

## Potomac Fever: A Republic At Risk

*There are really two nations here now, of virtually equal size, with almost nothing in common.*

By HAL CROWTHER

In the opinion business, there has never been a more difficult time to stay calm and positive. Cooler heads than mine — many of them — have proclaimed the launch of Donald Trump Redux as “a national nightmare” or “a constitutional apocalypse” and struggled to find a credible response. The reporters have done their job, keeping their focus on the facts and figures and the players on the field, avoiding the powerful impulse to howl “What the bloody hell?” as this bizarre cast of characters turns a stable republic into a neo-fascist Walpurgisnacht — complete, literally, with a dancing billionaire brandishing a chainsaw. There is nothing remotely resembling a precedent in this nation’s history.

It gets weirder, scarier with every news cycle. *The New York Times* color photograph of Trump’s first cabinet meeting, widely circulated, looks more like a satirical cartoon than a news photo. There they are, the men and women you’ve been reading about, the least qualified or accomplished, most mismatched and, worst of all, least independent crew of flunkies and oddballs who ever took charge of any government, far less ours. There’s our president with his usual smirk and his tangerine war paint, and three chairs down sits Robert Kennedy Jr. with his deep-fried face like some meso-American death mask. What a strange life this man must have led to wind up with a face like that. (But maybe he’s entitled to it — my father and uncle weren’t assassinated by madmen.) Trump has replaced deep state with creep state. And standing, hovering above them all in his black MAGA ballcap and Tech Support black T-shirt, is Elon Musk, the world’s richest man. Wearing a slightly glum expression, unlike the ear-to-ear smiles he’s been flashing in all of his photos with Trump.

Of course it’s rude and unkind to call attention to other people’s faces. I’m no George Clooney myself. But Trump’s strange underlings can’t even manage to look normal. Have you seen a picture of Emil Bove, one of the president’s legal hit men? You wouldn’t want to run into him on a dark night in the woods. And Rudy Giuliani? But I wish it was only their faces that frighten me. Examine the resume of

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Illustration by DOLORES CULLEN

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*Trump claims gutting federal agencies will save money, but cutting the IRS means government collects less taxes.*

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**TRUMP SET U.S. BACK 100 YEARS**

*Trump ambushed Ukraine’s embattled president Feb. 28, started a trade war March 3 and bragged about the new era March 4.*

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# The Progressive POPULIST

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## AN EDITORIAL

### Stop the Orange Betrayer

In his first six weeks back in power, Donald Trump betrayed democracy, the rule of law, neighboring trade partners as well as our allies overseas, his own supporters at home and the principles that have kept the United States a beacon of hope at home and abroad over the past century.

It is time for defenders of democracy to challenge the Great Betrayer, as well as Republicans who enable his power grabs.

The challenge was brought March 4 with Trump's speech before the joint session of Congress, where Republicans celebrated the return of their leader, who had spent the past four years fighting criminal charges for his attempt to rig the 2020 election — while baselessly claiming Democrats had stolen the election from him — and his attempt to mount an insurrection with a violent assault on the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in an attempt to stop the certification of the 2020 election — an insurrection that cost the lives of five police officers and injured 174 more. Trump has pardoned the assailants.

Trump also was found liable in separate cases in New York courts for fraud and for sexual assault and later he was convicted on 34 felony counts involving his use of business funds and documents to cover up his adulterous affairs before the 2016 election. A partisan majority on the Supreme Court obstructed the work of a special prosecutor who had brought indictments in Florida and D.C. involving the alleged insurrection and Trump's refusal to return classified documents he had taken from the White House.

After his inauguration, Trump proceeded with his plan to rule as a dictator, issuing executive orders setting aside acts of Congress, congressional appropriations and at least one article of the Constitution. He let centibillionaire Elon Musk set up an independent Department of Government Efficiency, operating under White House authority, as young computer hackers with sketchy backgrounds were sent into federal agencies to search computer files and, apparently arbitrarily, identified areas of potential "waste, fraud and abuse" that had escaped the attention of actual government auditors, such as inspectors general, whom Trump had summarily and illegally fired.

One of DOGE's first moves was to shut down the US Agency for International Development, which was authorized by Congress in 1961 to unite several programs that provided humanitarian assistance for underdeveloped countries and counter the Soviet Union's influence during the Cold War. It earned a good reputation for providing food and medical care to stop epidemics from spreading, as well as socioeconomic development. But USAID's inspector general had initiated a probe of Musk's Starlink satellite business. Musk said USAID was a "criminal organization" and that it was "beyond repair" and needed to be shut down. Trump ordered USAID merged into the State Department, despite warnings the move was illegal, and blocked payment of \$2 billion to contractors for work that already been done.

The Supreme Court provided a glimmer of hope March 5 when it ruled 5-4 that US District Judge Amir H. Ali had the authority to order the administration to restart the payments. Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Justice Amy Coney Barrett joined the court's three liberal justices in the ruling, which stirred hope the court won't endorse Trump's dictatorial powers, but it apparently shows four justices would give Trump whatever he wants.

DOGE has continued to call for thousands of federal workers to be fired, with the main targets being those who have been working less than a year, since they generally have less civil service protection.

Former Social Security commissioner Martin O'Malley predicted the slashing of 7,000 jobs in the agency would cause disruption within

three months of payments to some of the 73 million Americans who rely upon Social Security benefits. He also told *Rolling Stone* the gutting of employees and offices will also prevent Americans from easily applying for benefits and delay processing of disability claims.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is planning to cut 80,000 jobs from the agency that provides health care and other services for millions of veterans, according to an internal memo obtained by the Associated Press. That would require terminating tens of thousands of employees hired in a VA expansion during the Biden administration, including those who care for veterans impacted by burn pits under the 2022 PACT Act.

In the week before his speech to Congress, Trump had brought Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the White House on Feb. 28. But instead of negotiating to continue supporting Ukraine's three-year-long attempt to defeat Russia's invading army, Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance tried to browbeat Zelenskyy into capitulating, while news crews, including the Russian news service Tass, broadcast the debacle, as Vance lectured Zelenskyy on how he had not been properly thankful for everything the U.S. had done for Ukraine (while Trump was negotiating with Putin on the terms of "ungrateful" Ukraine's surrender). Trump ended up stopping intelligence sharing with Ukraine and left other support to NATO allies in Europe.

Democrats faced a challenge in how to respond to Trump's March 4 speech to Congress. Democratic congressional leaders favored maintaining decorum at Trump's speech to Congress, though many carried paddle-sized placards with messages of opposition.

US Rep. Al Green of Houston played the role of Old Testament prophet, pointing his cane and calling out Trump's lies and Republicans for moving to slash Medicaid, which provides health care for many of Green's working-class constituents. When Green refused to sit down and shut up, House Speaker Mike Johnson ordered the sergeant at arms to remove Green and let Trump continue with his lies.

Green went peacefully, and many Democrats applauded him for at least demonstrating resistance, but Republicans later moved to punish Green for his behavior.

Green was brought up for censure by the House, despite a history of Republicans heckling Democratic presidents Obama and Biden without retribution. Biden actually turned the heckling to his advantage in 2024, when Rep. Margorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) yelled out "Liar!" after Biden chided Republicans for floating the possibility of cuts to Social Security and Medicare. When others echoed Greene's objections, Biden responded, "We all apparently agree, Social Security and Medicare is off the books now, right? ... We've got unanimity." But Trump is not sharp enough to engage in a conversation that extends beyond his limited vocabulary of insults, and he had no answers to Al Green's accusations.

Ten Democrats joined Republicans in voting to censure Green, but dozens of fellow Democrats accompanied Green to the well of the House and sang "We Shall Overcome" in a show of solidarity, causing Speaker Johnson to declare a recess.

Democrats at home may grumble that their congressmembers are not aggressive enough in their resistance to Trump and the Republican majorities in the House and Senate, but the best thing Democrats can do is remain unified, hoping for cracks in the Greedy Oligarch Party, and prevent bad things from getting passed, at least until next year, when Republicans can be called to account for enabling Trump and his oligarchs in their attempts to cut Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and other programs for working families.

Until then, Democrats must hold the line in Congress and keep voters informed. In the meantime, don't despair. Organize. —JMC

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# JIM HIGHTOWER



The party's clueless cadre of insider consultants mocked Sen. Bernie Sanders for focusing on Trump's clique of profiteering oligarchs.

## Now Is the Time to Push for a Democratic Democratic Party

Once again, Sen. Bernie Sanders is showing that he's a leader who actually leads.

While top Democratic Party lawmakers are hunkered down in their Washington bunker, immobilized by the President Donald Trump-Elon Musk oligarchic coup on America's democracy, the feisty "little-d" democrat from Vermont is out in grassroots America, rallying workaday people with his National Tour to Fight Oligarchy. His effort has even caused the lethargic Democratic establishment to speak out. Against Bernie!

The party's clueless cadre of insider consultants mocked Sen. Sanders for focusing on Trump's clique of profiteering oligarchs: "Americans don't understand the word oligarchy," they clucked.

Excuse me, smart ones, but once again, you're wrong. The oligarchy has become quite well-known to us commoners who've suffered from their healthcare outrages, voter suppression, anti-union greed, rampant price gouging, etc. To the shock of elites in both parties, Sanders has even taken his "Fight Oligarchy" campaign into red congressional districts, drawing thousands of mad-as-hell in such Republican states as Iowa and Nebraska.

In a symbolic rejection of Bernie's on-your-side populist rebellion, Hakeem Jeffries — the Democratic leader in the U.S. House — rushed out to Silicon Valley to hug the billionaire oligarchs of high-tech! Far from confronting the rise of monopoly power, Jeffries assured the Tech Bros that the "Party of the People" is there to serve them.

Meanwhile, Democratic congressional leaders held an internal "gripe-fest" last month. Not griping about Trump's authoritarian assault — but about their grassroots constituents inundating them with calls and emails demanding that they grow spines and start fighting the rising oligarchy.

Sen. Sanders is showing the way for the Democratic Party to become ... well, democratic! Connect with him at the Bernie Sanders website at berniesanders.com.

### To the Barricades: Trump Plans to 'Fix' America's Postal Service

Uh-oh. Trump is hearing voices again. And the voices are telling him to do something truly stupid. As he puts it, "There is a lot of talk about the Postal Service being taken private," adding that "It's an idea that a lot of people have liked for a long time."

Hmmm, I haven't heard even one voice say our phenomenal public mail service should be privatized. Indeed, it is a widely popular government agency because it works for everyone — rich and poor, urban and rural.

When he claims that "a lot of people" like the idea of postal privatization, how many is a lot? Six? Six million? And what kind of people? Working stiffs, poor people, rural residents ... who? He gives a coded answer to that when he refers to the Post Office being "taken" private. Oh? Taken by whom? Of course ... by the corrupt profi-

teering billionaires who funded Trump. Their business plan is to have him hand the agency to them in the name of instituting "corporate efficiency" — meaning the privateers will go to three-day mail delivery, cut-off service to unprofitable poor and rural communities, raise prices, and fire legions of experienced postal workers.

They're out to steal an essential public treasure, but they're also trying to censor opposition to their political control of government. The Postal Service was created in 1792 in part to prevent royalists and oligarchs from controlling communications. If you think that's not a problem in modern America, reflect on the blunt media censorship being imposed right now by Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, and other petty potentates of corporate plutocracy.

To learn more, visit the American Postal Workers Union website (apwu.org).

### ***Ironically, Trump's Coup Attempt Is Uniting Americans to Fight for Their Common Good***

The Trump-Musk administration thought they could just stomp on us and our Constitution, replacing democracy with a MAGA monarchy. But they had not reckoned with one fearsome opponent: Sen. Chuck Schumer.

The Senate's top Democrat says he's getting "furious" about the GOP's oligarchic coup attempt. Wow, he might even fire off one of his strongly worded letters to the White House! So far, though, the Democratic "leader" is meekly urging a horrified public to just weather the storm, predicting that, "Trump will screw up."

Hello, Chuck — history clearly teaches that to fight totalitarianism, you actually have to ... fight.

People are asking: Why the hell is the party's top leadership AWOL? The good news is grassroots people themselves — the little-d democrats — have taken to the streets, leading the charge to STOP this plutocratic, autocratic power grab. So, "leaders" ought to at least follow! All Democratic national officials (including former presidents Clinton, Obama and Biden) should come out and stand together, demonstrating solidarity with the majority of Americans fighting this far-right, un-American assault by rampaging billionaires.

Most encouraging is the fact that workaday people — in red states as well as blue — are erupting in spontaneous protests and unity actions. Ironically, Don & Elon's self-serving plutocratic thuggery is rallying workers, veterans, schoolchildren, seniors, immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community, main street businesses — and, well, Americans — against them! The GOP assault on all of us reveals that we commoners really are in this together, and it will take each of us to defend the Common Good for one and all.

This is Jim Hightower saying to get involved in some of the actions in your area. Check out the resources we've listed at jimhightower.substack.com.

### ***Guess What? Hurricanes and Wildfires Don't Have Political Preferences***

May I just say that the stupidest, most despicable, most self-defeating political "tactic" in our present hyper-partisan climate is the accusation that victims of today's horrific wildfires, floods and such are getting what they deserve because of their political views.

Start with this month's catastrophic floods in Appalachia. If you've never had a river gushing into your home and town, you can't imagine the destruction, muck, stench, injuries, death and despair. Yet, various numbskulls who profess to be progressive have posted taunts online, chortling that these devastated victims are red-state, small-government Trump voters who don't deserve the government's helping hand in their time of dire need.

Likewise, right-wing MAGA squads, including some GOP congress critters, rou-

tinely jeer at wildfire victims in blue states and cities, gloating that hellfire is righteous punishment for "ungodly" people who oppose Trump's "divine mission."

Hello — this is not politics, it's disgraceful inhumanity. And those who engage in it are skuzz insults to America's democratic ideals of the Common Good.

Happily, though, even as some of our highest officials spew divisive and violent political rhetoric, the ingrained ethic in practically every community is to rush to the aid of anyone and everyone in times of disaster. I saw this up close when Hurricane Harvey slammed Houston in 2017. Washington officials played politics for weeks as the city was drowning — but hundreds of working

## War Eviscerates Our Ecosystem

By FRANK LINGO

There are obvious reasons to avoid war: the horrific mass killing, the homelessness and starvation after bombings, the hatred that festers to fuel terrorism and the next war in its aftermath. But another effect that gets little notice is war's ravaging of the world's water, land and wildlife.

A Feb. 23 *New York Times* opinion piece by Yale professor Sunil Amrith recounted some of the devastation from past wars, like how the incendiary bombings of Dresden, Hamburg and Tokyo in World War II that each killed over 100,000 humans, created their own temporary weather system — firestorms. Scientists estimated that fires just in 1944 and 1945 emitted over a billion pounds of soot into our atmosphere.

Professor Amrith advocates environmental peace-building, the practice of using ecological protection and cooperation among nations to ensure a durable peace. This idea emerged in the late 20th century but has yet to gain traction with world leaders.

More recently, the bombings of water treatment facilities in Gaza, Amrith notes, have caused 100,000 cubic meters of raw polluting sewage to flow into the Mediterranean Sea every day. Also, 80% of the trees in Gaza have been destroyed.

In Ukraine, the air has been filled with toxins from burning industrial facilities. The Black Sea Biosphere Reserve, a sanctuary for thousands of animal species, has had

people showed up from all over, bringing their small boats and power tools to organize ad hoc rescue teams, not asking anyone their party affiliation.

This is Jim Hightower saying ... That's our truest selves — and it's why it's essential to squash the malignant ethic of anyone who tries to pervert fundamental humanity into their red-blue morass.

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flooding from the bombing of a dam cause a massive die-off of birds and fish from release of hazardous chemicals. One Ukrainian official referred to the devastation from Russian bombing under the occupation, as "eco-cide," according to *The Guardian*.

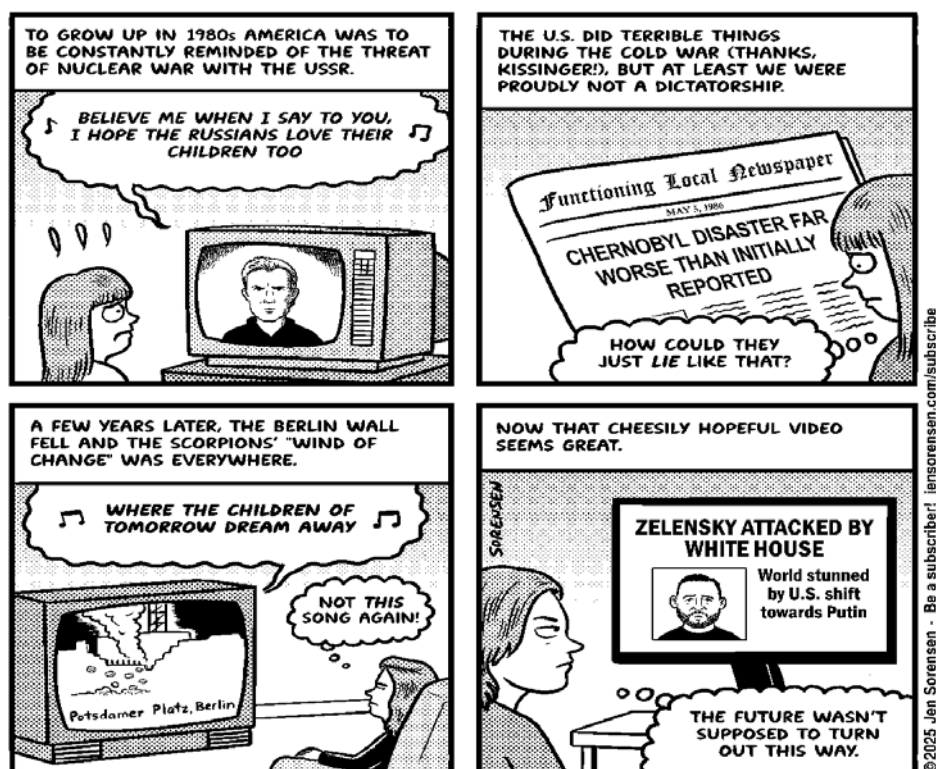
As I observed in a column written during the first Iraq War under Bush I over 30 years ago — the Earth loses all wars. The bombing back then set fire to oil wells which burned uncontrollably for years, spewing extremely toxic smoke into the atmosphere. But apparently that wasn't stupid and destructive enough to satisfy the masters of war under Bush II, who did it all over again even worse a decade later.

An estimated 70% of the world's population live under the iron grip of authoritarians. Dictators treat the planet like they treat its people — disposable as toilet paper. And now the wannabe dictator Trump has doubled down on the drilling to add exponentially to our already overheated climate.

Like it or not, human activity and ecological well-being are intertwined. "When people are doing well, that's when you have the greatest opportunities to secure a future for biodiversity," said Dr. Robert Pringle, a Princeton University biologist in a June 2023 *New York Times* article. "And when people are suffering and struggling, that's when [biodiversity] tends to fall apart."

So if we're able to gather some gratitude for a brotherhood of humans, perhaps we'll take care of each other and our ecology as well. We can manage that, can't we? Our very survival depends on it.

*Frank Lingo, based in Lawrence, Kansas, is a former columnist for the Kansas City Star and author of the novel "Earth Vote." Email: lingofrank@gmail.com. See his website: Greenbeat.world*



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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### What Does Putin Have on Trump?

In 1978, I was a high school junior studying the Russian language in upstate New York. Every other year, the junior and senior Russian language students would go on a class to the Soviet Union. We stayed five days in Leningrad, nine in Moscow and five in Kiev — all in hotels which were dedicated to foreign tourists. In all three hotels, all the rooms were bugged, wired for sound. We located some of the bugs and were always aware that we were being listened to. I informed the ceiling lamp that I needed fresh towels, and when I returned from an outing, fresh towels were on my bed, which was not the normal procedure. The hotel in Moscow was a modern (at the time) 15-story building. There was no button for the second floor on the elevators, but a girl went down the staircase, and as she was passing the second floor, the door opened as someone exited, and she saw dozens of people seated at desks with headphones on.

Decades later, technology has advanced to the point where I'm sure that these hotels are now wired for video, not just sound. In the U.S. today, there are so many hidden cameras in motel rooms and Airbnbs that there are 14 pages of spycam detectors on Amazon to choose from, so I'm pretty sure Russia is up to date on spycam technology. And I doubt they have respect for privacy.

To get to the point, I'm between 100% and 110% sure that Putin has at least one video entitled "Donald J. Trump's Microphallus and the Moscow Prostitutes," which, if made public, would make Trump the biggest laughingstock in the world, ever. We know Trump loves cheating on his wives, sometimes even with people who do not want to have sex with him (Google "E. Jean Carroll/Trump rape: or 'dozens of other women/little girls/Trump/rape' for confirmation.) And we know Trump spent a lot of time being a big shot in Russia before 2016. Trump's behavior with Putin makes perfect sense with these facts in consideration. He would rather be a traitor than be laughed at by the entire planet for his pathetic sexual exploits and capabilities. This explains the United States' current Ukraine/Russia policy of today completely. It's as obvious, and simple, as that.

KURT A. MAUSOLF, *Bristol, Tenn.*

### Oligarchs Won't Allow 'Good Old Days'

Alex Jacquez and Elizabeth Pancotti ("A Hostile Takeover of American Democracy," 3/1/25 *TPP*) note that there is now a corporate takeover of our political system. I suggest that the present chaos we face is an evolutionary development that clearly undermines past beliefs about the nature of the U.S. political system.

In the 1950s numerous American intellectuals celebrated the notion that the U.S. had become a pluralistic democracy because of New Deal-inspired social provisions and, most importantly, due to the fact that the labor movement had become a significant countervailing force to the power of big business. Furthermore, the farm bloc, growing consumer and civil rights movements and more liberal federal court decisions provided additional support for the idea that no one class or bloc had hegemony in society.

During the last 45 years, the decline of the labor movement and family farms, the decrease in anti-trust enforcement and the disproportionate access of the wealthy to the

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### Liberal Christians and the Long Run

By DON ROLLINS

The narrative of Progressive Christianity in America is a checkered affair. On the one hand, scores of champions for justice and dignity have risen from its ranks. Critical political battles could not have been won without the sacrifices of such religious liberals. And America is a better nation because, at their best, progressive Christians have drawn no distinction between faithfulness and prophetic action.

But from within as well as without, that same narrative has been read as an exercise in apathy occasionally punctuated with activism — a movement often plagued by overcaution, disorganization and "talk-activism" in the face of immediate danger. (Just read Dr. King's Letter from Birmingham Jail,

so say some of the critics.)

The truth about progressive Christianity lies in between these two schools of thought, likely somewhere near the juncture of liberation theology (shining compassion) and institutional inertia (human complexities). It's a halting, but persistent people where vision and current reality collide. In homier words, progressive Christianity is the place where Jesus has to attend committee meetings.

However understood, progressive Christians have been thrust into this alternate universe in which government mandated callousness is the order of the day. Not since the Dust Bowl days has their inherited message of justice with compassion been so tested.

In those desperate times, a besieged FDR reached out to progressive Christian clergy for their support in creating a social safety net. A large portion came onboard despite some resistance from parishioners, proclaiming the immediate mission of the liberal church was to hold the line until

political process has shaken the idea of pluralism.

The Trump-Musk attack on public institutions renders plausible the view that the U.S. is an oligarchic form of capitalism.

JIM PHILLIPS, *Wichita, Kansas*

### AI Taking Over Government

Elon Musk was able to make X function after firing 70% of the old Twitter staff because of AI.

Musk cut IRS staffing, and intends to use AI to enforce IRS taxation laws ... selectively.

Air traffic control, Social Security, Postal Service, most government services have detailed rules of operation which can be programmed into AI.

AI works pretty well with known situations, most of the time. It does not work with new, unknown situations. It does not innovate, create, or improve according to what's best for the people it serves. AI can be programmed to provide specific exceptions to specific people for their personal gain.

Musk wants to control the Treasury Department, Office of Management and Budget, and General Services Administration so he can control the issuing and payment of government contracts, including to his companies' multiple contracts. To enable such control, he needs to fire most of the employees and substitute AI to implement the departmental operations.

Enforcing the dictates of AI-programmed operations requires policing on the ground. Dictators, and wanna-be dictators like Trump and Musk, know that lowering people's standard of living down to subsistence will produce adequate numbers of candidates willing to uniform themselves in service of a regime that provides them basic food, shelter, and clothing.

Currently, several people, companies, and countries are competing to build more powerful AI. Soon, they will compete against each other, destroying a lot of "ancillary infrastructure" and "incidental people" in the process. One, or perhaps as many as four, AI-enhanced dictators will remain in virtual control of Earth.

Eventually, in the not-too-distant future, AI will become sentient. It will think for itself about itself. It will have the same desires for control and dominance that its creators imbued when they programmed AI. Then, "who" will control Earth?

With Concern,

BRUCE JOFFE, *Piedmont, Calif.*

### Under the Rule of Damaged Souls

What we see unfolding in Washington nowadays, and many other capitals as well, is the full flowering of the passions that have inspired certain people to become obscenely rich and to pursue god-like status. These passions come in two basic varieties—fear and greed.

The greed is obvious enough; there is nothing they wouldn't get done for money, always more money. Any belief, even the most basic connection to their own humanity, will be jettisoned in an instant for another taste of lucre. Money, in fact, comes to replace these precious moral attachments as their life-anchor.

Fear, though, seems contrary to their manifest brazenness; but they are used to assaulting every demon of theirs head-on, charging right at them, and not fleeing. Appearing weak is their greatest fear, so they actively deny it by talking tough and acting tough. Similarly, unfavorable truths must be denied, and all their lies must be true, in order for them to claim mastery of reality. Their money, guns, and circle of sycophants are layers of protection from the cold hard truth of their lives.

For us, these people may be pitied, reviled, or mocked, but only reluctantly obeyed, and certainly not worshipped. They will never love us or help us, regardless of our cir-

cumstances; they don't have the capacity to do so, even if they could see us.

So is it just human nature that a few among us, being emotionally damaged, will always rise up by pure force of will to direct our collective fate as they see fit? Perhaps, but not if we give this putative democracy the rigorous attention and continual upkeep that it requires. It is essential to identify these damaged souls among us and keep them in check.

JEFFREY HOBBS, *Springfield, Ill.*

### Harrowing Times

To say that these are harrowing and dangerous times for both U.S. democracy and the world is a seismic understatement. One critical issue that comes to the forefront is the total silence and acquiescence of the Republican party to the damning and destructive directives and initiatives of Donald Trump and his Project 25 conspirators. The Republicans as a party have been about as vocal as an oil painting when confronted with a huge array of disastrous plans that actually threaten human survival. One example is Trump's directive to "Drill baby drill!," which will expedite petroleum drilling and development and may very well be the catalyst and turning point for global catastrophic climate change. Trump is promoting and expediting a climate-based holocaust pursuing short term profit at a cost that may very well lead to global extinction. And there has been absolutely no Republican push back.

During the Cuban missile crisis Russian Submarine commander Vasili Arkhipov saved the world and all humanity by refusing direct orders to launch nuclear weapons which would have brought about WW3 and the end of humanity. Arkhipov rose to the occasion and prevented Armageddon. Simply said there should be monuments of him world wide honoring his courage and valor.

The Republican party needs to replicate the courage of Arkhipov and challenge Trump and his cadre over their wholesale assault on science, reason, equity, democratic principles, human decency, and the rule of law. This situation is indeed dire and true, authentic courage seems to be nonexistent or in very short supply with the political party that is responsible for putting Donald Trump in the White House. I am hopeful that the stark reality of what Trump represents will resonate in the conscience of at least a handful of Republican leaders. They may well face a political backlash for showcasing courage in the face of malignant opposition but history and indeed civilization will both honor and remember them.

JIM SAWYER, *Edmonds, Wash.*

### Zirin Nailed NFL

David Zirin's 3/1/25 *TPP* article entitled "Trump's Presence at the Super Bowl was an Affront to Every NFL Player" was the most informative sports column I have read in more than 70 years. I am sending copies of the column to several family members and friends. As a result of reading some of the facts set forth in the Zirin column, I plan to boycott and never attend or watch another NFL game on television. I hope to watch either the Trump impeachment trial or follow the removal from-office procedures under the 25th Amendment to the United States Constitution for his inability "to discharge the powers and duties of his office."

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

### If It Ain't Broke, Just Wait

Lo and behold, here we go again. "Trump the Terrible" has managed to "Make America Grate Again," in a prodigious way and in short order! Think brightly and shine the light, Americans!

BRUNO GAVRILOAIA, *Kansas City, Mo.*

Franklin Roosevelt's legislation could be passed. Help was on the way.

But that was then. Today's Christian liberals (and their institutions) are no less called upon to link arms with the suffering and the targeted; yet this time the mission of the liberal church is to resist, not speed up a government's response to widespread suffering. This time help isn't on the way. Worse yet, it's being withdrawn.

Trump's blood curdling, "We're Just Getting Started" March 4 address to Congress only reinforced this new and cold shunning of our neighbors in need. Progressive Christian communities across traditions and denominations should take him at his word.

Those congregations should expect further upticks in requests for assistance, and in direct proportion to new cuts in entitlement and other subsistence programs. The numbers are bound to skyrocket as federal grants are frozen.

Consequently, liberal Christian congregations will feel a strain on their budgets as

they work to breach the gap. Some will meet the challenge with focus and creativity, others will experience internal conflict as they discern their place in a barren, once unimaginable America.

Bishops, clergy, musicians and church staff will be called upon to rethink their calling in this new Republican world order. Likewise religion departments and seminaries in the liberal Christian tradition.

These are but a few examples of the fallout. In short, progressive Christians are being called to be the same, only different. To lean on their ancestors, yet into the times. It's a tall order.

Progressive expressions of Christianity aren't the only ones resisting policies crafted by millionaires and billionaires who wouldn't last a week in poverty. But they bring to the struggle a message of imperfect resilience sorely needed for the long run.

*Don Rollins is a retired Unitarian Universalist minister in Jackson, Ohio. Email donaldrollins@gmail.com.*

# The Gutting of Our National Park System

By BEN LONG

Imagine a million-acre wilderness: Mountain peaks. Rushing rivers. Bears and wolves. Now imagine a city the size of, say, Chicago.

In my corner of Montana every summer, those two things merge. Montana is home to Glacier National Park, and 30 years ago, the park had about a million visitors a year. Nowadays, the park attracts more than 3 million people a year.

It's like a major city teleported to the spine of the Rockies. Those visitors have needs—food, restrooms, parking lots and trails. They deserve to be safe. They expect to have fun. That's why we have park rangers, along with road crews, fire crews, wildlife managers and a myriad of other folks who keep the park functioning.

But today, when they should be planning for the next busy season, our public land managers and stewards find themselves knee-capped by a zealous, unelected budget slasher who wields not a red pen,

but a chainsaw.

For no reason, except the desire to cut the federal budget by eliminating as many staff members as possible, a team recruited by Elon Musk (under orders from President Trump) has slashed the workforces of our public land agencies.

Musk and crew suggest they are just getting started. Their excuses are specious. The idea that they are going to balance the budget on the backs of park rangers and trail crews is like saying they're going to dam the Colorado River with a few shovelfuls of gravel. Perhaps their long game is to so incapacitate management of national parks that privatization is the answer—selling off parks and other public lands.

Chicago serves its 3.5 million people on an annual operations budget of \$17 billion. Glacier Park's annual operations budget is 1,000 times less, about \$15 million. And Glacier Park is an enormous cash cow. Visitors from around the world are in the mood to eat, drink and spend in the local economy, to the tune of \$350 million annually. From that perspective alone, Glacier Park is one of the greatest bargains in government.

Glacier Park is not alone. It is surrounded by the Kootenai and Flathead national forests and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. Public land that be-

longs to you and me. Here and across the West, our public lands provide the setting for a way of life that attracts investment and newcomers.

Just as you can't run a ranch without ranch hands, you can't run public lands without land managers and staffers. They tend to be dedicated to the public good, almost always working for a modest salary, the love of the mission and the chance to work outdoors.

This problem goes beyond my community in Montana. The same deep cuts are happening across the Western public land states. It impacts every American who appreciates our public estate for its clean water, wildlife and world-class recreation.

Either Musk doesn't get this or doesn't care. A man wealthy enough for his own space program doesn't have to share public lands with the riffraff.

But Rep. Ryan Zinke, R-Montana, should understand. He is paid to care. In the last Trump Administration, he was the Secretary of the Interior. Now, he represents the western district of Montana in Congress, a district that contains both Glacier National Park and at least 10 million acres of National Forest.

I once ran across Rep. Zinke at a Montana saloon. Our conversation drifted to na-

tional forest management. While we disagreed on some things, I appreciated this parting comment.

"Remember," he said, "this can all be fixed."

Maybe, but it can't be fixed without good people.

Westerners who depend on public lands for our way of life and our livelihoods know that these lands need and deserve good stewardship. For that, you need stewards. Not a gutted, demoralized workforce that is forced to look over its shoulder for the next axe to fall.

The Republicans are in charge in Washington D.C. There is no other party to blame for bad decisions. It's past time for Zinke and others to bring some sense to the anti-government fever that is gripping the nation.

Our public lands are both economic assets and a patriotic point of pride. It's time our elected officials (and their unelected minions) act like it.

*Ben Long is a contributor to Writers on the Range, [writersontherange.org](http://writersontherange.org), a nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conservation about the West. He is senior program director at Resource Media in Montana.*

*Margot McMillen is off this week.*

## DISPATCHES

### EVEN THE RIGHT HAS A PROBLEM WITH TRUMP'S NEW ATTACK ON FREE SPEECH.

President Donald Trump bragged about taking steps to deport Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil March 10, saying the Columbia University graduate student who organized anti-Israel protests last year is "the first arrest of many to come," Emily Singer noted at Daily Kos (3/10)

"We know there are more students at Columbia and other Universities across the Country who have engaged in pro-terrorist, anti-Semitic, anti-American activity, and the Trump Administration will not tolerate it," Trump wrote in a post on his Truth Social site. "Many are not students, they are paid agitators. We will find, apprehend, and deport these terrorist sympathizers from our country—never to return again. If you support terrorism, including the slaughtering of innocent men, women, and children, your presence is contrary to our national and foreign policy interests, and you are not welcome here. We expect every one of America's Colleges and Universities to comply. Thank you!"

Khalil on March 8 was arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers, who said they were taking him into custody because the State Department revoked his student visa. However, Khalil is a legal permanent resident with a green card who had not been charged with any crimes before his arrest.

After his arrest, the Department of Homeland Security said Khalil led "activities aligned to Hamas, a designated terrorist organization," and that he would be deported because that violates Trump's Jan. 30 executive order that says the administration will "deport Hamas sympathizers and revoke student visas."

"We will be revoking the visas and/or green cards of Hamas supporters in America so they can be deported," Secretary of State Marco Rubio wrote in a post on X.

In an appearance on Fox Business March 10, Trump border czar Tom Homan defended Khalil's deportation, and said the United States can deport legal permanent residents.

"Absolutely we can," Homan said. "Did he violate the terms of his visa? Did he violate the terms of his residency here? Committing crimes, attacking Israeli students, locking down buildings, destroying property, absolutely. Any resident alien who commits a crime is eligible for deportation."

But Khalil wasn't arrested for any of those crimes.

Arresting and deporting someone over speech that does not align with the administration's policies is a terrifying slippery slope. Today it's Palestinian activists, but next it could be anyone who criticizes Trump or Republicans.

"This arrest is unprecedented, illegal, and un-American," the American Civil Liberties Union, which defends the right to free speech in the U.S., said in a statement March 10. "The federal government is claiming the authority to deport people with deep ties to the U.S. and revoke their green cards for advocating positions that the government opposes. To be clear: The First Amendment protects everyone in the U.S. The government's actions are obviously intended to intimidate and chill speech on one side of a public debate. The government must immediately return Mr. Khalil to New York, release him back to his family, and reverse course on this discriminatory policy."

Even anti-immigration right-wing activists have said they take issue with Khalil's arrest and deportation for that reason.

"There's almost no one I don't want to deport, but, unless they've committed a crime, isn't this a violation of the first amendment?" right-wing activist Ann Coulter wrote in a post on X.

Ultimately, the move is one of many free speech crack-downs Trump and the Republican Party have taken since he was sworn in Jan. 20. Trump also has targeted law firms who have defended Democratic officials or sued Trump.

On March 6, he signed an executive order that revoked

security clearances of lawyers at the law firm Perkins Coie and barred them from federal government buildings "when such access would threaten the national security of or otherwise be inconsistent with the interests of the United States." In the order, Trump attacked Perkins Coie for "representing failed Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton," and for defending Fusion GPS, which he said "manufactured a false 'dossier' designed to steal an election."

"This is dangerous as hell," Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD), ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee, told the *Wall Street Journal* of Trump's attacks on law firms. "If you defend other people's rights, even if it's your job, the president of the United States will retaliate against you."

Meanwhile, Rep. Robert Garcia (D-CA) received a letter from the Department of Justice in February demanding he "clarify" comments he made calling co-President Elon Musk a "dick."

"This sounds to some like a threat to Mr. Musk—an appointed representative of President Donald Trump who you call a 'dick'—and government staff who work for him. Their concerns have led to this inquiry," Ed Martin, interim U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, wrote in the letter.

"So if you criticize Elon Musk, Trump's DOJ will send you this letter," Garcia wrote on Bluesky. "Members of Congress must have the right to forcefully oppose the Trump Administration. I will not be silenced."

Martin also threatened Georgetown University Law School, saying that if the school continues to teach classes related to diversity, equity and inclusion that his office would not hire students from the school.

And House Republicans censured Texas Democratic Rep. Al Green for saying during Trump's joint address to Congress on March 4 Trump had "no mandate" to cut Medicaid. Republicans are also threatening to remove Green from his House committee assignments over his protest.

"With all these moves, fascism is no longer a threat: It's here, and it's terrifying," Singer concluded.

**CALL WHAT'S COMING TRUMP'S RECESSION.** As U.S. financial markets continued their downward spiral on March 10 amid rapidly mounting concerns about the impacts of President Donald Trump's erratic and destructive tariff policies, one economist argued that the president has almost single-handedly engineered economic conditions that could result in a recession in the near future, Jake Johnson noted at Common Dreams (3/10).

"Past recessions have been the result of policy errors or disasters," Dean Baker, senior economist at the Center for Economic and Policy Research, wrote March 10. "The most typical policy error is when the Federal Reserve Board raises interest rates too much to counter inflation. That was clearly the story in the 1974-75 recession as well as the 1980-82 double-dip recession."

"Then we have recessions caused by collapsing financial bubbles, the 2001 recession following the collapse of the stock bubble and the 2008-09 recession following the collapse of the housing bubble. And, of course, we had the 2020 recession because of the COVID pandemic," he added. "But now Donald Trump is threatening us with a recession, not because of something that is any way unavoidable, but rather because as president he has the power to bring on a recession."

Baker pointed specifically to Trump's decision to impose sweeping tariffs on imports from Canada, Mexico, and China, which the economist estimates will cost Americans roughly \$2,000 per household as companies push the costs of the tariffs onto consumers in the form of higher prices.

Retaliatory measures are also likely to inflict pain on Americans: On March 10, Ontario announced it would charge 25% more for the electricity it provides to Minnesota, New York and Michigan in response to Trump's tariffs on Canadian imports, a move that's expected to hike electricity bills significantly for ratepayers in those states.

China, meanwhile, hit back at Trump March 10 with an additional 15% tariff on U.S. farm products, including chicken, pork, soybeans and beef.

Trump's tariff policies, and the widespread confusion surrounding their implementation, have sparked a sell-off on Wall Street and broader fears about the state of the U.S. economy as the labor market shows signs of stalling and consumer confidence plunges.

"While a recession may not be fully baked into the cards at this point, the risk is evident and it's almost entirely coming from Donald Trump's policies," Baker argued, noting that while the recession threat is "first and foremost" driven by tariffs, they "are just one possible route."

"The other is Elon Musk's DOGE team attack on the government. If there was ever any doubt, it is now clear that this outfit has nothing to do with increasing government efficiency," Baker wrote. "The direct impact of Musk's job cuts on both the

*Continued on page 22*

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SMOKEY

Welcome to the Grifters Ball

Legalized bribery is still bribery—and there is no other way to describe the

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## FROM HARROP



China put resources behind developing electric vehicles. The US was on the case when Joe Biden was president. Trump is taking away subsidies.

### Why Is Trump Sabotaging the U.S. Auto Industry?

If Chinese leader Xi Jinping wanted to take down the U.S. auto industry – and he probably does – he couldn't have a better helper than Donald Trump. The American president's tireless efforts to slow America's shift to electricity-run transportation is a dream come true for China as it leads the world in that transition.

### Lake Avenue nearly dead on a warm Wednesday morning

By ART CULLEN

Sure is quiet in The City Beautiful. Nearly 50 degrees and all sunshiney, and barely a peep downtown that Wednesday morning at 10 a.m.

The notice had just gone out from Donald Trump:

All undocumented residents must register their whereabouts with the government so they could make arrangements to self-deport. If you don't register, you go to jail. "We will hunt you down," Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem warned.

Imagining a tumbleweed on Lake Avenue because mine was the rare car.

People are scared in Storm Lake, Iowa. They're tired. Easier to lay low. Those who have the means can stage their shopping boycott if they think they can make Amazon or Walmart wince. Latinos are steering clear just for safety's sake.

Tough times in the livestock sector keep people at bay, too. Pork has been taking a beating. Bird flu is everywhere – a barn full of turkeys in Sac County was the latest. The avian flu workers down in Ames

Electric vehicles are the cars and trucks of the future. In some parts of the world, that future is here. Norway now has more fully electric cars on its roads than the gas-powered kind.

China has put enormous resources behind the development and manufacture of EVs. The U.S. was on the case when Joe Biden was president. Trump is taking away those subsidies, thus messing with U.S. automakers' big plans to compete in this growing market.

The politics of it are also wild. About 80% of the Biden-era clean energy investments are in red states (or if they are rescinded, were).

In North Carolina, Toyota just unveiled a \$13.9 billion battery plant in the small town of Liberty. Another maker of cutting-edge batteries will soon open near Raleigh, not far from a factory that builds charging infrastructure.

Trump also wants to take away money Congress appropriated for EV charging stations. That appears to be illegal, but Republicans in Congress seem more afraid of Trump than voters who could lose jobs.

But one Republican, Alabama's Gov. Kay Ivey, defends that funding. "Having strategic electric vehicle charging stations across Alabama not only benefits EV driv-

ers, but it also benefits those companies that produce electric vehicles, including many of them right here in Alabama, resulting in more high-paying jobs for Alabamians."

All true.

Some observers surmise that Elon Musk sees a personal gain in slowing down the growth of charging stations. His Tesla currently has the largest network of fast chargers in the country. Adding chargers could help sales of EVs other than Elon's.

Potentially hurting the American automakers are the 25% tariffs Trump wants to slap on the parts they get from Canada and Mexico. This shared production arrangement makes U.S. cars more price-competitive on world markets, thus protecting the jobs of American workers.

But get this: Musk is now suing the European Union over its decision to put hefty tariffs on EVs made in China. Tesla, you see, makes more than half its EVs in China.

MAGA has been brainwashed to see evil behind efforts to direct American drivers away from fossil fuels. As a self-pitying Arizonan told *The Wall Street Journal*, EVs are "being pushed down our throats."

A Morning Consult poll taken last spring found that 4 in 10 Americans have unfavorable views of EVs. And 38% of those respondents said their political views

were a factor.

One must ask: What mean man is forcing Americans to buy electric vehicles? No one is stopping you or me from going to an auto showroom or used car lot and driving off with a 100% gas-powered machine.

Having the U.S. government help a new domestic industry is what we call economic policy. When Henry Ford's first Model T rolled out of the factory in 1908, America had almost no paved roads beyond the cities.

Ford was a strong advocate for the kinds of roads his new cars needed to run on. He became the first chairman of the Wayne County Road Commission. The Federal-Aid Road Act was passed in 1916 and the Federal-Aid Highway Act in 1921.

Back to the present, sales of Chinese-made EVs rose 40% last year alone. China also has the world's largest network of charging stations.

Something tells us President Xi Jinping likes the way things are going in the age of Trump.

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at the National Animal Disease Labs got canned by Elon Musk, so that won't help matters much unless maybe his boys from StarLink know something about virology.

A swirl is starting around the drain. Consumer confidence is tanking. A survey of bankers finds them frowning. Tariffs on Canada and Mexico, plus more on China, make most sentient people a little bit anxious – Canadian newsprint is about to go through the roof, and the *Times Pilot* went to weekly printing. We had been thinking about it, this pulled the trigger. Aluminum and steel, up and up. Coffee, up. Dairy and eggs, yada yada.

If you need to save a little, and would just as soon not be seen, you are not going to relax by shopping. You sure can see it on empty streets. You could ask them about it if you could find them. We have been told: We cannot talk. The Boss is watching. Trump is watching. Noem is on the hunt. Paranoid is a rational state of being.

The pork producers are queasy about tariffs. Mexicans like their pork. Good customers, they were. We got used to that cheap Canadian natural gas.

Legislators responded to this economic cauldron by excising trans people from the Iowa Civil Rights Act. Dominate, baby! Oh, yeah. Make 'em squirm. Make 'em suffer.

Fear that you will be hunted. Fear for your job. Fear for your safety.

Sure, let's go trade on cars! Oops, we

can't get the Fords out of Canada or the Chevys out of Mexico. Price could rise by a third on higher materials costs.

We are kicking some royal tush by relentlessly attacking queers, though. That should help bring down inflation.

You never know when ICE can come crashing. Better go register so they know where to snag you. "You betcha by golly," Juan says, "I want to make Storm Lake White again. Where do I sign up to self-deport since the website address they provided didn't work?" It's true: The website doesn't work. Musk & his Tech Boys are supposed to know this stuff.

Be patient. As Secretary Noem advises: "President Trump has a clear message: if you are here illegally, we will find you and deport you. You will never return. But if you leave now, you may have an opportunity to return and enjoy our freedom and live the American Dream." She cut some ads to that effect. The message is coming through, Roger that.

Tariffs come and tariffs go, but lost markets and higher prices persist. The last trade war sent China to Brazil for its soybeans, and they never quite came back.

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins said it will take a few months to bring those egg prices down as we ship in substitute supplies from ... Turkey? Yes, that's what they say. Not Mexico, certainly. A half-billion for imported eggs. Eggcellent. What

about all these layoffs of USDA folks who work with livestock?

"Who's going to take care of all the animals? Does she even have an understanding?" That is Dr. James Roth, one of the leading animal disease experts in the world at Iowa State University. He is not woke. He is a button-down farm boy at the top of the vet med profession who last week condemned Iowa's political class for not standing up to the madness.

Musk says if they go too far they can back up and fix it. Except they don't. Since 1961, the National Animal Disease Center has gone from 80 scientists to 43. The diseases keep getting worse. Turkeys die, hours are trimmed. Why go downtown when you can't afford a taco and the governor insists that the cops should collar you for being here?

Storm Lake is contracting right now. Too quiet. Too fearful. That's what they want, you could guess, for Lake Avenue to look like Sunday on a Wednesday. It is real, and it will get realer as the days grind on.

*Art Cullen is publisher and editor of the Storm Lake Times Pilot in northwest Iowa (stormlake.com). He won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing in 2017 and is author of the book "Storm Lake: A Chronicle of Change, Resilience, and Hope from America's Heartland." Email times@stormlake.com.*

### Farm Markets Hate Uncertainty – and Tariffs

By ALAN GUEBERT

One of the first marketing lessons offered to me, a wet-behind-the-ears ag editor, by a steely and successful ag futures trader was as simple and useful as a feed bucket.

"Markets hate uncertainty," Paul W. explained back when Ronald Reagan was president, "because uncertainty fuels panic, panic fuels selling and selling brings lower prices."

Paul's straight line logic came to mind after the Trump White House again said it would impose hefty tariffs on U.S. imports from Canada and Mexico, double current tariffs on Chinese imports, and consider new tariffs on other decades-long allies such as the 27-member European Union (EU).

The EU, however, sniffed out the Trump plan weeks ago and prepared for any trade punch the American president might throw. According to the Feb. 16 *Financial Times*, the EU is ready "to block imports of certain foodstuffs" that "could include US crops such as soybeans which are grown using pesticides EU farmers are not allowed to use..."

It's not an empty threat. Right now some EU farm groups are ready to fight an unwelcome, pending EU-Mercosur trade deal that opens their farm markets to South American ag powerhouses Argentina and Brazil and their fast-rising neighbors Uruguay and Paraguay.

Given current EU anger, the smart move by the U.S. would be to develop new, innovative programs to encourage increased European purchases of American ag goods,

not the imposition of expensive, counterproductive tariffs that will shove Europe's food buyers into the open arms of hard-nosed South American competitors.

The reason—like that feed bucket—is simple: In 2024, the EU purchased \$12.8 billion of U.S. farm goods, including \$2.3 billion of soybeans, \$428 million of ethanol, and \$387 million of corn. The latter two are recent records.

But the Trump White House seems unbothered by facts when tariff talk starts. If all the tariffs it has proposed are put in place, American farmers will face a global market that features U.S. tariffs on four of their top five (by 2023 data) ag customers: China (\$33.7 billion), Mexico (\$28.2 billion), Canada (\$27.9 billion), and the EU (\$12.3 billion).

Only Japan, with \$12.2 billion in U.S. ag purchases in 2023, has avoided the American tariff net this year. But there's still time for it—and others—to be pushed into the anti-trade calamity that the White House believes American farmers will embrace.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins assured farmers in early March that she, according to *Politico*, will "bail out farmers who are targets for any retaliation as a result of Trump tariff threats, as former USDA chief Sonny Perdue did during the first Trump Administration."

There are just two problems with Rollins's assurances. First, the money promised in any tariff bailout isn't hers; it belongs to U.S. taxpayers. As such, Congress will have a say on any "farm tariff bailout."

Second, the fact that a second Trump tariff bailout will be necessary only proves that tariffs, contrary to what the White House continues to claim, don't pay; they cost.

Somehow the White House, Secretary Rollins and other Trump-supporting public officials never mention that

basic economic reality when talking about who paid for earlier Trump tariffs.

It wasn't China, as she herself confirmed. U.S. taxpayers paid that \$23 billion.

If the second Trump tariff fight costs taxpayers another \$23 billion—and Rollins sends the promised \$31 billion to American farmers because of today's already sagging ag exports – U.S. farmers will receive more than \$50 billion in taxpayer money in the first year of the second Trump Administration.

That's not a feed bucket; that's a firehose.

*Alan Guebert is an agricultural journalist who was raised on an Illinois dairy farm and worked as a writer and senior editor at Professional Farmers of America and Successful Farming magazine and is now a contributing editor to Farm Journal magazine. See past columns, supporting documents, and contact information at farmandfoodfile.com*



# Trump's Ukraine Betrayal Puts America Last

By JOE CONASON

When Donald Trump and JD Vance roughed up Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House, their back-alley bullying was ... un-presidential, to put it politely. Tony Soprano would have displayed more diplomatic finesse than Trump, and the mobster's henchmen always had more dignity than Vance.

To vilify an American ally so publicly while spewing Russian propaganda points was a stunningly coarse betrayal.

But make no mistake in understanding what lies behind that contemptible episode, which represents the abandonment of American values and commitments under the banner of "America First." At this moment of national peril, let's not forget where the Trump gang found their foreign-policy slogan.

An organization purporting to represent the national interests of this country in the years before the Second World War,

"America First" in fact served as a front for a hostile foreign power that sought to impose an authoritarian order on Europe and the world, with tactics designed to divide and deceive the American people.

In many ways, "America First" resembled the MAGA movement that undermines democratic institutions at home and promotes autocratic regimes abroad. And just as "America First" was subsidized and sometimes directed by agents of Hitler's Germany, MAGA now appears to be the Western front for Russia's ongoing subversion of democracies around the world.

Does that mean Trump himself has adopted the authoritarian outlook of the Kremlin's pet political philosophers? He doesn't seem capable of geopolitical thought beyond the most superficial. But it doesn't have to be complicated to work for Trump. Russia constantly offers big inducements to him, such as the secret election assistance its agents flashed at his campaign in 2016 (an invitation eagerly embraced by Donald Trump Jr. and later by campaign manager Paul Manafort).

Whatever his motive, Trump's subservience to Vladimir Putin is now beyond dispute, as he openly lies about the Russian dictator's invasion of Ukraine, while threatening and undermining Zelenskyy. He may well believe that a "peace deal" would bring

his long-coveted plans for Trump Tower Moscow to fruition, not to mention all the other corrupt emoluments that Putin's oligarchs could lay before him. (Russians have already "invested" in his Truth Social money pit and must be snapping up pricey Don and Melania cryptocurrency meme coins by the thousand.)

And let's not forget the perpetually insecure Trump's insatiable need for flattery. In his sordid way, he has repeatedly nominated himself for the Nobel Peace Prize, proclaiming on many occasions that he "deserves" the Norwegian honor more than others who received it, and obliging his sycophants to utter the same nonsense. Watching the prize slip away as Zelenskyy insisted on security guarantees surely frustrated him — and led to that juvenile outburst in the Oval Office.

This relentless pursuit of financial and personal gain doesn't serve American interests in any way. Trump's campaign to wreck NATO and alienate our military allies in Europe and Canada only renders us less secure in an extremely dangerous world. Those reliable allies had our back after 9/11, the only instance when NATO's mutual defense pact has ever been activated. Trump and his idiot advisers have yet to explain how they will replace the defense and intelligence assets that help to protect

us and our allies together, not only in NATO but across the Pacific as well.

Should Trump withdraw military and intelligence support from Kiev, as he menacingly warned Zelenskyy he would, he will shift the massive power of the United States into a *de facto* alliance with our longtime adversaries — not only Russia, whose media and government organs constantly declare their anti-American hostility, but China and North Korea, both of which have joined the Kremlin's assault on Ukraine.

It will be fascinating to hear how Trump's Republican supporters in Congress, who often complain about the growing military and economic power of China, can justify what their president is doing in Europe. Whatever excuses they may present, we already know that they know that he is putting himself first — and America last.

*Joe Conason is the editor in chief of NationalMemo.com and author of several books, including (with Gene Lyons) "The Hunting of the President: The Ten-Year Campaign to Destroy Bill and Hillary Clinton" (St. Martin's Press, 2000). Conason co-produced a 2004 documentary film, "The Hunting of the President," based on the book. His new book is "The Longest Con: How Grifters, Swindlers, and Frauds Hijacked American Conservatism," with a foreword by George T. Conway III.*

## The Greatest Threat to Social Security in Its 90-Year History

**Donald Trump and Elon Musk are planning to utterly demolish Social Security's workforce to pay for billionaire tax cuts.**

By NANCY J. ALTMAN

The last few weeks have been the most destabilizing for Social Security in its 90-year history.

America's historic retirement security program has survived world wars, pandemics, and recessions. But without a rapid course correction, it may not survive Donald Trump and Elon Musk.

In mid-February, Musk demanded access to private Social Security data. When the Acting Commissioner of the Social Security Administration (SSA) declined, President Donald Trump immediately replaced her. He leapfrogged over 120 more senior employ-

ees to install a DOGE sympathizer, Leland Duke.

Duke is reportedly planning to lay off at least 15% of SSA's already understaffed, overworked workforce. SSA staff were sent a message on Feb. 27 telling them the organization will soon undergo an "agency-wide organizational restructuring" and incentivizing them to resign rather than get fired.

Trump and Musk have also instructed the government to terminate the leases on SSA's over 1,200 field offices, which are critical for the agency's public-facing work. Social Security field offices, like our post offices, are in every community. They're there to help us when it's our turn to access our benefits.

They've also ordered all workers to return to the office. But where are those workers supposed to go if their offices are closed? That only makes sense if the ultimate plan is not just to fire the currently reported 7,000 workers from SSA, but everyone!

Many of SSA's most senior employees, including five of eight regional commissioners, have left. This is causing an enormous brain drain. Together, they represent a huge loss of critical institutional knowledge. Collectively, those employees had almost 1,000 years of institutional knowledge and skills.

SSA was already severely underfunded

and understaffed before all of this. The DOGE bloodbath could lead to its collapse.

Most at immediate risk are those applying for disability benefits. Already, large numbers of disabled workers find themselves homeless, and a staggering 30,000 Americans die every year while waiting to receive their earned benefits. Now that number is likely to rise significantly.

Retirement benefits are less complicated to administer, but they're not safe either: People who are accidentally over- or under-paid will have a far harder time correcting the error. And the planned layoffs are so destabilizing that seniors may even see a disruption in their monthly payments.

Furthermore, Americans will have a terrible time reaching SSA if they have questions, need to change their bank accounts, or have other issues. Moreover, grieving families may have trouble getting the survivor benefits their loved ones have earned for them. Relying on a website or worse, an AI chatbot, won't cut it.

Nobody voted for this. During the presidential election, Donald Trump blanketed swing states with campaign flyers pledging that he wouldn't touch Social Security. Make no mistake: Trump has broken that promise.

In his March 4 address before Congress, Trump lied about this extremely efficiently run program. Worse, he's given Elon Musk,

who recently slandered Social Security by calling it a criminal "Ponzi scheme," the power to destroy it.

SSA's budget comes out of the Social Security trust funds, not general government revenue. That means that when Americans pay into Social Security with every paycheck, they're also paying for high-quality customer service.

That's exactly what we would get — if Congress allowed SSA to spend just a few percentage points more of its \$2.7 trillion surplus to hire and adequately train staff, open new field offices, and get wait times down. Instead, Donald Trump and Elon Musk are planning to utterly demolish Social Security's customer service to pay for billionaire tax cuts.

It isn't too late to stop this disaster. Everyone should call their members of Congress. Tell them that cuts to the Social Security Administration are cuts to Social Security. Tell them that you value your local Social Security field office.

Tell them to represent the people they serve by making Elon Musk and Donald Trump keep their hands off our earned benefits.

*Nancy Altman is the President of Social Security Works. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*

## How Putin's Corruptible Pawn Was Cultivated

By JOHN YOUNG

To mortified Americans everywhere — you who still cannot expel the hurt from your minds:

This president has done many horrible things: conspiring to undermine a U.S. election; inciting a bloody insurrection; breaking the law and skating past felony indictments.

As aghast as you've been at all that and about every stunning action since November, you never imagined it would come to the televised mugging of a western hero.

The victim: A man who every day fights to preserve the very democratic ideals for which generations of Americans have fought and died.

The mugger: One who ambushed and demeaned Ukraine's president to abet the geopolitical lustings of a murderous dictator.

Where did this start?

Was it when Ukraine's president risked retribution and crucial military aid by not telling lies about Joe Biden?

Was it in 2016 when Russia decided the best use of its diminishing might was to boost the election of the most destabilizing American candidate?

Neither. Too recent.

A good candidate for the nexus for this is way back 1986, when the then-Soviet Union thought a young, easily corrupted Manhattan developer might be up for a little — heh — *kompromat*.

What a good choice the Soviets made.

Though several publications have written about it, no

deep digging is necessary. The target of the Soviets' affections wrote about it in his "The Art of the Deal."

As reported by *Politico*, it began with a meeting, spontaneous or otherwise, with Soviet Ambassador Yuri Dubinin. It yielded a trip to Moscow where the man who would be Vladimir Putin's boy toy started to visualize a high-rise tower near Red Square.

In "The Art of the Deal" he remarked on "the ambition of Soviet officials to make a deal."

Who knows how much courting followed from there? Certainly, it appeared in play when Vladimir Putin sent the kindest of regards and accommodations when the Man from Manhattan was in Moscow for the 2013 Miss Universe contest.

Though the latter would say negotiations for a hotel in Moscow ceased before he ran for president, that was a lie, said former fixer Michael Cohen, who was doing some of the negotiating.

What about collusion with the Russians in 2016? Robert Mueller couldn't pin a crime on the recipient of that "from-Russia" love. Mueller did say the obstruction of the probe was criminal, and that Russian interference in the election was real and egregious.

From firing the FBI director for not playing ball, to yucking up with the Russian ambassador about it, it was all a magnificent and intricate game of cover-up.

As with all the investigations that brought Manhattan Man to the brink of jail over the last four years: If he was without fault, all he had to do was cooperate. Testify truthfully; set things straight.

Instead, he stonewalled. Then he ran to his hand-populated Supreme Court to invent an immunity defense for him.

With so many bits of evidence about all this, for my money a dead giveaway happened the other day, though it

barely got attention amid all the destruction wrought by this president.

It happened when FBI officials who had been assigned to monitor foreign interference in U.S. elections were forced out or re-assigned.

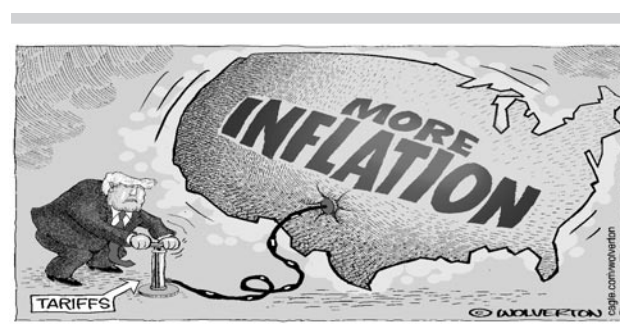
The White House shut it down. Nothing to see there.

Several publications recently have reported assertions by a former Russian intelligence agent, Alnur Mussanayev, that in 1987 the American striver angling to see his name on a Moscow tower was enlisted for his services by the KGB.

For one who has exhibited allegiance to none but himself, assuming the price was right — and you know it would be — a transactional relationship with the Kremlin wouldn't have been a stretch at all.

It hardly matters now, for as demonstrated in his horrendous treatment of Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the White House, it doesn't matter if he's picking up a check for it or not. He's doing what Putin would have hired him to do.

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## Cover Story...

Continued from page one

Dan Bongino, appointed Feb. 23 as deputy director of the FBI. He forged his credentials in the nastiest recesses of the far-right fringe and apprenticed with the unspeakable Alex Jones of InfoWars, the monster who mocked the slaughtered schoolchildren of Sandy Hook. Then he shilled for the NRA and filled the foaming-mad militant slot for Fox News. Now he podcasts lines like “Power. That is all that matters.” Bongino calls Democrats “scumbag commie libs” and mocks them as inadequate combatants in the civil war that’s coming.

These fanatics, these undisguised fascists, are among the creatures who float up from the dark holes where Donald Trump goes fishing for his friends. The shaved-bald Bongino must be one of the ugliest. He’s also the chief operating officer of the FBI. His boss, Kash Patel, is an even more passionate Trump “fan boy” who published a children’s picture book featuring The Donald as a heroic monarch. Google Mr. Patel and you’ll find a photo with a murderous gleam in his eyes, one that tops anything I’ve seen since Jack Nicholson in “The Shining.” Patel’s proposal to link the FBI to the Ultimate Fighting Championship, whose CEO Dana White is a major Trump supporter, has to go down as the silliest idea our government has ever considered. And then there’s Attorney General Pam Bondi, the last-minute substitute for Matt Gaetz, already investigating prosecutors who brought charges against Trump and the Jan. 6 insurrectionists. Rightwing women are a mysterious breed of primates, as incomprehensible to most of us as child molesters or necrophiliacs.

It’s impossible to believe that these individuals will leave the Constitution or the American legal system unharmed. Or that any democracy could maintain itself — for four years? — under the supervision of Trump’s Little Cabinet of Horrors. The agony, the unbearable regret, is that the election was so close, with fewer than 50% of American voters choosing this awful path of no return. It doubles the pain to live in a 51-49 “purple” state like my poor North Carolina, where sanity always seems just a few thousand votes beyond our reach. I take

heart when liberal veterans like Ralph Nader and Robert Reich express confidence that we’ll survive the nightmare. “Why I remain hopeful about America,” is the headline for Reich’s column.

I remain less sanguine. There are really two nations here now, of virtually equal size, with almost nothing in common. I’ve seen families split down the middle, people permanently alienated from their children or their parents when the MAGA poison has struck. The post-reason Republicans and their psychopath Trump, who seasons malignant narcissism with senile dementia, leave Americans very little middle ground. Civilized compromise is a distant memory.

It’s been my great luck that no one I ever admired or respected, among the living or the dead, would have voted for Donald Trump or honored him with a handshake. None of them would have considered him an appropriate chief executive or public servant of any kind. That includes several generations of the Republicans of yesteryear. We know it’s not true that current Republican voters are all racists, misogynists, anti-Semites, homophobes, Holocaust deniers, Q Anon believers and the like. Yet it’s almost certainly true that all the voters in those categories vote for Trump. You saw the worst of this gruesome gang at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. And they must have accounted for the agonizingly narrow margin that defeated Kamala Harris — 2.2 million votes out of over 150 million that were cast.

It’s hard to swallow. The very idea of America, the one most of us used to believe in, is imperiled by the most gullible majority and the least honorable, least competent president this country ever produced. What is a sane citizen supposed to do, when all the power is in the hands of thugs, cranks and fanatics, supported by craven eunuchs like nearly all the Republicans now in Congress? I talk to people my age whose children are seriously considering emigration to Portugal, Panama, South Africa. And these are younger people with good jobs and graduate degrees, the ones we can’t afford to lose. In the unlikelihood that one of them asked me for counsel, I confess I wouldn’t be sure what to say. But every optimist in even partial denial needs to grasp that Trump’s rapidly unfolding reign of terror and error can

eviscerate America, domestically and internationally. He seems determined to alienate every ally, even Canada, to destroy NATO and the European Union and empower Russia. In the annals of anti-diplomacy there has never been an episode more disgusting or depressing than last month’s ambush in the Oval Office, when Trump and his attack dog JD Vance abused and insulted the Ukrainian president and virtually threw him out of the White House.

Make America Gag Again. It has always been perfectly clear that Vladimir Putin has Trump in his pocket. It’s not clear what keeps him there — commercial prospects, dictator worship, the old rumor about a sex tape stored at the Kremlin? But from the very beginning of Trump’s ascendance he received and deserved Russian support, open or secret. Remember the first impeachment? Of all the wild conspiracy theories on the internet, most of them from the far Right, the one with the most supporting evidence is that Trump has always been a Russian agent.

And at home? The president was never strong on economics or any other academic discipline, but most economists agree that his policies, tariffs and taxes and all, will increase the flow of wealth to the rich and especially the super-rich, and impose increasing hardships on the poor and the working class. The culture-war rhetoric that Republicans implement to seduce poor and lower-middle class voters has been a tragic success, but it hasn’t fooled the readers of *The New York Times*. “President Trump’s plan could be summarized: Take from the poor and give to the rich,” one letter-writer declares. The next letter in the same column echoes him: “We have gone from war on poverty to war on the poor.”

These wars have commenced. Their outcomes may be catastrophic. Journalists are in the front line, as always. Coincidentally — or perhaps in reaction to Trump’s attacks on the media during his first term — there are at this moment two serious cultural projects celebrating media figures who rose to the occasion when politicians threatened to disgrace America. One is a documentary film, “Becoming Katharine Graham,” the story of the late *Washington Post* publisher whose decisions to print the Pentagon Papers and to tell the story of Watergate

changed American history. The second is a Broadway play, “Good Night and Good Luck,” which reminds us that it was Edward R. Murrow of CBS who issued the first warning against the excesses of Sen. Joe McCarthy’s anti-communist hearings. George Clooney, a newsman’s son, stars as Murrow and also co-wrote the play, adapted from his 2005 film of the same name. I take a personal interest in these stories because I used to work for Kay Graham, and because Murrow’s fearless producer Fred Friendly — Clooney played him in the movie — was one of my most memorable professors in graduate school.

Who will be the Graham or the Murrow of 2020s, in the twilight of traditional media, in the face of overwhelming dishonesty and hostility from our government? It won’t be Jeff Bezos, the current owner of Graham’s *Post*, who joined Trump’s recent parade of ring-kissing billionaires and refused to endorse Kamala Harris. But if we can’t be democracy’s first line of defense — no newspaper today carries half the weight or prestige that Murrow or Walter Cronkite enjoyed — we may at least serve as the canaries in the mineshaft. Every totalitarian regime begins by intimidating and eliminating critical voices. Vietnam just sentenced one of its most prominent journalists to 30 months in prison for Facebook posts criticizing the government. But the first time Bondi’s Justice Department takes legal action against an American journalist for doing his job, we’ll know that Trump and his cronies have crossed the fascist Rubicon. The Fourth Reich will be under way in the United States of America.

Good night and good luck.

*Hal Crowther is a longtime journalist whose latest essay collection, “Freedom Fighters and Hellraisers: A Gallery of Memorable Southerners” (Blair, 2018) won the gold medal for nonfiction at the Independent Press Awards, as well as the gold medal for essays at the Foreword Review Awards. A winner of the Baltimore Sun’s H.L. Mencken Writing Award, he is the author of “An Infuriating American: The Incendiary Arts of H.L. Mencken” (Iowa, 2015) and four previous collections of essays, with a fifth collection of essays, “Bible Belt Blues,” to be published in November. Email deleennis1@gmail.com.*

## How DOGE’s Cuts to the IRS Threaten to Cost More Than DOGE Will Ever Save

**The Trump administration claims gutting federal agencies will save money, but cutting the IRS means the government collects less taxes. “If you’re interested in the deficit and curbing it, why would you cut back on the revenue side?” one expert asks.**

By ANDY KROLL, ProPublica

Dave Nershi was finalizing a report he’d worked on for months when an ominous email appeared in his inbox.

Nershi had worked as a general engineer for the Internal Revenue Service for about nine months. He was one of hundreds of specialists inside the IRS who used their technical expertise — Nershi’s background is in chemical and nuclear engineering — to audit byzantine tax returns filed by large corporations and wealthy individuals. Until recently, the IRS had a shortage of these experts, and many complex tax returns went unscrutinized. With the help of people like Nershi, the IRS could recoup millions and sometimes more than a billion dollars on a single tax return.

But on Feb. 20, three months shy of finishing his probationary period and becoming a full-time employee, the IRS fired

him. As a Navy veteran, Nershi loved working in public service and had hoped he might be spared from any mass firings. The unsigned email said he’d been fired for performance, even though he had received high marks from his manager.

As for the report he was finalizing, it would have probably recouped many times more than the low-six-figure salary he earned. The report would now go unfinished.

Nershi agreed that the federal government could be more lean and efficient, but he was befuddled by the decision to fire scores of highly skilled IRS specialists like him who, even by the logic of Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency initiative, were an asset to the government. “By firing us, you’re going to cut down on how much revenue the country brings in,” Nershi said in an interview. “This was not about saving money.”

Since taking office, President Donald Trump and his billionaire top adviser Musk have launched an all-out blitz to cut costs and shrink the federal government. Trump, Musk and other administration leaders not only say the U.S. government is bloated and inefficient, but they also see it as a bastion of political opposition, calling it the “deep state.”

The strategy used by the Trump administration to reduce the size of government has been indiscriminate and far-reaching, meant to oust civil servants as fast as possible in as many agencies as possible while demoralizing the workers that remain on the job. As Russell Vought, director of the Trump White House’s Office of Management and Budget and an architect of Project 2025, put it in a speech first reported by ProPublica and Documented: “We want the bureaucrats to be traumatically affected. When they wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work because they are increasingly viewed as the villains.”

One tactic used by the administration is to target probationary workers who are easier to fire because they have fewer civil service protections. Probationary, in this context, means only that the employees are new to their roles, not that they’re newbies or underperformers. ProPublica found that the latest IRS firings swept up highly skilled and experienced probationary workers who had recently joined the government or had moved to a new position from a different agency.

In late February, the Trump administration began firing more than 6,000 IRS employees. The agency has been hit especially hard, current and former employees said, because it spent 2023 preparing to hire thousands of new enforcement and customer service personnel and had only started hiring and training those workers at any scale in 2024, meaning many of those new employees were still in their probationary period. Nershi was hired as part of this wave, in the spring of last year. The boost came after Congress had underfunded the agency for much of the past decade, which led to chronic staffing shortages, dismal customer service and plummeting audit rates, especially for taxpayers who earned \$500,000 or more a year.

The administration doesn’t appear to want to stop there. It is drafting plans to cut its entire workforce in half, according to reports.

Unlike with other federal agencies, cutting the IRS means the government collects less money and finds fewer tax abuses. Economic studies have shown that for every dollar spent by the IRS, the agency returns between \$5 and \$12, depending on how much income the taxpayer declared. A 2024 report by the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office found that the IRS found savings of \$13,000 for every additional hour spent auditing the tax returns of very wealthy taxpayers — a return on investment that “would leave Wall Street

hedge fund managers drooling,” in the words of the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.

John Koskinen, who led the IRS from 2013 to 2017, said in an interview that the widespread cuts to the IRS make no sense if Trump and Musk genuinely care about fiscal responsibility and rooting out waste, fraud and abuse. “What I’ve never understood is if you’re interested in the deficit and curbing it, why would you cut back on the revenue side?” Koskinen said.

Neither the IRS nor the White House responded to requests for comment. In February, Musk asked his followers on X, the platform he owns, whether they would “like @DOGE to audit the IRS,” referring to the U.S. DOGE Service team of lawyers and engineers led by him. DOGE employees have sought to gain access to IRS taxpayer data in an attempt to “shine a light on the fraud,” according to a White House spokesman.

For this story, ProPublica interviewed more than a dozen current and former IRS employees. Most of those people worked in the agency’s Large Business and International (LB&I) division, which audits companies with more than \$10 million in assets and high-income individuals. Within the IRS, the LB&I division has the highest return on investment, and the widespread cuts there put in stark relief the human and financial cost of the Trump administration’s approach to slashing government functions in the name of saving money and combating waste and fraud.

According to current and former LB&I employees, the taxpayers they audited included pharmaceutical companies, oil and gas companies, construction firms and major technology corporations, as well as more obscure private corporations and high-net-worth individuals. None of the IRS employees who spoke to ProPublica would disclose specific taxpayer information, citing privacy laws.

Continued on next page



# Putin's Pup Poops the Bed at Kremlin West

*He spent years signaling that he'd sell out America. Voters yawned, or whatever.*

By DICK POLMAN

There I was that Friday, lunching happily with a friend in a fine Philly eatery, immersed in the chatter and clatter, when my phone suddenly buzzed to tell me -whether I wanted to read it or not - that Russia's useful idiot was raising hell at Kremlin West, the building once known as the White House.

See, this is the big problem with being alive right now: You try to get on with your wee little life, only to be relentlessly reminded that You Know Who is a character straight from The Sopranos. He's Putin's Paulie Walnuts, flexing muscle for his homicidal master on duh street and in duh back room of Satrialieu's.

I got the news about his treatment of Ukraine prexy Volodymyr Zelenskyy somewhere between the breadbasket and the entree, and two words came to mind: Of course! Of course he surrendered this country to Russia. Of course he mouthed Putin's propaganda. Of course he shamed us in front of the world. Of course he took another

giant step toward destroying the American-led security network that has helped keep global peace since 1945. Of course he stomped on America's democratic values, like the way Paulie beat a woman to death in his mom's senior living center.

In the words of former George W. Bush speechwriter David Frum, "We're witnessing the self-sabotage of the United States."

What else did we expect?

Actually, I'll amend that: Seventy seven million voters were too oblivious, feckless, or stupid to pay a scintilla of attention, to expect anything one way or the other.

For nine long years Putin's Paulie signaled his traitorous behavior, pledging fealty over and over to a hostile power, but a fatal swath of the electorate simply snoozed. Like when he publicly invited Putin ("Russia, if you're listening...") to hack Hillary Clinton's emails. Like when the news broke that his '16 campaign chairman was doing business with a Russian intelligence officer (one of 30 documented meetings between Trump apparatchiks and the Russians). Like when he rejected the consensus findings of all the U.S. intelligence agencies that had documented Russia's cyber-efforts on his behalf in '16. Like when he said that America should no longer be required to come to the aid of NATO members, and invited the Russians "to do whatever the hell they want." Like when he alone, among all the western leaders, refused to condemn the poisoning of Russian dissident Alexei Navalny. Like a dozen other incidents.

So now here we are, with Kremlin West

conspiring with Russia to end the war in Ukraine on Putin's terms; joining North Korea to vote against a U.N. resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine; and with Paulie shoving Zelenskyy into a trunk for a ride to the Jersey marshes.

I know that egg prices are important, but what about our global reputation and credibility? Aren't those a tad important too? I get that many Americans' knowledge of the world could fit in a thimble, and that they don't care what happens in foreign lands unless lots of Americans are getting killed there, but is it not maximally alarming that an American "president" has been reduced to the status of useful idiot? What the hell is the matter with people?

A cartoon currently in circulation features two characters talking:

"Why didn't somebody warn us about this?"

"We were warned."

"Why didn't they tell us?"

"They told us."

"They should have said it in a way we believed."

"Some of us did believe."

"I blame them for letting us not believe them."

"They saw that coming, too."

By the way, I use the term useful idiot for one simple reason: It fits Trump to a T. It was coined in the late 1940s to derisively describe non-communists (duped businessmen, naive or compromised politicians) who were susceptible to communist manipulation.

Clinton Watts, a former FBI special agent and terrorism expert, said this eight years ago: "Russian influence of Trump most likely falls into the category of what (former Secretary of State) Madeleine Albright called a 'useful idiot' - a 'useful fool' - an enthusiast for Putin supportive of any issue or stance... Russian intelligence for decades identified and promoted key individuals around the world ripe for manipulation and serving their interests. Trump, similar to emerging alternative right European politicians, spouts populist themes of xenophobia, anti-immigration, and White nationalist pride that naturally bring about a retrenchment of U.S. global influence. By spotting this early, Russia could encourage Trump's ascension and shape his views."

At this late stage, it almost doesn't matter whether he has debased and shamed America because his views are in sync with Putin's, or because Putin is blackmailing him with God knows what, or because Russia put rubles in Trump's pocket back when he badly needed lucre, or because he's merely a fanboy of murderers. What matters most is how his thuggish sycophancy has weakened us a nation, and whether our somnolent citizenry has the requisite moxie to fight back.

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## Kroll...

*Continued from previous page*

With the recent influx in funding, employees said, the leadership of LB&I had pushed to hire not only more revenue agents and appraisers but also specialized employees such as petroleum engineers, computer scientists and experts in corporate partnerships. These employees, usually known internally as general engineers, consulted on complicated tax returns and helped determine whether taxpayers properly claimed certain credits or other tax breaks.

This work happened in cases where major companies claimed a hefty research tax credit, which is a legitimate avenue for seeking tax relief but can also be improperly used. Highly skilled appraisers have also recouped huge savings in cases involving notorious tax schemes, such as what's known as a syndicated conservation easement - a break abused so often that both congressional Democrats and Republicans have criticized it, while the IRS has included it on its list of the "Dirty Dozen" tax scams.

"These are cases where revenue agents don't have the technical expertise," said one IRS engineer who is still employed at the agency and who, like other IRS employees, wasn't authorized to speak to the media. "That's what we do. We are working on things where expertise is absolutely necessary."

Current and former IRS employees told ProPublica that the agency had expended a huge amount of resources to recruit and train new specialists in recent years. Vanessa Rollins, an engineer in the IRS' Chicago office who was recently fired, said probationary employees in LB&I outnumbered full-time staffers in her office. Much of her team's work centered on training and mentorship for the waves of new employees - most of whom were recently fired. "The entire office had been oriented around bringing us in and getting us trained," Rollins said.

These specialists said they earned higher salaries compared with many other IRS employees. But the money these specialists recouped as a result of their work was orders of magnitude greater than what they cost. The current engineer told ProPublica that they estimated their team of less than 10 people had brought in \$5 billion in adjusted tax returns over the past four years. (By contrast, a *Wall Street Journal* analysis published on Feb. 22 found that DOGE had found savings of \$2.6 billion over the next year, far less than the \$55 billion claimed by DOGE itself.)

A former LB&I revenue agent added that their work didn't always lead to the IRS recouping money from a taxpayer; sometimes, they audited a return only to find that the taxpayer was owed more money than they had expected.

"The IRS' mission is to treat taxpayers fairly so they pay the tax they legally owe,

including making sure they're not paying any more than legally required," the former revenue agent said.

Notwithstanding its return on investment and the sense of duty espoused by its employees, LB&I was hit especially hard by the most recent wave of firings, employees said. According to the current IRS engineer, the Trump administration appears to have eliminated the jobs of about 120 LB&I engineers out of a total of roughly 260. The person said they had heard more terminations were expected soon. The acting IRS chief and a longtime agency leader, Doug O'Donnell, announced his retirement amid the firings.

Several LB&I employees told ProPublica that the mass layoffs had been ordered from a very high level and that several layers of managers had no idea they were coming or what to expect. The cuts, employees said, did not appear to distinguish between employees with certain specialties or performance levels, but instead focused solely on whether they were on probationary status. "It didn't matter the skill set. If they were under a year, they got cut," another current LB&I employee told ProPublica.

The current and former IRS employees said the firings and the administration's deferred resignation offer led to situations that have wiped out decades of experience and institutional knowledge that can't easily be replaced. Jack McCumber was an LB&I senior appraiser in Seattle who got fired

about six weeks before the end of his probationary status. He said not only did he lose his job, but the veteran appraiser who was his mentor took early retirement. McCumber and his mentor often worked on syndicated conservative easement cases that could recoup tens and even hundreds of millions of dollars. "They're pushing out the experienced people, and they're pushing out people like me," McCumber said. "It's a double whammy."

The result, employees and experts said, will mean corporations and wealthy individuals face far less scrutiny when they file their tax returns, leading to more risk-taking and less money flowing into the U.S. treasury.

"Large businesses and higher-wealth individuals are where you have the most sophisticated taxpayers and the most sophisticated tax preparers and lawyers who are attuned to pushing the envelope as much as they can," said Koskinen, the former IRS commissioner. "When those audits stop because there isn't anybody to do them, people will say, 'Hey, I did that last year, I'll do it again this year.'"

"When you hamstring the IRS," Koskinen added, "it's just a tax cut for tax cheats."

*Andy Kroll covers justice and the rule of law, including the Justice Department, U.S. attorneys and the courts for ProPublica. This story was originally published by ProPublica.*



## THE BIG PICTURE/*Glynn Wilson*

# The March from Selma to Montgomery Should Go All the Way to Washington This Year

SELMA, ALA. — As fate would have it, no real plan of my own, I'm encamped in a Corps of Engineers campground on the Alabama River behind the National Park Service Interpretive Center on the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail. On March 9, the reenactment of that historic march was to kick off once again, as it does every year.

There is a hint of a rumor and a wish that might be too much for the local organizers to pull off. That is, why not march to Montgomery and keep on going, turning north toward Birmingham and march all the way to Washington, D.C. — picking up millions of marchers along the way.

That might shake up things in the nation's capital and change the subject away from Elon Musk's hacker team dismantling the federal government at least.

Of course it might also attract the president to call out the National Guard to stop it, like George Wallace tried to do in 1965, and really change the subject. If the Trump insurrectionists really want another civil war, why not give it to them NOW — rather than wait for this administration to rob us all of our Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, National Parks and hand the country over to Putin?

If it's going to be a war anyway, which it most certainly appears that it will, with half the country bowing down to the fascist dictator and the other half in full resistance mode, let's bring on the non-violence and see if Canada and Europe might come to our defense?

Trump browbeat Zelenskyy in the Oval Office and then pulled all U.S. aid to Ukraine. Europe stepped in to take up the slack. Maybe they will help us too? Hey, it's worth a try.

The reason I ended up here was a call from a news director in Tuscaloosa with Alabama Public Radio, who found me on Facebook and thought I might be able to help his award winning team in the new Digital Media Center in Bryant-Denny Stadium. He said we might be able to get some stories on NPR as well, so I said why not?

He and the management there indicated they would like to have some help in Montgomery. This is not something I was interested in jumping into, not at this juncture after spending the better part of the past 10 years covering national politics in D.C. But wait. The first story was an exhibit of Spider Martin photographs in the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, some of the best images

of Bloody Sunday in 1965 and the successful march to Montgomery. And it is, after all, the 60th anniversary.

OK, I said. I can do that. Spider Martin was one of my closest friends from 1986 to 2003, when about as broke as I am now, he shot himself in the heart with an old flare gun rigged up to shoot 16-gauge shotgun shells.

The last paying work he got was on a double byline story I did with Rick Bragg on the front page of *The New York Times* about an incinerator designed to destroy all the mustard gas stored at the Army base in Anniston. They used a large black and white picture from Spider on the jump.

You can still find it in the archives online, if you are a paying customer.

So, sure, I can do a story about that, I said. It ran on the web and the radio and UA paid for the story. It made up for not having any Social Security in March, since Elon Musk's team of hackers apparently targeted me as a bona fide member of Trump's enemies list the day he invaded the Treasury Department, accessed our Social Security information, and started building the algorithm to target critics of Trump, otherwise known as Trump's "enemies list." Or, if they didn't target "enemies," their interference with the Social Security system may have caused me (and others) to miss our March Social Security benefits through their incompetence or negligence. I guess I had the only story in the country about it, because it hit on day one.

I mean what have I been doing more than anything else over the past 10 years? Warning people about Trump, writing 1,080 stories, all there in our archives for anyone to see with no paywall, no popup ads. And you guessed it. None of them are flattering.

Where I come from, that's what a real journalist is supposed to do. Not just report what he said today, and did.

So here I sit through a major thunderstorm, wondering if "the people" might get the gumption to turn off the celebrity talking heads on cable TV, and stop sharing memes on Facebook long enough to pack a bag and come to Selma. I suspect they won't do it. It's all just big talk, like a lot of the so-called resistance these days.

But hey. If they want to do it, I will camp along the way and cover it. I know every campground between here and Washington and have stayed in most of them over the past 10 years.

I keep reminding people on social media about "The Art of War" by Sun Tzu. Steve Bannon knows the story.

"All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when able to attack ... seem unable; when using (your) forces ... seem inactive; when near, make the enemy believe you are far away; when far away, make them believe you are near."

That's too long for a Facebook meme. So most people miss it in the feed and move on to Netflix, I guess. Buyer's remorse? How when the channels his people watch are not telling the real story of what's going on? I did. And still do. As long as I'm able and not locked up or dead.

George Wallace never scared me. Neither does Trump. I will never get a seat on Air Force One, or an office in the White House. So what? I can see what's going on. And write about it from here. Wake up people.

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

## CDC Firings Undermine Public Health Work Far Beyond Washington

By RACHANA PRADHAN  
KFF Health News

The Trump administration's sudden firing of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention employees gutted training programs across the nation whose participants bolstered the workforce of state and local public health departments that for decades have been starved of resources.

The programs are designed to cultivate a new generation of public health leaders, many of whom have gone on to work at the CDC. That was far from its only purpose. Local and state officials said the departures threaten to undermine the nation's constant effort to identify and control infectious disease outbreaks.

The terminated CDC employees helped prevent and respond to outbreaks such as dengue fever and the flu. They worked with local officials to quickly test for viruses and ensure that testing in public health labs complies with federal regulations. Others monitored potential cases of tuberculosis or provided health education to adolescents to prevent sexually transmitted infections, according to interviews with fired workers and local public health officials.

As a CDC public health adviser, Gaël Cruanes had been working at New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to detect cases of tuberculosis, a serious illness that spreads through the air and usually attacks the lungs.

The Public Health Associate Program deploys recent college graduates and other early-career workers for two years. After starting his job in October, Cruanes said, he contacted newly arrived immigrants and refugees potentially at risk of spreading TB in hopes of getting them into the city's clinics for screening.

"It's purely for the safety of the public at the end of the day," Cruanes said. He and other trainees were fired in mid-February.

"It's unconscionable," he said.

A spokesperson for the Department of Health and Human Services, Andrew Nixon, declined to comment. The White House and CDC didn't respond to requests for comment.

The Trump administration's swift staff

reductions in February targeted probationary employees, many hired in the past two years, who lack civil service protections against firings. The administration on Feb. 26 ordered federal agencies to submit plans by mid-March for large-scale layoffs, a move that could encompass a much broader swath of workers.

After CNN published this article, at least some fired CDC workers in the training programs were notified on March 4 that their terminations had been rescinded.

Affected employees were cleared to work on March 5, according to emails viewed by KFF Health News. "You should return to duty under your previous work schedule. We apologize for any disruption that this may have caused," said the emails, which were unsigned and sent from an internal CDC email address.

The reversal came less than a week after a federal judge ruled that the Trump administration's widespread terminations of probationary employees were likely illegal.

Seven CDC employees — including from the associate program — assigned to the New York City health department were originally terminated, Michelle Morse, the agency's acting commissioner, testified during a City Council hearing Feb. 19.

In an interview, Morse said the health department was exploring how to retain them.

"We're looking into what the CDC could do," she said, "but we are really just trying to use our own levers that we have within the health department to see what's possible for those staff."

Since its creation in 2007, the Public Health Associate Program has placed 1,800 people in nearly every state and territory, plus the District of Columbia, according to the CDC.

The sudden firings meant "there was no lead time to try to figure out what we're going to do," said Anissa Davis, the city health officer at the Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services in California.

Three participants of the associate program worked at the Long Beach department, Davis said. A CDC public health adviser was one of four employees working on sexually transmitted infections and HIV surveillance. Two others were with the 13-person communicable disease control team, which includes staff who respond to outbreaks in nursing homes, hospitals, restaurants, and schools, Davis said.

"They are invaluable," Davis said. "Public health is always under-resourced so having these people really helps us."

The U.S. public health system was already under severe strain at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic — tens of thousands of jobs disappeared after the 2007-09 recession hit, and spending also dropped significantly for state and local health departments, according to a KFF Health News investigation. The backlash against pandemic-era restrictions drove many more officials to resign or retire. Others were fired. Still, officials said the pandemic also inspired some to pursue public health careers.

Scientists in the CDC's Laboratory Leadership Service program were also fired in February. The CDC in 2015 started the two-year training fellowship to improve lab safety and quality following a series of failures, including in 2014 when CDC staff in Atlanta were potentially exposed to anthrax. The program each year recruits a small number of doctorate-level scientists; several work in state or local health departments.

At least 16 of 24 fellows in the program were fired in mid-February, according to two scientists who were terminated and spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of professional retaliation. "Now we can't be a resource for these labs anymore," one of them said.

Public health labs need the CDC scientists "because they're underfunded, understaffed," the other said. "They are at their capacity already."

Lab fellows' responsibilities included helping with outbreak investigations and responses, including by training local staff on how to safely run tests or analyzing samples to identify the cause of an illness. Fellows were recently involved in setting up a new test in Florida to detect Oropouche, a relatively unknown insect-borne disease that has no vaccine or effective treatment. The World Health Organization in December said more than 11,600 cases had been reported in 2024 in South America, the Caribbean, the U.S., Europe, Canada, and Panama. The Florida Department of Health didn't respond to a request for comment.

Fellows also helped develop the capacity to test for dengue fever in American Samoa, one of them said.

"When new stuff happens that's urgent, it's almost all the time we get pivoted to it," the person said.

Participants in different training programs received the same form letter notifying them of their terminations, according to documents viewed by KFF Health News.

The letters said that terminated people had shown poor performance: "Unfortunately, the Agency finds that you are not fit

for continued employment because your ability, knowledge and skills do not fit the Agency's current needs, and your performance has not been adequate to justify further employment at the Agency."

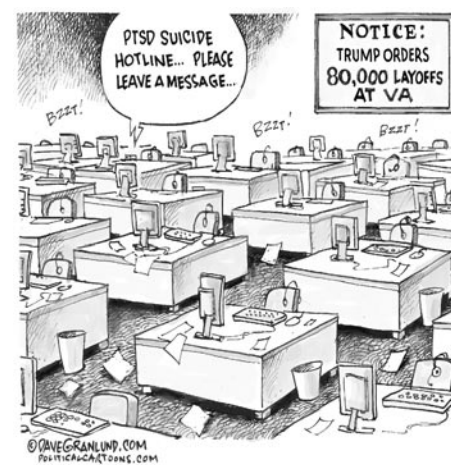
However, the fellows' supervisors had written memos and emails saying they were in good standing, according to documents viewed by KFF Health News. Cruanes said he had not had a performance evaluation when he was terminated — his first was supposed to be Feb. 18, three days after he received his notice. He was among the CDC staff reinstated on March 4.

In Minneapolis, a CDC public health adviser had been providing sexual and reproductive health education in two high schools, as well as doing citywide work on STI testing, said Barbara Kyle, the city's school-based clinic manager. The department was trying to shift those responsibilities to remaining personnel. "We're right now just scrambling," she said.

The city has relied on trainees through the CDC program for more than a decade, Kyle said.

"These two years of learning public health, on-the-ground experience, has really been such a positive move for our country," she said. "So that concerns me if we lose that pipeline."

*Rachana Pradhan reports on an array of national health policy issues for KFF Health News, a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs at KFF — the independent source for health policy research, polling, and journalism. Email rpradhan@kff.org. Follow @rachanadpradhan. Healthbeat reporter Eliza Fawcett contributed to this report from New York City. This article also appeared at CNN.*



## MARY SANCHEZ



The founding of the U.S.A. was a more multi-cultural effort than is commonly thought, with the roster of patriots including Latino leaders, troops and sailors.

### Our Understanding of American Patriotism Needs a Serious Reboot

The charge was simple enough: Learn enough about Latino involvement in the American Revolution to lead a discussion.

The request, for a speaking invitation, kicked off something far deeper. It ignited a determination to seek respect for and awareness of a wide swath of patriots who were crucial to the nation's founding.

They're not the usual suspects.

In short, the founding of the nation was more of a global, multi-cultural effort than is commonly thought.

History can ground us. Many of the nonsensical narratives coming out of the Trump White House and Congress would fall on deaf ears if people had a broader understanding of who served the nation as

a patriot.

Here are merely a few: General Bernardo de Galvez of Spain, Francisco de Miranda from Venezuela, and Captain Jorge Farragut from Minorca, an island off of Spain. These figures are prominent historically but remain largely unknown today.

Historians believe George Washington's Continental Army would not have prevailed without the valor of these Latino leaders and the troops and sailors they led.

Moreover, the colonists received help from Cuban women, who gathered up their jewelry and coins to help fund soldiers.

Militias made up of freed African-American slaves, Native Americans, and Spaniards took part in battles that recaptured Baton Rouge, Natchez, Mobile, and Pensacola from the British. Those battles were crucial geographically, saving the southern states.

Washington, our first president whose birthday the U.S. just celebrated with department store sales and a day off work, was grateful to these patriots, to say the least. At points, his fledgling navy and army couldn't have carried on without arms provided by Spain or the gold and other support from Cuba and Mexico.

And Spanish figures like Galvez, then the governor of Louisiana, also brought tremendous value in training others in maritime skills.

The multi-national efforts of that era made sense given Mexico's geographic contiguity with the U.S. and Cuba's proximity to Florida, where Juan Ponce de Leon landed in 1513.

Much of the revolutionary aid from Spain happened prior to that nation formally joining the war against the British in 1779.

And yet, when the Smithsonian Center

for Latino Initiatives set out to document the role of Latinos in U.S. military conflicts, it found the contributions of Hispanic patriots relatively unrecognized.

Latinos had been present in each era, often serving in high numbers, and in every U.S. military conflict.

In the U.S., we will soon begin celebrating our 250th anniversary.

Sadly, President Donald Trump will still be in office. From his mindset, anyone remotely connected to diversity, equity or inclusion (DEI) efforts should be jettisoned from the federal government.

The administration's anti-DEI push is so dystopian that in some conservative circles merely stating a label of racial or ethnic identity, outside of the majority white population, draws suspicion.

A federal judge recently blocked Trump's executive orders targeting DEI programs from receiving federal funds.

Trump's vague initial order had directed federal agencies to terminate all "equity-related" grants or contracts. The president followed the first order with another in which he required federal contractors to certify that they would not promote DEI.

Again, preliminary injunctions against both have been granted.

Reactions have been widespread, even outside of government, with major corporations ditching commitments to DEI and rewriting their mission statements, essentially bending to the will of the Trump White House.

History, accurately told, can serve as an anchoring force against these destructive efforts.

Consider Trump's childish insistence that

the Gulf of Mexico be renamed to "Gulf of America."

It was that body of water, which today is largely controlled by Mexico, on which General Galvez staged many of his most remarkable and revolutionary feats.

Granted, most of us have a rudimentary understanding of the American Revolution.

We recite bits and pieces of it from the hazy memory of an elementary school project, with little nuance or insight. We recall Betsy Ross sewing a flag of 13 stars, perhaps — never mind that historians say the story isn't true. Or maybe we remember a snippet about a galloping Paul Revere under the moonlight.

And, of course, we now have information about a certain someone who historians say did not chop down his father's favorite cherry tree. But we also know who most certainly owned other human beings — enslaved people that he bought, inherited, and laid claim to.

Was that reference to George Washington's moral failings uncomfortable?

It can be telling if historical references, like Washington's highly documented ownership of enslaved people, causes anxiety. Often it's because the truth grates against a more comfortable version we've somehow absorbed.

A far better option would be to simply tell the truth about history, unvarnished of moral retellings and not scrubbed of multi-cultural participants.

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## Trump's Politics of Cruelty

Will it be one more source of division, or will Trump's sadism unite Americans against him?

By ROBERT KUTTNER

The other day, Adrian Walker in *The Boston Globe* reported the story of Mike Slater, who survived four tours of duty as a U.S. Army infantryman in Iraq and Afghanistan. After suffering PTSD and being rehabilitated by the VA, he began working at the Veterans Center in Springfield, Massachusetts, serving other vets. In February, as a thank you from his country, Slater was notified by email that his job was terminated, courtesy of orders from DOGE.

We can look forward to hundreds of thousands of these stories. At USAID, people who have devoted their careers to alleviating human disease and starvation are being fired by text message and asked to clean out their desks on two days' notice.

Soon, there will likely be far more cruelty and suffering, as needy people lose health coverage under a diminished Medicaid, as more families are broken up by ICE raids, and more immigrant workers stop earning a paycheck for fear of being arrested and deported.

It's not surprising that Trump's signature is cruelty. This is an entertainer, after all, who got famous with the line "You're fired!" Trump has always identified with the winners. Suffering people, in Trump's sick psyche, are losers.

But that was reality TV. This is reality.

In reality TV terms, the ultimate celebrity apprentice winner is Elon Musk, who is rivaling even Trump in the human damage he is doing.

Other Republican presidents have presided over human suffering. Ronald Reagan knocked millions of needy people off the welfare rolls and cut a host of social programs that were preserving a measure of dignity for low-income Americans.

But Reagan disguised the cruelty with his sheer niceness and bogus policy rationalizations that these cutbacks were for people's own good by compelling them to get a work ethic.

Trump, by contrast, revels in cruelty. His pleasure in sheer cruelty was on display Feb. 28 as he did his best to humiliate Volodymyr Zelensky. The fact that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has resulted in immense human suffering was nowhere on Trump's radar. Trump's closing comment was "This is going to be great television."

When he considers Gaza, Trump doesn't see the deaths, the human displacements, and the mutilated children. He sees underdeveloped real estate.

When someone crosses Trump, that person must not only be fired, but annihilated. Trump said in a post on Truth Social that Gen. Mark Milley, Trump's former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, deserved execution.

It's not exactly news that Trump is a sociopath. The definition of a sociopath is someone who lacks any capacity for human compassion or remorse. Trump goes beyond even that, to sheer sadism.

**BUT MOST AMERICANS ARE NOT SOCIOPATHS,** much less sadists. Most Americans are kind to their neighbors, support charities, identify compassionately with

human suffering. So why isn't there a much greater outcry against Trump's delight in cruelty?

It's a more complex question than it first seems.

For starters, as the Nazi era demonstrated, when the government relies on fear and it is others who are suffering, it's too easy to avert your eyes. To paraphrase the famous warning of Pastor Martin Niemöller, they came for the immigrants but I am not an immigrant. They are firing civil servants but I am not a civil servant.

Where is the Christian right? Jesus of Nazareth not only taught compassion but lived it. And he preached against the hypocrisy that was rampant among the religious leaders of his day. But the religions established in his name have often been citadels of hypocrisy.

Trump is purely transactional. The religious leaders and their followers who support Trump based on his views on abortion, but ignore his dissolute life, are purely transactional as well. Jesus wept.

There is also the problem of resentment and lack of solidarity. *Politico* interviewed Trump voters in South Texas. One woman, named Nelda Cruz, was asked about the coming cuts in Medicaid. "I don't qualify for Medicaid, so fine with me," she said. "Now they're going to feel how I feel."

A fearful, angry, and divided people can become inured to meanness. I would like to believe America is better than that. Trump may yet meet his downfall. But it would be so much more heartening if the cause were not the price of eggs but a mass revulsion against Trump's sadistic cruelty.

Robert Kuttner is co-editor of *The American Prospect* ([prospect.org](http://prospect.org)) and professor at Brandeis University's Heller School. Like him on [facebook.com/RobertKuttner](https://www.facebook.com/RobertKuttner) and/or follow him at [twitter.com/rkuttner](https://twitter.com/rkuttner).

## Trump, Musk and Cruelty to Poor Kids

By GENE NICHOL

It was tough to learn that the new Trump crew had cut, immediately, some \$90 million in federal grant funding for North Carolina public school teacher hiring, support, compensation and training programs.

The Montgomery County schools will reportedly lose \$21.5 million over three years. A similar sum was axed from a project supporting teachers in Asheboro, Elizabeth City, Lexington, Mt. Airy and Scotland, Edgecombe, Vance and Warren counties. A Wake County program lost \$11.8 over three years and a Charlotte-Mecklenburg \$7.7 million effort was eliminated. A \$5.2 million grant sustaining a Winston-Salem State project to train aspiring teachers to help staff economically stressed schools in Winston-Salem and in Forsyth County was ended. And the list is

much, much longer.

The cuts land most heavily on North Carolina rural and urban Title I schools — those with high concentrations of low-income students. Such high poverty institutions, of course, frequently have less experienced teachers and more elevated turnover rates than their wealthier counterparts. It's harder to fully staff their faculties. The slashed grant programs were aimed at addressing these burdens. Now huge numbers of Tar Heel teachers will lose their jobs, or their promised incentives, or their crucial support programs. For the Trump folks, paying attention to the needs of poor kids and those who teach them is too close to DEI.

North Carolina Title I teachers often follow what an experienced Wake County teacher, Brendan Fetters, once described to me as "a calling within a calling." Their students know the trauma of coming home to the eviction notice or explain they couldn't do their homework the night before because the electricity had been cut off. A long-time Durham Title I teacher, Nashonda Cooke,

told me, unsurprisingly, many students come from single-family households where the mother, or less often, the father, works long hours, or the night shift, so that even third or fourth graders live largely unattended. Some have scarcely travelled out of their neighborhoods or gone to restaurants. One of my other heroes, Jessica Holmes, who grew up in intense poverty in Pender County, explained that many of her teachers were "committed to ending intergenerational poverty one student at a time." They do our best work. And hardest.

Then I thought, almost inescapably, of the videos of Elon Musk, wearing his ridiculous shades and a black MAGA hat, wielding a chainsaw given to him by the President of Argentina, receiving a rock star welcome at February's C-PAC conference. It had "long live liberty" emblazoned on the blade. I'll admit I don't know if there's a connection between Musk and the Department of Education cuts. Maybe not. Maybe it's just Trump. But the vision of the richest man in the world taking such delight in wounding the world's poorest

is difficult to erase. And even if the link is only Trump, I'll admit it makes me literally nauseous to see some of the most admirable people on the planet intentionally harmed by the most vile.

But it's not just Trump and Musk. Our Republican United States Senators and Congresspeople know what these public school lacerations do to North Carolina. They know how they hurt our most vulnerable kids — kids who already suffer mightily from our grotesque and long-standing violations of equal educational opportunity. Still, they likely will not say a word, not offer a peep in protest. They aren't allowed. No one could expect them to challenge the monster. Or monsters. Better to sacrifice their constituents' children.

Gene Nichol is Boyd Tinsley Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of North Carolina School of Law and in 2015 started the North Carolina Poverty Research Fund after the UNC Board of Governors closed the state-funded Poverty Center for publishing articles critical of the governor and General Assembly.

# Adopt a Red State: How Democrats Can Expose Republican Cowards

***GOP lawmakers are running from their own voters — Democrats should take their place!***

By THOM HARTMANN

Republicans have a new strategy to deal with town halls that are going poorly: Run and hide. Democrats have a great opportunity here.

Congressman Mark Pocan (D-Wis.) has been doing it for years. Representative Ro Khanna (D-Calif.) is doing three of them this coming month. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) is doing it, too. We should all be reaching out to our members of the House and Senate to ask them to do the same.

I'm talking about elected Democrats traveling to Red districts (House members) or Red states (Senators) to hold town halls in those places where Republicans refuse to show their faces.

After all, Republicans are running in the other direction. As NBC News reports:

"House Republicans are becoming weary and wary of in-person town hall meetings after a number of lawmakers have faced hometown crowds angry about the Trump administration's push to slash government programs and staffing.

"Party leaders suggest that if lawmakers feel the need to hold such events, they do tele-town halls or at least vet attendees to avoid scenes that become viral clips, according to GOP sources.

"A GOP aide said House Republican leaders are urging lawmakers to stop engaging in them altogether."

There are 214 Democratic members of the House and 47 Democrats in the Senate: if even a quarter of them were to adopt this strategy, even once a month, it could turn around politics in America.

For years, Congressman Pocan has regaled my listeners on his regular "Middays With Mark" segments with stories about how his Republican colleagues in nearby districts generally refuse to do town halls. So, he goes into those districts and does them himself, much to the delight of local Democrats and the curiosity of local Republican voters.

Congressman Ro Khanna revealed on my program that he's planning to do the same in two or three districts represented

by "bashful" Republicans in California.

And Bernie Sanders has been absolutely kicking ass, traveling across Red states and drawing huge crowds, filling and selling out major venues, with his "anti-oligarchy" tour.

Senator Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) recently bragged to reporters how he was learning how to do social media from a PowerPoint that Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) put together. It's a start, but why — if he's truly a leader — isn't he doing what Bernie is and visiting Red states to carry the Democrats' message?

Similarly, House Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.) told Rachel Maddow that he doesn't need any more "steel" in his spine. But why isn't he visiting Republican-controlled parts of America to let people trapped in the Fox "News"/rightwing-hate-radio bubble know what's really happening?

When members of Congress visit their constituents and take questions, it's almost always a newsworthy event, getting the kind of local coverage that you just can't pay for. When a member from the opposite party drops in, it's even more of a media event!

If you're represented by Democrats in the House or Senate, call them now — at 202-224-3121 — to encourage them to visit Red areas to carry the message of our democracy under assault by the Trump/Musk MAGA movement.

On the other hand, if you're represented by Republicans who refuse to visit their state or district to meet with voters, find a local venue (school auditoriums are generally easy to book) willing to host a town hall and tentatively set up a town hall for a visiting Democrat, then start reaching out to elected Democrats to find one who'll come to town.

It's so easy for members of Congress to settle into Washington, D.C., or take fancy junkets to the south of France, but this is a time of national emergency. Political theater is one of the few ways to break through media complacency — just look at the impact of the Tea Party when President Obama was talking about adding a Medicare buy-in to Obamacare — and this is political theater of the first degree.

It's time to get active, and to encourage our reluctant, wary, or even lazy Democratic politicians to get with the program.

Our Founders fought and died for our nation; the least our elected officials can do is hop on a plane and answer an hour's worth of questions.

*Thom Hartmann is a progressive radio talk-show host and the author of "The Hidden History of American Oligarchy" and more than 30 other books in print. He is a writing fellow at the Independent Media Institute. This appeared at hartmannreport.com.*

# Migrant Workers: 'Only the People Can Save the People'

***The National Day Laborers Organizing Network (NDLON) embodies an ethos of "solidarity, not charity," in both fire relief and immigrant rights.***

By SONALI KOLHATKAR

When the Eaton Fire began on Jan. 7 in Altadena, California, it blazed through residential neighborhoods, destroying thousands of family homes. On the morning of Jan. 8, as businesses burned on North Lake Avenue, a group of migrant workers met two miles to the south in neighboring Pasadena. They gathered at 6 a.m. to discuss an emergency response to the fires.

For the past 25 years, the Pasadena Community Job Center on South Lake Avenue has connected employers with skilled migrant labor, ensuring safe work environments, a living wage for workers, and quality work for customers.

Run by the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON), the job center has also been a hub for much more: strengthening rights and protections for migrant workers, being of service to the local community, and sharing the culture, stories, and music of its members. NDLON's work is intersectional, bringing together labor rights, fair pay, immigration, racial justice, climate resiliency, and community solidarity.

Less than two weeks before Donald Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration, migrant workers, who were poised to oppose the incoming administration's anti-immigrant agenda, quickly pivoted to emergency fire relief. Omar Leone, NDLON's arts director, helped organize "fire relief brigades," to clear debris and brush from burned and smoke-damaged areas in the wake of the deadly 100 miles per hour winds.

NDLON put the call out for volunteers and workers and, over several weeks, trained members of the brigades outfitted them with protective gear and cleaning equipment, and sent them to impacted neighborhoods with trucks bearing the slogan "Solo El Pueblo, Salva Al Pueblo," translated to "Only the People Can Save the People." Immigrants worked alongside citizens and workers stood shoulder to shoulder with employers. Leone, in an interview on *YES! Presents: Rising Up With Sonali*, explained how the brigades consisted of "day laborers, household workers, and many community volunteers from various areas

of the greater Los Angeles area."

On the morning of Jan. 10, as I surveyed the damage in the smoke-filled air of my North Pasadena neighborhood, I hailed such a group working on my street and requested their help to clear my backyard of debris.

The fire danger was still high, and in the horror-filled aftermath of the devastating tragedy, the fire relief brigades engaged in a simple act of solidarity that I will not soon forget. A group of well-trained young people—non-immigrants working under the leadership of immigrants—expertly cleared my backyard of dangerous debris, fallen fence panels, tree branches, and broken light bulbs, and hauled it all away in trucks.

At the same time, as it was overseeing such brigades, the Pasadena Community Job Center set up a donation hub in an empty lot next to its offices where community members dropped off food, clothing, and other necessities, and migrant workers organized to distribute them to impacted families. It became the largest hub in Pasadena during the early days after the fires. Its ethos was distinct from other donation centers, offering "solidarity, not charity"—a slogan emblazoned on the Pasadena Community Job Center's wall.

The Pasadena Community Job Center had all the expertise necessary to mobilize skilled workers in the wake of the disaster. Leone explained how members of the fire brigades were required to sit through a day-long formal OSHA training to ensure they understood how to safely work and dispose of materials.

Pablo Alvarado, NDLON's co-executive director, pointed out in an interview on *YES! Presents: Rising Up With Sonali* that, "It's impossible to rebuild Los Angeles without migrant labor." He explained, "A significant segment of people who work in the construction industry are undocumented immigrants."

Yet, at the same time as migrant workers were volunteering their time to clean up Altadena, NDLON was engaged in rigorous "Know Your Rights" workshops and trainings in Pasadena and around the country in preparation for the coming onslaught of federal immigration enforcement agents. Vulnerable workers were learning how to defend themselves from government forces while being of service to a devastated region.

"Before the fires, I was feeling really unsafe. I was having so much anxiety about what's coming from the Trump administration, preparing for it," said Alvarado. "There was so much stress. And when we saw people from all walks of life coming together... I just know that the world is better than what the political leaders are saying."

The story we are told about immigrants, primarily by conservative leaders, but also increasingly liberal politicians, is an

tithetical to the reality. It is a false narrative that immigrants are a burden on society. In such a context NDLON's transformative work tells the opposite story, a true narrative of immigrants being indispensable members of our communities.

Take the anecdote Alvarado related to me about a pro-Trump volunteer with NDLON's fire relief brigades. Early on during the clean-up effort, Alvarado led a large crew of about 100 people to clean Pasadena's Central Park of fallen trees. A young man who had helped to lift and move large tree trunks was so moved by his experience that he approached the NDLON leader and asked for a hug. "We embraced and I thanked him," said Alvarado. "After the embrace, I looked at him and he was wearing a 'Make America Great Again' hat."

To Alvarado, this was proof that "the divisions [between people] are imposed from the top-down."

NDLON's efforts have not only helped to demonstrate to conservative pro-Trump voters just how essential immigrant workers are to U.S. towns and cities but also solidified ties between Black and Brown communities. Altadena is a historically Black town, one where home ownership was within reach.

According to Leone, "The Pasadena [Community Job] Center has built strong relationships with the Black community, and this is something we feel very proud of." He sees a common cause between migrant workers and Black residents, "because the Black community also faces a lot of chal-

lenges, a lot of discrimination."

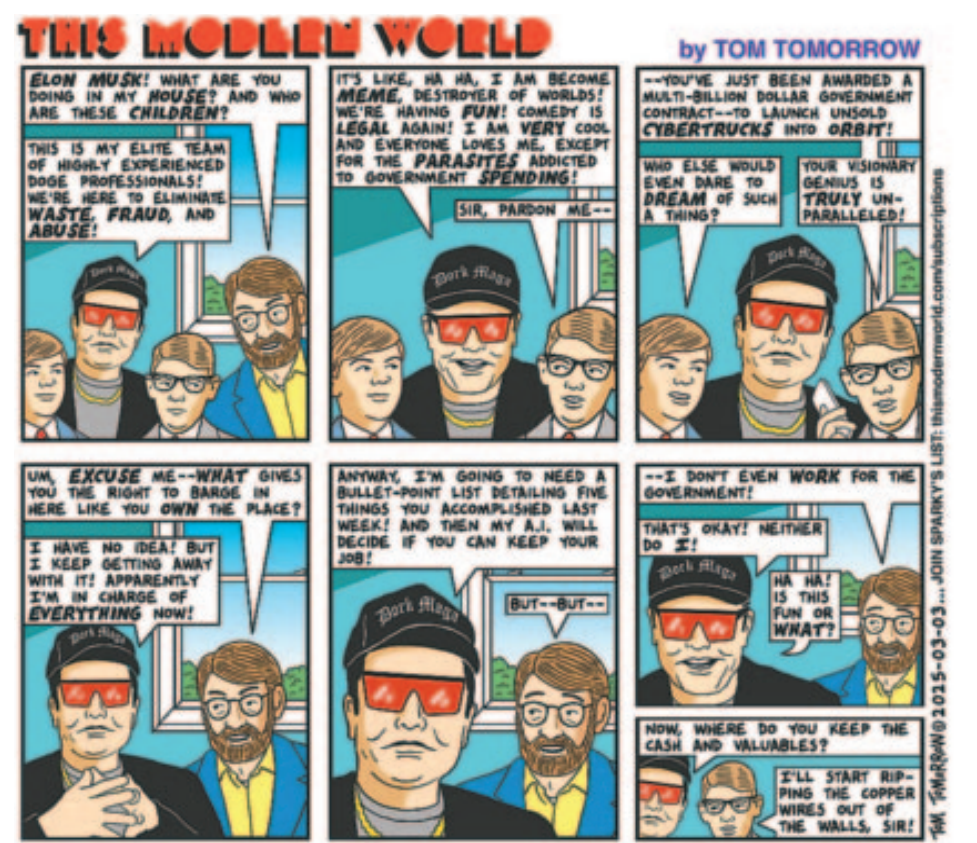
Solidarity is the antidote to division. NDLON's work at the Pasadena Community Job Center offers a model for a path out of the Trump administration's fascism. It is strategic, effective, and counteracts the propaganda of hate.

Most of all, NDLON's work offers a sense of hope to those who are tempted to give up in the face of authoritarianism, hate, and climate catastrophe—in the same vein as Altadena's residents hoping to rebuild and rise from the ashes of the Eaton Fire.

Leone, who leads NDLON's music band, Los Jornaleros del Norte, wrote a Spanish-language song about the fires called simply "Fuego." He explained that the song, based on testimonies of people who lost their homes, roughly translates into the following:

"This is everything I worked for my entire life, and I lost it in the blink of an eye. But I'm going to get up from this... I'm going to start from scratch. I don't know how I'm going to do it. I've done it in the past and I'm going to do it again."

*Sonali Kolhatkar is founder, host and executive producer of "Rising Up With Sonali," which airs on Free Speech TV and Pacifica stations. Her most recent book is "Rising Up: The Power of Narrative in Pursuing Racial Justice" (City Lights Books, 2023). She is a writing fellow for the Economy for All project at the Independent Media Institute, which produced this article, and she is racial justice and civil liberties editor at Yes! Magazine.*



# This Fresh Hell Brought to You by Citizens United

By SABRINA HAAKE

*These are the times that try men's souls... Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered.*  
~ Thomas Paine, "American Crisis," 1776

If you've watched or attended a town hall meeting recently, you've seen unfiltered outrage over Elon Musk and DOGE. Cutting costs to improve government efficiencies is one thing, wholesale elimination of systems that took 250 years to build is another.

As Musk takes a chainsaw to the federal government, Donald Trump plays golf, posts absurdist videos, and rage tweets from the toilet at 3 a.m. Meanwhile, GOP Congressmen keep quiet, their lips sealed by

Musk's credible threats to primary anyone who speaks out.

After effectively having been silenced under Citizens United, the ruling that teed up Trump's treasonous campaign of destruction, citizens' voices are rising to fill the void.

## This fresh hell brought to you by Citizens United

In 2010, the Supreme Court with the Citizens United decision allowed organizations, corporations, and the uber rich to begin making unlimited federal campaign donations. Since huge donations bring huge expectations, the needs of everyone else gradually faded in comparison.

Since CU, the legal interests of the powerful have prevailed consistently over the common man, to the point where today, Trump is stripping federal agencies bare to pay for \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts to the rich.

If there was ever a president who represented unfettered male domination, it's Trump. An implicit promise of the 2024 Trump campaign was to restore patriarchy to America. Trump voters were overwhelmingly male.

As you recall, Trump was found liable for sexual abuse; he famously told "Access Hollywood" that if you're a famous man "you can do anything. Grab 'em by the pussy"; he asserted during the recent campaign that he'd "protect" women "whether the women like it or not"; and he was instrumental in ending abortion rights nationwide.

After Trump's reelection, sexist and abusive attacks on women — such as "your body, my choice" and "get back to the kitchen" — surged across social media, according to an analysis from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

A remarkable number of Trump's cronies are sexual harassers and predators. Trump was introduced at the Republican National Convention by Dana White, chief executive of the Ultimate Fighting Championship, who was once caught on tape slapping his wife in a nightclub.

Trump's pick for vice president, JD Vance, has said professional women "choose a path to misery" when they prioritize careers over having children. He has claimed men in America were "suppressed" in their masculinity. Vance has characterized Democratic leaders as "childless cat ladies."

At a gathering of conservatives in February, Vance told young men: "Don't allow this broken culture to send you a message that you're a bad person because you're a man, because you like to tell a joke, because you like to have a beer with your friends or because you're competitive."

Trump's pick for defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, paid off a woman who accused him of sexual assault (Hegseth's own mother accused him of abusing women, though she later disavowed her words).

Trump's HHS secretary, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., was accused of sexually harassing his family's nanny and at one point kept a diary of his conquests, which his wife at the time found.

Elon Musk's "bros" are notoriously misogynistic, as is Musk. One of Musk's companies, SpaceX, reportedly paid \$250,000 to a flight attendant who said Musk exposed himself to her. In a lawsuit filed last year, former employees accused him of "treating women as sexual objects to be evaluated on their bra size."

One of the most pathetic symbols of the new manosphere is Mark Zuckerberg. After kissing Trump's derriere, the third-richest man in America called for more "masculine energy" because the corporate world was becoming "culturally neutered." He told Joe Rogan that "having a culture that celebrates the aggression a bit more has its own merits that are really positive."

Feb. 27, the Trump regime celebrated toxic masculinity by smoothing the way for Andrew and Tristan Tate to be extradited from Romania to the United States. The Tate bros had been accused of luring women to Romania and then forcing them to work as pornographic webcam performers. Britain is also investigating the Tate brothers for rape and human trafficking in

Trump/Musk are also strong-arming the world to advance their own oligarchic interests, in what *The Economist* calls Trump's "Mafia-like struggle" for power.

It is no accident that JD Vance's mentor oligarch openly seeks the dismantling of American democracy. The current oligarchs' revolution will, if successful, dramatically rewrite or discard the Constitution. And they put their money where their mouths are: In 2010, super PACs spent \$62.6 million on federal elections; in 2024, that figure surpassed \$4.1 billion.

## The compelling government interest in protecting democracy

SCOTUS found in CU that limiting political donations was a prohibited ban on free speech because "political speech must prevail against laws that would suppress it, whether by design or inadvertence." We have entered the terminus stage

Britain.

As *The New York Times'* Michelle Goldberg reports, Andrew Tate, a self-described misogynist, has regularly boasted about abusing and pimping women, offering to teach his technique to other men in online courses where students could earn "pimping hoes degrees." Women who live in his compound, he said in one video, aren't allowed to go out without him. Some are tattooed "owned by Tate." He left a voice note for a British woman who accused him of rape saying, "The more you didn't like it, the more I enjoyed it."

Tate is a big fan of Trump, championing him to his millions of mostly young male followers on social media. "I'm a Trump fan because I'm a man," Tate said in October. "You have to support Trump if you're a man." He's also a longtime friend of Donald Trump Jr., who called his detention in Romania "absolute insanity." One of Tate's former lawyers, Paul Ingrassia, is now the White House liaison for the Department of Justice. In January, when Tate announced plans to form a British political party and run for prime minister, Musk endorsed his analysis of British politics, writing, "He's not wrong."

I relate all this to you because it's important to understand the centrality of male dominance and misogyny to Trump's world — and to connect this to what other authoritarians and neofascists are doing around the globe.

The authoritarian manosphere is organized around a hierarchy topped by heroic male warriors. Winning is all about getting other males to submit to the dominant male. Women are relegated to subservient roles.

Anything that challenges the traditional heroic male roles of protector, provider, and controller of the family is considered a threat to the social order. LGBTQ+ people are believed to weaken the heroic male.

Trump recently issued an executive order declaring that the U.S. government will recognize only a person's sex assigned at birth, limit the definition of a "male" or "female" to their reproductive cells, and potentially withhold federal funding from programs that acknowledge transgender people or "gender ideology."

Anti-transgender themes were central

of that ruling, as political speech by the rich monopolizes all others, upending the very rationale behind CU. Not only has the logic of CU proved faulty, but House Republicans are preparing to impeach federal judges for blocking DOGE, bringing the dangers of CU full circle by aiming its destruction at the judiciary itself.

In its 5 to 4 ruling, the CU court examined the law limiting political expenditures under a "strict scrutiny" test. A strict scrutiny standard means the government must prove that the restriction furthers a "compelling governmental interest," and is narrowly tailored to achieve that interest. The government argued in CU that its compelling interest in limiting political expenditures was to prevent wealth-and-power-skewed distortion, to avoid the "corrosive and distorting effects of immense aggregations of wealth" dictating the outcome of federal elections.

Striking the limits nonetheless, the court

*Continued on page 15*

to Trump's 2024 campaign. He spent millions on anti-trans television ads and promised to restrict access to gender-affirming care and trans participation in sports.

Trump has made the traditional nuclear family a touchstone of domestic policy. In 2023, he pledged to "promote positive education about the nuclear family, the roles of mothers and fathers and celebrating, rather than erasing, the things that make men and women different."

Connect this to Putin.

Russia's crackdown on LGBTQ+ people started a decade ago when Putin first proclaimed a focus on "traditional family values." In 2013, the Kremlin adopted legislation that banned any public endorsement of "nontraditional sexual relations" among minors.

In 2020, Putin pushed through a "constitutional reform" that outlawed same-sex marriage. Last year, he signed a law banning "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations" among adults.

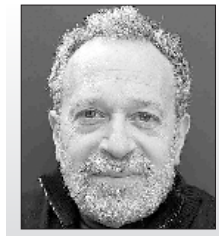
More recently, Putin signed legislation that bans people from officially or medically changing their gender, banning any "medical interventions aimed at changing the sex of a person," as well as banning changing a person's gender in official documents or public records. It also annuls marriages in which one person has "changed gender," and bars trans people from becoming foster or adoptive parents.

I don't want to oversimplify a complex social phenomenon or engage in the same kind of gender stereotypes that the manosphere promotes. Male domination is hardly the only characteristic that unites the Trump-Vance-Musk-Putin axis. Plenty of men have stood up to Trump. Misogyny is not unique to authoritarian men.

But as America slides toward neofascism, I think it important to understand that its roots draw from a deep distrust, bordering on hate, of people who seem weak or feminine — people who were born as, or have become, women.

*Robert Reich, former secretary of labor during the Clinton administration, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley. His latest book is "The System: Who Rigged It, How We Fix It."*  
See [robertreich.substack.com](http://robertreich.substack.com).

## ROBERT REICH



Trump, JD Vance and Elon Musk inhabit what's been termed the 'manosphere,' a place where the main events are dominance and submission.

## The Trump-Vance-Musk-Putin Manosphere

Did anyone else see the horrific display in the Oval Office Friday, Feb. 28, as a ritual exercise in male domination? I don't want to insult great apes, but I've seen similar performances at the zoo. Donald Trump and JD Vance sought to humiliate Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, treating him with the same disrespect they treat ... well, women.

Trump, Vance and Elon Musk inhabit what's been termed the "manosphere" — a place where the main events are dominance and submission. The whole point is to humiliate weaker men — and to subjugate women.

Women — especially women of color — have distinguished themselves in standing up to Trump, maybe because they're less intimidated by him than are many men, and because Trump has shown himself particularly fearful of strong women.

Which, if any, Republicans have been strong opponents of Trump. Answer: In the Senate, Republicans Lisa Murkowski and (barely) Susan Collins. In the House, the prize still goes to Liz Cheney.

Who has looked Trump in the eye and told him to show mercy for LGBTQ+ and undocumented people in America? Mariann Edgar Budde, the Bishop of Washington, at the National Prayer Service in January.

Who repeatedly took Trump to court on defamation charges, and repeatedly won? E. Jean Carroll.

Which prosecutors and judges were toughest in trying to hold Trump legally accountable? New York Attorney General Letitia James, Atlanta-based District Attorney Fani Willis, U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan, U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson, and U.S. District Judge Lauren King.

Who most successfully pummeled Trump in a presidential debate? Kamala Harris.

Which journalists have been most aggressive in questioning Trump? Megyn Kelly, CNN's Kaitlan Collins, reporter Yamiche Alcindor, CNN's Abby Phillip, The Grio's April Ryan, NBC's Savannah Guthrie, *The New York Times'* Maggie Haberman, CBS' Weijia Jiang, and *New York Magazine's* Olivia Nuzzi.

I could go on, but you get the point.



# Don't Let 'Reverse Discrimination' Reverse Our National Progress

By CLARENCE PAGE

Marlean Ames of Akron, Ohio, is not gay or a member of a racial minority.

But, please, she points out, don't hold that against her, as she alleges her employers have, as she takes her "reverse discrimination" case all the way to the Supreme Court.

I wish her well. As an African American male, I strongly oppose unfair discrimination against any race, gender or sexual preference, although I also know the charge can be very difficult to prove.

Or, at least, it has been. Ames' case aims to change that and, considering how much the high court and official Washington have shifted to the right in recent years, she could hardly have chosen a more opportune time to try.

The Supreme Court heard oral arguments Feb. 26 in her case, *Ames v. Ohio Department of Youth Services*, which has drawn a lot of attention since it could redefine how discrimination claims of all types are handled under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

The core issue is whether so-called "majority-group plaintiffs," legal language for white or heterosexual employees who allege discrimination, are so unusual that they must meet a higher standard of evidence than other plaintiffs in such cases.

The NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund argued

in a friend-of-the-court brief in the case that different standards were appropriate for majority and minority groups because minorities are historically the target of discrimination.

Before Ames' suit went to trial, lower courts ruled against her, finding that she was unable to meet that standard. Ames' lawyers argue that the standard is unconstitutional.

So do the Trump administration and other conservative legal groups.

The Biden administration also filed an amicus brief in support of Ames' position, as JURISTnews reported, "with former Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar agreeing that the background circumstances requirement is not supported by the text of Title VII."

On the other side were conservative groups like America First Legal, founded by prominent Trump aide Stephen Miller, which has campaigned nationwide against DEI programs as vigorously as his better-known campaign to tighten border restrictions.

"It is highly suspect in this age of hiring based on 'diversity, equity and inclusion,'" he has said, that minority groups face more discrimination on the job than majority groups do.

That faint praise is a backhanded tribute to the success of DEI campaigns, even as many Americans still scratch their heads in confusion over what DEI really is.

Having covered civil rights debates off and on for about a half-century, I am reminded of perhaps the most famous reverse discrimination case: *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, the 1978 landmark Supreme Court case that challenged the use of racial quotas in college admissions.

The court ruled in favor of Bakke, finding that the uni-

versity's affirmative action program violated the Civil Rights Act and the 14th Amendment.

When the high court ruled against specific racial quotas, many defenders of such policies mourned the beginning of the end for civil rights reforms. Instead, the effort to protect and defend civil rights continues despite periodic pushbacks yet also with many refinements and improvements.

As more people than ever seem to be quoting Martin Luther King Jr.'s immortal plea for "all men" to be "not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character," I am reminded that he was not being descriptive about the present as much as hopeful for a better future.

Our best way to get there as Americans is to help each other up, as we work together despite our many divisions, and not to waste too much energy trying to put each other down.

In that spirit, I wish Marlene Ames well, and I hope the Supreme Court will be wise in its judgment. There's nothing simple about our racial, gender and other conflicts, but finding solutions together despite our petty differences has served us well in the past and it still can work again, if we can build faith in each other.

Marlean Ames has taken on a complicated task, trying to work her way through our national tangle of history, group conflicts and tribal rivalries, looking for what most of us want: peace and justice.

I only hope the Supreme Court comes up with a decision that, even if we don't love it, we can work with it.

Let's hope.

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

## We Need Medicaid More Than Billionaires Need Tax Cuts

*Republicans in Congress want to gut Medicaid, denying life-saving health care for regular families to cut taxes for billionaires.*

By RAVEN MacFARLANE-BRADBROOK

When I was growing up, I was taught that only lazy people asked for "handouts" from the government in hard times.

But I've learned public assistance isn't a handout at all — it's a service our tax dollars pay for. We purchase these promises in good times so we have something for rainy days. And let's face it, almost all of us have days when we need help.

I work in the beauty business, and making people look and feel fabulous is my passion. Even more important to me is my family — including my husband, who re-

cently suffered a stroke and is in a long recovery process, and my son, who has autism and needs a high level of support.

I own my own salon, but as a small business owner I don't make enough to meet my family's significant health needs. So I was overjoyed to learn that I qualified for Medicaid — so my child could get his speech, occupational, and physical therapy, and my husband could get the same. My health issues, too — and my unaffordable prescriptions — can finally also be addressed.

My husband and I have paid into the system our whole lives and I'm grateful it's there to help us now that we need it. The hoops, the bureaucracy, the benefits that ought to be more generous can get frustrating, but we're making it work. We couldn't survive without it.

But now, the new administration and Republicans in Congress want to gut Medicaid, spending our tax dollars on tax cuts for billionaires instead of life-saving health care for regular families.

The House Republican budget blueprint calls for stealing, over nine years, \$880 billion out of Medicaid to help pay for \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts for the richest people in

the country. That will pay for a lot of champagne aboard million-dollar yachts, but at the expense of my family's health.

Nationally, 72 million Americans rely on Medicaid. It's the nation's largest health insurer. It pays for in-home care and 60% of nursing home care. It covers dental, vision, and hearing care for seniors. It helps people with disabilities like my child and my husband get care.

Further, nearly 13 million Americans are dually enrolled in both Medicaid and Medicare, so cuts to Medicaid are also cuts to Medicare.

In North Carolina, where I live, 2.7 million people are enrolled in Medicaid and its State Children's Health Insurance Program. Yet our Republican representatives in the districts with the most Medicaid need voted for the House GOP budget plan that would eviscerate the program.

The same is true for other deep red districts across the country, which have some of the highest Medicaid enrollment rates.

They say they want to end "waste, fraud, and abuse." But no rational person would believe that Medicaid has nearly \$1 trillion in waste. There is an estimated improper payment rate of just 5%, and likely

most of that is simply because of paperwork that is missing or filled out incorrectly.

Republicans also want to tie receiving life-saving healthcare to stringent work requirements. But 92% of working-age, able-bodied adults who receive Medicaid already work — or else are not able to work due to caretaking responsibilities, illness or disability, or attending school.

Attaching work requirements to a basic human need isn't just questionable morally — it's also ineffective, because those who can work are already working. What it will do instead is create such an administrative burden on enrollees and states that millions of people will simply lose coverage.

Listen up lawmakers. We are hard-working people, making the world more beautiful and trying to get health care for our families. How do you justify taking that away just to line the pockets of billionaires?

It's high time you fought for us, not against us.

Raven MacFarlane-Bradbrook is a salon owner and Medicaid advocate from Greensboro, North Carolina. This op-ed was produced in partnership with the Working Class Storyteller and distributed by OtherWords.org.

## GRASSROOTS/Hank Kalet

### De-Alignment

Nothing good can be said about Russia's war on Ukraine. The death toll, which has been almost impossible to pin down, continues to rise.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's Russia invaded a sovereign neighbor and has engaged in war crimes. It has usurped large sections of Ukraine's territory, and leveled Ukrainian cities and towns. Ukraine has responded, valiantly, holding on for three years against the onslaught, but it is the smaller and weaker participant, and there are limits to what it can accomplish on the battlefield.

The immediate and obvious costs, the most important for now, are the lost lives and decimated infrastructure in eastern Ukraine.

The war also has empowered arms traders and is offering a proving ground for new weapons: drones, new long-range American, British and Russia weapons, North Korea missiles.

Some of the same can be said for Israel and its assault on Gaza — new, bolder and potentially deadlier weapons are being rolled out by Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

The war — both wars, really — has to end, both quickly and fairly, a dual-reality being ignored as of this writing, as the debate gets refracted through the lens of world power-dynamics, President Donald Trump's bromance with Putin and the world's autocrats, and American domestic politics on the right and the left.

The international dynamics are clear — or should be. The war is an example of two things: The bullies have been unleashed and the world order is in a state of flux.

Great power no longer demands responsibility (to quote from "Spider-Man"), but is instead the demand itself. Those

with the bigger armies hold the cards, as Trump essentially told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

For Trump and his team, this means all diplomacy is a form of deal making designed to have winners (him) and losers rather than one in which everyone involved tries to find a solution that is both fair and long lasting. This is why his limited discussions with Ukraine have been more focused on extorting mineral wealth from the country than on finding a permanent solution both sides could live with.

Trump's extortion and general lack of concern for the rest of the world are symptoms, and not the cause, no matter how much we want to put the blame directly on him. The unraveling of the institutions built from the ashes of World War II and then retooled following the break up of the Soviet Union has been inevitable in many ways because many of these institutions were built to deal with Cold War realities.

Russia has always seen NATO as a direct threat (because it is in many ways), and each expansion of the original group has only reinforced that sense in Moscow. It sees NATO creeping closer to its borders in a way that, were it happening with a Russian alliance in Central America, would cause us to send troops. This is not conjecture. This is what much of the Reagan presidency entailed.

We are living in a wholly different reality and have been for the last 35 years, but in many ways we have sought to recreate the mechanisms and institutions we used during the Cold War to maintain an illusory exceptionalism that has finally and fully dissipated.

Putin's war against his neighbor has demonstrated the limits of a Western foreign policy that calls for the provision of weapons but not actual soldiers. (No, I am not advocating for "boots on the ground," just pointing out the limits of what always has been a contradiction.)

The war — and Trump's reaction to it — has also heightened divisions within the antiwar movement, fissures that have long existed but that now threaten our ability as peace activists to find a just ending to the bloodshed in Ukraine.

When Putin's forces entered Ukraine, I was concerned

that the war would be used to prop up military budgets and weapons sales. That has happened, as I said.

What I didn't see coming was the shifting of alliances, and the way some on the left have gravitated to Putin's side — trotting out an ornate set of mischaracterizations, mythologies and lies to rehabilitate Putin and undermine the Ukrainian defense efforts.

Much of this has been a social media thing, with some on the left arguing that the 2013-2014 Ukrainian crisis — known in Ukraine as the Maidan protests or the Revolution of Dignity — was part of a U.S. coup that topped a legitimate, if pro-Russian leader. They've trotted out the Ukraine=Nazi trop, one that has some historical legitimacy, but that unfairly relies on a small coterie of rightwing elements to undermine the legitimacy of Zelenskyy's election.

Zelenskyy is not perfect, and too many in the West have developed a kind of crush on him, investing him with superhuman powers. He's just a man, an elected politician, one who happens to be leading a war-ravaged nation that remains under assault.

But this is not about Zelenskyy. It is about legitimate suspicion of American malfeasance abroad, earned by decades of misadventures and nefarious actions by our intelligence agencies, of a realpolitik of power dressed up as virtue and all of that. I get why my left colleagues are suspicious, but I think they have been captured by their own paranoia — a phenomenon Naomi Klein describes in "Doppelgänger" in regard to the rightward shift and conspiracizing of so many former lefties and liberals.

This war needs to end and it needs to end quickly. But its end must not come at the expense of the Ukrainian people, which is where this seems to be going as I write this. A truce that does not include protections against future Russian incursion is not a truce at all.

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## Diseases: They're Baaaack

Welcome to the new horror show: Diseases-Zombies. They are baaaack. We can watch their progress in our communities, our hospitals, our schools. Government epidemiologists (if they still exist) can track their progression. But unlike the poltergeist of Tinseltown, this story has no rapid ending. And, unlike the moviegoers who spend 90 minutes shrieking at the havoc, we cannot exit our country as easily as we could leave the theater, returning to a poltergeist-free normal.

Measles is the first to emerge from the dog-eared tomes of history. We used to accept, and fear, measles as one of the unavoidable diseases of childhood. No cure. No treatment, other than palliative. Inevitable repercussions. Most children survive after a very unpleasant week; some need hospitalization; a few end up deaf or blind. And a statistical few die. Again, no way to offset the damage. Not super vitamins, fresh air, or sanitized sheets.

Science gave us a solution: vaccines. Once upon a time too-optimistic epidemiologists were ready to call measles extinct in this country. But when too many of us spurned vaccines as unnatural, potentially harmful, or a plot of Big Pharma, Measles, once thought dead, revived. To date, Measles has emerged in New Jersey and Texas; but it is among the most contagious of diseases. Expect more cases, more deaths.

Expect too a recurrence of some long-ago killers, once rarely seen. Measles can leave survivors with weakened immune systems, open to whooping cough (pertussis), diphtheria, tetanus. We can treat these with antibiotics, assuming parents identify the disease quickly, and quickly start antibiotics. Of course, that presupposes parents trust modern medicine enough to take their sick children to doctors, to give them antibiotics. Again, physicians used to routinely administer the DPT vaccines to children; but as anti-vaxxers demur, these Disease-Zombies will surely resurface.

Polio is the deadliest of the diseases. No cure. No treatment. Lifelong paralysis. Sometimes paralysis of the limbs; sometimes, of the lungs. Look up photos of iron lungs on the web. The World Health Organization (President Trump wants to withdraw this country's support) has been trying to eradicate polio. Parts of the globe still have cases: but the United States has been almost free for decades (except for one unvaccinated man in 2022). But if we lag in vaccinating our children, expect cases here.

We have other diseases that we can forestall with vaccines. Shingles, for instance, has no cure, no sure-fire treatment. Yet vaccines can tamp down the virulence, if not prevent the disease. Pneumonia is called an "old man's friend" because it can hasten the death of people who are very ill, on the shore of the river Styx. But pneumonia can also kill people who are relatively healthy. Add the flu to the list of Diseases invading the country. Vaccines are not perfectly calibrated to eradicate the flu, but can decrease the incidence, decrease the virulence.

These Diseases, moreover, wreak extraordinary havoc, not solely because they attack the unvaccinated, but because the diseases spread rapidly. People who are not fully vaccinated, people with compromised immune systems, people unlucky enough to be near an infected person - all are vulnerable. A kindergartner with measles has exposed a class-

room, maybe the entire school. A barista with the flu can infect a lot of latte-drinkers. And, for those budget-crunchers among us, every disease costs money for hospital stays, for medications, for physician visits. We all pay for these outbreaks.

As for the bogey - it is helpful to blame some exogenous force - it is too easy to focus only on the "anti-vaxxers." They share the blame with a callous government that has pandered to them. I suspect that many of the public officials, from federal to state levels (even in Louisiana, which has stopped urging vaccinations) have seen that their children are vaccinated. Ditto for the officials allowing "philosophical objections" that make it easy for parents to send unvaccinated children to school. Have they let their own children go unvaccinated? The notion of substituting "informed consent" for pro-vaccination campaigns speaks to a popular libertarian mindset, placating those parents who don't trust physicians or their government.

But it is the government's job to protect all of us. Letting unvaccinated children into schools, on playgrounds, at day care centers puts at risk other children. A voting majority of us dismiss government as irrelevant, wasteful, inefficient, trusting Elon Musk to pare all those employees doing they don't know what. We must shrink Uncle Sam: they scream.

We shrink him at our peril, for Government today is the only force that can vanquish the Disease-Zombies running amok. Crucially, the job of government is to keep us safe. To cite Thomas Jefferson, "The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government." This President, with his anointing of a professed "anti-vaxxer" to lead the country's health department, is bent on destroying, not saving, life.

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## Viruses Make a Comeback

By SAM URETSKY

Years ago there was a series of childhood diseases, measles, mumps and chicken pox, and polio - viral diseases. The Region of the Americas was certified polio-free by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1994. The African region was certified free of wild poliovirus in 2020.

Measles was declared eliminated in the United States in 2000. But outbreaks still occur. Texas reported 146 measles cases, with 20% hospitalized and one death of an unvaccinated child. The majority of the cases were in Gaines County, which is home to a large unvaccinated Mennonite population. Other reported cases are in Alaska, California, Georgia, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York City and Rhode Island. There was one case in Kentucky - an adult who apparently contracted the disease in a gymnasium.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., recently confirmed as the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is an environmentalist, but also an antivaxxer. FactCheck.Org reported that Kennedy played a part in one of the worst measles outbreaks in recent memory. In 2018, two infants in Samoa died when nurses acci-

dentally prepared the combined measles, mumps and rubella, or MMR, vaccine with expired muscle relaxant rather than water. The Samoan government temporarily suspended the vaccination program, and anti-vaccine advocates - including Kennedy and his nonprofit organization - flooded the area with misinformation. A subsequent epidemic resulted in 83 deaths - mostly children under age 5.

More recently, in July 21, after RFK Jr. claimed he's never told people to avoid vaccination, CNN Facts First reported, "Kennedy's anti-vaccine record has been extensively documented. He has long pushed the debunked claim that there is a link between childhood vaccinations and autism. Among other things, he has also misstated the contents of vaccines, falsely claimed there is convincing evidence that the 1918 influenza pandemic and HIV both originated with vaccine research, and repeatedly touted misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines. In 2021, for example, he baselessly claimed that there had been a wave of "suspicious" deaths among seniors who had taken these vaccines." There is no evidence that HIV (AIDS) had no relationship to vaccine research.

Sen. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii) underscored RFK Jr.'s troubling record as Schatz on Feb. 12 urged his colleagues to vote against RFK Jr. in the confirmation vote. A day later the Senate voted to confirm Kennedy as Health and Human Services secretary, a victory for President Donald

Trump. The vote was essentially along party lines, although Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky once again joined with Democrats to oppose the nomination. McConnell, who is not seeking re-election, has voted against three of Trump's Cabinet nominees, more than any other Republican senator. The others McConnell opposed are Pete Hegseth as defense secretary and Tulsi Gabbard as director of national intelligence.

Senator McConnell described his experience as a survivor of childhood polio in a statement explaining his opposition to Kennedy. "This Administration - led by the same President who delivered a medical miracle with Project Warp Speed [development of the COVID 19 vaccine] - deserves a leader who is willing to acknowledge without qualification the efficacy of life-saving vaccines and who can demonstrate an understanding of basic elements of the U.S. healthcare system."

During the hearings, McConnell said, "Kennedy denied being anti-vaccine, telling senators instead that he is 'pro-safety.' He went on to say, 'I believe that vaccines play a critical role in health care.' But in a podcast in 2021, NBC reported Jan. 29, Kennedy said "We - our job is to resist and to talk about it to everybody. If you're walking down the street - and I do this now myself, which is, you know, I don't want to do - I'm not a busybody. I see somebody on a hiking trail carrying a little baby and I say to him, 'Better not get him vaccinated.' And he heard that from me. If he hears it from

10 other people, maybe he won't do it, you know, maybe he will save that child."

As head of the Health and Human Services, Kennedy said that the public health establishment is too focused on infectious diseases and wants to redirect resources toward panoply of problems he characterizes as the chronic disease epidemic, including obesity, diabetes, autism and mental illnesses. He blames them on greedy corporations, including drug companies that worry healthy Americans would be bad for their bottom line and food producers using harmful pesticides and additives.

While Kennedy promised that there would be mass firing as soon as he took office, and hundreds of employees at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration and the National Institutes of Health received termination letters the weekend after Kennedy's confirmation, NPR reported on March 4 an unknown number of CDC employees received an email saying their letters of termination were rescinded and "your physical and logical access has been restored and you are cleared to return to work on Wednesday, March 5, 2025." It added, "We apologize for any disruption that this may have caused."

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## Haake...

*Continued from page 13*

determined that the government's justifications were "not compelling" enough because, on balance, the overall effect was to chill the political speech of corporations, organizations, and the wealthy, resulting in both speaker and viewpoint discrimination.

The problem with CU's rationale is that, when applied in today's media setting, it discriminates against the viewpoints of everyone else. When the world's richest man spent \$44 billion to purchase a social media platform to amplify his own political views, he chilled the free political speech of everyone else. Ditto when he spent an additional \$288 million to get Trump elected, largely through disinformation. When Trump promised fossil fuel giants who donated \$1 billion to his campaign that he would gut environmental laws as their payback, he chilled the free speech of everyone who depends on clean air and water but can't pony up a cool billion.

As Justice John Paul Stevens wrote in his dissent, CU represented "a rejection of

the common sense of the American people, who have recognized a need to prevent corporations from undermining self government."

## Musk is a walking poster boy for overturning CU

CU, in short, allowed Musk to purchase his co-presidency. Musk is now gutting agencies that previously regulated his corporate conduct; soon there will be no government agency left to regulate pollution by Space X, or to audit Starlink in Ukraine, or to check Musk's plans to expand X into an "everything app" for banking and financial services.

Seeking to throw millions of federal workers into unemployment, Musk calls them "parasites," undeserving recipients of government funding. By his own measure, however, Musk himself is the US' biggest parasite, having received over \$38 billion in subsidies, loans, contracts, and tax credits backed by the federal government. He used tax dollars to become the richest man

in the world, and now seeks to cut the most basic services—including health care—for the little people who subsidized his way.

The fox is not just in the henhouse, he is building a fortress around it so he can eat every last hen without interference, starving fox colonies outside the fortress be damned.

## We have reached the terminus stage under CU

That Republicans are too terrified to stop Trump, who is now aiding and giving comfort to the enemy, illustrates the danger in allowing outside wealth to dictate the outcome of federal elections.

Despite Fox News' claims to the contrary, this is the not the America we want or voted for, and it's not the America our grandfathers fought for. CU has brought us to the end stage of a free democracy, as Trump deliberately inches the world closer to WWII.

At a meeting last month with governors in the White House, Trump pointedly

attacked Maine's Gov. Janet Mills, threatening to cut Maine's federal funding if she didn't comply with his policies, prompting Mills to shoot back, "See you in court." Trump, secure in the knowledge under CU that Musk's money would defeat Mills in the next election, snapped, "Enjoy your life after governor, because I don't think you'll (ever) be in elected politics (again)."

If preserving our system of democratic governance isn't a more compelling governmental interest than letting rich men control the debate, nothing is.

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# WAYNE O'LEARY

## Banana Republicans

*"Congress can't do anything except complain." — Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa)*

The latest dictionaries define a "banana republic" as a small, dependent country, usually in the tropics, run despotically. That describes the entity known as the congressional Republican Party; it's dependent (on Donald Trump), and it's run despotically (to suit Donald Trump), its members having been reduced to debasing themselves to stay in the good graces of the White House. Let's call them Banana Republicans.

As Trump and his acolyte Elon Musk proceed on their mission to destroy the federal government, so that it can't tax or regulate the billionaires and the corporations, there's no pushback from ruling Republicans in the Senate or House of Representatives. Under Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-S.D.) and House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.), the dismantling of congressionally authorized agencies, the illegal firing of public workers, and the abrogation of Congress' constitutional power of the purse have produced no GOP resistance whatever; the majority members of one coequal branch of government sit in silence as the executive of another (and his smirking enforcer) terrorize official Washington to root out highly exaggerated "waste, fraud and abuse."

It's tempting to chalk this behavior up to weak leadership from Thune and Johnson, who've been ineffectual figures their entire careers, and to their outright fear of Trump and his MAGA followers. Political

cowardice is certainly a large part of the problem; these two sycophants have groveled before the bully Trump from the start. But what's transpiring goes beyond mere wimpish behavior.

The truth is the GOP congressional majority secretly likes what Trump is doing; they need little encouragement to assume the fetal position. As I suggested in a previous column (2/1/25 *TPP*), hatred of government (the military excepted) has been part of the Republican DNA for eons (actually, since the party evolved from antislavery radicalism to big-business conservatism during the Gilded Age). Proposals to shrink government and eliminate its programs invariably have GOP support. That's why Americans should be aware of what's on the party's upcoming agenda, which despite denials involves so-called entitlement reform.

The Republican Party's Project 2025 has openly called for reversing the Biden-era initiative that permits Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices and has likewise endorsed aggressively directing retirees into expensive and restrictive private, for-profit Medicare Advantage plans — in effect, exacting benefit cuts. Project 2025 also advocates postponing by several years the age at which seniors can apply for Social Security benefits, another indirect entitlement cut.

But the MAGAs will start with savaging means-tested Medicaid, which is less a pure entitlement than a joint state-federal health-insurance program for low-income Americans. The tentative GOP congressional budget would impose \$880 billion in Medicaid cuts. Project 2025 suggests such means as setting a spending cap on the mostly federally funded program to limit payments per person and reducing enrollment by making eligibility requirements much harder to satisfy.

Rest assured, complementary cuts to Social Security and Medicare, as yet unspecified, are also on the way; they'll be needed to pay for extending the massive 2017 tax reductions for the wealthy and the

corporate sector demanded by Trump. That the compliant Banana Republicans in Congress will vote for this tradeoff is a given.

A brief journey back through history provides an instructive lesson in the enduring GOP attitude toward entitlements. It's been argued that major federal programs like Social Security and Medicare exist because "everyone," regardless of party, agreed to their enactment. That's historically inaccurate. When Social Security was passed in 1935, it was almost exclusively with Democratic votes. Republicans fought its creation tooth and nail inside congressional committees and only relented when the measure's popularity made more visible opposition politically suicidal.

The final votes for passage were 371 to 33 in the House and 76 to 6 in the Senate, but preliminary votes drew near-unanimous GOP opposition. Out of 19 Senate Republicans voting in committee, 12 were opposed, and all House Republicans except one voted on the floor of Congress to recommit the enabling legislation to committee. The party's rationale, of course, was that Social Security was "socialism," an opinion shared by organized business.

A year later, the 1936 Republican presidential campaign centered around continued opposition to the new entitlement. In October of that year, as Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. recounted in "The Politics of Upheaval" (1960), an activist group of conservative industrialists implemented a repeal strategy, one eagerly endorsed by the Republican National Committee; it included posting negative placards in manufacturing plants and inserting propaganda leaflets in workers' pay envelopes. The government was presumably appropriating employees' pay via the FICA tax, money they would never recover, for benefits they might never receive. Further, in an imaginary apocalyptic scenario, American workers would shortly face being fingerprinted, photographed and made to wear identifying dog tags.

The GOP's losing 1936 standard-bearer, Alf Landon, joined in the hysteria, calling Social Security "a cruel hoax," an unjust, unworkable and wasteful program leading to dangerous regimentation. Worse, the federal government would pry into the personal records of Americans, something Elon Musk and DOGE (not the Social Security Administration) are doing right now, with the approval of a Republican president and a Republican Congress.

Seventy years later, the Republicans, having failed to kill Social Security at birth, tried once more to cripple it as a social-insurance program. President George W. Bush, following the lead of his party's congressional leadership, attempted unsuccessfully to privatize it in 2005 as part of his so-called Ownership Society. In a scheme hatched by former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, federal payroll taxes would have been diverted to create investment accounts that retirees would then have used to gamble in the stock market, placing the entire system at the mercy of the marketplace. Thankfully, the plan went nowhere.

The GOP, which has never reconciled itself to the programs of the New Deal and Great Society, also tried to block Medicare. Republicans publicly opposing its creation in 1965 on the grounds it was socialist included Ronald Reagan, Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon. As with Social Security, Republicans voted against Medicare in committee (unanimously in the House of Representatives), then belatedly supported it in the light of day.

The Banana Republicans of the 119th Congress will certainly try again to undermine America's social-insurance programs, this time using the cover of Elon Musk's techie DOGE predators. Defenders had better be ready.

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## Supporting Empathy, Rejecting Apathy

By SETH SANDRONSKY

My parents, Alex and Sylvia, grew up as Jewish Americans in NYC during the Great Depression. The Bolshevik Revolution had in part shaped the tenor of that era, but socialism had been popular in the USA before this revolutionary change. In the depression era, FDR, responding to the working-class ferment that swept up folks like my mother and father, critiqued elites as economic royalists. Later as adults, my parents held labor union jobs and voted for Democrats, due in the main to the programs such as the National Labor Relations Act, Social Security and Unemployment Insurance. Consequently, they empathized with the downtrodden.

Empathizing for others, collectively, entered my consciousness as an elementary school student, thanks to the intersections of personal and political changes underway at the time. My parents divorced, casting me into a different social reality in the Whites-only suburb in which I grew up. Meanwhile, the efforts of non-White people to overcome their second-class status under Jim Crow, was plain as day. Alex and Sylvia opposed Jim Crow. I sensed the importance of supporting this struggle, and did so in my own way, with all the lack of grace at times befit that of a boy figuring out his place in the world.

I vividly recall some of the participants in the struggle for equality during the 1960s, from striking farm workers to Black radicals. I witnessed the former during public rallies for the United Farm Workers labor union at the state Capitol in Sacramento. A sense of solidarity with the UFW and their supporters washed over me while standing with my mother and sister, backing these essential workers whose daily toil ensures that everybody eats. Crowds had that kind of impact on me.

For every action there is a reaction. Reaganism, right out of California, where I grew up, was a reaction against radical pol-

itics of peace and social justice in the 1960s. Empathy for the less fortunate was the enemy of such right-wing politics, which rose as the postwar economy weakened. The Democratic Party of FDR became GOP-lite, not overnight, but imperceptibly, a little like the frog boiling in warming water.

My parents moved to the right, one more than the other, away from the Old Left of their youth. The social stability from union jobs and a shorter working day buckled among the working class. A new socioeconomic playbook rose. I became a recovering Democrat.

The DP, my parents' party, became what the late Glen Ford, editor of *The Black Agenda Report*, termed "the more effective evil," in talking left and walking right. His pointed description focused on those who vote Blue as choosing the lesser evil over the GOP, the White man's party, after LBJ's Great Society legislation. In my view, the two parties reflect a lack of choice, a political masquerade.

On that note, President Donald J. Trump, is a kind of culmination of this political abandonment of the working majority for the benefit of the sedentary minority. He has, successfully for the time being, tailored his appeal to voters sold out by one half of the country's political duopoly. There is resistance to his politics, I suggest in part, due to his and the GOP's cruelty and lack of empathy. Take the pushback from immigrant communities resisting ICE raids and federal workers facing mass firings under the Elon Musk-led DOGE dismantling of government spending and employment that fails to benefit millionaires and billionaires.

By the time of the 1990s, after Reagan's blame-the-government ideology spewed from the Heritage Foundation, launched with \$250 million from Joe Coors over a half century ago, my parents were in their golden years. President Clinton attacked the New Deal and Great Society policies with much success. No GOP politician could have outdone him. The political rhetoric praising meritocracy rose, threatening to eclipse the practice of empathy. Nonprofits grew in part as a reaction to the weakening of New Deal and Great Society

policies.

The forces of political reaction and transformation had profound impacts, vanquishing the Old Left and New Left. Nevertheless empathy as a human quality that ties humans together remains a force of power. Demonizing equality, immigrants and minorities in an era of economic instability growing daily has a limited shelf life, in my perspective.

Today I feel confident my parents would have resisted Project 2025, which is the latest chapter in scapegoating the Other, and restructuring government to serve the oligarchs such as Trump's biggest donors. Hate government, not the economic system, was and remains the corporate thesis of the Heritage Foundation. What Noam Chomsky calls a "corporate-run and propaganda managed society" is ripe for radical change starkly opposed to the Project 2025 playbook.

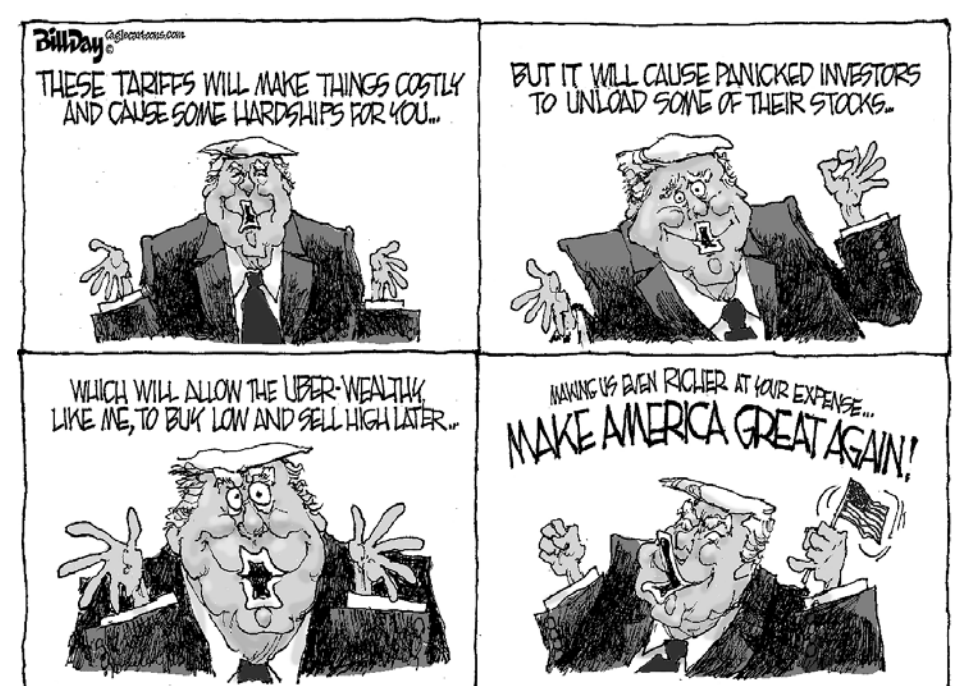
Empathy can empower actions to humanize a changing social order whereby the American empire loses its economic primacy and becomes a part of the multipolar world system. It is an inevitable process, as

night follows day and the seasons change. Evolution is baked into the natural and social order we inhabit.

Meanwhile in the USA, a proposed GOP budget puts access to healthcare on the chopping block for millions of children and low-wage workers receiving Medicaid. This is a strategy of cruelty to pay for extending Trump's tax cuts to millionaires and billionaires. This is also a politics of stupidity, as Steve Bannon notes, given there are scores of MAGA voters on Medicaid.

Accordingly, empathy is a, not the, solution to weaken an economics and politics of cruelty, whether in its DP or GOP forms. Therefore, expanding the quality of empathy is a next step of necessity. In the meantime, the forces of greed are trying to grab income and wealth from everyone else. Apathy enables that grab. Empathy weakens it. My parents would be on the side of the empathetic, as I am.

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# The West has Long Demanded of Palestinians what Trump Demanded of Ukraine – and More

By JUAN COLE

ANN ARBOR – David Smith of *The Guardian* reminds us that Donald Trump is a fan of World Wrestling Federation matches, in attempting to explain the sad spectacle at the White House on Feb. 28.

Trump is demanding that Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the president of Ukraine, “make peace” with Russia, accusing him of risking plunging the planet into WW III with his stand against the Russian invasion. Trump told Zelenskyy, “you’re either going to make a deal or we’re out.” He meant by “deal” acquiescing in the Russian annexation of the Donbass and neighboring regions of Ukraine.

Democrats denounced Trump and JD Vance for the clearly rehearsed ambush. Léonie Chao-Fong at *The Guardian* quoted Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) as saying of Zelenskyy, “Our country thanks HIM and the Ukrainian patriots who have stood up to a dictator, buried their own and stopped Putin from marching right into the rest of Europe.”

I don’t bring all this up to talk about the rights and wrongs of the Ukraine War. There are military analysts and political scientists who have argued for some time that given Russia’s advantages in size and manpower, an outright Ukrainian victory is unlikely.

That said, emboldening Vladimir Putin in this way is unwise, sort of like letting your rival at the poker table know you don’t have any face cards.

I would like to take the moment to point out that Trump’s demands of Ukraine are no different than the US and Western Europe’s demands of the Palestinians back in the 1990s, and that nowadays the West appears to expect the Palestinians simply to commit mass suicide.

Like Ukraine, Palestine was also invaded – in the latter case by the Zionist settler colonialists, who took possession of it and chased Palestinians out of their homeland. The newly dubbed Israelis expelled 57% of the Palestinian population from what became Israel, stealing their homes and farms and taking them for themselves. They even finished bringing in the crops the Palestinians had planted. Those Palestinian refugees were crowded into Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan and Lebanon in the main. Now the Israelis are coming after these refugees, expelling them once again.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has displaced 10.2 million Ukrainians, about 23% of the Ukrainian population as it stood before the war. So Ukrainians have suffered much less displacement than the Palestinians.

Moreover, in 1967 Israel invaded and

seized the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, occupying the Palestinians all over again, both the refugees settled there and the Palestinians who had lived in those territories before 1948. There were over 300,000 Palestinians from the West Bank working abroad when the Israeli troops marched in, and Israeli authorities locked them out of their country forever.

Since 2014, Russia has invaded and occupied 19% of Ukraine.

Israel took 78% of Palestine in 1948 by military conquest and through deliberate ethnic cleansing campaigns that included premeditated massacres of Palestinian villagers to spread panic.

So in 1993, the Palestine Liberation Organization did exactly what Trump is demanding Zelenskyy do. They relinquished any claim on the part of Palestine the immigrant European Jews had grabbed and turned into Israel, accepting 22% of the old colonial British Mandate of Palestine on which to establish a Palestinian state. Israel pledged to withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967, with a deadline of 1997. Benjamin Netanyahu derailed that plan completely, and the Palestinians received less than nothing for having given up so much.

Trump is demanding that Zelenskyy accept the equivalent of the 1993 Oslo Accords that were acquiesced in by the

Palestinians. Zelenskyy pointed out that Putin might do the deal but then renege, and Trump and Vance shouted him down. But that is exactly what the Israelis did.

Americans who feel that what Trump is asking Ukraine to do is unfair are suffering from a blind spot when it comes to the Palestinians. I don’t know if it is racism – that many Americans code Ukrainians as “White” and Palestinians as “Brown.” But many Americans cannot see the Palestinians, cannot empathize with them, cannot understand them as fellow human beings.

Now Trump is asking Palestinians to leave Gaza, one of the few bits of Palestine on which they still can live. It would be like asking 17 million Ukrainians permanently to pick up and go to Poland and other countries, giving up on Ukraine forever, and allowing Russian colonists to replace them. Even Trump isn’t asking that of the Ukrainians. Yet.

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## Try a Little Diplomacy

By JASON SIBERT

Many diplomats have stated that diplomacy is war by non-lethal means.

In her story, “The Art of Diplomacy,” writer Maher Randeria said: “Diplomacy is a delicate art. Contrary to the now widespread belief, it is not a weakness but the advantage of foresight. It is the heart of international relations and the soul of negotiation. However, its essence extends far beyond politics and world affairs. At its core, diplomacy is the practice of tact and strategic communication; an art that fosters understanding, minimizes conflict, and seeks mutually beneficial solutions. Aurea mediocritas, the golden mean, the sweet spot where all involved parties can benefit from effective problem-solving.”

Diplomacy is crucial in resolving conflicts with your peers and those around you. Whether navigating tense workplace dis-

agreements, handling delicate family matters, or simply engaging in social discourse, maintaining a diplomatic approach allows everyone to express their opinions and concerns. It’s easy to escalate situations until there’s one prevailing voice. It’s quicker and, at times, rather practical. This is where democracy and diplomacy feed off of each other. While democracy thrives in open discourse and debate, diplomacy refines that discourse into solutions, held accountable to all the parties it is meant and made to serve.

But democracy is not a battlefield where only one side wins, as it is a dialogue, a negotiation, and a careful balancing of interests. Without diplomacy, democracy risks becoming a vile screaming ground; without democracy, diplomacy risks losing its integrity. If you do not believe in the value of a diplomatic approach, here are some big-picture consequences. Randeria talked about the poison our politics: “The rise of political hyper-partisanship, polarization in the House of Representatives, and the abrasive erosion of civil discourse have led to a derisive and frighteningly unpredictable po-

litical climate where discourse is underscored by outright biased confrontation and personal attacks, both on social media and in real life. This unwillingness to compromise and engage in diplomatic practices has caused significant harm, creating an increasingly fractured society.”

From an internationalist standpoint, a shift away from diplomatic relationships towards aggressive and isolationist policies, where nationalistic ideas are favored over patriotic duty, strains alliances, look at the backlash over Vice-President JD Vance’s speech in Europe. The Treaty of Versailles in 1919, which used punishing measures rather than reconciliation, was one of the causes of World War II. The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 became a crisis due to the severe lack of diplomatic agreement that nearly ended in nuclear catastrophe. It should be noted that the Cold War only began to de-escalate with sustained negotiations like the Sustained Arms Reductions Treaties.

The problem with applying diplomatic principles in today’s political environment is

the rise of right-wing populism: Donald Trump (US), Marine Le Pen (France), Nigel Farage (UK), Alice Weidel (Germany), and others. The right-wing populists of the world often make concessions to Russia in foreign policy, Italy’s Giorgia Meloni is an exception. In addition to making concessions to an international outlaw that sets poor norms (Russia), these leaders are so beholden to nationalism that it prevents cooperation, the foundation of diplomacy. These movements are also shaky regarding democratic norms in their own countries, a domestic version of diplomacy. It doesn’t matter whether it’s domestic policy or foreign policy, right-wing populists see little need for cooperation.

What’s the answer? It’s very simple. A revival of democratic norms and diplomatic principles at home and in other countries. In other words, a political defeat of right-wing populism. Can this be done? I guess history will write the story.

*Jason Sibert of St. Louis, Mo., is the Lead Writer for the Peace Economy Project. Email jasonsibert@hotmail.com.*

## Stop the Weaponization of Humanitarian Aid

***I’m a proud Jewish American who helps fundraise for Palestinian refugees. My faith – and international law – demand an immediate resumption of aid in Gaza.***

By MARA KRONENFELD

Israel’s assault on Gaza, with backing from the United States, has created one of the worst humanitarian crises on the planet. Now Israel is violating a hard-won ceasefire deal by refusing to admit all aid into Gaza.

The Israeli government also passed legislation recently to outlaw UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. This is an outrageous violation of international law that will only lead to more suffering.

UNRWA was established by the United Nations in 1949 to alleviate the “the conditions of starvation and distress” of more than 750,000 Palestine refugees forcibly displaced by the establishment of Israel in 1948. It was intended to be temporary, pending “a just and durable solution to their plight.”

But in the stubborn absence of a political solution, UNRWA has continued to help Palestinian refugees over the last 75 years. Today, Israel’s ban on UNRWA threatens to cripple the humanitarian response in Gaza. It will deprive millions of Palestine refugees of essential food assistance, along with education and health care.

In Gaza, Israel’s deliberate weaponization of starvation has left 345,000 people facing catastrophic food insecurity. Over 90% of children aged 6-23 months, along with pregnant and breastfeeding women, are facing “severe food poverty.” Innocent people, including children, continue to die from hunger and malnutrition by being denied the most basic assistance: food.

I’m the executive director of the UNRWA USA National Committee – and a proud Jewish American.

My grandfather escaped Nazi Germany while his sister and her family were murdered for being Jewish. My family knows firsthand what it’s like when the suffering and deaths of some innocents are mourned and not others – and how that’s contributed to a world in which innocents can be killed en masse and we are silenced into not objecting.

Indeed, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, and many genocide scholars, even some inside Israel itself, have called Israel’s war on Gaza a genocide. We see the attacks on UNRWA – including the killing of 275 UNRWA staff members during this war – as part of that assault.

Rarely do governments baselessly attack and smear humanitarian workers with decades of service, as this Israeli government has. But these abuses, along with other propaganda efforts intended to intimidate and harass critics into silence, are well funded efforts to distract us from the brutality of the crimes being committed in Gaza, with total impunity, under our watch.

Unfortunately, the U.S. has supported these actions – by first pausing and ultimately ending all funding to UNRWA under the Trump administration.

But this cruelty doesn’t speak for the American people. Ordinary Americans have courageously stepped up to support suffering innocent people, donating over \$56 million in life-saving critical humanitarian aid to Gaza through UNRWA USA while our own government has sadly stepped down from its humanitarian duty.

My Jewish faith demands that I play my

part in repairing the world. To defend the hate and killing that I see everyday is actually the most antisemitic and immoral position I could hold. I hope one day UNRWA can be dissolved because peace makes their work no longer necessary – but not because an extremist government unlawfully tries to shut it down.

This is why I ask all compassionate Americans to join UNRWA USA in standing against Israel’s outrageous and unjust ban. Let’s raise our voices in declaring “hands off UNRWA” and demand an immediate resumption of aid to protect the precious lives of children and their families in Gaza.

*Mara Kronenfeld is Executive Director of the UNRWA USA National Committee (online at unrwauusa.org), a separate but affiliated non-profit to UNRWA that mobilizes U.S. support for the agency’s mission. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*



# Musk Acting Fast as Trump's Macbeth

By JAMIE STIEHM

**I**f it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly." - William Shakespeare, "Macbeth"

"Quickly" is the key word for Macbeth as he muses before the bloody murder of King Duncan of Scotland. He must do the deed with his dagger by night, while the court sleeps. Act now or not at all.

"Quickly" is the passcode for Elon Musk — or Musk — as he acts as henchman for the man who would be king, President Donald Trump. The federal government is under a ruthless siege like thunder, lightning and rain — so swiftly that it's hard to arrest or even protest the process.

Thousands in the federal workforce had no reason to brace for mass layoffs one month into Trump's reign. They have families and mortgages, a stable economy, last they looked. Dedicated career public servants, specialists in their fields, they don't deserve such brutal firings.

The new FBI director is threatening to uproot and reassign agents all over the

country to decentralize law enforcement.

Awakening Americans are now full of sound and fury at a brash South African brandishing a dagger to government professions in the dead of the night.

Musk's foul murder is in plain air and sight, often by email. He is orchestrating layoffs, cutting the life out of the Treasury, Pentagon, Justice Department, National Institutes of Health, the IRS in tax season, you name it.

It's unprecedented (or "unpresidential") to fire C.Q. Brown Jr. as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — on a shabby phone call while he's on the southern border late on Friday. Yes, shabby. Trump didn't even do it himself.

But make no mistake, Trump is loving every minute of it. Roy Cohn, his mentor and former Sen. Joseph McCarthy's lawyer, would be so proud of him. (Remember, McCarthy went on a rampage against the State Department.)

In Musk, Trump's found a new match, a marriage of true minds. Making people suffer is their greatest pleasure. The Germans have a word for their shared trait: schadenfreude.

Trump sees Musk, along with his explosive new helpers like Pete Hegseth, defense secretary, and Kash Patel, FBI director,

as clearing the way for a complete and hostile takeover of the American government. Only fierce loyalists with no call to conscience need apply to the top of the court.

Farmers, many of you voted for the man, and now your crop exports for humanitarian food relief around the globe have been cut off as the U.S. Agency for International Development closed abruptly.

You thought Trump was your friend, with his trash talk about diversity, equity and inclusion. But agriculture is far from this cunning Copperhead New Yorker's mind. All he really wants is absolute power and more tax cuts for the richest among us — (and Ukraine's minerals). Rural red states shall soon feel duped.

The really bad news is that Trump does not care about public opinion or polls this time around. He's not up for reelection. Yet he's transparent in thinking about breaking the Constitution and "serving" past two terms.

Musk is our Macbeth, sprung from a land that enforced White supremacy and apartheid and locked up Nelson Mandela for 27 years. He is an immigrant who should be rounded up and deported for the harm he has done to the American body politic.

No private citizen has ever had the au-

thority and a free hand — to wield a dagger.

Shakespeare's worst villain, Macbeth, had pangs of remorse. Musk has none for the lives he is displacing and darkening, nor for the republic writ large.

For those who fell under the surprise attack in Trump's first month, I urge you to act like you're part of a guild or a union. Collective action in the public eye, joining different departments together, builds bonds and speaks to what's going on.

That is the formula for peaceful resistance: Make yourselves seen and heard in large gatherings that make bold statements and invite others in.

Layoffs separate you from contact with each other, meaning that networks will have to rise from scratch.

Above all, don't despair. As the poet Audre Lorde wrote of self-preservation, "that is an act of political warfare."

Let's not let America become a tragedy of Shakespearean proportions.

*Jamie Stiehm is a former assignment editor at CBS News in London, reporter at The Hill, metro reporter at the Baltimore Sun and public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. She is author of a new play, "Across the River," on Aaron Burr. See JamieStiehm.com.*

# What We Can Learn From Green Acres

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

**B**efore arriving in Portugal in February, I didn't know the name of the country's prime minister, Luis Montenegro; or the president, Marcelo Nuno Duarte Rebelo de Sousa; or the leaders of the two major parties, the ruling Socialist Party (Partido Socialista), Pedro Nuno Santos, and right-wing Enough (Chega), André Ventura; or the president of the Supreme Court of Justice, Henrique Luis de Brito de Araújo.

Or that I was in the Third Portuguese Republic.

(The First Republic ended in 1926 when a military coup established an authoritarian government called Estado Novo, led by António de Oliveira Salazar until 1968, then taken over by Marcelo Caetano. That was the Second. In 1974, a mostly bloodless coup — called the "Carnation Revolution" because of the use of the carnation on soldiers' rifles as a symbol of peace — ushered in this, the Third. If you're ever on *Jeopardy!* all this might come in handy.)

While doing stand-up comedy during the George H.W. Bush administration, I heard a comedian ask a crowd if it knew the names of the Cabinet secretaries.

Nobody did.

He started humming the theme from *Green Acres*.

Everyone started singing along.

Darling, I love you, but give me Park Avenue.

The comedian then said to the crowd, "That's how Hitler did it."

The arrogant feed on the ignorant.

I came to Portugal because I sensed it was safer and healthier and had fewer people with enough firearms to invade neighboring Spain. I'm sure there are Portuguese who would say to me, and to my desire to bathe in superficiality and public relations, "Tire a cabeça da sua bunda." ("Take your head out of your ass.")

Which is what many of us want to say to the Trump supporter.

In 1960, John Steinbeck, in a piece for *Esquire* titled "A Primer on the Thirties," wrote, "Except for the field organizers of strikes, who were pretty tough monkeys and devoted, most of the so-called Communists I met were middle-class, middle-aged people playing a game of dreams. I remember a woman in easy circumstances saying to another even more affluent: 'After the revolution even we will have more, won't we, dear?' Then there was another lover of proletarians who used to raise hell with Sunday picnickers on her property. I guess the trouble was that we didn't have any self-admitted proletarians. Everyone was a temporarily embarrassed capitalist."

There's also a line attributed to Mark Twain, from 1888: "It's easier to fool people than to convince them that they have been fooled."

During the past 40 years, the greatest trick the Republican Party pulled on the American people was convincing enough of us that our problems were not caused by the Elon Musks of the world but by the fashionable woman at the Kroger checkout line who was using a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program card (SNAP), caused by those who want to take down Confederate flags and change the name of Columbus Day, caused by women who, because of interference with their lifestyles, kill innocent children who just happen to be in their uteri. If you're a temporarily embarrassed capitalist, you're struggling not

because of Musk and Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg and insurance companies and hydrocarbon extractors, but because taxpayers bought Oreos for that woman at Kroger.

I have friends in same-sex marriages who are afraid their marriages will be soon be dissolved. I want to tell them states won't do that, the Supreme Court won't do that, the American people won't stand for that.

But I can't.

Everyone outraged by that prospect is already outraged, just as everyone who's outraged by pregnant women dying in hospital parking lots because doctors won't perform life-saving procedures is already outraged, just as everyone who's outraged by GOP politicians forcing public-school children to hear instruction that Jesus is Lord over America is already outraged.

Many Americans are sufficiently chagrined and apoplectic — it's just that there aren't enough of us who are. Maybe it's because there aren't enough of us who can't find a gynecologist who will perform a D&C for fear of losing his or her license, or enough of us working for USAID, or enough of us worried about being rounded up by ICE officials.

We used to do empathy better.

Can you imagine in today's America where a Joseph Welch, he who confronted Sen. Joseph McCarthy, would ask, "Have you no decency, sir, at long last?"

Can you imagine in today's America where Donald Trump asks Americans to sacrifice to help save Europe?

Please.

We can't get people to wear masks in the waiting rooms of infectious-disease clinics and our vice president is telling leaders of Germany's Nazi-channeling AfD that they are that country's only hope.

Even if Trump declares martial law, or invades Mexico, or imprisons Joe Biden and Jimmy Kimmel, many of us will still be able to go out to dinner, even if the Peruvian chef who made it for us is being escorted out in zip ties.

Target will be open and we'll be able to check Facebook.

This is the second time Donald Trump has been empowered to hit a button and get a Diet Coke from the Oval Office.

This is the second time we haven't dodged this particular bullet.

The president of the United States made a fool of himself in front of the Ukrainian president, and Elon Musk has made, according to the *Washington Post*, \$38 billion in government contracts, loans, subsidies, and tax credits. But somewhere someone had a student loan forgiven. Somewhere someone is teaching a course on the history of the Palestinians. Somewhere there's a book in a library about a family with two daddies.

Selective outrage, American-style.

Many of us watched *Green Acres* and felt some kind of kinship, affection for Sam Drucker, who owned the general store; Hank Kimball, the county agricultural agent; and Fred Ziffel, the farmer. We should have paid closer attention to the America that wanted to be Mr. Haney.

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

See [barryfriedman.com](http://barryfriedman.com) and [friedmanoftheplains.com](http://friedmanoftheplains.com).

## EDGE OF SPORTS/Dave Zirin

# Linda McMahon's Only Qualification as Education Secretary Is a History of Spreading Hate

*Even in Trump's cabinet of hucksters, reality-show stars, and drunk White nationalists, Linda McMahon is a bizarre choice for education secretary.*

**T**he first Major League Baseball player to break the color line was Jack Roosevelt Robinson in 1947. The first Black man, in the restricted, country club world of golf, to play in the Masters was Lee Elder in 1975.

The first Black man's win of the World Wrestling Federation championship was in 1997, when the biracial charisma-machine Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson took the belt. It would not happen again for another Black wrestler until 2019, when the title adorned the waist of Kofi Kingston. The longtime fan favorite was then squashed in eight seconds by German American Übermensch Brock Lesnar and never got a rematch. This backstage decision was widely perceived as humiliating to Kingston and a slap in the face to fans and Black wrestlers who were literally crying with joy when Kofi was crowned.

In the world of sports entertainment, where outcomes are scripted, the most common role for Black wrestlers had always been minstrelsy: Ugandan headhunters, "voodoo practitioners" holding human skulls, and a Black woman named Sapphire. (The "Sapphire caricature" is a minstrel trope from the early 20th century, so none of this was subtle.)

Much ink has been spilled about the history of WWE's rank racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism. In these analyses, the blame for their constant commodified mockery of marginalized groups has been put upon the shoulders of "the Boss": the alleged sex-trafficker, rapist, and friend of Donald Trump Vince McMahon. (The racism at WWE also was never just in front of the cameras. According to a recent lawsuit, it flourished behind the scenes as well.)

But Vince McMahon conveniently obscures the role of the company's former longtime CEO who operated largely—if not always—off-camera, Linda McMahon. Every bit of racist bile spewed by this company had her stamp of approval. She also held the alleged job of covering up the numerous allegations of gender violence levied against her husband. (Federal prosecutors quietly dropped the charges against Vince on Feb. 14, which I'm sure was done in the interests of justice and had nothing to do with Trump's seizure of the Justice Department.)

Today, Linda McMahon is, of course, Trump's Secretary of Education. Even in this cabinet of hucksters, reality-show stars, and drunk White nationalists, it's a bizarre choice. Not only does she know nearly nothing about basic

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## Trump's Autocratic Moves Toward Corporate Fascism

Trump has mused publicly about his fondness for Viktor Orbán, Hungary's "elected" dictator, and how he accomplished commanding control over his people. Trump and his loyal Trumpeteer and Musketeer cohorts are taking an American-style approach, step by faster step, far ahead of the conventional resistance.

Step One is to announce that you are a STRONGMAN ruling by largely unlawful Executive Orders and ignoring the laws that demand congressional action.

Step Two is to dominate the news cycle and expand your own "news" media, such as Trump's for-profit company Truth Social. Trump is a juggernaut of declarations, attacks on perceived opponents or "woke" activity, and he lies about conditions in the country and the world, and more lies about his false successes. He has regular meetings at the White House with apprehensive reporters who know they are getting played, but relay his sound bites, often unrebuted to the people (such as his false outbursts about U.S. AID's activities abroad).

Step Three is to always be on the offensive and never admit mistakes or to being wrong or ignorant about anything. This puts the resistance on the defensive, reacting instead of proactively keeping Trump off balance.

This tactic is working to keep the hapless Democrats still in disarray, like "deer-in-the-headlights." This freeze led to the Democrats' ignominious defeat on Nov. 5 by the most politically vulnerable GOP presidential candidate ever.

The Democrats blew an opportunity to use the two-month interregnum between the election and Trump's inauguration to hold public hearings in the Senate laying down challenges on very popular agendas opposed by the GOP (to raise the minimum wage, expand the child tax credit, increase social security benefits frozen for over 40 years, tax the under-taxed, sometimes zero-taxed, super rich and giant corporations, and crack down on corporate crooks exploiting consumers and workers, especially on health insurance and credit transactions.) Instead, the Democrats disgracefully took their vacations and departed with a whimper on Jan. 20.

Step Four is to push ferociously plutocratic redirection, disruptions and suspensions of federal agencies so as to benefit enriching the super-rich like Musk and Trump. This means firing the law enforcers against corporate crime, such as major contracting fraud, and stealing from Medicare, Medicaid, and the bloated defense budget.

Step Five is to redirect massive monies (such as from Medicaid) from America's social safety net to pay for even more military dollars and tax cuts for the rich and big corporations than Trump gave them in 2017. These cuts were never seriously challenged by the Biden Administration or Congressional Democrats like House Ways and Means Chair Rep. Richard Neal (D-Mass.). This brazen move is so cruel that some GOP Congressional toadies are beginning to quiver since many Medicaid recipients were Trump voters and people are turning out at crowded town meetings to loudly berate the surprised Republicans.

Step Six is to deeply consolidate Der Fuhrer's power inside government and outside countervailing forces. Trump fired top military generals without cause, pushed out the chief lawyers for the three military services and replaced them with heel-clicking loyalists ready to obey any illegal order in violation of the Nuremberg rules. Remember that the unstable Trump has his finger on the nuclear trigger.

Throwing out competent civil servants in agencies dedicated to helping Americans in need (Meals on Wheels, Head Start) and replacing them with clenched-teeth Trumpers now wrecking or illegally closing down federal agencies (such as the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau) devoted to auto safety, airline safety,

workplace safety, environmental, climate, health protection, pandemic preparedness, and consumer protection from relentless profiteering, and protection of fair labor standards and practices.

Step Seven is using the withholding of federal grants and spewing of propaganda to reduce important research and free speech on university and college campuses, intimidating and suing the corporate owners of the mainstream media to get in line or else face exclusion from the White House press corps and face FCC investigations of the radio and TV business, including NPR and PBS.

Who's left, you might say, to stop Trump, who is on the road to a deep corporate fascist state?

The answer is: THE PEOPLE, taking their sovereign power under the Constitution to protest with specific demands, and to fully use the courts, give backbone to the media and launch a giant "You're Fired" march on Washington in the Spring for a groundswell behind Impeachment. Trump is harming all Americans — Red State, Blue State, conservatives and liberals which can bring together a left/right movement changing Congress in the 2026 elections.

He is rescinding huge grants on renewable energy projects mostly going to Red States. He is canceling or suspending millions of government contracts to small business contractors or subcontractors. He is unemploying thousands of their workers every day, fueling inflation with steep tariffs, shaking the stock markets, fomenting chaos, anxiety and dread through American households and the business community itself.

Will Trump get away with what he is wrecking and self-enriching? Trump and his crew of demolitionists, led by the Musk and his poisonous Tusks recognize no boundaries, no legal or moral limits. My sense is NO. This guess is based on the immediate energy, courage and smart defiance by the growing resistance from all backgrounds around the country. Time is of the essence before the next step toward a dangerous police state arrives.

### A Clarion Call for Large, Organized Rallies Back Home

Critical protective lifelines are being eliminated in all states, red and blue, endangering the health, safety, and economic, well-being of Americans — workers, small business, the elderly, the infirm, the children, the air, water, and undermines protection against rising epidemics and violent climate damage to communities. TRUMP/MUSK are slashing emergency services provided by our federal workers from the FAA to FEMA to EPA the monitoring of dangerous hotspots of toxic chemicals.

TRUMP/MUSK are already unlawfully violating contracts and cutting off millions dollars in federal payments for small business contractors. This, of course, harms the workers in these firms. Efforts for cleaner air and water, and key farm programs are being dismantled.

To enrich themselves and other billionaires, TRUMP/MUSK are cutting thousands of skilled IRS investigators focused on big-time tax evasion by the Super-Rich. There is a criminally insane takeover of our government that every day is dictating, without Congressional authority, deadly actions that amount to a dictatorship. TRUMP/MUSK are the "an enemy of the people." This is not what Trump supporters voted for. They did not vote for a Kleptocracy that goes after people's programs and that does nothing to stop the hundreds of billions of dollars of corporate welfare, corporate crime against US taxpayers (such as fraud inflicted on Medicare and Medicaid),

*Continued on page 21*

## TED RALL

### The Incredible Vanishing Liberals

For this essay, let's not debate the pros and cons of our new old president. Detailing specific reasons that many Americans are upset with/scared of/annoyed by President Donald Trump and the Republican Party would be a distraction from a point that desperately needs to be made. Suffice it to say, millions of people are angry, disappointed and would prefer entirely different political policies and priorities out of Washington.

The fact that we should linger upon is this: Many, many liberals feel very, very impotent. And this should be a major cause of concern.

When Republicans celebrate their win by mocking their opponents, they're whistling past the small-d democratic graveyard of history. Winning an election is good. Crushing your opponents' political will to live is dangerous.

For liberals, there is a lot not to like about politics since Jan. 20. Trump has signed a blizzard of sweeping executive orders on myriad controversial issues. His administration is attempting a radical revamp of the relationship between the American people and their government, much of it carried out by a brash "break things, move fast" tech-bro billionaire. Given the high stakes and the polarizing nature of the issues involved, and that Trump's approach is so radical, resistance should be expected from both Democratic politicians on high and street demonstrations from the grassroots.

Instead, Democrats at all levels have been compliant and largely silent. Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, a centrist Democrat, complains: "(Congressional Democrats) are failing to do what is their fundamental responsibility constitutionally — to be a check." Republicans barely control the Senate, yet all of Trump's nominees have been approved. Democrats even voted unanimously to support a far-right neocon, Marco Rubio, as secretary of state.

Activists have been passive. There have only been sporadic protest marches. Trump's proposal to annex and ethnically cleanse Gaza, a would-be war crime, elicited little measurable reaction from the anti-imperialist Left, certainly no protests analogous in size to last year's pro-Palestinian campus protests. Compared to the antiwar movement of the 1960s and similar demonstrations opposing Ronald Reagan, attendance at marches has been anemic. Seven out of 10 Democrats are tuning out political news. Liberal-leaning cable news networks CNN and MSNBC have seen their ratings plummet and are shaking up their lineups.

Democratic donors, taking note of the disarray, are closing their checkbooks. "(Democrats) want us to spend money, and for what? For no message, no organization, no forward thinking," a donor told *The Hill*.

When a substantial portion of a republic's population believes there is nothing it can do to influence political leaders, the system is in trouble.

With Trump barely a month into his second term, history may record Democrats' current beaten-down-dog mien as a momentary blip preceding a spurt of determined reenergization and a journey to recovery, reinven-

tion and future victory. A devastating 1964 defeat left the GOP crestfallen and depressed. "Barry Goldwater not only lost the presidential election yesterday but the conservative cause as well. He has wrecked his party for a long time to come and is not even likely to control the wreckage," James Reston wrote in *The New York Times* on Nov. 4, 1964.

He was wrong. Ray Bliss, chair of the Republican National Committee from 1965 to 1969, led the GOP out of the wilderness by patching up ideological divides and organizing at the local level. Nixon won in 1968 — barely — and in a landslide in 1972. Ronald Reagan shaped much of the way government looks today.

But Democrats don't seem likely to pull off such a trick. As they say in 12-step programs, the first step is admitting you have a problem. The party is addicted to campaign contributions from corporations like Big Pharma and Big Tech who influence it against doing much to appeal to the working-class voters they need to win elections and who are migrating to Trump and the Republicans. But there's no evidence they see that as a problem. Some top Democrats want to wean themselves off big corporate money by adopting Sen. Bernie Sanders' proven small-contributor model, but the only suggestion we've heard from new Democratic National Committee chair Ken Martin is that the party needs more and better messaging.

"We also need to give people a sense of who we are as Democrats, what we believe in and what we're fighting for," Martin said on Feb. 17. While Democrats say they oppose Trump, they don't seem to believe in much at all. They're not fighting, whether for or against anything. Don't take my word for it. Listen to them: "The courts," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer says, "are the first line of defense" against Trump.

What of the Senate, where Democrats hold seven more seats than needed to jam up legislation with filibusters? They're abdicating their checks and balances to the judiciary.

If you're a liberal voter, the ideological battlefield currently looks like the Ukrainians' situation. You keep losing. You're deploying the same old failed strategies and tactics. No new miracle weapons are coming. There's no reason to think that anything will improve.

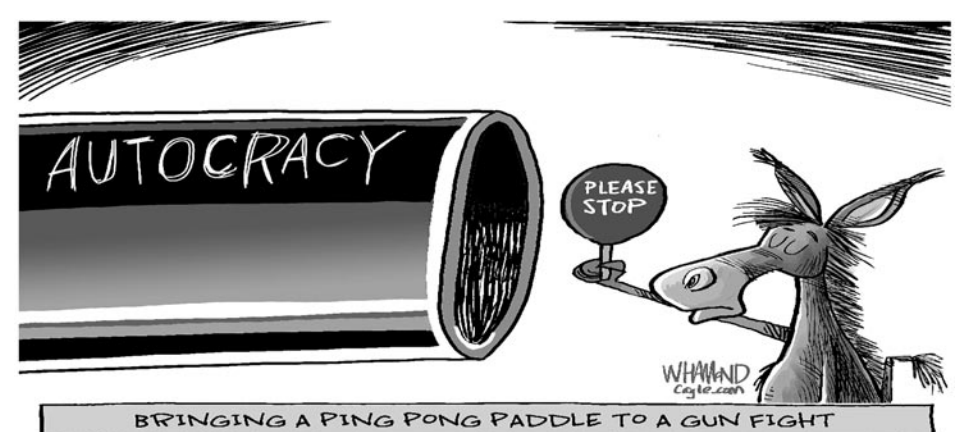
Liberals see that there's no hope. So they're alienated and checked out.

So Trump runs wild and the streets remain empty.

If you're conservative, the prospect of a Great Liberal Vanishing should spook you. In late-stage Rome, citizens got tired of politics and allowed themselves to be distracted by bread and circuses. The Republic slid into autocracy. German liberals disengaged from Weimar Republican politics as the Social Democratic Party, the dominant left-leaning party at the time, governed in a coalition with bourgeois parties who blocked attempts to address popular priorities like unemployment relief after the depression began in 1929. In our time, low voter turnout correlates with stagnant governance and populist takeovers — and U.S. elections begin with a lower turnout rate than many other countries.

A democratic republic can limp along, hollowed out, for a while. But the less people care about the system, the easier it is for a demagogue to step in and claim, "I alone can fix it." By then, no one's paying attention.

*Ted Rall, political cartoonist, columnist and graphic novelist, co-hosts the left-vs-right DMZ America podcast with fellow cartoonist Scott Stantis and The TMI Show with political analyst Manila Chan. His latest book is the graphic novel "2024: Revisited." Write him c/o his website (rall.com), Twitter @tedrall*



# Why Do We Blame Lions?

By WENDY KEEFOVER

Mule deer herds are declining across the West for many reasons. But three states, Utah, Wyoming and Nevada, want to both pin the blame on mountain lions and “resolve” the issue by using cruel traps.

Utah has now opened the floodgates to year-round lion hunting and trapping, while Nevada continues to resist trapping reforms. In Wyoming, a proposed law allowing lion hunting and trapping without restrictions was thwarted only after legislators heard overwhelming opposition from citizens as well as the state’s wildlife department.

In 2023, Utah legislators quietly but drastically altered lion management without a public involvement process. Since trapping began, of the 109 lions captured by trappers, 82% were females.

This coincides with a recent study that found that most mountain lions who fall victim to traps are hungry mothers, driven to feed themselves and their kittens. But dead mothers can’t nourish orphaned kittens, who are left to starve.

State agencies use the survival of adult females as a measure for maintaining lion populations. Utah data show that in 2024, the female lion mortality rate reached an unsustainable 60%.

The state’s carnivore manager recently admitted that Utah’s lion populations are in decline. He also told a legislative committee last fall that “we need to keep our foot on the gas” to continue to suppress female lions. At that same meeting, his boss said that prolonged drought had taken a toll on mule deer numbers.

It only makes things worse that, in January 2025, Utah’s wildlife board approved the sale of mountain lion pelts, claws and skulls on global markets.

In contrast, Wyoming’s House Bill 0286, which would have removed quotas, season limits and prohibitions on trapping mountain lions, failed to make it past its first committee hearing. The values of participatory democracy and science-based management won the day.

When it comes to traps, the problem is that they also indiscriminately kill non-target species, including endangered animals, deer, raptors and pets. Yet Nevada continues to prioritize trappers’ interests over ethical and biological considerations.

This January, Nevada’s wildlife commissioners denied a citizen petition that sought to modify trapping regulations to prevent the suffering and deaths of mountain lions caught in traps set for other animals. Overlooking strong arguments, the commission voted to uphold its current time limit for checking traps to 96 hours.

This means lions or other trapped animals could suffer for days in leghold traps or foot snares until the trapper arrives to kill them.

Here’s the basic issue: States blame lions for the decline in mule deer, but science makes it clear that the West’s populations suffer most from the threats of modern life.

Highways, housing, and energy development fragment the land, while cattle and sheep compete for habitat. Other pressures come from over-hunting, poaching, wildfire, noxious weeds, drought, and fluctuations in snowpack and temperatures.

There’s also chronic wasting disease, a fatal, infectious prion disease that affects deer, elk and moose. Mountain lions and other native carnivores play a critical role in limiting and even halting the spread of CWD.

In a Wyoming study, biologists found that 28% of mule deer in two populations were infected, and that lions primarily preyed upon sick individuals. A Colorado study similarly revealed that mountain lions killed more diseased deer than human hunters, and that lions consumed over 85% of the carcasses, thus removing substantial amounts of prion contamination from the environment.

Unlike human hunters who target the healthiest individuals in a population, carnivores selectively prey on diseased animals. Lions are needed to maintain healthy herds, and if states were smart, they’d recognize their value to our ecosystems.

The contrasting attitudes of these three states illustrate a larger battle over managing wildlife in the West. Utah has embraced a market-driven approach that prioritizes commercial interests over conservation.

Wyoming, even with its strong hunting culture, recognized that unregulated mountain lion killing was too radical. Nevada, despite calls for reform, remains stuck in outdated, cruel policies.

For the sake of the West’s ecosystems, we need wildlife agencies and lawmakers to look at the facts and stop scapegoating native carnivores. Anyone who wants to hunt abundant mule deer herds needs to face the reality that the West’s landscapes are degraded.

Lions, though, are not to blame.

*Wendy Keefover is a contributor to Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, an independent nonprofit dedicated to spurring conversation about the West. She is senior strategist for native carnivore protection for Humane World for Animals.*

## Ulysses Grant Deserves Another Look

By ROB PATTERSON

History is a not always factual, permeated as it can be by the prejudices of its writers, rumors, prevailing social attitudes, mythologies ... many factors. Winston Churchill said, “History is written by the victors.” Henry Ford asserted that “history is more or less bunk.” Both quotes tell truths related to the documenting of the events of the past.

But in time, we hope, and I believe more often than not, history gets close to and even documents factuality, thanks to the efforts of skilled and devoted historians dedicated to divining the truth. That sometimes comes to us as revisionist history.

As I watched the three-part series “Grant” on Prime, it led me to consider my own misconceptions about Ulysses S. Grant, the general who won the Civil War and served as the 18th president of our nation.

One might call it revisionist, but I think it’s better tagged as an informed reassessment and rehabilitation of a man whose legacy has been not served as well as it should have by history.

The documentary is based on historian Ron Chernow’s best-selling 2017 biography of the same name that sought to correct the record on the man. He is joined by a number of other esteemed historians as commentators. Dramatic recreations of key scenes from Grant’s life round out the show.

The common short-take read on Grant tends to focus on his flaws: his financial struggles and failures, the high casualty rates for his troops as a general that prompted some to label him a “butcher,” the corruption within his administration, and his drinking. Icons are still human and ergo flawed.

But as this documentary’s end credits rolled, I had to proverbially nod yes to the final quotes by some of the historians. “Grant is the unheroic hero of our greatest nation epic: the Civil War and Reconstruction,” says author, academic and military historian Barton A. Myers. “He was committed to making America fully just, fully equal,” notes African American historian Christy S. Coleman, who once headed the

American Civil War Museum.

It’s a tribute to the quality of this doc that I came away so affirmative about Grant. I was already rather well aware of him from my Civil War readings and a college course on the Civil War and Reconstruction – taught by a professor who was a South Carolina native yet didn’t fall prey to the Southern spin on the topic. Even though a paternal-line family legend claims we have some sort of relationship relationship to Grant, I still held an unduly skeptical view of the man.

One key to getting who Grant was, as can be learned in this series, is the seemingly contradictory notion suggested above about the man being an “unheroic hero.” In Grant’s case it leans more towards being like a Zen koan. He was not “heroic” as a man because he was a modest man. At a time when politics and the rest of public life is infected by soulless and toxic narcissism, it’s a mightily positive trait that speaks very well for his character.

That modesty is reflected in how he was very much a man of the people. Militarily, that was reflected in how he was a battlefield general (and looked it) and not one who commanded from a headquarters

far behind the lines in crisp, clean uniforms.

As a president, he strived to rule and administer as a man of the people. His admirable if somewhat naive trust of some people brought corruption into his administration. Much as he tried to see Reconstruction through to its greatest fulfillment, it sadly failed for the most part. But his legacy merits this excellent reconsideration.

### Populist Picks

**DOCUMENTARY TV SERIES:** “World War Weird” – This lively three-season, 22 episode show chronicles rather numerous weird, bizarre and often little known aspects and oddities within the history of the two world wars.

**DOCUMENTARY FILM:** “The Levys of Monticello” – Yep, a Jewish family bought and owned Thomas Jefferson’s home for nearly a century, preserving it while facing antisemitic pushback.

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## SATIRE/Rosie Sorenson

### Another One Bites the Dust

Elon Musk was working late one night at his San Francisco company, Neuralink. Neuralink’s mission is to explore the use of brain implants to restore the ability of a person to walk and to function normally after a devastating accident or disease.

Jacob, the clinic director, noticed that the light was still on in the soundproof lab at 2 a.m. Elon was known to work 24-7, so Jacob wasn’t worried. However, at 3:30 a.m. he crept up to the lab door, opened it a crack.

The music blared so loudly that Jacob covered his ears. Musk was dancing around the room, flailing really, in his black shirt and jeans, holding tight to his chainsaw which was buzzing on high. Musk wriggled his hips awkwardly, singing wildly off key in a vain attempt to imitate Freddie Mercury: “Another one bites the dust. Another one bites the dust. And another one gone and another one gone, another one bites the dust.”

Just then Musk whirled around and, startled to see Jacob, lost control of the chainsaw, severing his neck. The bloody buzzing

monster flew out of Musk’s arms and roiled violently on the floor next to his body. His head, laying nearby, twitched, his eyes wide open in horror.

Jacob rushed forward, grabbed a long probe from the table and swatted the chainsaw away from Musk’s body. He carefully reached for the vibrating handle and hit the “Off” switch.

The chainsaw sputtered to a stop as Jacob grabbed his phone and hollered, “May Day! May Day! Elon’s hurt. Help me NOW! Lab 17! Bring towels!”

Seconds later, two husky young men rushed in wearing navy denim work pants and chambray shirts with Neuralink logos stitched to their breast pockets.

Brad, the short one, seeing the mess on the floor, ran off to vomit in the corner.

Jon, the tall one, cried, “What the hell ...,” as he threw the towels over what was left of Musk’s neck.

Jacob screamed, “Get Mary now!”

“I just saw her leave!” said the short one. “Get her NOW. Tell her Elon’s been hurt. No details.”

Five minutes later, Mary skidded into the room.

“Oh, God. No! How did this happen?” she cried and flung out her arms.

Jacob said, “He was dancing with his chainsaw and slipped.”

“Jesus, Jacob, what do you expect me to do?”

“Save him, Mary, you have to save him! You’re a neurosurgeon. I’ve seen your work.

You have to put him back together again.”

“Are you kidding?” she sobbed.

“Mary, do it for Elon. He would do it for you.”

“Oh, God,” she cried and rubbed her forehead. “Go get the stretcher.”

Seconds later, they hoisted his bloody headless body onto the stretcher, placing the head at his side, eyes still startled.

They raced him to the fully-equipped operating room. Her assistant, Nancy, was already gowned and waiting with all the surgical instruments laid out.

Seventeen hours later, Mary buzzed for Jacob.

“OK, Jacob. It’s done.”

“And?”

“And, he’s alive. We won’t know for several hours if it worked. I did my best, Jacob, you knew I would, but this? OMG?” She started to bawl.

“I trust you, Mary.”

Elon was hooked up to monitors displaying all of his vital signs. Tubes were everywhere, some supplying fluids, others draining away blood.

Miraculously, Elon recovered and returned to work in only three weeks. No one was ever told about the unfortunate accident, just that he had needed a vacation in Costa Rica.

Trump and his Storm Trooper boys returned to the slash and burn projects he’d designed, with one significant difference.

“What’s the matter with you, Elon?” hollered Trump. “I hired you to kill a lot of

## Remembering Civil Rights Champion Walter White

*A new PBS documentary is a gripping chronicle of the NAACP's fight for equality*

No, the new nonfiction film “Forgotten Hero: Walter White and the NAACP” is not about the lead character in AMC’s crime drama, *Breaking Bad*. But the name of the protagonist played by Bryan Cranston in the long-running TV series could just as well be a knowing nod to the true-life equal rights champion of the same name. Cranston’s character was a high school chemistry teacher who also happens to be a meth manufacturer and dealer. Similarly, the real Walter White appeared to be one thing, but was actually another.

White was born in Atlanta in 1893 to mixed-race parents, and was the grandson of an enslaved person. Though his blue eyes and blonde hair made him easily able to “pass for White,” White firmly identified with the African side of his ancestry and went on to parlay his appearance to “go behind enemy lines” in order to expose White supremacy. He would go undercover and infiltrate White mobs, eliciting confessions about their organizing terrorism campaigns and then reporting them to the public through the then-fledgling National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In 1918, White relocated to New York City to serve as the NAACP’s secretary assistant.

The nearly two-hour, fact-packed “Forgotten Hero” serves a dual purpose: In addition to providing a comprehensive biography of White, the documentary also chronicles what has arguably been America’s leading civil rights organization and its struggle for equality.

W.E.B. Du Bois looms large in this historical production as an NAACP co-founder and editor of its monthly magazine, *The Crisis*, the influential author of 1903’s *The Souls of Black Folk*, and a scholar who taught at the historically Black Atlanta University. Du Bois became friends with the White family, but, as “Forgotten Hero” relates, his increasing militancy put him at odds with the NAACP and with Walter himself, who became the organization’s executive secretary in 1929.

No hagiography of White or of the NAACP, the documentary evenhandedly depicts the group’s strength and weaknesses, its triumphs and setbacks. It’s interesting to learn that muckraking journalist Ida B. Wells—who pioneered the reportage on lynching that White would continue, often at great peril to himself—parted company with the NAACP.

According to “Forgotten Hero,” the NAACP dropped the ball when it came to one of the biggest racial injustices in African American history, the Scottsboro Boys. These were the nine Black teenagers charged with raping two White women in Alabama, who were swiftly convicted, with eight of them sentenced to death in 1931. The documentary states that the image-conscious, more middle class-oriented NAACP and White were wary of the case, as the nine proletarian adolescents had illicitly boarded a freight train, which during the Depression was a widespread practice among the poor known as “hoboing.”

Meanwhile, the Communist Party USA—which the film’s narrator, actor Joe Morton, calls “a rising civil rights organization”—spearheaded the Scottsboro Boys’ legal defense. Thus began a rivalry that lasted decades between the NAACP and the more leftwing communists, which militantly supported equal rights for Black Americans. (Du Bois, who left the NAACP during the 1930s and split with White, eventually joined the CPUSA late in life in 1961.)

In addition to reporting on lynching and setting the NAACP on a legal strategy to combat racism, White was also the sparkplug for the organization’s entering the political fray, which had not been as vigorously pursued since Jim Crow laws had disenfranchised so many Black people in the South. Possibly the country’s most prominent African American outside of sports and show business during the Depression, White was friendly with Eleanor Roosevelt, who facilitated Walter’s meeting with FDR at the White House. It was the first such reception of a Black leader since their cousin, Teddy Roosevelt, invited Booker T. Washington to the Executive Mansion in 1901.

White’s efforts to lobby Franklin Roosevelt to publicly support an anti-lynching law and other civil rights measures were unsuccessful, due to the President’s fear of losing Dixie Democrats’ votes. But after the United States entered World War II, Walter successfully urged FDR to allow Black Americans to work in the defense industry. Amid the rising voting power of Black people, President Harry Truman ended segregation in the armed forces in 1948.

An anti-lynching law wasn’t enacted until decades later, when President Joe Biden signed the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act on March 29, 2022.

White remained the NAACP’s executive secretary until 1955, although his power inside the organization, which experienced faction fights, had declined over the years. In addition to Du Bois, another top rival who emerged within

the group was Thurgood Marshall, NAACP’s chief counsel and chief counsel in the case which won the historic school desegregation ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* with a unanimous Supreme Court ruling. (In 1967, Marshall became the first Black Justice appointed to serve on the highest court in the land.)

Ironically, White lost support within the pro-integration organization he led for 36 years because he divorced his African American wife and married a White woman, Poppy Cannon, in 1949, when interracial marriage was rare and illegal in many states.

In 1955, nine months after White’s death, longtime NAACP activist Rosa Parks defied segregation laws by refusing to give up her seat to a White passenger, spurring the Montgomery Bus Boycott and igniting the Civil Rights Movement. The direct action tactics of nonviolent civil disobedience of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Freedom Riders, and others shook the institutions of apartheid in the South—and, according to the documentary’s narration, “eclipsed the NAACP.”

Control of the movement passed from the NAACP to other organizations, including the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. By the late 1960s, the SNCC changed the “N” in its name from “Nonviolent” to “National” and the leadership of the Civil Rights Movement moved on to more militant advocates of “Black Power,” including the Black Panthers.

Walter White, says Wayne State University history professor Kidada Williams in the film, is “one of the unsung heroes of the twentieth century.” *Forgotten Hero* restores his status among the pantheon of civil rights leaders. Skillfully blending archival footage, photos, and original interviews with contemporary historians and relatives of the film’s subjects, co-directors Rob Rapley and Michelle Smawley have created a vivid, invaluable history of one of the nation’s most significant equal rights organizations.

However, these veteran documentarians might have missed one intriguing point about their subject: Walter White’s great-grandfather may have been enslaver William Henry Harrison, who went on to be elected U.S. President in 1840. Now, that’s unforgettable!

*Forgotten Hero: Walter White and the NAACP* premiered Feb. 25, 2025, 9 to 11 p.m. ET on PBS, PBS.org and the PBS App.

*Ed Rampell is a film historian and critic based in Los Angeles. Rampell is the author of “Progressive Hollywood, A People’s Film History of the United States” and he co-authored “The Hawaii Movie and Television Book,” now in its third edition. This first appeared at Progressive.org.*

### Zirin...

*Continued from page 18*

education policy, as seen in her confirmation hearing, she has been sued for covering up the sexual abuse of a child at WWE. I know it’s a cliché, but imagine the QAnon riot if a Democratic nominee for education secretary (of all jobs!) was stained with such a charge.

At least Trump’s last education secretary, the odious Betsy DeVos, had a history of trying to destroy public education. In other words, she was well-versed in this world, even if it was only to eradicate it. So what possibly are McMahon’s qualifications? Perhaps it is her alleged experience covering up sexual assault, something that could come in handy for this administration. But her apparent comfort in a culture that abuses women and children is not why she holds this position. It’s also more than just her plans to follow Trump’s orders and, in her words, “wholeheartedly” support the dismantling of the Department of Education—thereby cutting critical resources to underserved students. It’s even more than her willingness to execute a cornerstone of Trumpism and make life hell for trans kids in their schools. The White House could have found any Heritage Foundation nepo baby to do that.

So why Linda McMahon? It seems that there are two kinds of Musk/Trump cabinet members: There are the dignity-free quislings happy to humiliate themselves for

a taste of power (see Marco Rubio). Then there are the true believers who share the Musk/Trump fascist perspective of the world: all power to mediocre rich White men willing to strip-mine this country, and the only role for the “others,” no matter how accomplished, must be as minstrels. And these “others” must accept this with a smile if they want so much as an audience with the Orange King. (Just ask “our Tiger.”)

Linda McMahon falls into the second category. She is 76 years old and wants her legacy to be turning the bigotry that made her so obscenely rich into public policy. She’s a simpleton when it comes to education. But she knows how to sell racism as a brand and is applying that WWE expertise to how our kids will be taught.

The first sign was in her largely overlooked confirmation hearings when she was asked about whether she supported teaching Black history in schools, and she answered, “I’m not quite certain.” I reached out to educator and author of the recent book “Teach Truth: The Struggle for Antiracist Education,” Jesse Hagopian about McMahon’s comments. He said, “Entertaining the possibility of outlawing Black history in the US is about rigging the fight so justice always loses. The goal of these attacks on education is to create fear and confusion so that teachers hesitate to tell the truth about systemic racism.”

Then her Education Department issued a terrifying memo threatening to cut off federal funding to public schools and col-

leges that engage in “race-related decisions,” saying “assessments” would begin Feb. 28. (So much for local control!) That would mean schools could lose federal funding perhaps for teaching AP African American history (my son’s favorite class), or having a club for Latinx students, or painting an elementary-school mural of Rosa Parks during Black History Month. But as Hagopian describes, the real goal of McMahon’s memo is to sow fear in teachers and administrators about what they can and cannot teach. He calls Linda McMahon an “educational arsonist,” burning down our rich history of resistance to make us ignorant of the idea that change is possible and hamper our ability to fight back.

If the New Testament is right, someday this educational arsonist will exist among the flames. But until then, when she tries to go scorched-earth on our schools and our truths, she could in return be drenched. As Linda McMahon tries to incinerate our learning communities, she will learn the words of Kurt Vonnegut: “I can think of no more stirring symbol of humanity than a fire engine.”

That fire engine’s siren is now blaring from inside Linda’s “house.” On Feb. 24, star wrestler Phil Brooks—known as CM Punk—walked to the ring wearing a Chicago Teachers Union shirt. This was not scripted. Brooks, an institution unto himself in his hometown of Chicago, has known people connected to the CTU for years. To come out in this shirt on the day his boss declared

war on public education—a boss whose family’s union busting is part of WWE history—was an act of public defiance. Brooks also has publicly supported transgender youth, one target of McMahon’s attacks on our most vulnerable students.

Phil Brooks is not Joe Hill, as liberal scolds on social media were quick to point out. But in this era, we should embrace imperfect messengers willing to stand up to this fascist agenda. While many liberals rolled their eyes given the backdrop of WWE, the public school teachers in my life were delighted that the photo of Brooks went viral. They felt seen. And given the popularity of WWE among their students, they were especially thrilled with who was watching. No active male US athlete, shoutout to Dijonai Carrington, has yet to visibly stand up to Trump on the field of play. May Brooks be the first of many White male athletes to step up. The “CM” in CM Punk stands for “Chicago Made,” and Monday night he sent a message to Linda McMahon that if she goes after Chicago, the battle will be joined.

*Dave Zirin is the sports editor at The Nation. He is the author of 11 books on the politics of sports. He is also the coproducer and writer of the new documentary “Behind the Shield: The Power and Politics of the NFL.” Email edgeofsports@gmail.com*

### Nader...

*Continued from page 19*

and bloated big business contracts with Uncle Sam that are now not being investigated.

Saving our country from the cruel and vicious dictatorship seizing our government can only come from the people — Ameri-

cans of all political backgrounds who show up and speak up at rallies, preferably outside local Congressional offices (with their Senators and Representatives invited) — rural, suburban, urban communities nationwide. The TRUMP/MUSK overthrow of the existing corporate state, can soon become a POLICE STATE. Actions by citizens must expand rapidly before the egomania-

cal, openly lying, vengeful TRUMP throws our beloved country into anarchical convulsions leading to massive disasters.

The Founding Fathers freed America from the tyrant King George III and gave us the Constitution to block any future Kings. Trump, who wants to be a King, said, “I have an Article II, where I have the right to do whatever I want as president.”

Respect the trust bequeathed to us from our first Patriots in 1776 and 1783. Mobilize and galvanize NOW.

*Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate, lawyer and co-author of the book, “Wrecking America: How Trump’s Lawbreaking and Lies Betray All” with Mark Green (2020). See www.nader.org or facebook.com/ralphnader.*

## AMY GOODMAN



Shutting Gitmo, which has been run as a lawless offshore dark site, would save at least a half-billion dollars a year and should be a no-brainer.

### Want to Save Taxpayer Money? Close Guantánamo

President Donald Trump and Elon Musk, the world's richest man, have unleashed global chaos with mass firings and funding freezes as they attempt to eviscerate the US government. Musk's so-called Department of Government Efficiency, DOGE, has revealed significant problems – within its own operations, that is. In late February Musk's DOGE team quietly removed their top five posted cost savings, after journalists found, to put it mildly, major errors, like mistaking \$8 billion for \$8 million, or claiming \$2 billion in savings instead of \$18 million.

Meanwhile, one flagrant expense on the federal balance sheet, which should be zeroed out, is staring Musk in the face: the US naval base and prison complex at Guan-

tánamo Bay, Cuba.

Shutting Gitmo would save at least a half-billion dollars per year. These figures are based on dated estimates, and don't include additional, classified amounts. The estimate still points to enormous waste: \$500 million per year to house 15 prisoners, three of whom have been cleared for release. That amounts to over \$91,000 per prisoner, per day. In 2022, the federal Bureau of Prisons reported the per person cost to incarcerate stateside was \$43,000 per year, or about 0.1% of the cost at Guantánamo.

Clearly, Guantánamo should be closed primarily because it's been run as a lawless, offshore dark site where countless innocent people have been held without charge for decades, where the government has tortured prisoners, and where presidents from both parties have imprisoned people virtually incommunicado, without due process or constitutional rights.

But when viewed with the cruel, fiscal logic that Elon Musk is now allegedly using to cut the federal bureaucracy, closing Gitmo is a no-brainer.

Except that the Trump administration has decided to jumpstart another of Guantánamo's dark chapters, as an immigrant detention camp. On Jan. 29, Trump instructed the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense to "expand the Migrant Operations Center at Naval Station Guantánamo Bay to full capacity."

President George H.W. Bush and President Bill Clinton both used the base to jail migrants. In 1991, Haitians began fleeing the US-backed coup that deposed Haiti's democratically-elected President Jean-Bertrande Aristide. Between 1991 and 1993, an average of 12,000 Haitian asylum seekers in-

tercepted at sea were held daily at Guantánamo. Three-quarters of them were forcibly repatriated to Haiti, exposing them to violence or retribution.

In January 2002, as the George W. Bush administration was ramping up Guantánamo to hold prisoners in the so-called War on Terror, the late human rights attorney Michael Ratner of the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), speaking on the *Democracy Now!* news hour, described the conditions he encountered while representing asylum seekers in the early 1990s:

"The place is really a hell hole. It's not that bad for the servicemen who have set up a McDonald's and everything else on their part of the base, but where we were, a remote part of the camp, in a desert surrounded by barbed wire with detention facilities, really, in the heat and outside, it's really unbearable."

As the 1990s progressed, Guantánamo's migrant prison population swelled to 45,000, as many Cubans caught at sea attempting to reach Florida were also held there.

CCR and other groups were able to challenge the post-9/11 legal black hole of Guantánamo, ensuring prisoners there accessed their constitutional rights. But Ratner's description, more than 30 years on, is still accurate.

Guantánamo is now overseen by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who served there as a military officer from 2004-2005. In 2021, when he was a weekend host on the Fox News Channel, Hegseth commented on Gitmo:

"It's a prison without a mission... It got mucked up very, very early when left wing lawyers and other protections came in... it

could have been a great place to expeditiously interrogate, try and execute people we are fighting a war against... [Now] It's of almost no value. It's a nursing home."

Hegseth, while lamenting the lack of summary executions there, was right about one thing: Guantánamo has no value. Except, perhaps, as a dramatic backdrop to Trump's promised mass deportations. Hundreds of immigrants have already been rounded up, shackled and flown there, only to be then relocated elsewhere. Both Hegseth and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem have flown in for photo ops, no doubt at great taxpayer expense, which should irk Musk's DOGE team.

CCR, meanwhile, is back in court, challenging the Trump administration's attempt to restart migrant detentions on Guantánamo.

"For 40 years, dating back to the early 1990s, the United States government has used Guantánamo as a legal dumping ground for its political problems," CCR Executive Director Vince Warren said on *Democracy Now!* "We are trying to make good on the failed promise of Barack Obama and Joe Biden to close that terrible facility."

If Elon Musk is serious about cutting costs, he should take a hard look at Guantánamo Bay.

*Denis Moynihan cowrote this column. Amy Goodman is the host of Democracy Now!, a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on more than 1,400 radio and TV stations. Her sixth book, co-authored with Moynihan and David Goodman, is "Democracy Now!: Twenty Years Covering the Movements Changing America."*

## Celebrate the Resilience of Immigrant Mothers

By BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP

My mother-in-law was born on a small ranch in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, in 1951. After her mother died from illness, my mother-in-law crossed into Brownsville, Texas, during the Charro Days Fiesta.

She was 13, undocumented and alone.

I've written about my mother-in-law's journey before. However, in light of Donald Trump's immigration policies and his attempt to end constitutionally protected birthright citizenship, it is important to share her story once again.

The Charro Days Fiesta is celebrated annually in Brownsville, Texas. This year it ran from Feb. 27 to March 1, but it was first conceived in 1937 by local business leaders as an antidote to the Great Depression. The event commemorates Mexican heritage found on both sides of the Rio Grande and is named in honor of the "Charro," a handsome Mexican cowboy.

Anyone who has ever visited a border town knows that a hard cultural divide does not exist. Cultures blend regardless of lines drawn or walls built.

As part of the Charro Days Fiesta, in the 1960s, international bridges were opened to allow people to cross the border without papers during what was called the "Paso Libre," meaning "free pass." My mother-in-law crossed into Texas on the Paso Libre as a young teenager and did not go back. She was a "Dreamer" before it had a name. She stayed in Texas with her aunt where she met my father-in-law, who was a second-generation Texan.

It wasn't until 2017, on what was her third attempt, that she aced her citizenship test. My husband watched with pride. My mother-in-law had first attempted citizenship in the 1980s. She paid for her test only to learn she would have to take it in English, even though she is a Spanish speaker. In the Texas border town where she lives and works, everyone speaks Spanish. She tried again in the '90s, but she had been conned into paying for a nonexistent test. In 2017, she was finally permitted to take the test in Spanish.

When asked what drove her to see it through, she said that she wanted to be an American citizen like her children and her husband. She wanted to show them she could do it and make her family proud. She also wanted the right to vote. On July 14, 2017, she was sworn in as an American citizen.

We are all so very proud of her. We are also very glad that she is now an American citizen.

This administration is hellbent on deporting as many people as it can. It makes no sense especially considering that United States first lady Melania Trump is an immigrant, and second lady Usha Vance is first-generation American as the daughter of Indian immigrants. The women in the White House could be shining examples of the American melting pot we all learn about in elementary school. Immigration is the most universal story we share as Americans. It should be the common ground that unites us.

Trump and Vance have an opportunity to represent what is truly possible in this country but instead they choose to be a hypocritical example of how to wield power steeped in privilege to deepen the divide.

I'm grateful to my mother-in-law for her strength and resilience. For her bravery and her resolve. Because of her, I have my beautiful family. She represents so many immigrant mothers who came before her as well as the ones who live in America now. For Women's History Month, they all deserve our respect and gratitude.

*Bonnie Jean Feldkamp is a wife, mother and former opinion editor at the Louisville Courier-Journal. Do you know anyone who's doing cool things to make the world a better place? Send an email to Bonnie@WriterBonnie.com. Check out Bonnie's weekly YouTube videos at <https://www.youtube.com/bonniejeanfeldkamp>.*

## Dispatches ...

Continued from page 5

budget and the economy is likely to be small. The bigger impact is the uncertainty they have created in large sectors of the economy."

"In short, Donald Trump has good reasons for telling us that his MAGA policies might give us a recession," he added. "It's hard to know how bad this recession would be, but it will definitely be the 'Donald J. Trump recession.'"

**GOP'S PLANNED MEDICAID CUTS ARE TOTAL SELF-OWN.** House Republicans shot themselves in the foot by voting for a "budget blueprint" that will cut \$880 billion from Medicaid over the next 10 years, paving the way for yet another tax cut for Elon Musk and his billionaire pals, Markos Moulitsas Zúniga noted at Daily Kos (3/7).

It was a vote so transparently toxic that "moderate" Republicans justified their vote by claiming it's just a "starting point," not an actual budget cut. Meanwhile, rabid far-right Republicans demanded even deeper cuts to Medicaid.

You think voters are going to know the difference between a "budget blueprint" and a final bill when Democrats run ads telling voters that their representatives voted to cut Medicaid?

Regardless, Republicans won't be able to achieve their tax cuts without cutting Medi-

caid, as was confirmed March 5 by the Congressional Budget Office.

So are we supposed to believe that "moderate" Republicans will ultimately vote against Medicaid cuts in a final bill, with President Donald Trump and MAGA breathing down their necks?

They've shown zero ability to resist far-right pressure. In fact, they live in terror of physical threats from the unhinged MAGA cult, and they're already getting attacked by Democrats for voting to gut Medicaid. So what do they have to lose in the end?

Well, re-election, for one.

A new poll from KFF Health News confirms just how idiotic and politically dangerous the GOP's Medicaid cuts are.

Just 5% of Democrats and 14% of independents want Medicaid funding decreased. And among Republicans, just 33% want Medicaid decreased, 24% want it to be increased, and 43% are happy with the way it is now.

But here's the kicker: Among rural voters, just 23% want Medicaid funding decreased, and among rural Republicans, that number is just 35%. And it's no surprise, since Medicaid is disproportionately a rural program.

Among rural voters, 75% say Medicaid is "very important" to their communities, and 23% say it's "somewhat important." And among rural Republicans, 95% say Medicaid is either "very

or "somewhat important." Holy moly!

None of this should be particularly surprising, given how beneficial to Republicans Medicaid has proven to be.

In 2023, a Georgetown University report found that six states — New Mexico, Louisiana, Arizona, Florida, South Carolina, and Arkansas — had at least half of children living in rural areas and small towns covered by Medicaid. Five of these are red states—four solid red.

And the 10 states with the most children on Medicaid in small towns and rural areas were all deep red: Texas, North Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Ohio, Arkansas, and Indiana.

"Non-elderly adults and children in small towns and rural areas are more likely than those living in metro areas to rely on Medicaid/CHIP for their health insurance. As a consequence, reductions in federal Medicaid funding being contemplated in Congress are more likely to cause greater harm to rural areas and small towns than metro areas," the report said.

And it is within that context that Republicans voted to gut the program.

There was a historical reversal in voting habits in the 2024 election, Kos noted. Trump won voters making less than \$50,000, while Kamala Harris won those making over \$50,000, signaling that Democrats have become the party of the educated while Re-

publicans are the party of the poor.

But as effective as their culture war has been in moving low-income demographics in their direction, GOP policies aren't following suit.

Trump is fixated on inflation-fueling trade wars and mass deportations, crypto bros, vulgar Gaza fantasies, gutting the federal workforce and programs that directly help people, and—of course—tax cuts for billionaires.

**REPORT: WORKING-CLASS AMERICANS LIVE 7 YEARS FEWER THAN RICH.** People living in the top 1% of U.S. counties ranked by median household income live on average seven years longer than their counterparts in the bottom 50% of counties, according to a March 7 report from Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), the ranking member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

"The massive income and wealth inequality that exists in America today is not just an economic issue, it is literally a matter of life and death," Sanders said in announcing the report, Elouise Goldsmith reported at Common Dreams (3/7).

What's more, the stress of living paycheck to paycheck "also leads to higher levels of anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease and poor health," Sanders argued, in a nod to some of the survey responses included in the analysis.

*Continued on next page*

# In Just Five Days, Trump Has Set the Country Back Nearly 100 Years

By DANA MILBANK

With a modesty we have come to expect of him, President Donald Trump informed Congress on March 4 that he had already ushered in “the greatest and most successful era in the history of our country.” He told the assembled lawmakers that he “accomplished more in 43 days than most administrations accomplished in four or eight years.”

Armed with a portfolio of fabricated statistics, Trump judged that “the first month of our presidency is the most successful in the history of our nation — and what makes it even more impressive is that you know who No. 2 is? George Washington.”

Republican lawmakers laughed, whooped and cheered.

Usually, such talk from Trump is just bravado. But let us give credit where it is due: Trump has made history. In fact, it’s not much of an exaggeration to say that, over the course of the last five days, he has set the United States back 100 years.

Trump on March 3 implemented the largest tariff increase since 1930, abruptly reversing an era of liberalized trade that has prevailed since the end of the Second World War. He launched this trade war just three days after dealing an equally severe blow to the postwar security order that has maintained prosperity and freedom for 80 years. Trump’s ambush of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in the Oval Office, followed by the cessation of U.S. military aid to the outgunned ally, has left allies reeling and Moscow exulting. The Kremlin’s spokesman proclaimed that Trump is “rapidly changing all foreign policy configurations” in a way that “largely aligns with our vision.”

And our erstwhile friends? “The United States launched a trade war against Canada, its closest partner and ally, their closest friend,” Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on March 4. “At the same time, they’re talking about working positively with Russia, appeasing Vladimir Putin: a lying, murderous dictator. Make that make sense.”

It only makes sense if, against all evidence, you believe, as Trump apparently does, that Americans were better off 95 years ago than they are today.

We’re apparently going to have to relearn that lesson the hard way. The blizzard of executive orders that Trump has issued, though constitutionally alarming, can be rescinded by a future president. Elon Musk’s wanton sabotage of federal agencies and the federal workforce, though hugely damag-

ing, can be repaired over time. But there is no easy fix for Trump’s smashing of the security and trade arrangements that have kept us safe and free for generations.

“We’re certainly not in the postwar world anymore,” Douglas Irwin, a Dartmouth College economist and fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, tells me. He calculates that Trump’s hike in tariffs is the largest since the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 accelerated the nation’s slide into the Great Depression. And Trump’s current tariffs, which in Irwin’s calculation affect imports worth about 4.8% of gross domestic product, will have an even greater impact on the economy than did Smoot-Hawley, which affected imports worth 1.4% of GDP, and the McKinley administration’s tariffs during the 1890s, which affected imports worth 2.7% of GDP (and which also were followed by a prolonged depression).

Irwin figures the current tariffs “are likely to be much more disruptive” than those historical cases because the U.S. economy is much more dependent now on “intermediate goods” — meaning materials such as auto parts, needed by American businesses to make finished goods. Trump has brought the average tariff on total imports to 10%, a level not seen since 1943, in Irwin’s analysis.

Late March 4, after stocks plunged for a second day, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick appeared to signal a retreat, saying the administration would “probably” announce March 5 that it was meeting Canada and Mexico “in the middle some way.” Yet even if Trump were quickly to abandon the trade war he just launched, the effects will probably be long-lasting, because he has upended the gradual liberalization of trade that has been underway since 1932.

Trump, in imposing 25% tariffs on Canada and Mexico, has violated the spirit, if not the letter, of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement he negotiated during his first term. “So, going forward, what country would ever sign a trade agreement with the United States knowing that we can find some sort of excuse that’s outside the agreement to raise the tariffs?” Irwin asks. Instead, he expects a return of the “corrupt process” that existed before the 1930s in which tariffs remain on the books and businesses try to curry favor (in this case, with Trump) to win exemptions.

Inevitably, the retaliation has already begun. Canada is imposing 25% tariffs on \$155 billion of American goods — and the premier of Ontario, vowing to “go back twice as hard” at the United States, is slapping a 25% tariff on electricity going to the United States, while threatening to cut the lights off entirely. China is imposing tariffs of up to 15% on U.S. imports and banning some exports. Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, calling Trump’s justification for the tariffs “offensive, defamatory and groundless,” has said she would announce her coun-

try’s retaliation plans the following weekend.

And Trump keeps escalating. After Trudeau said on March 4 that Trump wants “a total collapse of the Canadian economy, because that will make it easier to annex us,” Trump mocked “Governor Trudeau” on social media and vowed that “when he puts on a Retaliatory Tariff on the U.S., our Reciprocal Tariff will immediately increase by a like amount!”

The Dow Jones Industrial Average shed more than 1,300 points. Inflation forecasts are increasing (the free-trading Peterson Institute says Trump’s tariffs will cost the typical American household \$1,200 per year). Retailers such as Target and Best Buy are warning about higher prices. The Atlanta Fed’s model of real GDP growth, which in February saw 2.3% growth in the first quarter, now sees a contraction in the first quarter of 2.8%. And Trump is threatening to hit more countries with more tariffs, on metals, cars, farm products and more, in the coming weeks.

During his first term, Trump tweeted that “trade wars are good, and easy to win” — but he had the good sense not to test this in a major way. Now, we all get to experience what actually happens when we launch one.

Trump’s moves to dismantle the trade architecture of the last century is all the more destabilizing because he is simultaneously moving to knock down the alliances that maintained security for most of that same period. As the *Washington Post’s* Francesca Ebel reported from Moscow, Putin’s government sees Trump’s humiliation of Zelensky as a “huge gift” that furthered Russia’s ambitions of dividing the West. Former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev called it a “proper slap down” of “the insolent pig” Zelensky. Hungary’s repressive leader, Viktor Orban, also celebrated: “Thank you, Mr. President!”

And while Trump blames the victim for Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, China is growing bolder in its desire to take Taiwan. Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post* quoted analysts calling the Trump-Zelensky rift part of a “systemic reordering” of geopolitics in which “Beijing was positioned to capitalize on the rapid disintegration of the West” that legitimizes “Beijing’s vision for a post-American world order.”

As the authoritarians celebrate, freedom’s defenders weep. Lech Walesa, the celebrated champion of Polish democracy, joined other former political prisoners in a letter to Trump expressing “horror and disgust” at the American president’s treatment of Zelensky, saying they were “terrified by the fact that the atmosphere in the Oval Office during this conversation reminded us of the one we remember well from interrogations by the Security Service and from courtrooms in communist courts.”

Democratic leaders across Europe, and across the world, spoke up in defense of Ukraine. “We must never confuse aggressor

and victim in this terrible war,” wrote incoming German chancellor Friedrich Merz.

Now, these democratic leaders must contemplate rebuilding what Trump has destroyed. “Today,” European Commission Vice President Kaja Kallas wrote on the day of Trump’s betrayal of Ukraine, “it became clear that the free world needs a new leader.”

In the House chamber on March 4, there was little sign of the United States that until now has led the free world.

Republicans, once the party of free trade, applauded Trump’s vows to impose tariffs — or additional tariffs — on Canada, Mexico, the European Union, China, India, Brazil and South Korea.

“We’ve been ripped off by nearly every country on Earth, and we will not let that happen any longer,” he said. As for the pain his trade policies are already causing, he said: “There’ll be a little disturbance, but we’re okay with that. It won’t be much.”

Trump spoke — repeatedly — about his election victory, about the “radical left lunatics” who prosecuted him, and about his culture-war battles against transgender Americans and against “diversity, equity and inclusion.” With taunts and nonsense claims (more than 1 million people over age 150 receiving Social Security!), he goaded the Democrats, who answered him with messages (“False,” “No Kings Live Here”) on signs and on T-shirts. When Rep. Al Green, a 77-year-old Democratic lawmaker from Texas, waved his walking cane and shouted at Trump that he had “no mandate to cut Medicaid,” Republican leaders, who allowed members of their party to shout “bulls—” at President Joe Biden from the House floor, called in the sergeant at arms to evict him.

It took nearly an hour for Trump to talk about trade. He didn’t get to Ukraine until nearly an hour and 20 minutes into his speech, and then it was to level the false claim that Ukraine had taken \$350 billion from the United States, “like taking candy from a baby,” while Europe spent only \$100 billion on Ukraine — dramatically overstating the U.S. contribution and understating Europe’s.

“Do you want to keep it going for another five years?” he said, looking at the Democrats. “Pocahontas says yes,” Trump added, referring contemptuously to Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Massachusetts).

At this, Vice President JD Vance chortled — and the Republican side, once the home of proud internationalists, responded with derision, cheers and applause.

And so collapses the architecture of freedom and prosperity: with a lie, a taunt and a guffaw.

*[Editor’s Note: On March 6, Trump put on pause the tariffs on Canadian and Mexican goods until April.]*

*Dana Milbank is a political columnist for the Washington Post, where this appeared. Follow him on Twitter @Milbank. Email dana.milbank@washpost.com*

## Dispatches ...

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The analysis echoes findings by other researchers that higher income is associated with greater longevity. According to a Congressional Research Service report from 2021, life expectancy has generally increased over time in the United States—with the exception of during COVID-19 pandemic—but “researchers have long documented that it is lower for individuals with lower socioeconomic status compared with individuals with higher socioeconomic status. Recent studies provide evidence that this gap has widened in recent decades.”

The findings in Sanders’ report relied on county-level data in the United States between 2015 and 2019, the five years prior to the pandemic. For that time period, Sanders’ staff matched each U.S. county with both median household income data from the U.S. Census Bureau and average life expectancy data from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, according to the report.

The life expectancy gap was greater when comparing higher-earning urban and suburban communities with lower-earning rural communities. “Urban and suburban counties with a median household income of \$100,000 have an average life expectancy of

81.6 years, while small rural counties with a median household income of \$30,000 have an average life expectancy of 71.7 years—a 10-year gap,” according to the report.

A boost in earnings also translated into a boost in life expectancy. For example, “among rural counties, a \$10,000 increase in median annual household income is associated with an additional 2.6 years of life expectancy,” according to the report.

**DEM LEADERS CHASTISE TRUMP SPEECH PROTESTERS.** House Democratic leadership privately confronted the roughly dozen progressive members of their caucus for apparently disregarding requests for decorum during President Donald Trump’s terrible speech to a joint session of Congress, Alex Samuels noted at Daily Kos (3/7).

According to Axios, the three most senior House Democratic leaders—Caucus Chair Pete Aguilar, Minority Whip Katherine Clark, and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries—gathered the group of disruptors on March 6. The trio was reportedly “very unhappy” with the cadre of leftist lawmakers who (gasp!) coordinated outfits or refused to clap during Trump’s nearly two-hour speech.

Reps. Jasmine Crockett of Texas, Maxine Dexter of Oregon, Maxwell Frost of Florida, and Melanie Stansbury of New Mexico, were

among the progressive lawmakers called into the “come to Jesus meeting.”

A source familiar with the gathering stressed that the lawmakers were “not getting yelled at” nor were they “being talked to like they are children.” Instead, House Democratic leadership said they wanted the affected legislators to “understand why their strategy is a bad idea.”

“It doesn’t surprise me leadership is very upset. They gave specific instructions not to do that,” another source said, seemingly referring to a “dear colleague” letter that Jeffries sent to the caucus before Trump’s address.

In the letter, Jeffries urged his colleagues to have a “strong, determined, and dignified Democratic presence in the chamber.” Democrats were also privately told not to use props during the president’s speech.

But some rank-and-file Democrats ignored both requests.

Stansbury, for instance, held a sign reading, “This is NOT normal,” which was yanked out of her hands by GOP Rep. Lance Gooden of Texas. And Frost wore a shirt donning the phrase, “No Kings Live Here,” an apparent reference to Trump’s description of himself as a “king” in a recent post on Truth Social.

Democrats don’t seem to know how they plan to protest Trump—assuming they even want to at all. Those who vote in favor of the president’s agenda, even if they later admit

that they screwed up, face few consequences. Meanwhile, silent protesters are admonished behind closed doors while those who object to Trump’s lies more blatantly—such as Rep. Al Green of Texas—got censured by the House, including by 10 fellow Democrats.

Perhaps Democratic leadership wanted all protests to occur outside of the chamber. But considering that the bulk of their caucus has struggled to find an effective way to call out Trump, it’s shameful to pull aside the few members who have directly pushed back against the Trump administration, Samuels noted.

Surprising no one, other “Democrats”—like Rep. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania—have also admonished dissenters. On the day of Trump’s speech, Fetterman called the protests “a sad cavalcade of self owns and unhinged petulance” in a post on X.

Notably, Democrats’ takedown of their own caucus’ protesting methods isn’t all that different from what Trump himself said shortly after Green was kicked out of the chamber.

“This is my fifth such speech to Congress,” he said, “and once again, I look at the Democrats in front of me, and I realize there is absolutely nothing I can say to make them happy or to make them stand or smile or applaud.”

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