another upon “stealing” a school. Earlier this year, Florida State University and the Atlantic Coast Conference settled their own 14-month legal battle over “exit fees.” A “defined path” now exists for the Seminoles to take their talents to, say, the Big Ten should they so desire.

University of Wisconsin v. University of Miami is novel for introducing a school-versus-school action into this chaotic legal landscape. The case concerns former Wisconsin cornerback Xavier Lucas, who signed a two-year “Name, Image, and Likeness” contract with the Badgers in late 2024. According to Wisconsin’s complaint, Miami representatives met with Lucas shortly thereafter and persuaded him to break his deal. In addition to violating “the NCAA’s established anti-tampering rules,” the Hurricanes allegedly disregarded “established contract and tort law.” Consequently, Wisconsin suffered “substantial pecuniary and reputational harm.”

If the first half of the 2020s was about player compensation, the second half promises to define the terms of player movement. Having established themselves as multimillion-dollar professionals, big-money student-athletes may now be bound by the same contractual rules that obtain elsewhere. Just as LeBron James can’t simply flee the Lakers for another NBA franchise, the star college footballer of the future (probably) can’t cancel his just-inked, high-dollar bargain unless all the parties to the deal agree.

We are a long way from amateurism. Nor are universities likely to do anything but intensify the current athletics disarray, so pronounced are their incentives to field winning squads. In theory, Congress could clean up the college sports mess with a single thoughtful bill. But, well, this isn’t a humor column. Instead, look for judges to say what the rules of university athletics will henceforth be. Will that outcome please anyone? No, but it’s what we’re stuck with. Hey, Your Honor, throw the flag.

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GURDON

Joe Biden's final 'eff you' to the Democrats



Hunter Biden's expletive-filled diatribe against almost every senior Democrat was the kind of rant people answer ironically with, "Why don't you tell us what you really think?"

Talking to YouTuber Andrew Callaghan, the former president's son demonstrated the same lack of impulse control that made him a drug addict in the past. He lacerated former Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), former President Barack Obama and his acolytes, Anita Dunn, James Carville, David Axelrod, and others.

His ripest words were aimed at Hollywood star George Clooney, one of the regicide Democrats who toppled former President Joe Biden in 2024 after the octogenarian's precipitous mental and physical decline and his inability to govern had been made obvious by his catastrophic debate performance against Donald Trump on June 27.

Hunter said of Clooney, "F*** him and everybody around him. I don't have

to be f***ing nice. ... He supposedly treats his friends really well. You know what I mean? Buys them things. And he's got a really great place in Lake Como, and he's great friends with Barack Obama. F*** you, what do you have to do with f***ing anything? Why do I have to f***ing listen to you? What right do you have to step on a man who's given 52 years of his f***ing life to the service of this country, and decide that you, George Clooney, are going to take out basically a full-page ad in the f***ing New York Times to undermine the president?"

Profanities interspersed with boasts about unmatched achievements are exactly the modus operandi of Biden senior. Like father, like son. Hunter's performance was equal measures of bragging and bile that Byron York describes as expressing the undiluted and unadulterated id of the embittered former president.

If, a year after his father's ouster, Hunter was channeling Joe's expletives, his hatred of the party he'd led, and his detestation of former colleagues who elbowed him out, it helps explain what the former president has felt for the past year and what motivated his key decisions in his final months in office.

He was surely at his most resentful and bitter in the weeks when he saw former political friends turn against him and found that he was powerless to stop them. His resentment and bitterness would have come to a boil at the moment he dropped out and immediately afterward, when it sank in fully that all was lost and his career had been forcibly ended in ignominy.

What did he do at that moment? For 27 minutes after his 1:46 p.m. post on X announcing that he was leaving the race, he did nothing. Then, at 2:13 p.m., he tweeted again to say he was backing former Vice President Kamala Harris as

his replacement.

Hunter has presented this in his recent podcast appearance, among others, as the most selfless act in Joe's storied career of public service. But surely, it was the biggest "Eff you!" of his long career.

Some people say the 27-minute gap was strategically smart because it did not let the endorsement overshadow the huge news of Biden stepping aside. But that assumes the rest of the Democratic Party bigwigs were already all-in for Harris and wanted maximum effect for the announcement.

That notion, however, is surely belied by two things: First, Harris was a terrible candidate and was known to be a terrible candidate. She had become vice president not because of any achievements but only because Biden wanted a black woman in that position. She'd bungled her own campaign for the nomination despite being an early favorite, and then bungled her assignments as vice president or buried them under a heap of word salad.

Biden's endorsement stuck the party with a candidate it could not repudiate. It made her the inevitable replacement. She was the outgoing president's instant revenge on Democrats who'd betrayed him. He'd lumbered them with a leader whose haplessness was a matter of public record.

Second, some political analysts say Obama's five-day delay in endorsing Harris was tactical and due to his wish to avoid making her nomination look stage-managed. But a simpler explanation is probably more accurate; he knew she was a loser. He'd have loved to replace her with someone with a better chance of winning and whom he could control for the next four years. But after agonizing for five days, racking his brains for a way to get someone better, he knew it couldn't be done. His former vice president had skewered his old boss and the party that had ditched him.

Joe Biden's implicit message to Democrats in endorsing Harris was the same as Hunter's message to Clooney: "What right do you have to step on a man who's given 52 years of his f***ing life to the service of this country?" And then, "So you can run with this loser. F*** you!" ★

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

"Biden's endorsement stuck the party with a candidate it could not repudiate ... She was the outgoing president's instant revenge on Democrats who'd betrayed him."

YORK

Measuring what Americans think about immigration



CBS News published a new poll with the headline, “Poll finds support for Trump’s deportation program falls.” The story seemed straightforward. But the story behind the story is worth looking into.

The poll found that 44% of those surveyed approved of the way President Donald Trump is handling the issue of immigration, while 56% disapprove. After that came a number of more specific questions. What do you think about “the Trump administration’s program to find and deport immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally”? Forty-nine percent approved, while 51% disapproved.

Then: “Do you think the Trump administration is mainly prioritizing dangerous criminals for deportation, or is it mainly prioritizing people who are not dangerous criminals?” Forty-four percent said prioritizing dangerous criminals, while 56% said prioritizing those who are not dangerous criminals. And: “So far, do you think the Trump administration is focusing too much, about the right amount, or not enough on deporting immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally?” Fifty-one percent said too much, 33% said the right amount, and 15% said not enough.

“On matters of deportation, differences hinge on who, and how many, Americans see as being targeted, as well as the use of detention facilities,” CBS wrote. “The Republican and MAGA political base remain overwhelmingly approving of it all, but the rest of the American public has become less so.”

It was all pretty run-of-the-mill stuff, until this question: “Do you think Donald Trump’s policies are making the number of migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border go up, go down, or not

change?” Unlike an opinion question, this was a fact-based query, with a right and a wrong answer.

Sixty-four percent gave the obviously correct response — Trump has made the number of migrants crossing the border go down. But 28% said the Trump policies have made no difference, which was flatly wrong. And 8% said crossings have actually gone up, which was crazy wrong.

Just for the record, the Border Patrol recorded 2,206,436 encounters with illegal border crossers in fiscal 2022, the first full year of Joe Biden’s presidency. (The government keeps the numbers in fiscal years — fiscal 2022 ran from Oct. 1, 2021, to Sept. 30, 2022.) In fiscal 2023, there were 2,045,838 encounters, and in fiscal 2024, there were 1,530,523. So far in Trump’s presidency, there were 8,348 encounters in February, 7,183 in March, 8,378 in April, 8,723 in May, and 6,072 in June. You do the math. There has been an off-the-cliff drop in encounters since Trump became president. And just to emphasize things, even of those small numbers of crossings, U.S. officials are not allowing any of the illegal crossers to stay in the country.

So, how did so many poll respondents get the situation so wrong? Put the 28% and the 8% together, and you get 36% of Americans who don’t know what Trump has done on the border. Or maybe they know but will not acknowledge it. So take a closer look into the details of that simple question: Have Trump’s policies made the number of migrants crossing the border go up, or down, or made no difference?

Looking into the details of the poll, the numbers for Democratic respondents were striking. A full 43% of Democrats said Trump’s policies have made no difference, while an additional 10% said those policies have made border crossings go up. That’s

a majority who either do not know or who reject the facts on the border. Just 47% of Democrats knew, or admitted, the correct answer.

Some of it is just lack of knowledge. In any poll, there will be some number of people who don’t know basic political facts. But the Democratic numbers seem larger than that. Perhaps respondents have been reading and watching news outlets that largely ignore the border issue but pay a lot of attention to the deportation issue. Or perhaps they know the situation on the border but just don’t want to acknowledge it.

In any event, the answers to the border crossings question could tell us something about the answers to all the other immigration questions in the CBS poll, and perhaps in other polls as well. What do people mean when they say they do not approve of Trump’s “immigration” policy? Do they mean border security? Do they mean Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations? Do they mean action against people who broke the law by entering the country and then broke it again by committing some other crime? Or those who broke the law by entering but have not committed any additional crimes?

And what do they know about what the Trump administration is doing? Do they know about the border crossing numbers? Do they know what the ICE raids are accomplishing? A lot of that will depend on what, if any, news coverage they read and watch. For example, for the worst years of the Biden border incursion, Fox News was the only national news organization to cover what was one of the most important stories of recent decades. People who got their news from other sources might not have known what was going on.

Why did those news sources downplay such obviously consequential news? That’s another story. The fact is, it’s entirely possible significant numbers of Americans, even now, are not fully informed on what is going on in the Trump administration under the heading of “immigration.” The new CBS poll, with its seemingly confusing results, appears to show that. ★

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

CONCHA

How the mighty have fallen, Barack and Michelle Obama edition



Sometimes it's not the fall that kills you. It's the sudden stop at the bottom.'

It seems like only yesterday when the results came in from Pennsylvania in 2008. The Keystone State was Republican nominee John McCain's last stand in a race that almost no one thought he could win against a surging Barack Obama, backed by a slobbering American press in a way we'd never seen.

Obama won Pennsylvania by more than 10 points, sealing the race to become the 44th president of the United States. The result wasn't stunning given the financial crash, former President George W. Bush's unpopularity, and McCain's slow and tedious performances on the stump compared to the electric Obama. What

was stunning was the fact that just a few years prior, Obama was a mere community organizer with no executive experience.

All of that didn't matter: Barack Obama knew how to wow a crowd. He was relatable. He was young, capturing the presidency at just 47. His wife, Michelle Obama, was charming and strong. His two young daughters, Sasha and Malia, were adorable. It was Camelot all over again.

Obama's eight years in office, however, were a profound disappointment, especially given the hype. The economy grew at an average of just 2.3%. Unemployment remained stubbornly high well after the 2008 crash, averaging 7.4% throughout his term. Wars he promised to end slogged on in Iraq and Afghanistan. Guantanamo Bay, to the chagrin of many on the Left, remained open. And the only major

legislative accomplishment he could point to was Obamacare, which only succeeded in exploding healthcare costs and insurance premiums.

In 2010, the GOP won back the House in overwhelming fashion, adding a net gain of 63 seats. In 2014, the GOP took back the Senate.

The 2016 election, however, provided the fatal blow to the former president's legacy. He had convinced his vice president, Joe Biden, not to run, instead opting for former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. For Obama, it was always about symbolism; handing off the first black presidency to the first female presidency was the ultimate checkmark for a party obsessed with identity.

But then-candidate Donald Trump, the real estate mogul, reality TV star, and New York tabloid king who had never run for public office, had other ideas. Despite headwinds from a hostile media and Clinton outraging him 2-to-1, Trump would defeat her comfortably in the Electoral College by capturing the "Blue Wall" of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

Trump's victory, like Obama's in 2008, reflected what voters wanted most: change. Experience in government was seen as a liability, and the establishment (see: McCain, Romney, and Clinton) was seen as defenders of the status quo.

Obama lost the House and Senate during his time in office. Despite being a former first lady, senator, and secretary of state, his handpicked candidate lost a race many thought was impossible to lose.

In 2009, Obama's party controlled both chambers of 27 state legislatures. Eight years later, Democrats controlled both chambers in only 13 states.



Former President Barack Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama unveil their official White House portraits during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House, Sept. 7, 2022, in Washington.

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BARONE

Are ex-presidents a help or hindrance?



For a generation, Americans have had a historically large number of ex-presidents around, a possible source of counsel from one of only 45 people who have exercised the broad powers conferred by Article II of the Constitution.

You might expect former presidents to supply elements of personal comity and institutional norms to current politics, and sometimes they do. Certainly, the few periods with no living former presidents have been times of stress when incumbents might have called on seasoned predecessors for advice.

Presidents in those periods faced threatened war with France (1799-1801), violent resistance to Reconstruction (1875-77), the Great Depression (1933), and Watergate (1973-74). During the only quiet ex-president-less period (1908-09), Theodore Roosevelt witnessed the return of the White Fleet's voyage around the world.

But having a lot of ex-presidents around hasn't always helped. The only period before the 1990s with five living former presidents was between March 1861 and January 1862, when Abraham Lincoln faced secession of the Confederate states. None were Lincoln voters, and none gave him much support.

One, John Tyler, was elected to the Confederate Congress. Footnote: Tyler was born in 1790. His grandson Harrison Tyler died in May. These two Tylers spanned almost all the 250 years.

Americans did not have five living ex-presidents again until Bill Clinton was inaugurated in January 1993, and we've had at least four except for 25 months in 2006-09. I remember suggesting to the White House social secretary that he sponsor a six-president event, but that never happened. However, the young incumbent and Presidents Gerald Ford,

Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George H.W. Bush attended Richard Nixon's funeral in April 1994.

Clinton, presumably aware of voters' continued respect for the men he succeeded, seemed to carefully refrain from blaming them for his woes. George W. Bush, aware of his father's respect for Clinton, behaved similarly. This was a stark contrast of the hostility and noncommunication between the onetime confreres but then rivals — Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower.

On the surface, that comity has continued. Five presidents, including the incoming and outgoing incumbents, attended the Trump inaugurations in 2017 and 2025.

But none had endorsed him, not entirely surprisingly given his vitriolic attacks, going back to the 1980s, on the immigration and trade policies of both parties. Those attacks continued, but it's worth noting that the Clinton-Bush comity was past history even before the dramatic escalator descent in June 2015.

Barack Obama, taking office after the financial crisis of 2008 and the successful execution of the still unopposed Iraq conflict he had long

opposed, did not leave off his criticism of his immediate predecessor after his victory speech. Nor did he deal with his party's defeat in the 2010 midterm elections by engaging successfully, as Clinton had with then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich's Republicans after 1994 and Bush with then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi's Democrats after 2006.

Instead, his administration responded, as conservative lawyer Cleta Mitchell recalls, with Internal Revenue Service persecution of Tea Party activists. And Obama himself, nettled by repeated charges by Trump and others that he was born in Kenya, after finally releasing his long-form Hawaii birth certificate, days later launched a lengthy attack on Trump, seated in the audience, at the 2011 White House Correspondents' Association dinner. Some reporters believe that attack prompted Trump's candidacy.

Then there is the fact, underlined by documents released by Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard last week, that in December 2016, after Trump's surprise victory over Hillary Clinton, "the [intelligence community] is prepared to produce an assessment per the president's request [*italics added*], that pulls together the information we have on the tools Moscow used and the actions it took to influence the 2016 election."

Within days, newspapers printed leaked accounts of the bogus Steele dossier, paid for by the Clinton campaign — critical fuel for the Russia collusion hoax. Whether and how much the outgoing president was involved in the project of delegitimizing the incoming president, based on fake documentation, is a question that the press has shown little or no interest in addressing, just as it has shown little

“Five presidents, including the incoming and outgoing incumbents, attended the Trump inaugurations in 2017 and 2025 ... But none had endorsed him...”

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During that stretch, the Democratic Party lost a net total of 13 governorships and 816 state legislative seats, the most of any president since Eisenhower.

Upon leaving office, Obama didn't follow in the same footsteps as President Jimmy Carter, who helped build thousands of homes through Habitat for Humanity. He purchased beachfront mansions on Martha's Vineyard and Hawaii and a home near the White House. At his 29-acre Vineyard estate in 2021, Obama threw himself an elaborate 60th birthday party with hundreds of maskless guests inside a huge tent during the height of COVID-19. The Obamas also captured Emmy nominations for producing various Netflix projects after signing a multimillion-dollar deal.

As their hometown of Chicago crumbles under bumbling socialist Mayor Brandon Johnson (currently at 14% approval, the lowest in the city's

“The Obamas await the completion of their presidential library in Chicago, the biggest boondoggle in presidential history.”

mayoral history), the Obamas have almost been invisible in any attempt to save their hometown. Thanks to a mass exodus to red states, the Windy City's population is at its lowest in a century. Its income and sales taxes remain among the highest in the country. Its unemployment rate, 5.2%, is well above the national average of 4.1%. Violent crime continues to be a major problem.

Instead, the Obamas await the completion of their presidential library in Chicago, the biggest boondoggle in presidential history. A project on the city's poorer South Side, once projected to cost \$300 million, will likely eclipse \$1 billion to complete. For context, Bush's presidential library cost \$250 million and didn't exceed budget. The Obama library is already raising the rent of many apartments and homes in the surrounding area to the point that some residents have been forced to move out. By the time the center maybe opens in 2026, it will have taken more than a decade to finish and gone impossibly over budget.

As for the former first lady, let's just say her podcast has been anything but inspiring, including her odd complaints about how tough life was while living in the White House. “You're paying for every bit of food that you eat. You're not paying for housing and the staff in it ... but everything, even travel, if you're not traveling with the president, if your kids are coming on a Bright Star, which is the first lady's plane, we had to pay for their travel to be on the plane,” she whined recently.

Goodness gracious. Food and first-class travel needed to be *paid for*? How

did the family survive in this Gulag for eight years?

Earlier this year, Michelle Obama also decided not to attend Carter's funeral services, making her the only spouse not to attend among the Bushes, Clintons, or Trumps. As for the marriage itself and rumors of a possible divorce, Barack appeared on her podcast last week to assure everyone that everything was OK, which was patently awkward to listen to.

Overall, the former first lady's podcast, co-hosted by her brother Craig Robinson, launched this year and, despite major hype, is ranked 78th in listenership on Spotify. For someone who has consistently been voted the most admired woman on the planet, this project is a profound failure.

In the days leading up to the 2024 election, Barack Obama made the rounds in swing states, imploring black voters to vote for former Vice President Kamala Harris based on her gender and race. It was seen as sanctimonious because it was; Trump won a larger share of the black vote.

The Obama magic and influence are clearly gone. The Democratic Party is drifting further into the abyss without any true leader, clocking in at 19% approval, per Quinnipiac.

One is a former president who can't get anybody elected and wants \$1 billion as a shrine to his below-average presidency. The other is now a B-list podcaster.

How the mighty have fallen. ★

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interest in why he is the first president since the invalided Woodrow Wilson to stay in Washington, in a house bought for \$8 million, after his time in office.

Blaming your party's election loss on foreign interference or collusion was once known as “red baiting” and “McCarthyism.” The norm in the past, observed by Bill Clinton in 2000, was for a president to accept the result, however disputed, and not to cast a pall of illegitimacy over his successor. Obama, at the least, failed to fulfill what was arguably his duty to prevent that from happening.

One might reply that Trump failed much more grievously to uphold that norm by challenging the result of the 2020 election and inspiring the pro-Trump crowd's assault on the Capitol. I agreed at the time and agree today. “While Trump's exact words to the crowd on the Ellipse didn't constitute a criminal incitement,” I wrote then, “they were uttered with a reckless disregard for the possibility they'd provoke violence that any reasonable person could find impeachable.”

Reversing this spiral may turn out to be a task for the next generation. This has happened before. The five ex-presidents in 1993 were among the

seven from the GI Generation (born 1908-24) who served over the preceding 32 years. The five presidents elected to serve the 36 years up to 2029 include three leading-edge baby boomers (all born in 1946), one late boomer (1961), and one pre-boomer (1942).

After electing 78-year-old candidates in 2020 and 2024, Americans are surely ready to choose someone from a later generation in 2028. Will that president, with several ex-presidents in their 80s plus one over 65, reverse the negative spiral? ★

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HANNAN

Trump leads, think tanks follow



Ed Feulner, who died on July 18, was a big man in every sense. Tall and bulky, he had a largeness of spirit, a generosity of soul, and his ambitions were commensurately vast. When he started running the Heritage Foundation in the early 1970s, it had nine employees. Now it has 300, half a million registered supporters and a nine-figure budget.

If Feulner was bothered by Heritage's swing to MAGA isolationism after 2020, he was too discreet to say so. Yet the think tank he leaves behind is very different from the one he helped found.

Feulner was one of the original fusionists. He believed that the Right needed to be a coalition of foreign policy hawks, Christians, classical liberals, nationalists, and strict constitutionalists. Feulner himself had libertarian leanings and was a moving spirit behind the Mont Pelerin Society, but he made a point of employing Russell Kirk, the ultraconservative who claimed to have less in common with libertarians than with socialists.

Being a fusionist emphatically did not imply moderation. On the contrary, Feulner can claim as much credit as anyone for ending the ideological drift of the Nixon-Ford years and enabling Reaganism. His 3,000-page policy manifesto, *Mandate for Leadership*, was published in the year Reagan was elected. The Gipper implemented two-thirds of it.

What was Feulner's superpower? He was no orator, and never claimed to be an original scholar — he had people for those things. Rather, he was brilliant at reading others, building relationships, and understanding motives. It is no exaggeration to say that he determined the balance of the Republican caucus, especially after Newt Gingrich's victory

in 1994. By publishing scorecards that measured candidates' ideological soundness — Reagan himself, in a bad year, scored only 62% — he switched the incentives for public figures.

How, then, did Feulner respond when those incentives were reordered by Trump, when it became career-enhancing for Republicans to demand tariffs or friendship with Putin? With a combination of pragmatism and principle. He knew he must shift with the times to keep his influence. Yet he tried to moderate the authoritarianism and protectionism that were coming into vogue.

To pull off that balancing act, he genuinely altered elements of his own outlook. I recall a conversation *à deux* in 2017, which he ended by declaring cheerfully, "Got to get back to draining the swamp!" There was no one else present, and he wasn't being ironic — he had simply internalized the vernacular so as to remain relevant.

During the first Trump term, Heritage backed the administration, though not always its agenda. Feulner was careful not to criticize Trump or his personnel, but he continued to make the case for free trade, supporting allies and respecting the Constitution. All of that, naturally, enraged MAGA hardliners, who loathe qualified support, recognizing only unconditional fealty. When Kay Coles James, then the president of Heritage, condemned the Jan. 6, 2021, rioters, it upset some donors and, more immediately, some commentators.

"You may have sent them money, hopefully for the last time," Tucker Carlson told viewers on his Fox News show, opening a furious harangue against the think tank. As funders withdrew, Coles James stood down early, and Heritage began to change its

tune. According to Kevin Roberts, the current president, "President Trump's decision to pardon nearly all Jan. 6 defendants is a necessary corrective to the brazen weaponization of our justice system by the Left."

Even the oldest of Heritage's convictions have been altered for the sake of MAGA compliance. Tariffs, denounced for 50 years as poverty-inducing, are now "a tool of statecraft." Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, who got 10% on Heritage's congressional scorecard as a Democratic representative, is now "excellent", while Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is "taking on big corporations and big government."

Ukraine is suckering Americans into handing over aid. Indeed, the Ukrainian flag, which used to fly above Heritage's Massachusetts Avenue headquarters, was not only hauled down — it was replaced, when Trump was convicted, by the upside-down Stars and Stripes.

All organizations need to listen to their bases, of course. "Donor capture" is simply a pejorative way of saying that people will not hand their cash to outfits of which they disapprove. Yet think tanks exist to lead the debate, set the agenda, and plant the flag in advance of the vanguard. Feulner always understood how to get the balance right and, even at the last election, backed former Vice President Mike Pence for the nomination.

When voters go through an autocratic moment, conservative institutions, like politicians, respond. Then again, if think tanks now take the attitude attributed to the French revolutionary Auguste Ledru-Rollin — "I am their leader, I must follow them!" — what are they for? ★

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RESTORING
AMERICA

GREEN

Sentimental education



If you don't like Columbia University's principles, it has others. For decades, Columbia rejected the evidence of its political extremism as a conservative smear job and said academic freedom was priceless. But when the Trump administration pressed the university to follow the law, its professors folded. The price of academic freedom turns out to be \$200 million, the amount Columbia must repay to the federal government, plus \$21 million in damages to staff. What is this country coming to? You can't even riot against the Jews no more.

Columbia's statement of surrender said the university "does not admit to wrongdoing." Neither did Prince Andrew, and he paid \$16.3 million to Virginia Giuffre to keep a sexual assault case out of court. There is no better way of proving your innocence than sending your accuser a few million dollars. Columbia will pay the fine back in student-loan style over three years. The payments unlock the \$400 million in federal funding that the administration suspended. See what it did there?

Getting Columbia to cough up is a win for Leo Terrell, who heads the Justice Department's Task Force to Combat Antisemitism, and Linda McMahon, secretary at the Department formerly called Education. It shows that government can still work, providing it's led by conscientious public servants who follow the law. And it's always nice to see the vain and hateful humbled and hit right where it hurts, in the endowments. But we have not, to paraphrase Trump, D.J. (University of Pennsylvania, class of 1968), won so much that we should be tired of winning.

The problem with the universities is structural. They are essential to research and development in the sciences, including innovations in medicine as well as technology in its military and

civilian aspects. They are also essential to credentialing the halfwits who will soon be running the country. Their professors abuse this responsibility in four ways: soaking up taxpayer cash, teaching poisonously anti-American ideas, filling the universities with foreign students whose parents pay top dollar, and taking three months' vacation in Vermont in the summer. It's completely unacceptable.

Still, just as it would defeat the national interest for the Trump administration to avenge itself and us for the partisan corruption and paralytic productivity of the federal bureaucracy, it is against the national interest for us to torch the universities, even if they are full of arsonists who hate us. Like Columbia said in its nonadmission of not-guilt about the thing it didn't do to the Jews, "reform was and is needed."

The Trump administration began the battle by forcing institutions to comply with the law. But that's only the first of four ways the universities abuse their privileges. And there's not much we can do about the three months in Vermont.

That leaves the ideas in the classroom and who gets to hear them. The universities' business model is predicated on milking donations from elderly graduates and fees from foreign kleptocrats buying an MBA for their children. The first group has finally awoken from its sentimental slumbers. The second is now realizing that America is no longer for sale.

The Trump administration's tough love for Columbia's campus fits its foreign and economic policies. If you want to compete, you need to grow your people skills and knowledge. It's madness to give foreigners places that Americans might use, especially when, as in the case of China, there's evidence to suggest widespread espionage in campus labs.

There's a quick fix for universities' addiction to foreign cash. Set ceilings on the number of foreigners in undergraduate and graduate programs, and link them to federal funding. The more a university breaks the ceiling, the more federal cash it loses. That way, universities can still work against the national interest if they really want to, but they won't be double-dipping.

That leaves the classroom content. In a survey of Harvard University's class of 2024, 45% of students asked graduates if they were "reluctant to share their views about charged topics in class."

Thirty-two percent were uncomfortable discussing such matters outside of the classroom because of concerns about "peers' judgment, worries about criticism on social media, unease about reputational damage, and fear about potential bullying and harassment complaints."

These figures are a disgrace. If Harvard were serious, all students would be afraid to speak freely. There would be 0% conservatives on the faculty. From this, we conclude that the universities are so bloated that they can't even do the things they want to do, let alone do the things we would like them to do.

Harvard is richer than Columbia and, it appears, smarter. It reckons it can wait it out, and it may be right. One of its gambits is to "mull" creating a "conservative studies center," presumably funded by sentimental graduates and staffed by libertarians. It would be cheaper and more productive to fund a crop of new universities. And now I'm off to Vermont to work on my monograph. ★

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Edwin J. Feulner Jr., 1941-2025

Conservative titan who built the Heritage Foundation

By Daniel Ross Goodman

When Edwin J. Feulner Jr. strode into Washington, D.C., in the early 1970s, he saw a capital city awash in liberal ideas, with conservative thought relegated to the fringes, a whisper in a town shouting for progressivism. Unfazed, he rolled up his sleeves, co-founded the Heritage Foundation in 1973, and turned it into what Newt Gingrich would later call “the Parthenon of the conservative metropolis.” Feulner, a political scientist with a relentless drive and a knack for turning ideas into action, died on July 18, 2025, at 83, leaving behind a legacy that reshaped the American conservative movement and influenced presidents from Ronald Reagan to Donald Trump.

Born on August 12, 1941, in Chicago, Illinois, to Edwin J. Feulner Sr., a real estate firm owner, and Helen Joan Franzen, Feulner grew up in a devout Roman Catholic family of German descent. His three maternal uncles, all parish priests, instilled in him a sense of purpose and discipline. Raised in suburban Elmhurst, he was drawn to big ideas early, devouring Barry Goldwater’s *The Conscience of a Conservative* and Russell Kirk’s *The Conservative Mind* while at Regis University in Denver, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in

English in 1963. His intellectual curiosity led him to the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania for a master’s degree in 1964, followed by studies at Georgetown and the London School of Economics. In 1981, he capped his academic journey with a doctorate in political science from the University of Edinburgh, his thesis exploring the Republican Study Committee, a group he’d later help shape.

Feulner’s early career was a masterclass in strategic positioning. After stints at the Center for Strategic Studies and Stanford’s Hoover Institution, he landed on Capitol Hill as a congressional aide, first to Republican Rep. Melvin Laird, who later became President Richard Nixon’s defense secretary, and then as chief of staff to Republican Rep. Phil Crane. As executive director of the Republican Study Committee, Feulner honed his ability to translate conservative principles into policy. But he saw a gap: Conservative ideas lacked a dynamic, action-oriented platform. In 1973, alongside Paul Weyrich and Joseph Coors, he founded the Heritage Foundation to fill that void, determined to make it a think tank that didn’t just ponder but pushed.

Taking the helm as Heritage’s president in 1977, Feulner revolutionized the think tank model. He rejected the ivory tower approach, insisting on concise, actionable policy reports that could fit in a lawmaker’s briefcase — a strategy dubbed the “briefcase test.” Under his leadership, Heritage became a powerhouse, producing the *Mandate for Leadership*, a policy blueprint that became the intellectual backbone of Ronald Reagan’s administration. Reagan, who awarded Feulner the Presidential Citizens Medal in 1989, called Heritage a “vital force.” Feulner’s vision of “big-tent conservatism” united diverse factions, emphasizing free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional values, and a strong national defense. His mantra, “You win through multiplication and addition, not through division and subtraction,” became a rallying cry for the movement.

Feulner’s influence extended beyond Heritage’s walls. He wrote nine books, including *The American Spirit* (2012) and *Getting America Right* (2006), and contributed to countless journals. He served as a public member of the U.S.

delegation to the United Nations, advised Reagan on domestic policy, and held leadership roles in the Philadelphia Society, Mont Pelerin Society, and Intercollegiate Studies Institute. His global reach earned him honors from Taiwan, South Korea, and the Czech Republic. Feulner’s tireless travel — logging over 150,000 miles annually — had him with leaders worldwide, spreading the gospel of economic freedom and individual liberty.

Even after stepping down as Heritage’s president in 2013, Feulner remained a force, serving as interim president in 2017–2018 and contributing to Project 2025. He cowrote its afterword and served on Trump’s 2016 transition team, cementing Heritage’s role in shaping GOP agendas. Critics accused him of fueling partisan division, but supporters hailed him as a disciplined strategist who made conservatism a policy-driven force. “Ed Feulner was a giant,” said House Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-LA), echoing sentiments from figures such as Newt Gingrich and Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY).

Feulner’s personal life was as steadfast as his professional one. Married to Linda Leventhal Feulner for over four decades, he was a devoted father to Edwin III and Emily V. Lown and a doting grandfather. A Knight of Malta and member of St. Mary’s Parish in Alexandria, Virginia, his faith anchored his work. His “Feulnerisms,” such as “People are policy,” reflected his belief in mentoring the next generation, leaving a network of leaders across government and beyond.

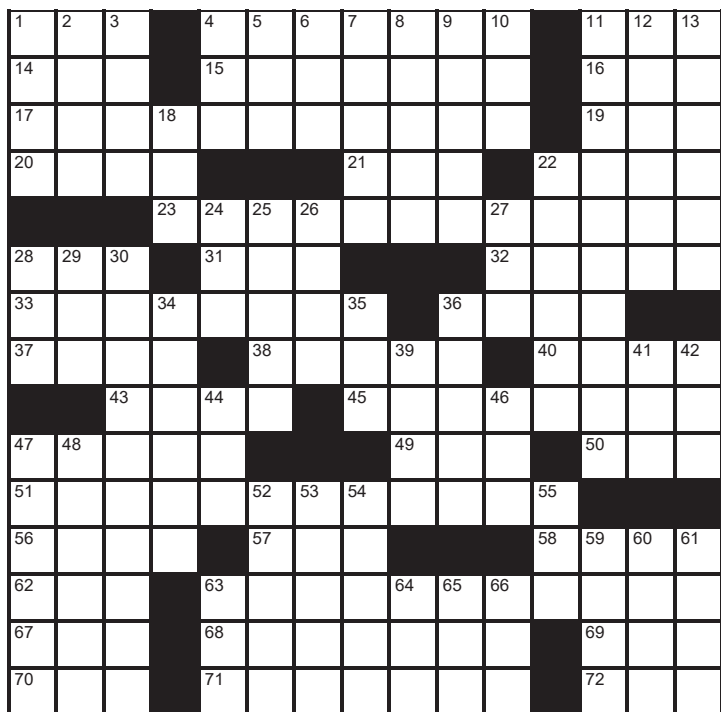
In his final years, Feulner never slowed down, signing off correspondence with “Onward!” — a nod to his unyielding optimism. As conservatives mourn his loss, we might picture him at Heritage’s helm, grinning as he hands a lawmaker a crisp policy brief, certain it’ll change the game. He’d probably chuckle at the fuss, reminding us, as he often did, “In Washington, there are no permanent victories and no permanent defeats.” Onward, indeed. ★

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.

Files

By Brendan Emmett Quigley

Note: Both words in this puzzle's theme can precede the word "files"



ACROSS

- 1 Nudge, as one's memory
4 Throws off the tracks.
11 One of three in Fiji
14 Miner's discovery
15 Soccer star Megan
16 Cholera
17 Picture of a certain soccer shot?
19 Break a commandment
20 Group standard
21 Prefix with cycle
22 "Whoopee!"

DOWN

- 23 Customer nobody knows about?
28 Fawn's mother
31 Leaves in a bag
32 Exams for sophs or jrs.
33 Hard container for coffee?
36 Manipulator
37 For fellows only
38 Lacking
40 Run through
43 Brazilian soccer legend
45 Words affixed during a mani?

- 47 Driving needs
49 Here: Fr.
50 Novel
51 Radius, diameter, etc.?
56 Internet auction locale
57 Historic time often named after presidents
58 Fail miserably
62 Get in a pool
63 Rupert Murdoch?
67 Sailor's assent
68 Misleading claims or practices that falsely promote green benefits
69 Turning point?
70 H.S. equivalency test
71 School basics
72 Be behind

DOWN

- 1 Justice Roberts
2 Popular cookie since 1912
3 Paraphernalia
4 Dr. of rap
5 Corn serving
6 Coll. in Troy, N.Y.
7 "The White Lotus" actress ___ Lou Wood
8 Not suitable
9 Common sense
10 Realize
11 Take away courage
12 Show the ropes to
13 Beliefs
18 Pings on X, for short
22 Most sensible
24 And so on: Abbr.
25 ___ and desist
26 Torrent
27 Records that may be broken
28 Record players

- 29 Wild thing?
30 Vanished into thin air?
34 EPA member?
35 A billion years
36 Mohawk River city
39 Sudden attack
41 Paul Bunyan's tool
42 "Incidentally," in textspeak
44 Baton Rouge sch.
46 Illuminated
47 Swelling reducer
48 Steak type
52 Sponge
53 Eagerness
54 Erect
55 Exercise target
59 "The Simpsons" bus driver
60 Cat's sound
61 Jane Fonda's "Klute" role
63 Ran into
64 Pro
65 Impair
66 Morning hrs.

SOLUTION TO LAST

WEEK'S CROSSWORD:
MOVEABLE TYPE

Washington Examiner

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