

August 13, 2025 • \$7.99

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IRELAND WITH VBT BICYCLING VACATIONS

Journey on Two Wheels

Exploring Ireland with VBT Bicycling Vacations

BY RENÉ MACK

If you are traveling to Ireland, it's because you've been lured there by your soul or the Fates, seduced by the green countryside, the stories, the people, the human spirit, hardship, grit, laughs, and of course, Guinness. One does not go to Ireland to get somewhere else, but to arrive. Stepping onto this land is to awaken the Irish DNA that somehow seems to be in all of us, regardless of ancestry.

Ireland is a land of the senses. It seeps into you by walking on grass, peddling down back roads, feeling the mist in the air, being kissed by the warm sun, absorbing the endless green fields, and touching monoliths older than the pyramids or Stonehenge. It is here you can feel the sorrow, poverty, and generational scars of the potato famines, respect the hardship of the land, and admire the people who persevered even more.

These are the Irish themselves. They know you are here to become living witnesses to these fabled shores. This is no living museum—the entire country from Dublin to the hamlets to the Aran Islands are writing history in the future tense, while living in the present and guarding the past.

When my great-grandparents arrived in New York during the last of the famines, they passed down stories of the land they once called their home. The women were immigrants upon arriving in America and indentured servants. They were Americans, but always American Irish.

My son is adopted, and it turns out he is about 97.6 percent Irish. Though I had visited the country before, my wife and son had never been to Ireland. So, when he turned 18, it was time to make the

pilgrimage as a family.

Now, we are intrepid, global travelers. Despite this, we've taken only one tour and gone on a few cruises throughout our lifetimes, particularly when our son was younger given cruising was the vacation of least resistance, but I've been to more than 120 countries.

But to truly grasp and understand Ireland is not so easy. It's allusive. It's not like going to some of the great cities or regions of Europe. It's about backroads and places not easily discovered on a map. The journey is about being content with oneself—getting lost, stopping along the way, reveling in the moment, and thus discovering the people—The Irish—along the way.

And to my surprise, my wife suggested we take a bike tour of Ireland. We are not cyclists. We bike, on occasion, on flat land. Manhattan flat. Jersey Shore flat. Hilton Head Island flat. Flat flat. So, a bike tour in Ireland, racking up to 30 miles a day for a week with many hills seemed daunting as we reached an age where the government asks one to draw a clock that reads a quarter past ten during your physical, evoked doubt.

We turned to VBT Bicycling Vacations, a renowned and award-winning tour company based out of Vermont that offers cycling tours all over the world. Though my family is active and in good health, it still seemed like a leap of faith. Then they educated us on e-bikes.

Electric bikes, or e-bikes, use a nearly silent electric motor to amplify riders' pedaling power, which helps propel them up those challenging hills or extend the distances they can ride comfortably. Not

motorbikes or mopeds, e-bikes provide a boost of power-on-demand while riders are pedaling, to complement their own propulsion and speed. Cyclists can choose from multiple levels of assistance—or no assistance at all.

Thankfully, what originally seemed impossible is now easily doable due to the technology of e-bikes. VBT's introduction of e-bikes is the biggest game changer for people that want to be active or try something different (like a bike tour) but have hill anxiety and prefer a flat bike world.

So, we bought our padded bike seats and pants, gloves, some rain gear (it is Ireland, where you can experience all four seasons in a day after all) and took the leap.

We booked a seven-day itinerary including roundtrip airfare from the U.S. to Dublin, and then Cork. It would turn out to be one of the most memorable, and personally satisfying trips of our lives.

The seven-day adventure started in Cork which is famed for its street scenes, pubs, music, and of course, Blarney Castle and the famed stone located just outside the city. With a centrally located hotel, and an easily walkable city, it was a great start to rolling into vacation mode. We then rode via coach to Ennis, a delightful town of winding streets, great pubs, and even a fun public golf course. The chicken pot pie at the Old Ground Hotel was one of the best I've ever had, naturally complimented by a Guinness. It was here the group assembled and began the tour starting with energetic walks along the stunning Cliffs of Moher rising from the Atlantic Ocean.

It was in Lisdoonvarna where we learned to ride our e-bikes, and soon we were on our way down country roads, watching surfers riding waves in the Atlantic, and rolling off the miles along the wild and stunning coastline. Along the way were ruins of old abbeys and even thousands of years old monoliths. The peddling was easy and the e-bikes made light work of it, allowing us to absorb all that we experienced along the way at a leisurely pace.

VBT's local guides eased us into the journey, fitting our bikes, and encouraging us on a few warmup rides. That late afternoon, we learned there was always a pint of Guinness or Irish whiskey if one wanted to toast the day and evening ahead. We stayed at the charming and peaceful Sheedy's Country House Hotel, a place I would have never found on my own, even with all my travel experience.

Like I said, we are not really tour people. But our cycling group, who we lived with, ate with, and traveled with were intriguing and fascinating—and would be an element that created a truly positive and memorable experience. They were eclectic. One was a surgeon from Virginia, one a widow, a supermarket manager from Pennsylvania, a young dentist from Alaska, a couple whose husband was a former Navy SEAL, a public relations professional from New York, and so on. All different people from all walks of life. And the group bonded quickly, helping each other along the way and collectively pushing the boundaries of predictable and comfortable worlds. Some had never been on a bike tour, others (the older couple in their late 70s who could out bike us all) were doing four trips back-to-back and on their 17th VBT tour. Rather impressive.

The biggest surprise in Ireland was the food. This was no McCann's or Blarney Stone on Manhattan. The food was exceptionally fresh, sophisticated, balanced, and delicious. For example, the menu at the Lough Inagh Lodge Hotel in Connemara featured Achill grown Pacific oysters and Guinness hot and lemon; roast duck breast with star anise and plum sauce, Killarney lobster, and Irish beef fillet steak with peppercorn sauce.

Of course, there was warm chocolate pudding with butterscotch sauce and vanilla ice cream, and panna cotta with fresh fig and port sauce, and local cheeses with crackers and fruit.

At the Old Ground Hotel in Ennis, one could find Asian style spiced pork belly and mixes leaves, couscous salad with Hoisin and sesame seed salad, roasted salmon with scallion mash, wild mushroom risotto, and roasted chicken supreme stuffed with pancetta, plus local cheese in a creamy wild mushroom sauce.

At every hotel, pub, and eatery, the food was nothing short of local, abundant, and excellent.

The following morning, we had a hearty breakfast and started out with the group on a route down country lanes and backroads, past old castles, ruins, endless rock walls covered in ivy and wildflowers, and onto the beguiling landscape called The Burren,



KYLEMORE ABBEY

a seemingly endless rock formation that juxtaposes the greenery of the land. It was here we met our first local expert (I'm always a bit wary of these parts of any trip) but he was truly captivating—almost part of the land—thanks to generations before him. We pushed off with a deeper understanding of the people and mysteries that swirl around Celtic Ireland. My wife and I were averaging around 25 to 30 miles a day at our pace and doing just fine thanks to the three "booster" speeds on our e-bikes. We also slept quite well!

The following day we peddled and explored ancient religious sites and ruins in the pastoral country sides of Carran and Kilfenora. We explored Neolithic tombs that cemented the ancient history of this place. We rolled into Galway on the West coast of Ireland overlooking the ocean and were greeted by a bustling, small city full of music, pubs, happy embracing people, and vibrant life. Our little, yet upscale hotel, was ideally situated for exploring the town on our own as much or as little as we wanted. In our case, this would be the one-half day of pouring rain, and, like the Irish, we were prepared. It made no difference—we learned you can have fun in the Irish rain (whiskey optional).

At this point in the journey the group became a bit tired. VBT obviously knew what they were doing, and we woke up and took a short ferry ride to truly remote Ireland, the Aran Islands, a mysterious, ancient stronghold boasting some of the finest prehistoric monuments in all of Europe, including the ancient Druid site of Dun Aengus. With essentially one loop road, beaches, and the little town of Kilronan, the group biked or walked at their leisure and took time to relax. All could feel this location was a place in Ireland older than Ireland itself, full of mystery and myths. Our hotel, a series of small ultra-modern, semi-attached units or apartments with sweeping views of the seas, and an amazing restaurant, seemed to sum up the endless contradiction and juxtaposition that is Ireland.

By now we understood that while this was an active vacation, it was also a social vacation—one of chemistry, curiosity, new

adventures, and learning that getting lost was how one discovered to be content with oneself (but there was relief when you found a fellow cyclist on the road after getting lost for a while). By the middle of the trip we had all learned that if we did straggle, or stop for one too many photos or a pint too many in the pub, our trusty VBT guides were always in a van ready to pick us up, or help us along the way.

The next day we ferried back to the mainland and rolled to Rossaveel and Connemara. This leisurely ride featured stunning scenery, the "Wild West" of Ireland, great pubs to relax and linger at, and a plethora of views of beaches, woodlands, farms, peat bogs, and even small mountains. The hotel on this night would be in the middle of nowhere, the Lough Inagh Lodge in Connemara—ancient and wonderful, with great food, a warm hearth, and the ideal view of lakes, mountains, and tranquility.

On the final day of our tour, where cycling was now a second thought, and preparing for sun, rain, warmth, and cool breezes an instinct, was perhaps the best ride of them all—a morning trip up to the impressive and intact Kylemore Abbey, on flower strewn backroads along the mesmerizing Renvyle Peninsula, and wonderful views, where crashing waves mingle with the beaches and coves along the coast.

We would return home via Dublin, an energetic and fabled city. What started out as a journey with an unease over the unknown ended with a sense of accomplishment, an understanding that seeing the world (or a little part of it) at 10 or 15 miles per hour allowed the senses to come alive. We grasped the true nature of Ireland—it's people, culture, history, and mystery. The country had indeed seeped into our DNA, or in my case, reawakened it. One does not go to Ireland to get somewhere else, but to start the journey of a lifetime.

For more information on Xanterra Travel Collection® and its affiliated properties, please visit [Xanterra.com/stories](https://www.xanterra.com/stories).

A bipartisan permitting reform breakthrough

The Supreme Court limited its scope last month. President Donald Trump changed how federal agencies enforce it during his first month in office. Republicans tried to rewrite it in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, but were thwarted by the parliamentarian. Now, permitting reformers are back, this time with a bipartisan House bill that would provide much-needed regulatory relief from the National Environmental Policy Act to virtually every sector of the economy.

House Committee on Natural Resources Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR) and Rep. Jared Golden (D-ME) introduced the Standardizing Permitting and Expediting Economic Development Act last month, legislation that in Westerman's words would "launch America into a future where we can effectively innovate and implement to revitalize our infrastructure, meet skyrocketing energy demands, lead the world in the [artificial intelligence] race and work in harmony with our natural environment."

As Golden stresses in his statement on the bill, and the Supreme Court reinforced in its recent decision on the law, NEPA is a "procedural statute." Unlike the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts, NEPA doesn't actually make the environment better in any measurable way. It doesn't remove bacteria from our water or particulates from the air. All it does is create a series of hoops federal agencies must jump through whenever anything they do touches the environment.

If the Interior Department wants to issue a grazing permit for a rancher, it must comply with NEPA. If the Forest Service wants to do a controlled burn to prevent forest fires, it must comply with NEPA. If the Energy Department provides a loan guarantee for a power line, it must comply with NEPA.

In theory, the hoops NEPA requires federal agencies to jump through sound fine. It requires agencies to study how their actions affect the environment. These studies are called Environmental Impact Statements. Federal agencies studying

the environmental effects of their actions sounds good. But NEPA goes further than that by empowering entities to sue in federal court if the scope of a review is too large, or too small, or if all the Ts weren't crossed and all the Is weren't dotted.

This citizen suit provision has become a boon to environmental activists and their nonprofit organizations that raise money by bragging to donors about all the infrastructure projects they have prevented. While these litigants lose more than 80% of the time, their suits cost money to defend, cause years of delay, and often end with a project's cancellation, even though the project caused no underlying environmental harm.

The SPEED Act tackles this problem in a number of ways. First, it untriggers NEPA if the agency action is only financial. Loan guarantees or program grants no longer need to comply with NEPA. It also limits who can sue under NEPA to those who both participated in the public comment process, made a specific substantive claim, and can show direct harm to them from the agency action. This is a huge limitation compared to the old regime.

Most importantly, however, the SPEED Act allows projects to continue while the agency addresses NEPA noncompliance. No more project delays! Even if a plaintiff shows that an agency abused its discretion in the NEPA process, a project can continue while the agency rectifies the error.

The SPEED Act would be a huge boost to the entire economy. Roads will be built faster and cheaper, as will factories, power plants, transmission lines, homes, apartments, ski resorts, shopping centers, and much more. Name anything that needs to be built, and thanks to SPEED, it will be built cheaper and faster.

Some in the Democratic Party are now styling themselves as part of an Abundance Movement. The SPEED Act is a test for these Democrats. Do they support real permitting reform to make America a country that builds again? Or will they side with environmental groups and push our country further down the path of decline and mediocrity? Hopefully, for the sake of young Americans hoping to start a family, Democrats choose growth, dynamism, and bipartisanship. ★



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Florida's immigration enforcement model

President Donald Trump deserves much praise for securing the southern border without any new laws and lining up the cash needed for future immigration enforcement in the “one big, beautiful bill.” But Republican governors deserve plenty of credit on border security, too, especially those who effectively turned the tide on illegal immigration in their states before Trump resumed control of the White House.

No one has aided Trump's mass deportation efforts more than Gov. Ron DeSantis (R-FL), who was aggressive on immigration enforcement before Trump's second term. In fact, DeSantis's border record could be considered the blueprint for the second Trump administration.

Signed into law by DeSantis in May 2023, Florida's SB 1718 mandates that every employer with more than 25 employees use the Department of Homeland Security's E-Verify program. It also bans local governments from issuing identification cards to illegal immigrants, empowers state law enforcement to suspend the business licenses of companies found

employing illegal immigrants, and requires hospitals to record the immigration status of all patients, including emergency room visits.

The same so-called experts who said Trump's enforcement-only policies wouldn't work said the Florida law would also fail to stop illegal immigration. They warned that even if the law did work to decrease the illegal immigrant population in the state, it would tank the Sunshine State's economy. The experts were proven wrong on both fronts.

Illegal immigrants left Florida, and as a result, emergency Medicaid claims by illegal immigrants fell significantly across the state, and housing prices stabilized. Meanwhile, as illegal immigrants left the state, Florida's economy continued to grow. Wages rose in construction, agriculture, landscaping, and hospitality as employers were forced to find native born American workers to replace cheap illegal immigrant labor. DeSantis's law has been a complete success.

With Trump in office, no state has been a better partner on immigration than Florida. All state agencies have signed 287(g)

law enforcement cooperation agreements with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, as have all 67 county sheriffs. DeSantis has even twisted a few local arms to get those agreements signed, such as in Orange County. But now, federal and state law enforcement are working together to locate, arrest, and deport illegal immigrants across the state.

State law enforcement officers have since detained over 1,000 illegal immigrants from traffic stops and have assisted in immigration raids, netting more than 1,000 arrests with federal law enforcement.

Then there is the most theatrical element of Florida's immigration enforcement efforts: “Alligator Alcatraz,” a facility that is capable of holding 2,000 detainees and set for expansion to 4,000. Notably, 600 illegal immigrants detained at “Alligator Alcatraz” have already been deported. Other Republican controlled states are scrambling to set up their own detention facilities.

Florida has even worked with Border Patrol to create a state-funded program that pays for flights home for illegal immigrants who choose to self-deport after they have been encountered during state traffic stops.

Florida has proven that bold leadership and strong cooperation with federal authorities can deliver real results on immigration. By embracing every available enforcement tool from mandatory E-Verify to the construction of “Alligator Alcatraz,” DeSantis has shown that states can play a meaningful role in immigration enforcement. The results speak for themselves: fewer illegal immigrants drawing on taxpayer-funded services, rising wages for American workers, and an economy that continues to thrive despite dire predictions from the so-called experts.

As other Republican-led states look to Florida's model, the Sunshine State stands as both a proving ground and a partner for Trump's national deportation strategy. The message is clear: When state and federal leaders work together with courage and resolve, immigration laws can be enforced, American workers can prosper, and communities can feel secure once again. ★

Gov. Ron DeSantis speaks about deportation flights from “Alligator Alcatraz” in Ochopee, Florida.



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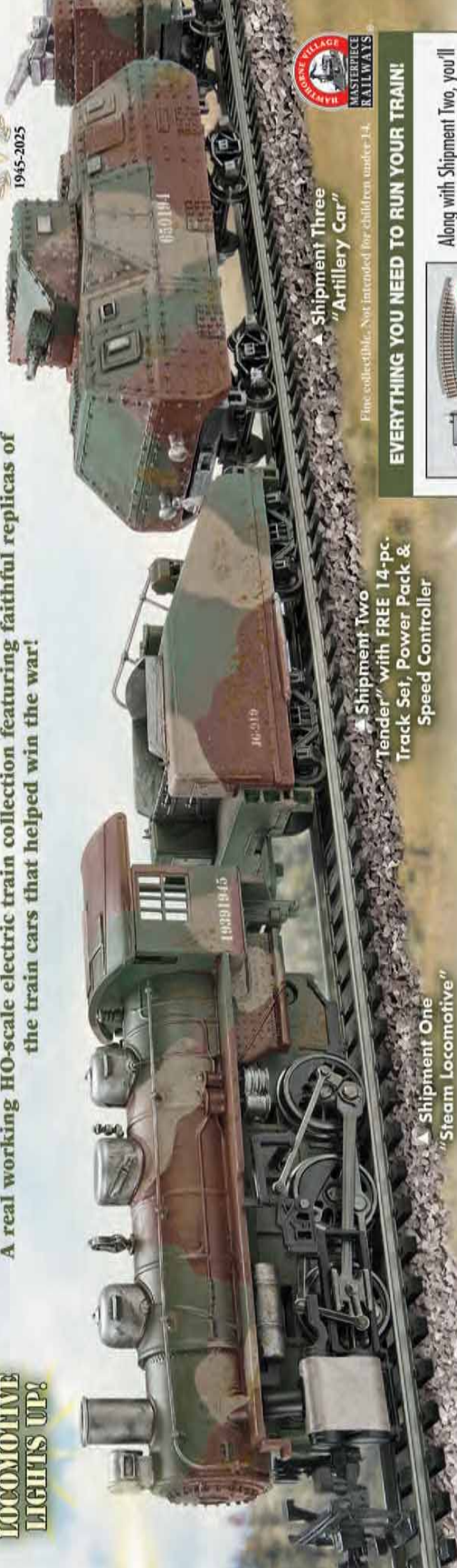
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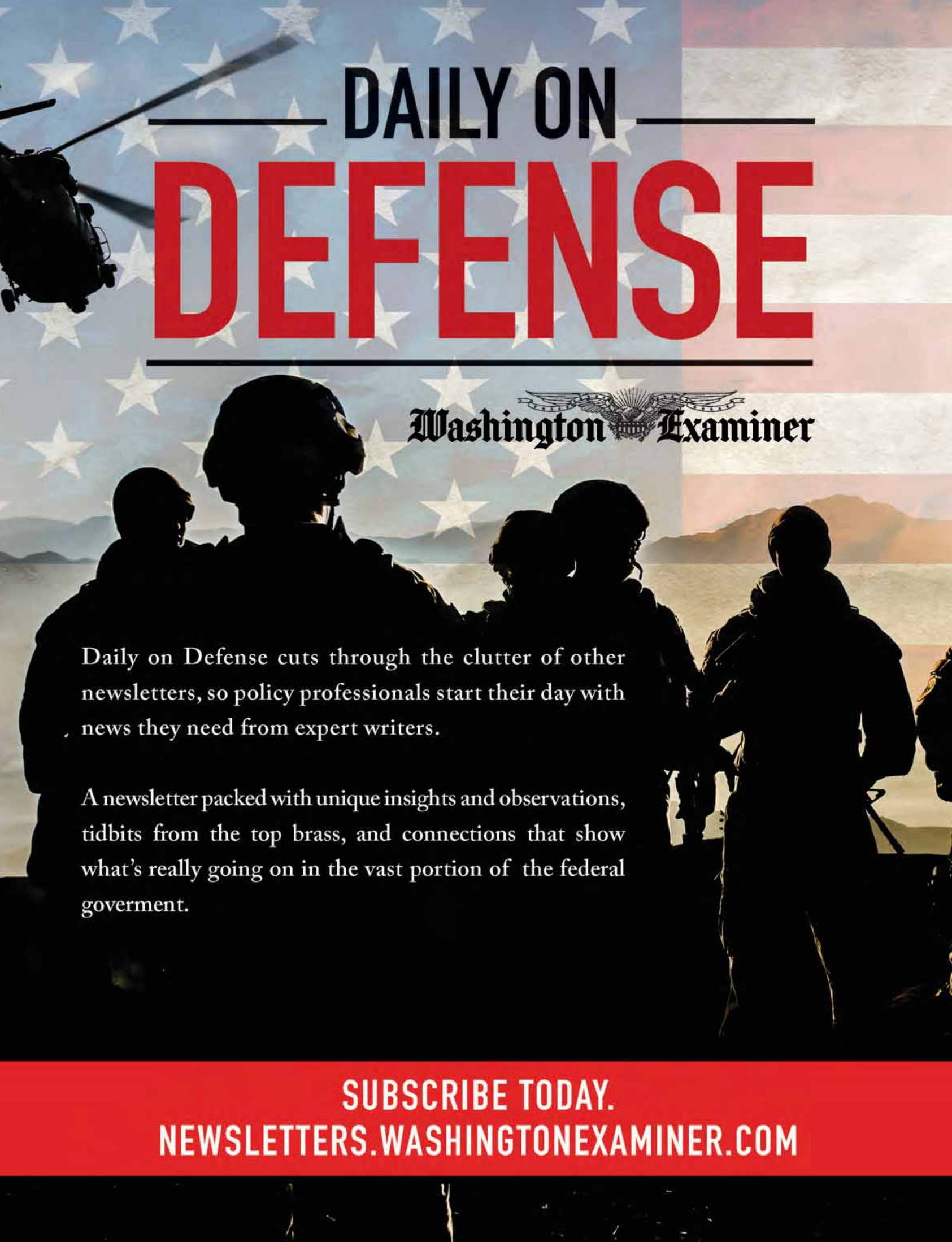
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New York City's fractured anti-socialist majority



Is it possible to build a big enough political coalition to prevent the election of a socialist mayor in an overwhelmingly Democratic city? That's the test ahead of New York City voters in November.

Early indications are that the answer is yes, but it won't be easy. Zohran Mamdani won the Democratic mayoral nomination by double digits in June. That is usually good enough to win the general election, and there are some signs that Democrats are coalescing around their radical young nominee.

But the verdict is far from unanimous. According to the *RealClearPolitics* polling average, Mamdani leads with 35% of the vote. Former Gov. Andrew Cuomo, the Democratic runner-up who is running in the general election as an independent candidate, takes 22.7%. Republican Curtis Sliwa comes next at 18%. Incumbent Mayor Eric Adams, who is also still in the race as an independent, is holding on to 12.3%. It should be noted that most of this polling is from July.

Thirty-five percent is rather far from a majority, but in a four-way race, it is good enough. If New Yorkers don't want a mayor who muses about seizing the means of production, globalizing the intifada, or defunding the police, they will need to settle on a viable alternative. Cuomo is the best-polling. Yet if you are a Republican voter in the Big Apple, you are probably not inclined to view the Cuomos as your savior. It is nevertheless difficult to see Mamdani losing if a Republican wins 15% to 20% of the vote.

Another way of looking at this dilemma: President Donald Trump has been weighing getting involved in the race. The *New York Times* has reported that he and Cuomo have discussed the contest, though the president has historically been closer to Adams. Trump could swing enough GOP voters to Cuomo to make the race more competitive, but he could just as easily produce a rally-around-the-nominee effect for Mamdani.

That's clearly the way Mamdani sees it. "This should be a race about ... who will make this city affordable, who will ensure that each and every New Yorker is safe, who will bring our city forward, not an audition for the best jester for Donald Trump and his billionaire supporters," he told reporters after news of Trump's interest in getting involved first broke. The *New York Times* put it more delicately in its subheadline: "The possibility that the president will seek to intercede could inject an element of unpredictability into an already fractious contest."

That it could. The implications of Mamdani's election would reach far beyond the five boroughs. He would instantly become a national model for directionless Democrats. That could redound to the GOP's electoral benefit in the longer term, as the Democrats switch out the aging Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) for younger versions. Or it could simply lead to more left-wing misgovernment.

Four years of David Dinkins made even New York City ready to vote Republican, though it should be noted that Rudy Giuliani was competitive in the general election four years prior. Not so with Sliwa.

New Yorkers who wish to avoid this experiment are running out of time. ★

Hugo Gurdon will return next week.

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Your Land



In-N-Out Burger restaurant on July 21 Daly City, California. The restaurant chain heiress and CEO Lynsi Snyder announced that she will be relocating her family from California to Tennessee, citing the challenges of raising a family and running a business in the state.

Could California Drive Out In-N-Out?

In-N-Out stands above all competitors not only because of its quality but also because of its positive association with the state it calls home (Sorry, Texas, Whataburger just doesn't compare). But that relationship is slowly dwindling, and the "In-N-Out" name might soon describe the chain's time in California.

In-N-Out was founded in California

in 1948, becoming a West Coast juggernaut that operates differently from its many fast food competitors. The chain has not embraced the franchising model or gone public, ensuring that each new location is high-quality as it expands. It has slowly stretched to neighboring states and now reaches as far east as Texas, with new locations planned for Tennessee in the near future.



A sign warns patrons of car break-ins at the In-N-Out Burger in Oakland, California.

That growth into Tennessee is of particular note as California's Democratic Party makes running businesses in the state more difficult. In-N-Out's CEO moved her family to Tennessee, citing how hard it is to raise a family in California. The chain's headquarters remains in California, but a new "eastern territory office" is opening in Tennessee, setting up the possibility for a future headquarters transition if California continues its Democratic death spiral.

In-N-Out's relationship with its home state has suffered under Gov. Gavin Newsom (D-CA). In 2021, San Francisco demanded that restaurants check for proof of COVID-19 vaccinations, as part of the state's incoherent and anti-science collection of masking and vaccination policies. In-N-Out refused, and the city temporarily shut down its San Francisco location.

In-N-Out permanently closed its Oakland location, the chain's first-ever closure, thanks to the city's crime crisis. Driven by soft-on-crime California law and soft-on-crime Oakland "prosecutors," the crime crisis in the city became so dangerous that the chain could no longer guarantee the safety of its employees or customers, despite still being profitable.

In-N-Out then joined the push to repeal some of California's soft-on-crime policies with Prop 36, fighting against

state Democrats (including Newsom) to sell the ballot measure to voters. In-N-Out stood against California's coddling of criminals and its COVID-19 authoritarianism, fighting both every step of the way.

But those fights can be exhausting, especially as California's business environment worsens. The chain has had to raise prices after California Democrats jacked up the minimum wage for fast-food workers. In-N-Out's starting wage was already higher than the original \$16 per hour and the new \$20 per hour. However, California's heavy-handed actions led to inflation that all businesses must account for in their pricing.

California keeps making things tougher for everybody, including In-N-Out. The chain will expand all the way to Tennessee, and its CEO now resides there while it builds a new Eastern management hub. In-N-Out says it will keep its headquarters in California, but the chain will now have an escape hatch if California's terrible governance continues.

In-N-Out may be a California staple, but it is not part of whatever suicide pact to which the California Democratic Party has tied the state's government. California has lost much of its shine, but losing In-N-Out would be the best representation of the state's decline to date.

—By Zachary Fari

Aztec Batman: Defender of Human Sacrifice

There's usually a fun element to fictionalizing history. Imagine a world where Dwight Eisenhower shot Adolf Hitler to end World War II in place of the führer's bunker suicide, or John Wilkes Booth being stopped by a good Samaritan who saved Abraham Lincoln's life and allowed the 16th president to deliver on his promise of "malice toward none" during Reconstruction.

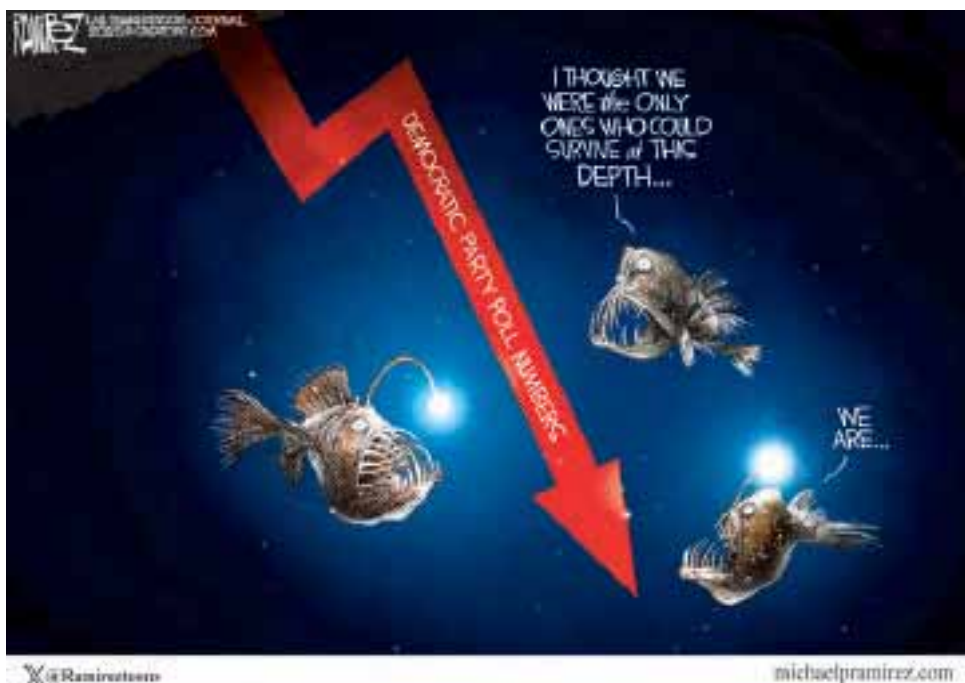
Hollywood has tried its hand at historical fiction on numerous occasions. Magneto in *X-Men: Days of Future Past* tried to stop the bullet that killed John F. Kennedy, thus validating the magic bullet theory and that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. And Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* offered an alternative history where Hitler and the entire German high command are eliminated in one massive theater fire and bombing.

But the latest offering in Hollywood's historical fiction canon does not fantasize about killing Nazis or stopping a presidential assassination. Instead, Warner Bros. Animation is set to release *Aztec Batman: Clash of Empires*, a fictionalized account of Hernan Cortez's conquest of Mexico, where the invaded Aztecs and their cult of human sacrifice turn to Batman as their salvation, while the conquistadors who stopped this barbarism turn into villains from the Batman rogues gallery.

According to the online synopsis of the film, which is set for an October release, an Aztec boy, driven by grief after his father, an Aztec chieftain, is killed by Cortez, is chosen by a bat god to confront the invading Spaniards and defend the Aztec empire. Cortez, in the meantime, becomes the villain Two-Face.

Imagining the white conquistadors as merely a deranged and greedy lot who committed a mass genocide against a sophisticated and peaceful people is the sort of historical revisionism that one would expect from the faculty lounge of UC-Berkeley, not a comic book-inspired movie.

The Cortez expedition in 1519 remains one of the most audacious and remarkable feats in history. With a small





band of several hundred Spaniards, Cortez managed to conquer an empire of millions. Even with the technological advantages that his expedition had, the success of this conquest was nothing short of miraculous. But it did not come without help. Few would dispute that the expedition would have failed if it weren't for the thousands of natives who joined his cause to conquer the Aztec empire.

That's because the Aztec empire was a murderous death cult that was brutally oppressive and subjugated the villages within its reach, forcing them to provide a steady stream of victims for ritualistic human sacrifices. When the Spaniards came, Cortez had little trouble rallying natives to his cause, as he promised an end to the depravity and forced the Aztecs to end the practice of human sacrifice.

Warner Bros. Animation could have told a fictionalized story in which the chieftain was hauled off to be a human sacrifice, and his son took on the mantle of Batman to help Cortez conquer the death cult that ruled Mexico at the beginning of the 16th century.

Instead, the studio would have you believe that the civilization that cut the beating hearts out of innocent men,

women, and children was actually the good guys, while the white men who stopped them were a band of murderous psychopaths. After all, maintaining the narrative that white men in history were evil and preyed on the fictionalized innocent and peaceful indigenous people was more important than an honest accounting of history.

—By Jeremiah Poff

Stand By Your Man

Trend pieces rarely identify something brand new because there is nothing new in the lives of men and women.

Likewise, when the *New York Times* explains the latest cultural developments to its readers, the features often tell them more about the cultural milieu of highly educated, white, feminist, 30- to 40-something-year-old, city-dwelling women — that is, the outlet's writers and their friends — than they tell them about any larger slice of society.

"Why Women Are Weary of the Emotional Labor of 'Mankeeping'" is the outlet's latest explication of the zeitgeist.

On one level, the theme rehashes the feelings Tammy Wynette expressed 55 years ago: "Sometimes it's hard to be a woman/Giving all your love to just one man."

Nor is it clear that "mankeeping" is a new term. The word was far more popular during debates over slavery than it is today, Google data suggests.

The trend piece wrestles with real phenomena that are not the inventions of too-online feminists: Men having fewer male friends than in years past, and, implicitly, adult life becoming oriented toward women rather than men. But also, it's just another essay about how much men stink, and it can be a bit confusing to follow all the arguments against men.

Abolishing "guy time" was, after all, a feminist, egalitarian project, all in the name of including women in formerly all-male settings. This inclusion was needed "because the presence of women may help disrupt conventional masculinity norms and promote more communal interactions," as academics put it.

So the Boy Scouts, all-male golf clubs, and guys' pickup games had to be abolished — sorry, made inclusive.

Also, a poisonous ingredient in toxic masculinity, we have been told for more

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than a decade, is that men don't share their feelings enough. Now, the problem is that they share their feelings too much?

But the most interesting detail in the story is the headline phrase "emotional labor."

This strained phrase tells us what really bugs the folks who write these essays: the expectation that you, an autonomous individual, should ever suffer, cry, rejoice, be happy, or get angry on behalf of anyone but yourself.

The *New York Times* article defines "mankeeping" as "the work women do to meet the social and emotional needs of the men in their lives." It laments that some women have become "a central — if not the central — piece of a man's social support system."

Imagine being the most important person in someone's life!

The supposed problem here is basically marriage and family.

The article links to a *Vice* article, which says "mankeeping is driving women to celibacy." That *Vice* piece complains about "the emotional labor women end up doing in heterosexual relationships. It goes beyond remembering birthdays or coordinating social plans. It means being your partner's one-man support system. Managing his stress. Interpreting his moods. Holding his hand through feelings he won't share with anyone else. All of it unpaid, unac-

knowledge, and often unreciprocated."

There you go. Unpaid emotional labor is intolerable for the modern feminist. It's also known as loving one another, which sounds a little too much like the stuff Jesus used to talk about. Jesus, marriage, commitment? That's the patriarchy, after all.

—By Timothy P. Carney

The Moral the Merrier

Gallup's annual surveys on the moral acceptability of various issues have produced largely predictable results, with social conservatives remaining in the minority on most measures. The findings were generally unremarkable, except on the question of polygamy, which stands out as a growing point of divergence among younger respondents.

It remains the case that a strong majority, 74%, of people view polygamy as morally wrong. Likewise, but on the flip side, there is significant national agreement that birth control, divorce, premarital sex, gay or lesbian relations, and embryonic stem cell research are morally acceptable. But that 21% of people approve of polygamy is still a surprising number, especially to one who doesn't follow social surveys.

Increases in polygamy acceptance have happened before. In 2020, overall polling for it came up with 20% of people, down just slightly from 21% in 2015. In 2005, that number was just 6%.

Those numbers themselves are a problem, but the age-specific data are worse. This year, 31% of 18-34-year-olds say that polygamy is morally acceptable, 21 percentage points more than the 55-and-older crowd.

It makes sense that there was once a more solid consensus against polygamy: The practice is a bad deal for women — consider abuse, property, and general wellbeing — for children — the "two-parent privilege" is not a minimum — and for Western civilization. As more Americans attempt to reject the Christian foundation of the country, they widen the door to polygamy and its implications. And while polygamy is nothing new, it certainly hasn't reached normal status in our society. Where are young people getting the idea that it is a viable option?

The legacy media, of course, is always an answer. In this case, it's a primary one. Sociologist Brad Wilcox has tracked and rebutted media promotions of polygamy for at least a decade, hopefully to some avail. And in just the past couple of years, the *New York Times* has pushed such pieces as "Interested in Polyamory? Check Out These Places?" and "I Was Content With Monogamy. I Shouldn't Have Been."

Add to this publicity aspect the examples of the adults who surround these young people. No-fault divorce has been a disaster (along with the popularity of regular old divorce) for the children from these broken families. Other children bear the consequences of family formation breakdown as a whole, such as with entirely fatherless homes or adoptions into gay households. Marriage and dating, in general, have degraded in recent times.

All the measures of sweeping moral tolerance, with birth control (90%) and divorce (75%) in the lead, seem to be the measures by which we can track relational decline. Likewise, moral decline, given at least our instinctive repulse at the polygamy trends.

No matter how increasingly tradition-minded, young people are still eminently impressionable. It shouldn't take something like polygamy to startle their predecessors.

—By Emma Fuentes



Popular CoQ10 Pills Leave Millions Suffering

Could this newly-discovered brain fuel solve America's worsening memory crisis?

PALM BEACH, FLORIDA — Millions of Americans take the supplement known as CoQ10. It's the coenzyme that supercharges the "energy factories" in your cells known as *mitochondria*. But there's a serious flaw that's leaving millions unsatisfied.

As you age, your mitochondria break down and fail to produce energy. In a revealing study, a team of researchers showed that 95 percent of the mitochondria in a 90-year-old man were damaged, compared to almost no damage in the mitochondria of a 5-year-old.

Taking CoQ10 alone is not enough to solve this problem. Because as powerful as CoQ10 is, there's one critical thing it fails to do: it can't create new mitochondria to replace the ones you lost.

And that's bad news for Americans all over the country. The loss of cellular energy is a problem for the memory concerns people face as they get older.

"We had no way of replacing lost mitochondria until a recent discovery changed everything," says Dr. Al Sears, founder and medical director of the Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine in Palm Beach, Florida. "Researchers discovered the only nutrient known to modern science that has the power to trigger the growth of new mitochondria."

Why Taking CoQ10 is Not Enough

Dr. Sears explains, "This new discovery is so powerful, it can multiply your mitochondria by 55 percent in just a few weeks. That's the equivalent of restoring decades of lost brain power."

This exciting nutrient — called PQQ (*pyrroloquinoline quinone*) — is the driving force behind a revolution in aging. When paired with CoQ10, this dynamic duo has the power to reverse the age-related memory losses you may have thought were beyond your control.

Dr. Sears pioneered a new formula — called **Ultra Accel Q** — that combines both CoQ10 and PQQ to support maximum cellular energy and the normal growth of new mitochondria. **Ultra Accel Q** is the first of its kind to address both problems and is already creating huge demand.

In fact, demand has been so overwhelming that inventories repeatedly sell out. But a closer look at **Ultra Accel Q** reveals there are good reasons why sales are booming.

Science Confirms the Many Benefits of PQQ

The medical journal *Biochemical*

Pharmacology reports that PQQ is up to 5,000 times more efficient in sustaining energy production than common antioxidants. With the ability to keep every cell in your body operating at full strength, **Ultra Accel Q** delivers more than just added brain power and a faster memory.

People feel more energetic, more alert, and don't need naps in the afternoon. The boost in cellular energy generates more power to your heart, lungs, muscles, and more.

"With the PQQ in **Ultra Accel**, I have energy I never thought possible at my age," says Colleen R., one of Dr. Sears's patients. "I'm in my 70s but feel 40 again. I think clearly, move with real energy and sleep like a baby."

The response has been overwhelmingly positive, and Dr. Sears receives countless emails from his patients and readers. "My patients tell me they feel better than they have in years. This is ideal for people who are feeling old and run down, or for those who feel more forgetful. It surprises many that you can add healthy and productive years to your life simply by taking **Ultra Accel Q** every day."

You may have seen Dr. Sears on television or read one of his 12 best-selling books. Or you may have seen him speak at the 2016 WPBF 25 Health and Wellness Festival in South Florida, featuring Dr. Oz and special guest Suzanne Somers. Thousands of people attended Dr. Sears's lecture on anti-aging breakthroughs and waited in line for hours during his book signing at the event.

Will Ultra Accel Q Multiply Your Energy?

Ultra Accel Q is turning everything we thought we knew about youthful energy on its head. Especially for people over age 50. In less than 30 seconds every morning, you can harness the power of this breakthrough discovery to restore peak energy and your "spark for life."

So, if you've noticed less energy as you've gotten older, and you want an easy way to reclaim your youthful edge, this new opportunity will feel like blessed relief.

The secret is the "energy multiplying" molecule that activates a dormant gene in your body that declines with age, which then instructs your cells to pump out fresh energy from the inside-out. This growth of new "energy factories" in your cells is called mitochondrial biogenesis.



MEMORY-BUILDING SENSATION: Top doctors are now recommending new **Ultra Accel Q** because it restores decades of lost brain power without a doctor's visit.

Instead of falling victim to that afternoon slump, you enjoy sharp-as-a-tack focus, memory, and concentration from sunup to sundown. And you get more done in a day than most do in a week. Regardless of how exhausting the world is now.

Dr. Sears reports, "The most rewarding aspect of practicing medicine is watching my patients get the joy back in their lives. **Ultra Accel Q** sends a wake-up call to every cell in their bodies... And they actually feel young again."

And his patients agree. "I noticed a difference within a few days," says Jerry from Ft. Pierce, Florida. "My endurance has almost doubled, and I feel it mentally, too. There's a clarity and sense of well-being in my life that I've never experienced before."

How To Get Ultra Accel Q

This is the official nationwide release of **Ultra Accel Q** in the United States. And so, the company is offering a special discount supply to anyone who calls during the official launch.

An Order Hotline has been set up for local readers to call. This gives everyone an equal chance to try **Ultra Accel Q**. And your order is backed up by a no-hassle, 90-day money back guarantee. No questions asked.

Starting at 7:00 AM today, the discount offer will be available for a limited time only. All you have to do is call TOLL FREE **1-888-358-9670** right now and use promo code **WEUAQ825** to secure your own supply.

Important: Due to **Ultra Accel Q** recent media exposure, phone lines are often busy. If you call and do not immediately get through, please be patient and call back.

Scott Bessent's Moment

The treasury secretary is staying on the job at a pivotal point for Trump's economic agenda

By Salena Zito

PITTSBURGH

It should come as no surprise that Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent declined to be the next Federal Reserve chairman. Spend any time listening to Bessent talk, and it is clear he is laser-focused on one thing, something he can only accomplish in his current job: lifting America's economy into a position where both Main Street and Wall Street are performing equally robustly.

The 79th treasury secretary also loves working with President Donald Trump, something that became very evident when I was a fly on the wall on Air Force One at the end of May. That's when Bessent traveled with the president to the U.S. Steel Mon Valley Works—Irvine Plant in West Mifflin, Pennsylvania. The banter, trust, and respect that went both

ways between the men were tangible.

Bessent was considered a leading candidate for the Fed job. But Trump told CNBC earlier this month that he had narrowed the field of possible future Federal Reserve chairmen and that Bessent was not on the list. Not because of any falling out, but quite the opposite.

"Well, I love Scott, but he wants to stay where he is," Trump said during a *Squawk Box* interview. "I asked him last night, 'Is this something you want?'"

Trump explained that Bessent said, "Nope, I want to stay where I am." He actually said, "I want to work with you. It's such an honor."

Bessent has become a central figure in promoting Trump's economic agenda, from tax cuts and deregulation to the tariffs now kicking in globally.

A MAN WITH A PURPOSE

In mid-July, Bessent was standing in a sunlit hallway at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. He had just finished a panel at the inaugural Pennsylvania Energy and Innovation Summit that Sen. Dave McCormick (R-PA) organized, bringing together stakeholders in energy, the trade unions, and artificial intelligence.

Bessent said in an interview with the *Washington Examiner* he was thrilled with the possibilities coming from the event, opportunities he says cross all sectors in the American economy.

"It's what I call parallel prosperity, capital and humans, and both sides can do great," Bessent said. "People can make money, workers can have a great future."

After spending the bulk of the time



FROM MAIN STREET TO WALL STREET

Bessent grew up in a small fishing town in South Carolina called Little River. His father, who was in real estate, fell on hard financial times. His mother was a homemaker who often worked in the family business to help out. His parents were married to each other twice. His mother married again three more times.

“My dad was a real estate developer, and then my mom mostly stayed at home,” he explained. “And then my dad had some financial troubles and substance abuse problems, and she ran his business for a while.”

The financial hardship led Bessent to work two jobs at the age of 9, he said. He set up the umbrellas on the beach and was the busboy at the cafeteria — jobs that led him to be very supportive of Trump’s “no tax on tips” pledge during the campaign last year.

“No tax on tips is very personal for me,” he said.

Bessent said he was very interested in the world as a child and knew he wanted to be in the thick of it.

His father had the biggest science fiction collection in South Carolina, so much so that his go-to line is that, as a child, he could point to Alpha Centauri on a map before he could point to Chicago. It was a hobby Bessent said he could never quite figure out because his father never liked leaving home.

“We lived in the house he was born in, that had been in the family, however many generations,” Bessent said. “He loved serving the country in the Army, but he never wanted to leave home.”

Bessent left small-town South Carolina for Yale University after high school. He explained that he came from a very diverse part of South Carolina and that New Haven, Connecticut, was not so different.

“Plus, South Carolina has a big Yale tradition, and family has gone there,” he added.

His academic goals were journalism or computer science.

“I liked writing narratives and all that, and then always very good at quantitative things,” Bessent said. “And then I did a summer internship in investing, and it turned out that was a good combination of both.”

He still deeply loves journalism.

FUNNY, HOW?

Bessent has a way of using deadpan humor to discuss serious issues. If you are

there talking to people attending the event, Bessent said he was left with the sense it had been a wild success.

“People are over the moon,” he said. “I mean, I’ve never seen anything like this.”

It was his third time in Western Pennsylvania in under a year. The first was election eve at Trump’s penultimate event at PPG Paints Arena in Pittsburgh’s Hill District, which was filled with young people, such local luminaries as Roberto Clemente Jr., and a surprise endorsement from podcaster Joe Rogan.

Bessent’s second visit to the state was in May at the Irvin Plant, where Trump singled him out during his speech for getting the deal between U.S. Steel and Nippon Steel over the finish line. The president also ribbed him for

not being as beefed up as the union steelworkers in attendance.

“This is on behalf of Scott, the secretary of treasury ... and all the great geniuses and people we have working, and they are smart, but I don’t think you’d be a good steelworker,” Trump said deadpanning as he looked at Bessent, adding, “Scott, I’m sorry. I’m going to have to put a little more muscle content into that guy, but he’s great. He’s great at what he does.”

For his part, Bessent did a pretty good job of feigning incredulosity.

The U.S. Steel-Nippon Steel deal and the growth of the energy and AI industries take the cyclicity out of the Pittsburgh economy and bring in stability.

“It brings back the communities and fulfills the promise of this administration to Main Street America,” Bessent said.



Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, left, speaks with Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick in the White House, Aug. 6, 2025.

really paying attention, it is very funny. It's something Andrew Ross Sorkin at CNBC noticed just recently at a Sun Valley Conference.

"Sorkin actually looked over at me and said, 'I just thought you were like a professor. You are actually really funny,'" Bessent said.

"I've always been funny, you've just been grumpy," the treasury secretary responded without missing a beat.

When I compared it to the dialogue in a David Mamet play, Bessent is thrilled. "Oh, I love Mamet, by the way," he said.

Bessent said his humor comes from the Southern tradition of enjoying storytelling.

"Everybody always says to me, 'You do such a great job of explaining things,'"

“My job is not to tell President Trump what to do. My job is to give him options and outcomes. ‘If you do this, I believe this will happen. If you do this, I believe that will happen.’ And I understand he has a very high risk tolerance, much higher than mine.”

—Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent

he said. "I think a lot of it is because you explain things through stories or things that have happened or whatever. I think the other thing was important. Our family was very affluent for a couple hundred years, and then we weren't."

Bessent worked his way through college, holding down three jobs during summer break and at least one, if not two, jobs during the school year.

AN INEVITABLE BOND

The dynamic between Trump and Bessent has a familiar feel to it despite them having worked together for only a short time. That is in large part because Bessent has known the entire Trump family for decades, even attending the funeral of Trump's father, Fred Trump, in 1999. But that was because Bessent was best friends with the president's late brother, Robert.

Bessent explained the family would attend New York's Collegiate Church.

"The appeal was the pastor, Norman Vincent Peale," he said. "So every Sunday, he got the power of positive thinking, then they went to the same Italian restaurant, and then they went and looked at every empty apartment that they had and [were] like, 'OK, these are the repairs. This is what we got to do.'"

"So I think I understand where he's coming from," Bessent said of Trump. "Also, I know how smart he is, and I think my job is to try to explain to the world where he's taking things. My job is not to tell President Trump what to do. My job is to give him options and outcomes. 'If you do this, I believe this will happen. If you do this, I believe that will happen.' And I understand he has a very high risk tolerance, much higher than mine."

Bessent added that Trump "has a very high self-preservation too, and we kind of oscillate between even pushing the risk envelope."

"He just has the most open mind of anyone I've ever seen," Bessent said of Trump's decision-making process.

So why don't journalists who cover Trump in Washington see that?

The deadpan returns. "Oh, they don't want to," Bessent said. "It happens because they had no imagination, that this is the way we've always done it. And if you have a Ph.D. in international relations from Johns Hopkins, and the president basically turns everything you've been taught and the orthodoxy of 50 years upside down, and you've wasted your entire life."

THE WALK-OUT LIST

Bessent has goals he plans to hit before he leaves this job. But the first order of business is to never let the institution own him.

"It would be very easy for the building to run you because there's so much to do every day in terms of rolling the federal debt, in terms of all the day-to-day responsibilities," he said. "However, there are 10 things I want to do when I walk out in January of '29: Establish the U.S. dollar dominance straight away out of this little mess, fix the housing market, all these other things, fix the banking system so it worked for everybody, and then having this Main Street boom."

Did Bessent ever imagine he would be the treasury secretary?

"Not really, but a lot of the things that I ended up doing in my life for my career actually got me ready for it," he said. "So being in international finance, in the currency market, and teaching economic history at Yale, if I hadn't had a lot of student loans, I might've been a professor."

Bessent's childhood may have prepared him the most, especially for how the Trump administration is covered by the press.

"I think part of it might just be the shell that I had once my dad went bankrupt," he said. "You just kind of have a protective shell and you don't really care what anybody says about anything." ★

Salena Zito is a national political reporter for the Washington Examiner and author of the New York Times bestseller Butler: The Untold Story of the Near Assassination of Donald Trump and the Fight for America's Heartland.

What's Really Going On in Gaza

How food gets in — and who gets it

By Seth Mandel

On Aug. 1, Hamas released a video of Evyatar David, an Israeli kidnapped from the Nova music festival on Oct. 7, 2023, and held in the dungeons of Gaza since that

day. David was emaciated, practically a skeleton, and moved in slow motion. Near the end of the video, his captors show images of what we are to interpret as starving Palestinian children in Gaza. On the screen appears a message in English, Hebrew, and Arabic: “They eat what we eat. They drink what we drink.”

The point was clear: If Palestinians in Gaza don’t eat, neither do the Israeli hostages.

But the next day, Hamas released a second video of David, and this one exposed the lie at the heart of the first. In the second video, we see a meaty arm hand David a can of beans, which the hostage explains is supposed to keep him alive for two days.

If Hamas were telling the truth when declaring, “They eat what we eat,” David would be fattened up from his captivi-



Emaciated Israeli hostage Evyatar David is offered a can of beans in a video released by Hamas, Aug. 2, 2025.

ty. Indeed, everyone should be so lucky to eat as Hamas eats — throughout the war, Hamas has flaunted its access to

food and to the United Nations facilities that store it.

That reminder of Hamas members’ conspicuous consumption stood in stark contrast to the message of the news cycle that had been raging for days prior: the charge that Israel had been deliberately starving Gaza to the brink of its existence. Warnings of famine have been an ever-present fixture of the anti-Israel side of the narrative of this war, and those warnings have always proved false. What made a much larger swath of the public believe the sky was really falling this time? A viral, and baldly misleading, photograph.

On July 23, the U.K. tabloid *Daily Express* ran a cover photo of Mohammad al Motawaq, an 18-month-old Palestinian child in Gaza, looking gaunt in his mother’s arms. Young Mohammad instantly became the symbol of Israel’s supposed policy of starvation. The next day, news agencies around the world, including the *New York Times*, began using photos of Mohammad. He was, the *New York Times* reported, born healthy — and now he was wasting away. The photo went viral at a moment when concerns over food scarcity in Gaza were growing again, and the

narrative quickly turned against Israel. Israeli leaders were caught off guard because they had recently accepted the terms of a ceasefire and expected Hamas to do the same. Instead, Hamas turned down the deal, and public outrage focused on Israel.

Even President Donald Trump seemed moved by the photos. “Based on television, I would say ... those children look very hungry,” Trump said on July 28. He added, “There is real starvation in Gaza — you can’t fake that.”

During Trump’s first term in office, the images of the aftermath of Syrian dictator Bashar Assad’s chemical-weapons strike on civilians, including children, convinced the president to reverse his policy of non-intervention in that country’s civil war. Israel’s critics hoped the photos of young Mohammad would turn him against Israel. But Trump held steady. The next day, he posted on social media: “The fastest way to end the Humanitarian Crises in Gaza is for Hamas to SURRENDER AND RELEASE THE HOSTAGES!!!”

Trump remained focused on improving the humanitarian situation in Gaza but was hesitant to break with Israel publicly. That caution proved wise, as the photos of young Mohammad turned out to be highly misleading. Mohammad was suffering from cerebral palsy and hypoxemia, and his brother, who was cropped out of the photos, is healthy. *Semafor* obtained internal *New York Times* communications revealing that the paper had initially wanted to use a photo of a different child in place of Mohammad — but that child, too, had cerebral palsy. It suddenly appeared to be rather difficult to document the starvation that Israel’s critics claimed was happening with such certainty.

Of course, that doesn’t mean there is no suffering in Gaza. The question of whether there is hunger is different from the question of who is responsible for the misery. Trump has consistently, and correctly, held Hamas responsible for its willingness to sacrifice Palestinian civilians to provoke outrage toward Israel. As prominent Palestinian expat and activist Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib wrote, Hamas really does want Palestinians in Gaza to starve: “Producing mass death from hun-



Mohammad al Motawaq with his mother and, right, brother, in one of several photographs of the 18-month-old released by Hamas in late July to reinforce claims that children in Gaza were starving. It later emerged that Mohammad was born with cerebral palsy.

ger is the group’s final play, its last hope for ending the war in a way that advances its goals.” That is because Hamas cannot win on the battlefield. Its only hope for holding on to power in Gaza is the intervention of the international community. If the world can restrain Israel through diplomatic pressure, Hamas can live to fight another day. Hence the full-court press with propagandistic photos that could elicit waves of outrage faster than they could be debunked.

But that doesn’t definitively answer the question of whether there is malnutrition in Gaza at all, nor does it explain why the narrative shifted so decisively in late July. To answer that, we must address a different question: *How does Gaza get its food?*

Until a few months ago, Gaza got its shipments of humanitarian aid delivered to Israeli border crossings, where the aid was inspected and then sent on into Gaza in convoys of U.N. trucks. The system had obvious flaws: For one, Hamas accompanied many of the trucks and guarded much of the warehoused supplies, giving the terrorist group open access to the food. Hamas also insisted on controlling the distribution of aid and shot to kill anyone collecting aid to distribute who wasn’t a member of Hamas.

The terrorist group also siphoned a certain amount of aid right off the bat, before the truckloads could be delivered to the warehouses. And non-Hamas-guarded trucks were hijacked by Hamas militants or gunmen hired by Hamas.

According to Palestinians who worked at the crossings, Hamas would take inventory of everything that came into the strip to levy taxes on it. Another Gaza contractor said Hamas would charge local merchants protection dues and would confiscate their supplies if they didn’t pay up. Hamas would also, the *Washington Post* revealed, confiscate aid vouchers and distribute them to members. Finally, Hamas would resell food at a steep markup, making a profit and pricing many Palestinians out of the food that was supposed to be free. Halfway through the war, Hamas had reportedly pocketed \$500 million from reselling the aid. The money enabled Hamas to keep recruiting and

paying members, while the stolen food stores kept Hamas members well fed.

On top of all that, U.N. agencies were found to have been infiltrated by Hamas members. Some U.N. employees took part in the Oct. 7 attacks. Others held hostages in Gaza. At one point in the war, the Israel Defense Forces discovered an entire Hamas data center and server farm underneath a U.N. office, which was sharing its access to the electric grid with a room full of Hamas servers and whose placement served to shield the Hamas command center from the IDF.

In February, an alternative aid-distribution plan took shape. In March, Israel paused all aid to Gaza in preparation for the new system. Backed by the United States and Israel, the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation launched in May, opening select distribution sites in the enclave. Its mission was simple: give the free humanitarian aid directly to Palestinians in Gaza instead of Hamas soldiers. The U.N. refused to participate in the new system, and most so-called “humanitarian” nongovernmental organizations also boycotted. Hamas responded by attacking GHF workers, spreading false rumors about where aid would be distributed to trick hungry Palestinians in



Armed Hamas fighters ride atop an aid truck in Rafah, Gaza, Dec. 19, 2023.

Gaza into making futile treks in the heat, and creating as much chaos as it could outside the distribution sites.

Meanwhile, the U.N. let hundreds of trucks full of food and other supplies bake in the Gaza sun rather than distribute them under the new system. This combination of factors — the two-month aid pause, the U.N.'s refusal to work with GHF, and Hamas's mischief — ensured that there would be less food available

to Palestinians in Gaza than anyone had initially planned.

But just how much less? Here is where the “famine” claims run up against hard numbers. According to the World Food Programme, the people of Gaza require 62,000 tons of food per month. As writer and researcher Salo Aizenberg pointed out, in the two months prior to the March aid pause, enough aid entered Gaza to feed the enclave through August. All told, that brings the total amount of aid to enter the strip during the war to nearly 1.5 million tons, which would be enough to feed the people of Gaza for 23 months — longer than the war has lasted thus far. Amid global pressure, Israel has allowed more trucks, airdrops, and crossings to get aid into Gaza in recent days as well. And some U.N. aid trucks have been operating since May.

So where did the food go?

We already know that pre-GHF aid was diverted by Hamas. And the recent aid? Since May, according to the U.N.'s own data, over 87% of the aid was hijacked, looted, or diverted. Barely 10% made it to its destination. The rest was taken “peacefully by hungry people or forcefully by armed actors.”

Members of Hamas aren't the only “armed actors” in Gaza — there are clans

challenging their power in certain areas — but they are the most prevalent. And it is highly unlikely that the majority of the hijacked aid was taken “peacefully” because that would require stopping a convoy of large trucks and swarming them. But either way, the U.N. simply couldn't get the job done. U.N. aid, therefore, is likely to go only to those who have weapons and numbers and the strength to mob convoys. This is a recipe for the poor getting poorer and the hungry getting hungrier. And it highlights a seeming contradiction at the heart of trying to get aid into enemy territory: One can increase aid without solving malnutrition because ending malnutrition requires one to remove bad actors from the equation, which is the entire point of Israel's counteroffensive in Gaza.

In other words, the interests of the West and the interests of the “humanitarian” world are aligned. Admitting that, however, requires the acknowledgment that an Israeli military victory is a prerequisite for those interests to be fulfilled. Are Israel's critics capable of facing up to this inconvenient truth? The future of Gaza depends on it. ★

Seth Mandel is senior editor of Commentary.

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Trying To Be Like Trump

Democrats imitate their nemesis without understanding his appeal

By Isaac Schorr

A decade into the Trump era, Democrats are, to nearly everyone's great amusement, still searching for their own version of the cultural icon-turned-two-term president.

Well, not all Democrats. Some believe they have at long last found her.

The *Atlantic* headlined its recent profile of Rep. Jasmine Crockett (D-TX) "A Democrat for the Trump Era." It is, to author Elaine Godfrey's credit, no puff piece.

Crockett's "colleagues still haven't learned what, to her, is obvious: Democrats need sharper fiercer communicators," Godfrey observes after conveying the second-term legislator's irritation at falling short in her bid to serve as the ranking member on the House Oversight Committee.

"It's like, there's one clear person in the race that has the largest social-media following," Crockett told her interlocutor, seemingly incredulous that anybody could be using any other metric.

"Crockett is testing out the coarser, insult-comedy-style attacks that the GOP has embraced under Trump, the general idea being that when the Republicans go low, the Democrats should meet them there," Godfrey continued. For a few examples: Crockett roasted Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) for her "bleach-blond, bad-built, butch body," has repeatedly mocked Gov. Greg Abbott (R-TX) for being confined to a wheelchair with a paralyzed lower half of his body, and suggested during a podcast appearance that Trump supporters are "sick."

"We've got a mental health crisis in this country because everyone, no matter how you affiliate yourself, should be against Trump, period," she insisted. Apropos of

nothing at all: Godfrey noticed, and documented, that Crockett's cellphone lock screen was a headshot of herself.

In another notable aside, Godfrey relayed that Crockett responded to the reporter's attempts to reach her colleagues for comment by mistakenly assuming that she could prevent the *Atlantic* from moving forward with the piece. The congresswoman announced she was "shutting down the profile and revoking all permissions" four days before it was, in fact, published.

Such coarse bravado, to put it kindly, has its admirers among the Democratic faithful. Trump's victory in every single swing state last year, followed by his steamrolling of them at the outset of his second administration, has many on Team Blue clamoring for not just victory, but blood.

Literally, in some cases. House Democrats recently complained to one



Having lost two presidential elections, Democrats are eager to nominate their own gangster president to punish their enemies. This simplistic understanding of Trump's success is childlike in its folly.

Capitol Hill reporter that they're facing increasingly hysterical demands from supporters at local town hall events.

"This idea that we're going to save every norm and that we're not going to play [Republicans'] game ... I don't think that's resonating with voters anymore," one lawmaker said.

"Some of them have suggested ... what we really need to do is be willing to get shot," recalled another. "Our own base is telling us that what we're doing is not good enough ... [that] there needs to be blood to grab the attention of the press and the public."

A third was told that "civility wasn't working," and that they ought to prepare for "violence."

The sentiment is more than anecdotal. According to the most recent *Wall Street Journal* poll, the party is more unpopular than it's been in at least 35 years, and that's in no small part because of the erosion of support from within its own ranks, largely over its perceived failure to push back against Trump. Another recent survey from the *Associated Press* found that the term Democrats associated most with their own party was "weak."

It is in this environment that Crockett has become a national figure, a Democratic "fighter" willing to go toe-to-toe with Trump by biting as hard and scratching as deeply as he does in the ring. She's not only the favorite to win the Democratic nomination for Senate in her home state should she seek it next year, but she has fans all over the country who

would have her set her sights even higher. Democratic strategist Max Burns has argued that she should play a "lead role in reshaping the party's 2026 message." And at a church outside of Atlanta, Godfrey listened as a crowd rose to its feet as the pastor shouted, "Jasmine Crockett for president," and "2028 is coming, y'all."

They should be careful what they wish for.

In the years since Trump pulled off his shocking upset victory over Hillary Clinton, the Democrats have been laboring under a series of myths about themselves and Trump that have compelled them to continue digging their own graves.

The first is that they are too noble, too genteel, and indeed too good for their own good. The record belies this misdiagnosis. Trump's abrasive rhetoric and often forthrightly self-centered approach to governance are more jarring to Team Blue than Team Red, not only because Trump is wearing the latter's jersey, but because they recognize that the former has been playing the same game for years. Trump just abandoned the pretense.

To call Mitt Romney, the last Republican presidential nominee prior to Trump, a Boy Scout would be to make him sound infinitely more menacing than he actual-



ly was. A former Massachusetts governor who placed an obvious emphasis on his fiscal conservatism, Romney picked the arguably even less threatening Paul Ryan as his running mate. Both have been exceedingly critical of Trump for the better part of the last decade.

What did their good behavior earn them? A staggering number of smears invented by Democrats and dutifully parroted by their thinly veiled media allies. The Democratic leader in the Senate accused Romney of not having paid taxes for four years. Joe Biden told a predominantly black crowd that the GOP ticket was “going to put you all back in chains.” Ads went up depicting Ryan pushing an elderly woman off a cliff. And when Romney referred to having “binders full of” female applicants that he used to fill jobs during his time in Boston, the entire tangled mess of Democrats in office and the Fourth Estate alike cried foul for reasons that his critics still can’t attempt to articulate without embarrassing themselves.

Romney’s plight paled in comparison to those of Brett Kavanaugh and Clarence Thomas, whose nominations to the Supreme Court were imperiled by unsubstantiated accusations of sexual misconduct. Before them, Ted Kennedy, the full-time nepobaby and threat to women everywhere, marched to the Senate floor to assassinate Robert Bork’s character. In a lesser-known episode of cruelty, Senate Democrats dragged Miguel Estrada, a well-qualified George W. Bush nominee to the District of Columbia Circuit Court of Appeals, through a grueling, yearslong nomination process that he eventually abandoned because they deemed him “especially dangerous” as a result of his Hispanic heritage.

Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan were madmen marching the United States toward nuclear war. Bush was a theocrat. John McCain was compared to George Wallace. Only the historically illiterate could be awed by, and apparently convinced of the efficacy of, Crockett declaring that “Donald Trump is a piece of s***, OK? We know that. Yes, yes! He is, he is, he is!”

Trump’s electoral success isn’t explained, in part, by his willingness to play a game Democrats haven’t been, but by his eagerness to play the game they have been for over a half-century.

In part. The Democratic political class misunderstands Trump’s appeal as readily as it misunderstands its own lack thereof. Back in 2018, Adam Serw-

er hypothesized that “the cruelty is the point” or, in other words, that “President Trump and his supporters find community by rejoicing in the suffering of those they hate and fear.”

That’s probably true of some small proportion of any coalition, but it’s an incontrovertible mistake to attribute such cartoonish evil to the plurality of the country that voted for Trump. It may be comforting to conceive of oneself as standing athwart a sadistic voting bloc of bigots seeking to make their neighbors’ lives worse, but that comfort continues to prove self-destructive. Nine years and two lost presidential elections after



Democrats are eager to nominate their own gangster president to punish their enemies. This simplistic understanding of Trump’s success is childlike in its folly. His detractors loathe him so fully that they are completely unable to see past his flaws.

Clinton uttered her infamous “basket of deplorables” crack, many progressives continue to labor under the misimpression that Serwer had their opponents pegged. And, having lost two presidential elections, they themselves are eager to nominate their own gangster president to punish their enemies.

This simplistic understanding of Trump’s success is childlike in its folly. His detractors loathe him so fully that they are completely unable to see past his flaws. The incumbent president is unique for his sharp, loose tongue and shameless pursuit of his self-interest, yes. But he also has his strengths, the first and most obvious one being his preexisting status as a figure of cultural significance prior to his political career. For decades leading up to 2015, Trump cultivated an image as the very picture of

American success: A distinctive-looking New York City man in a suit and trench coat with a big ego, big ambitions, big mouth, who built big buildings. His failures, most notably in Atlantic City, only served to reinforce the fact that he’s a daring entrepreneur, a new kind of American pioneer.

Second is his singular way of speaking. To this day, Trump has never delivered a commanding, signature podium-and-teleprompter style speech, but he has nevertheless entered hundreds of memorable turns of phrase into the American lexicon at press conferences, gaggles, as well as on social media and *The Apprentice*. His verbal tics, over-the-top gestures, and knack for creating indelible moments are endearing to the public in a way that professional Democrats who devote their work lives to covering and fighting him could never understand.

Last, but not least, is the fact that to many, he presents as eminently reasonable rather than the imposing, right-wing maniac he’s so often treated as. Trump is a relative centrist on abortion who wants to leave the issue to the states. He talks about entitlements like they’re his own children. And it was on his watch that the party removed language about traditional marriage from the Republican platform last year.

Trump may have run far to the right of any other candidate on immigration back in 2016, but that’s only because the entirety of the Democratic Party, and much of the GOP, was so far out of step with the public. For the Left, “Mass deportations” sounds like one of the first steps in a fascist’s playbook. For the median voter, it sounds like the logical step in a country with millions of people residing in it illegally.

Whatever any perceptive political observer makes of his character and performance in office, they must acknowledge these sources of Trump’s popularity. Democrats’ systemic failure to do so led to their defeat in 2016 and 2024, and their continued failure to do so now might condemn them to further losses down the line. Their own Donald Trump, Jasmine Crockett is not.

Can a party so plagued by projection and a misconstrual of the defining political figure of the age come up with its own adaptation of him? If it looks at Crockett and thinks, “Maybe,” the answer is a resounding “No.” ★

Isaac Schorr is an editor at Mediaite.


 A large photograph of Hulk Hogan at a campaign rally. He is wearing a red bandana, a red t-shirt, and a large, fluffy red and orange lei. He is holding a large American flag high in the air with his right hand. The background is a dark arena with bright lights and a crowd of people.

HOGAN'S HERODES

Hulk Hogan waves an American flag before President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally at Madison Square Garden in New York, Oct. 27, 2024.

A wrestling icon and the political divide

By Daniel Ross Goodman

When I was 5 years old, the corner of our family room in Longmeadow, Massachusetts, was my own Madison Square Garden. Armed with a squadron of World Wrestling Federation action figures — “Macho Man” Randy Savage, Bret “The Hitman” Hart, “The Undertaker,” and, of course, “The Ultimate Warrior,” my undisputed favorite — I’d stage epic wrestling matches on a makeshift ring

of couch cushions and carpet. The Ultimate Warrior’s face paint and frenetic energy spoke to my kid-brain, but even then, I couldn’t resist the gravitational pull of Hulk Hogan. What wrestling fan didn’t love the Hulkster? With his bleach-blond mustache, red bandana, and 24-inch pythons, he was the Babe Ruth of professional wrestling — a quasimythical figure who wasn’t just a character but a living legend in our day and age.

My father, sensing my obsession,

took me to see Hogan in the flesh at the Springfield Civic Center. I can still feel the electric buzz of the crowd, the way the arena shook when Hogan’s theme, “Real American,” blared through the speakers. He hulked up, shook off a clothesline from “Rowdy” Roddy Piper, and dropped the leg on him to a thunderous roar. I was hooked. But by 7, I learned the dirty secret: Wrestling was scripted. The magic faded, and my fandom shifted to “real” sports — basketball, baseball, and football. Yet,



Hulk Hogan fires up the crowd between matches during WrestleMania 21 in Los Angeles, California, April 3, 2005.

looking back, I see now that wrestling's pageantry, emotions, and performances were as real as any slam dunk or home run. And Hulk Hogan? He was the beating heart of it all.

FROM THE RING TO THE RIGHT

Hogan's political arc wasn't inevitable. In the 1980s and '90s, he was the all-American hero, waving the flag and preaching, "Train, say your prayers, eat your vitamins." His politics, if you could call them that, were vague — patriotic platitudes that fit the Reagan era but didn't scream partisan. He was a showman, not a senator. Yet as the culture wars heated up, Hogan found himself drawn into the fray, his larger-than-life persona perfectly suited for the polarized stage of 21st-century politics.

Hogan's political awakening crystallized in the aftermath of a personal scandal that could've ended him. In 2012, Gawker, the snarky, left-leaning gossip site, published a leaked sex tape showing Hogan with the wife of radio host Bubba the Love Sponge. The tape, recorded without Hogan's consent, was a gross violation of privacy, but Gawker's editors framed it as "newsworthy," gleefully mocking the wrestler under the headline, "Even for a Minute, Watching Hulk Hogan Have Sex in a Canopy Bed is Not Safe For Work but Watch It Any-

way." Worse, the tape revealed Hogan using racial slurs, sparking a firestorm that cost him his WWE contract and public goodwill. The Left branded him a racist, and the Right saw a man targeted by a vindictive media.

Enter Peter Thiel, the billionaire tech mogul and conservative kingmaker. Thiel, nursing his own grudge against Gawker for outing him as gay in 2007, saw an opportunity. He secretly bankrolled Hogan's \$100 million invasion-of-privacy lawsuit against the site, funneling \$10 million to a legal team led by Charles Harder. The 2016 trial was a spectacle, with Hogan's larger-than-life persona squaring off against Gawker's self-righteous "journalism" defense. A Florida jury sided with Hogan, awarding him \$140 million (later settled for \$31 million), a verdict that bankrupted Gawker and sent shock waves through the media world.

The lawsuit wasn't just a personal victory for Hogan. It was a cultural earthquake. Thiel's funding, revealed post-trial, exposed a new playbook: Deep-pocketed conservatives could weaponize the legal system to silence left-leaning outlets. Critics cried foul, warning of a chilling effect on press freedom. Supporters, including many on the Right, cheered the demise of Gawker, a site they saw as emblematic

of woke excess — smug, invasive, and unaccountable. Hogan, once a victim, emerged as a conservative folk hero, the guy who took down the "wokist" media with a leg drop heard 'round the world.

Hogan's journey didn't end in the courtroom. In 2023, at 70, he underwent a late-life baptism, a moment that added depth to his public persona. The ceremony, held at a Florida church, saw Hogan and his wife, Sky Daily, publicly declare their faith. "Total surrender and dedication to Jesus is the greatest day of my life," Hogan posted on X, sharing images of the event. For a man whose career was built on bravado, the humility of the moment struck a chord with conservative audiences, who saw it as a redemption arc — a wrestler turning from scandal to salvation.

This spiritual pivot dovetailed with Hogan's growing alignment with the MAGA movement. He had dabbled in politics before, supporting Barack Obama in 2008 before flipping to Mitt Romney in 2012. But by 2016, Hogan claimed he cast his first-ever vote for Donald Trump, a fellow WWE Hall of Famer whose bombastic style mirrored his own. Their friendship, forged in the 1980s at WrestleMania events hosted at Trump's Atlantic City properties, deepened as Hogan embraced Trump's anti-establishment ethos. The July 13, 2024, assassination attempt on Trump in Butler, Pennsylvania, was the final catalyst. "When I saw him stand up with that fist in the air and the blood on his face — as a warrior, as a leader — I realized that's what America needs," Hogan said on Fox News.

Hogan's political apotheosis came on July 18, 2024, at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee. Taking the stage to "Real American," he delivered a performance that fused wrestling theatrics with MAGA fervor. "Well, let me tell you something, brother!" he roared, his signature catchphrase igniting the crowd. He called Trump his "hero," praised his toughness, and tore off his shirt to reveal a red Trump-Vance tank top, flexing his biceps as the arena erupted in "U.S.A.!" chants. "Let Trumpamania run wild, brother! Let Trumpamania rule again! Let Trumpamania make America great again!"

The moment was pure Hogan — part promo, part patriotism, all spectacle. Trump, watching from the family box, beamed like a child at WrestleMania, even blowing Hogan a kiss. For MAGA

faithful, it was a cultural touchdown: a wrestling legend, redeemed by faith and vindicated in court, aligning with their champion against a common enemy — the liberal elite. Hogan's speech wasn't just a highlight of the RNC. It was a defining image of the 2024 election, a middle finger to the Left wrapped in a red bandana.

Hogan doubled down in the months that followed, appearing at Trump's Madison Square Garden rally and an Inauguration Day event at Mar-a-Lago. He even used a promotional event for his Real American Beer brand to take shots at former Vice President Kamala Harris, asking a crowd if he should "body slam" her or "drop the leg" on her, comments that stirred controversy for their perceived insensitivity. "That was the beers talking," he later quipped, but the damage was done — and for MAGA fans, it only burnished his credentials as an unapologetic provocateur.

Hogan's death from cardiac arrest in July 2025 in Clearwater, Florida, unleashed a torrent of reactions. Trump led the tributes, calling him a "great friend" who was "MAGA all the way — strong, tough, smart, but with the biggest heart." Vice President JD Vance, another Thiel protégé, hailed him as a "great American icon." But the Left wasn't so kind. Social media posts on X erupted with vitriol, branding Hogan a "racist MAGA supporter" and a "heel" who "teamed up with Peter Thiel to destroy Gawker." One user snarked, "Rest in Poverty, Hulk. We hardly knew ya." Another pointed to the Gawker lawsuit, accusing Hogan of being a pawn in Thiel's anti-press crusade.

The attacks centered on two flashpoints: the 2015 racism scandal and the Gawker case. The same leaked tape that eventually led to Gawker's downfall also happened to capture Hogan using a racial slur while discussing his daughter's dating life. His apologies — "It was unacceptable for me to have used that offensive language; there is no excuse for it" — did little to quell critics, especially after additional racist remarks surfaced from 2008 jailhouse calls. Black WWE wrestler Mark Henry called it a "dark cloud" over Hogan's career, noting that he never fully addressed the issue. For the Left, Hogan's MAGA turn only confirmed their view: He was a bigot who found a home in Trump's America.

The Gawker lawsuit, meanwhile,



Donald Trump and Hulk Hogan meet at WrestleMania VI in Atlantic City, New Jersey, March 29, 1987.

remains a lightning rod. Progressive Democrats see it as a chilling precedent, with Thiel's funding signaling a new era of billionaire-driven censorship. Journalist Josephine Riesman, in a scathing piece for *The Handbasket*, called Hogan a "vessel" for Thiel's "war on the free press," arguing that the lawsuit paved the way for Trump's legal battles against media outlets such as CBS. Others, like Slate's wrestling columnist, framed Hogan as a willing accomplice in Thiel's vendetta, noting his half-hearted apology to black wrestlers upon his 2018 WWE return.

Yet these attacks only fuel Hogan's posthumous ascent as a conservative

“Hulk Hogan's death ensures that his story will only grow larger. In life, he was a wrestler, a showman and a flawed man who weathered scandals and emerged as a MAGA warrior. In death, he's poised to become a conservative myth — a symbol of resistance against the Left's cultural hegemony.”

icon. To the Right, the Left's outrage is proof of his impact — a man who stood up to cancel culture, defeated a woke media giant, and embraced faith and patriotism. His flaws, they argue, are outweighed by his courage. As Charlie Kirk put it, "Hulk Hogan was a genuine, uniquely American creation. Fearlessly original. Flawed but unbowed. He had the courage to stand on his own principles, and he never stopped fighting for his country."

Hogan's death ensures that his story will only grow larger. In life, he was a wrestler, a showman, and a flawed man who weathered scandals and emerged as a MAGA warrior. In death, he is poised to become a conservative myth — a symbol of resistance against the Left's cultural hegemony. His Gawker victory, backed by Thiel's millions, will be studied as a master class in taking down the media elite. His baptism will resonate with evangelicals, who see in him a prodigal son redeemed. And his RNC performance, shirt ripped and muscles flexed, will be replayed as a defining moment of Trump's 2024 triumph.

The Left's attacks, far from diminishing him, will only solidify his status. Every X post calling him a racist or a Thiel pawn burnishes his credentials among conservatives who view such criticism as a badge of honor. Hogan's story fits the MAGA narrative: a man vilified by the woke, lifted by faith, and vindicated by his loyalty to Trump. His Real American Beer brand, now embroiled in a \$10 million lawsuit, will likely become a collectible for MAGA fans, a relic of their hero's final stand.

Hogan's legacy mirrors wrestling — scripted yet visceral, flawed yet undeniable. He wasn't the Ultimate Warrior, my childhood favorite, but he was something greater: a cultural force who transcended the ring to become a political titan. As I reflect on that night in Springfield, watching him drop the leg on Piper and electrify the crowd, I realize that the Hulkster never stopped performing. He just traded the squared circle for the political arena, and in doing so, he ensured his name would echo long after the final bell. Let Trumpamania run wild, brother. ★

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It's Getting Late for Late-Night Television

Things could get worse for the Colbert clones once Trump is gone

By Andrea Ruth

In a surprise move, CBS is sun-setting *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. Colbert's show debuted following the retirement of David Letterman, who hosted *Late Night* on the network from 1993 to 2015.

Much has been made of the cancellation, and naturally, CBS is taking a lot of arrows from those claiming the move is somehow connected to President Donald Trump. Paramount recently settled a lawsuit with the president for \$16 million, and last month, the Federal Communications Commission approved Paramount's \$8 billion merger with Skydance.

Trump, of course, celebrated the decision, writing on Truth Social, "I absolutely love that Colbert got fired. His talent was even less than his ratings. I hear Jimmy Kimmel is next. Has even less talent than Colbert! Greg Gutfeld is better than all of them combined, including the Moron on NBC who ruined the



Late-night host Jimmy Kimmel chokes back tears as he describes his dismay at Donald Trump's election, Nov. 6, 2024.

once great Tonight Show."

Comedy Central's Jon Stewart, HBO's John Oliver, and NBC's Jimmy Fallon and Seth Meyers were in Colbert's audience as a show of "unified support"

because the easiest thing to do these days is to blame Trump for whatever ails someone. Of course, Colbert's show debuted right around the time Trump was steamrolling the GOP competition for the presidential nomination in 2015. It seems odd that it took Trump 10 years to put whatever pressure it was on CBS to yank Colbert off the air.

Still, the "unified support" from other late-night hosts is indicative of where the genre is in the 21st century. Long gone are the days of Johnny Carson, Jay Leno, Letterman, and Conan O'Brien, whose sole purpose was to provide entertainment to an audience. Monologues were written to make the audience and viewers laugh. It was a great place to see new and classic bands and musicians. It provided an outlet for up-and-coming comedians.

Late-night show hosts now have an attitude of self-importance, congratulating themselves for their work. Following the announcement of the sunset of Colbert's show, Stewart said, "The shows that you



Above, host Stephen Colbert with dancers dressed as COVID vaccine needles in September 2021.

now seek to cancel, censor, and control ... a not insignificant portion of that \$8 billion value came from those f***ing shows. That's what made you that money. Shows that say something, shows that take a stand, shows that are unafraid."

"Believe me, this is not a 'We speak truth to power,'" Stewart said. "We don't. We speak opinions to television cameras, but we try. We f***ing try every night."

The financials don't match Stewart's claims. Colbert's show was losing anywhere from \$40 to \$50 million per year against a budget of nearly \$100 million, according to CBS. Colbert's ratings peaked in 2017-18 with an average audience of 3.1 million viewers. That figure dropped to 2.1 million in 2021-22. Colbert's latest ratings are his worst yet, with an average of 1.9 million viewers in 2024-25, with the bulk of that audience made up of those older than 65. Trump's return to power has given Colbert a bit of a lift.

Leno recently blasted the introduction of not just politics, but partisan politics, into late-night television. Leno, who hosted *The Tonight Show* for 22 years, said, "I like to think that people come to a comedy show to kind of get away from the things, the pressures of life, wherever

it might be. And I love political humor, don't get me wrong, but what happens is people wind up cozying too much to one side or the other."

The venerable host then asked, "Why shoot for just half an audience? Why not try to get the whole?"

Leno told jokes at the expense of politicians, and their party affiliation didn't matter. He once cracked, "Newt Gingrich

“
Long gone are the days of Johnny Carson, Jay Leno, Letterman, and Conan O'Brien, whose sole purpose was to provide entertainment to an audience. It was a great place to see new and classic bands and musicians. It provided an outlet for up-and-coming comedians.

said today that Bill Clinton has dishonored the presidency. Then he got in a limo with his third wife and drove off to give a speech about family values." Another one at the expense of a Democrat: "President Clinton is denying he had an affair with Monica Lewinsky. He said he did not have sex with that woman. I believe him — mainly because he's been lying for so long, he's actually gotten good at it."

The difference between Leno and Colbert is that the former's jokes were not ideological. They were observational. He saw a current event, and he and his writers turned it into a joke. The idea was to entertain the audience and make them laugh. It had nothing to do with creating a situation for people to merely applaud because the host tickled the right political view.

During the O.J. Simpson saga, Leno's show had a bit called "The Dancing Itos," which was a reference to Judge Lance Ito, who presided over the former football star's murder trial. Ito faced accusations of playing to the camera because the trial was televised, and Leno found an opening to make comedy out of something serious. Colbert, on the other hand, created an elaborate dance routine devoted to promoting the COVID-19

vaccine, complete with him strutting around onstage with dancers dressed as hypodermic needles.

Kimmel, on the eve of Trump winning the election in 2024, began crying on air as he bemoaned how it was a “terrible night” for an extensive list, including children, women, science, healthcare, journalism, the environment, and more.

Meyers recently said on the *Armchair Expert* podcast that he wants his show to be “cathartic to do and cathartic to watch.”

It isn’t surprising that critics have said that late-night television has turned primarily into late-night therapy sessions for liberals, and the connection to Trump is more likely correlation than causation. After all, Trump was not a factor in Trevor Noah bolting *The Daily Show*. Samantha Bee’s show on TBS was canceled in 2022, and James Corden’s *The Late Late Show* also went dark. His show was supposedly losing \$20 million a year. Last fall, NBC announced *The Tonight Show* would go to a four-night-per-week schedule with Friday shows being repeats. *The Daily Show* is also broadcast four nights per week, down from five.

Greg Gutfeld of Fox News has managed to fill a void for conservatives looking for late-night television that caters to their politics and has the Fox brand at his disposal to do so. The result is higher ratings than Colbert, Fallon, and Kimmel.

It would be easy to say the phrase “Go woke, go broke” would apply here, and for many on the Right, it was entirely partisan politics that began to spell the demise of late-night television. While

“While woke politics could certainly be a contributing factor, the nature of television, technology, and culture has also fanned the flames, which could ultimately spell the end of late-night TV as we know it.”



Above, comedian Richard Pryor holds a chicken while speaking with Johnny Carson on *The Tonight Show*, Oct. 9, 1986.; at left, host Jay Leno jokes about singer Michael Jackson, Feb. 4, 2012.



that could certainly be a contributing factor, the nature of television, technology, and culture has also fanned the flames, which could ultimately spell the end of late-night TV as we know it.

Late-night television had its heyday from the 1970s to the early 2000s, when hosts had some of their highest ratings. Of course, there were limited options at the time. Most people had cable television by the late ‘90s. However, satellite television was still relatively new. YouTube did not launch until 2005. Netflix didn’t begin to offer its streaming service until 2007. Social media was limited to MySpace before the launch of Twitter and Facebook, and the first smartphone did not appear until the debut of the iPhone in 2007.

In 2025, the menu for choosing what to watch and when is almost limitless. With multiple streaming services, YouTube, podcasts, and other ways to access content, there is less of an audience for late-night television. Even fans of Colbert or Kimmel can find their opening

monologues online if they want to ingest the red meat and skip the guests and the remainder of the show. Networks and media companies are investing heavily in their streaming products as audiences are increasingly rejecting scheduled linear programming in favor of on-demand content and more personalized experiences.

The smorgasbord of choices also allows those who let their politics influence their viewing to make it easier to watch what they want, rather than what gets served up. If someone who hates Kimmel but likes a band appearing on his show, they can watch Gutfeld for the politics and search for the band’s performance on YouTube the next day.

It all presents a challenge in the next several years, particularly after Trump leaves office. For all of the talk about Trump as a “threat” to whatever ideal one wants to pull out of a hat, there is no denying the impact he has on media ratings and revenue. In 2018, Ted Koppel, formerly of *Nightline*, told CNN’s Brian Stelter to his face, “CNN’s ratings would be in the toilet without Donald Trump.”

Perhaps network executives see the writing on the wall. Trump provides a boost, and if late-night shows are losing money with him in office, it could only mean a continual slide once he leaves office for good. ★

Andrea Ruth is a regular contributor to the Washington Examiner.

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Washington Briefing



WHITE HOUSE

JD Vance, Trump's policy translator

The president dishes out the hot takes while his understudy comes in to smooth things over for more sensitive ears

By Haisten Willis

In the 2010-era sketch comedy series *Key & Peele*, former President Barack Obama had an “anger translator” who would interpret his calmly delivered pronouncements into rage-fueled tirades, revealing Obama’s deepest inner thoughts.

If Obama said, “We count on the press to shed light on the most important issues of the day,” the translator, named Luther, would say, “And we can count on Fox News to terrify old white people with some nonsense!”

If Obama said, “Hillary Clinton will have to raise huge sums of money to win the White House,” the translator would add, “Oh yeah! She gon’ get that money.”

And if Obama said, “We need to stay focused on big challenges, like climate change,” the translator would throw in, “If you haven’t noticed, California is bone dry! It looks like a trailer for the new *Mad Max* movie up in there.”

A decade later, it could be said that Vice President JD Vance serves as President Donald Trump’s policy translator,

interpreting Trump’s blunt declarations into calmly delivered statements that reveal the president’s true intentions.

If Trump says, “We have to have Greenland,” Vance would say, “If the people of Greenland were willing to partner with the United States — and I think that they ultimately will partner with the United States — we could make them much more secure.”

If Trump says, “Why wouldn’t there be a regime change [in Iran]?” Vance would add, “We want to achieve the end

of the Iranian nuclear program. The Iranians are clearly not very good at war. Perhaps they should follow President Trump's lead and give peace a chance."

And if Trump says tariffs are "the most beautiful word" because "we were so rich" when we used them, Vance would throw in, "The fundamental goal of President Trump's economic policy is, I think, to undo 40 years of failed economic policy in this country. For far too long, we got addicted to cheap labor, both overseas and by importing it into our own country."

It's sort of the anger translator in reverse, with Trump dishing out the hot takes and Vance coming in to smooth things over for more sensitive ears.

In that respect, it's also an inversion of historic norms in which the president plays the role of statesman and the vice president comes in as the heavy in a good cop, bad cop routine.

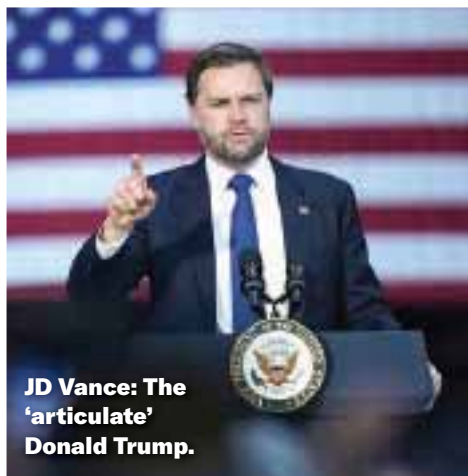
"In modern times, presidents have sometimes been relatively more civil in their discourse, while vice presidents have sometimes engaged in rougher language," said Joel Goldstein, a vice presidential scholar at Saint Louis University.

One good example is former President Richard Nixon, who was a fierce attack dog as Dwight D. Eisenhower's vice president in the 1950s, leaving Eisenhower as the commander in chief who transcended politics.

But when Nixon was elected president in 1968, Spiro Agnew became "Nixon's Nixon," Goldstein said, as Agnew was known for his bombastic attacks on the media, student protesters, and even moderate Republicans.

However, this hasn't always been the case. As vice presidents, Gerald Ford, Walter Mondale, and George H.W. Bush often spoke more temperately than their bosses, and Dick Cheney, for all of his controversies, could have been a more rational expositor of administration policies than former President George W. Bush two decades ago.

Others argue that Trump is the real outlier in the situation rather than Vance, and that Trump's first-term vice president, Mike Pence, provided an even stronger contrast to the president thanks



JD Vance: The 'articulate' Donald Trump.

to his long history in the pre-Trump GOP.

"Trump is just unique," said David Greenberg, a professor of history, media studies, and journalism at Rutgers University. "He's the only president to regularly use such harsh, impulsive, over-the-top, vulgar, and nasty language — and a tone to match — in his public statements. Other presidents might occasionally shock us with their eruptions, but with Trump it's the norm, [which is] part of what many people find so off-putting about him and part of what others admire."



President Trump is a one of one, but I would say that the vice president stands head and shoulders above most everyone else in the political space. He's really figured out what works for him and how you can communicate these important issues without sounding like a politician.

—Jason Miller, a longtime Trump adviser

Despite his typically polished demeanor, Vance is not immune to fiery social media posts or, especially, heated exchanges with rival politicians and TV journalists.

On the campaign trail, Vance said former Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee, could "go to hell" over the botched Afghanistan withdrawal. He once blamed "dumb presidents" for the ill-fated Middle Eastern wars of the 2000s, and referred to Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA) as "Jose" while defending the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

Vance has also sparked memorable one-liners in his TV interviews, notably including, "Martha, do you hear yourself?" and, "I don't really care, Margaret."

His most famous, or maybe infamous, moment came at the end of February, when Vance confronted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky over gratitude.

"Do you think that it's respectful to come to the Oval Office of the United States of America and attack the administration that is trying to prevent the destruction of your country?" Vance asked after Zelensky inquired what "kind of diplomacy" could be had with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"You should be thanking the president for trying to bring an end to this conflict," Vance added.

But in other settings, Vance has articulated the Trump administration's policy views at length through speeches on the economy, free speech and religious liberty, and the meaning of citizenship.

While Trump seems pleased with Vance's performance, the question will eventually turn to whether or not the vice president can leap from second-in-command to commander in chief. Trump has avoided weighing in so far, saying Vance is very capable but that "you have a lot of very capable people."

Vance's refined manner and policy chops play well among certain voter types, but Trump was elected twice and secured the GOP presidential nomination three consecutive times with his brawling, name-calling, all-caps style of politics.

The YouTube comments section of a recent Vance speech at the Claremont Institute revealed a split in Republican views of him.

“JD Vance. The ‘articulate’ Donald Trump,” one comment said.

Another seemed to agree that the speech was articulate but had a different takeaway.

“That was so perfect, it scared me,” the comment said. “Always loved Vance, but he’s like a robot.”

Jason Miller, a longtime Trump adviser, said Vance has learned a lot quickly since he was named Trump’s running mate a year ago.

“President Trump is a one of one, but I would say that the vice president stands head and shoulders above most everyone else in the political space,” Miller said. “He’s really figured out what works for him and how you can communicate these important issues without sounding like a politician.”

Miller didn’t bite when asked about Vance’s 2028 plans, but praised him more generally.

“The vice president has been very smart to not talk about anything beyond the current task at hand,” Miller added. “That being said, I would say that most people believe he has a very bright political future ahead of him, and he’s an absolute juggernaut on the campaign trail.”

Vance spokesman Will Martin made a similar point while also praising Trump as the leader of the Republican Party.

“Vice President Vance has learned a tremendous amount from President Trump over the years, and it’s clear that influence has had a positive effect,” Martin said. “Of course, while the vice president is always eager to talk about how this White House is delivering for the American people by securing the southern border and making life more affordable for working families, there is no better spokesperson for this admin-

istration than President Trump himself.”

While Vance is unlikely to win friends on the political Left anytime soon, he’s won tremendous influence on the Right, and some argue he’s already the de facto 2028 GOP nominee.

Presidential historian Craig Shirley said that ultimately, it’s not Vance’s communication style that matters most but his authenticity.

“One thing I always told my clients is to be yourself, or as Socrates said, know yourself,” Shirley said. “Voters can smell a phony a mile away, but they like sincerity.”

“If a man is going to be blunt, they say, ‘Okay, he’s blunt, that’s his style,’” he added. “And if a man is going to be smooth and urbane and sophisticated and nuanced, they say, ‘okay, that’s his style.’” ★

Haisten Willis is a White House reporter for the Washington Examiner.

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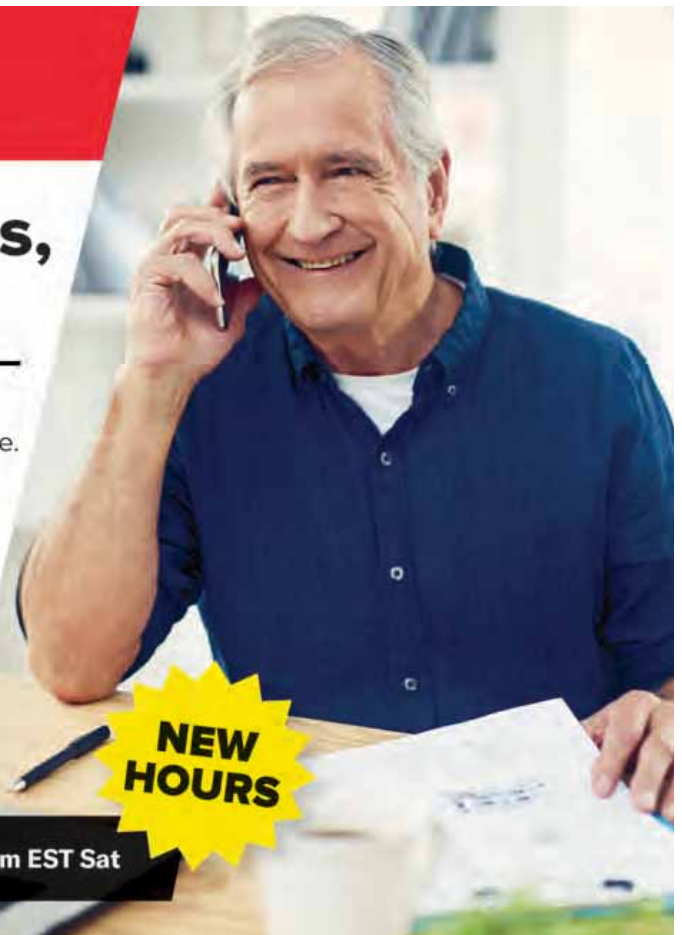
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TECHNOLOGY

Trump rolls out 'Winning the AI Race' action plan

Its success will depend on whether the policy stimulates enough American innovation to stay ahead of China

By Jessica Melugin

The White House is moving forward with its plan for promoting innovation and global adoption of U.S. artificial intelligence.

President Donald Trump has signed three executive orders and unveiled a report, "Winning the AI Race: America's AI Action Plan," designed to cement U.S. leadership in artificial intelligence through deregulation, infrastructure investment, and ideological influence of AI systems.

The preamble to the report quotes Trump: "As our global competitors race to exploit these technologies, it is a national security imperative for the United States to achieve and maintain unquestioned and unchallenged global technological dominance."

The plan hinges on removing regulatory barriers that the White House asserts slow down AI innovation. Federal agencies are instructed to identify and repeal regulations, including environmental laws, which could hinder AI deployment.

On the heels of not including preemption of state-level AI regulations in the large budget and spending bill recently signed into law, the AI plan urges federal spending not to be directed "to-



President Trump has instructed Federal agencies to identify and repeal regulations, including environmental laws, which could hinder AI deployment.

ward states with burdensome AI regulations that waste these funds but should also not interfere with states' rights to pass prudent laws that are not unduly restrictive to innovation."

The plan also advocates open-source AI development and a "try-first" culture, urging faster private-sector adoption and cautioning against overbearing bureaucratic restrictions. The administration aims to foster open-source and open-weight AI by improving access to computing resources for startups, researchers, and academics, and encouraging private-public partnerships.

The plan calls for regulatory sandboxes — temporary, relaxed-oversight environments — through agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration and the Securities and Exchange Commission. This will allow firms to deploy AI tools with fewer constraints in areas including healthcare, energy, and agriculture.

Additionally, the White House directs the Federal Trade Commission to review all investigations that may "unduly burden AI innovation," and to evaluate "all FTC final orders, consent decrees, and injunctions, and, where appropriate, seek to modify or set aside any that unduly burden AI innovation." This acknowledges that many of the country's largest AI investors are Big Tech companies currently in legal proceedings with the agency over anti-trust and other concerns.

The plan's second pillar is infrastructure. It details an aggressive strategy to fast-track permits for data centers, semiconductor factories, and energy projects. The administration proposes categorical environmental exclusions for AI infrastructure, authorizing federal agencies to override local zoning to accelerate project buildouts.

It also seeks to streamline or reduce key environmental laws. In particular, it proposes circumventing the National Environmental Policy Act for AI-linked infrastructure projects, citing urgency and prioritizing economic growth.

But some environmental advocates warn this undermines long-standing standards for impact assessments and community participation, said J.B. Branch, Big Tech Accountability Advo-

“The Trump Administration's latest AI directive is a billion-dollar giveaway to Big Tech that puts corporate profits ahead of public safety.”

—J.B. Branch, Big Tech Accountability Advocate at Public Citizen

cate at Public Citizen, a consumer advocacy association.

“The Trump Administration’s latest AI directive is a billion-dollar giveaway to Big Tech that puts corporate profits ahead of public safety,” Branch said in a statement announcing his group’s alternative People’s AI Action plan.

Still, the administration’s AI approach likely will appeal to supporters in the tech and energy realms.

“America must once again be a country where innovators are rewarded with a green light, not strangled with red tape,” Trump told those AI advocates gathered for the plan’s unveiling.

And the administration’s AI proposal touches on several politically charged policy areas.

The Commerce Department’s National Institute of Standards and Technology is directed to strip references to misinformation, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and climate change from federal

AI guidelines. While the government will only contract with large language model providers deemed “objective, free from top-down ideological bias.”

That last directive is proving controversial even among some AI enthusiasts.

Spence Purnell and Adam Thierer, of the R Street Institute think tank, warn about the practicality of certifying AI products as ideologically or politically impartial.

“Neutrality and fairness in technological systems are worthy goals, but they do not translate into concrete, easily enforced public policies,” they write in an analysis.

They also raise possible First Amendment worries. “Government efforts to police ‘fair’ speech in AI systems — even through procurement processes — could raise some free speech concerns if done over-aggressively,” they continue.

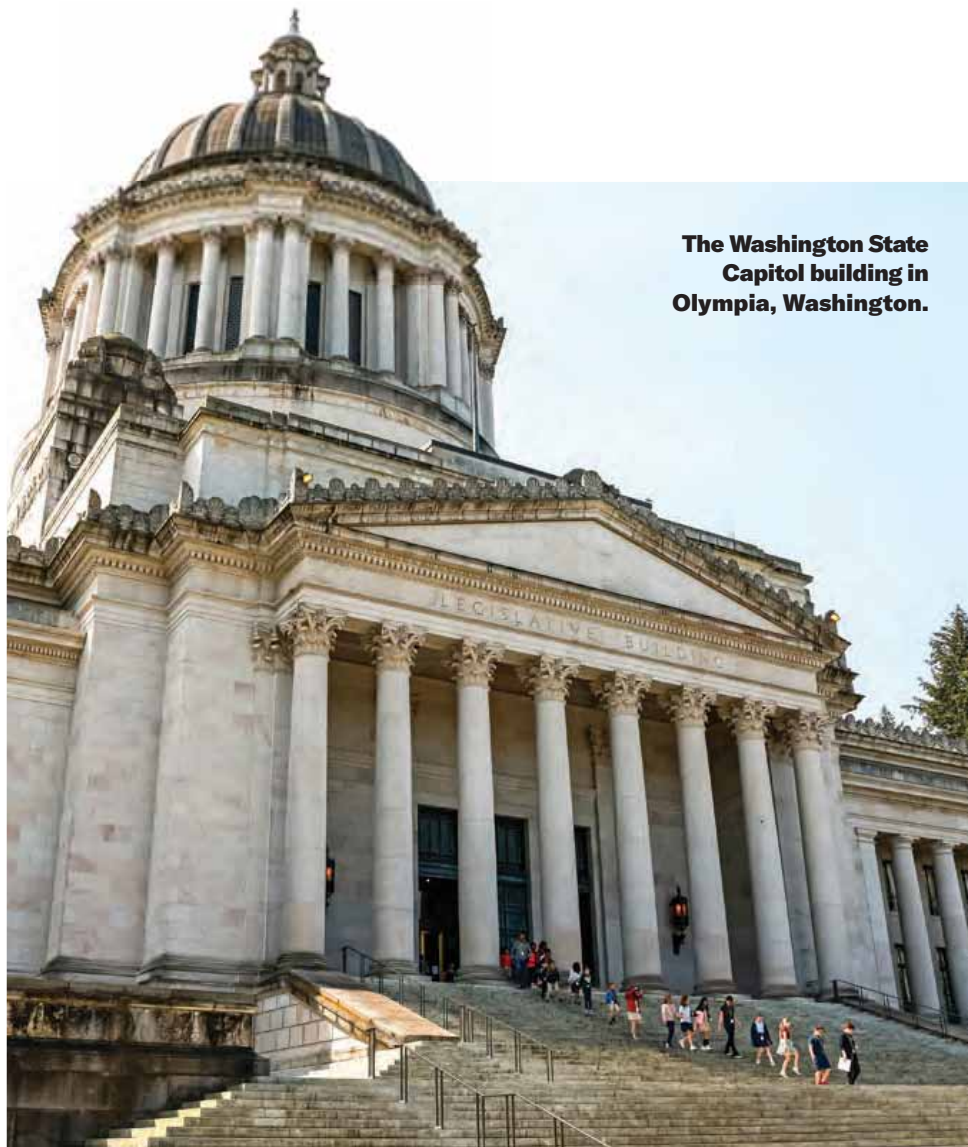
As implementation of the plan pro-

ceeds, much will depend on whether the policy stimulates enough American innovation to stay ahead of China and others in the global race to lead in AI, or if it generates unintended environmental and social costs. That competition is viewed as paramount in crafting domestic AI policy. Marc Andreessen, a leading tech investor and AI authority, recently said that “the world, 20 years from now, is going to be running on Chinese AI or American AI.”

Additionally, the administration’s ability to justify the plan’s bias framework with concrete definitions of “ideological neutrality” and its management of energy trade-offs will be closely scrutinized. ★

Jessica Melugin is the director of the Center for Technology and Innovation at the Competitive Enterprise Institute and a 2025 Innovators Network Foundation antitrust and competition policy fellow.

A promotional graphic for the Washington Examiner. At the top, the logo features an eagle with wings spread, perched on a shield with stars and stripes, flanked by the words "Washington" and "Examiner" in a stylized, gothic font. Below the logo, the text reads: "THE WASHINGTON EXAMINER BRINGS ITS READERS THE BEST IN BREAKING NEWS AND ANALYSIS ON POLITICS." The background is a collage of various political images. In the foreground, three smartphones are displayed. The leftmost phone shows the Washington Examiner's Twitter profile, which has 21.2K posts, 149K followers, and 147 following. The middle phone shows the Washington Examiner's Facebook profile, which has 776K likes and 997K followers. The rightmost phone shows the Washington Examiner's Instagram profile, which has 449 following and 358.3K followers. Below the smartphones, a red banner contains the text: "FOLLOW US TODAY @WASHINGTONEXAMINER" followed by icons for Instagram, Facebook, and X, and the text "WASHINGTON EXAMINER @DCEXAMINER".



The Washington State Capitol building in Olympia, Washington.

CONGRESS

Washington state a bystander in gerrymander tug-of-war

A 42-year-old redistricting commission prevents the kind of raw map-drawing politics playing out in Texas and California

By Jeremy Lott

Washington state is normally a lock for Democrats. The Democratic Party has held the governor's mansion since 1985, including one agonizingly close election that is widely regarded by local Republicans to have been stolen.

Washington Democrats now control statewide elected offices after the lone

Republican, then-Secretary of State Kim Wyman, got sideways with the GOP faction favorable to President Donald Trump as he rose to the White House for his first, nonconsecutive term. Wyman jumped ship for the administration of Trump's successor (and predecessor), former President Joe Biden.

Democrats enjoy comfortable majorities in both houses of the state legisla-

ture. Both U.S. senators are Democrats, and the U.S. House congressional delegation is 8-2 in their favor.

So why is it, in the current struggle among several red and blue states to gerrymander more favorable House districts with an eye on next year's midterm congressional elections, that Washington isn't one of the places Democrats appear to be looking to corral votes?

"It's a non-story for Washington State," Luanne Van Werven, former chairwoman of the Washington State GOP, told the *Washington Examiner*. "We have a redistricting commission made up of two Republicans and two Democrats," and the commissioners, by all accounts, are "not willing to reopen redistricting."

State Democratic leadership appears to agree. "We have already done our share to get Democrats in the House," state Senate Majority Leader Jamie Pedersen (D-Seattle) told the local publication *The Washington Standard*. "There's no juice to squeeze in the lemon here."

State House Majority Leader Joe Fitzgibbon (D-West Seattle) agreed with his legislative counterpart from the other side of the Capitol, in Washington's state capital, Olympia. Fitzgibbon pointed out that the Democrats already hold 80% of Washington's House seats. In a state where the 2024 Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris beat Trump 57% to 39%.

Fitzgibbon said that it would "take some very creative map drawing to get to 9-1" and that there was "no chance Republicans would be interested in helping us."

It would take a two-thirds vote of the legislature, a majority that Democrats don't enjoy, to do anything with the current district structure. Washington Republicans have threatened lawsuits if local Democrats even think about it.

POLITICS OF COMMISSION

Washington legislative voices insist that it is out of their hands because voters took it out of their hands, and that is mostly true. Washington voters passed Amendment 74 in 1983 by 61%, creating the Washington State Redistricting Commission.

The commission is somewhat independent of the legislature and strictly bipartisan. It consists of two Republicans, two Democrats, and a non-voting chair whom both sides decide they can work with. It is convened every 10 years following the census. Its work started in 1991.

If the idea was to remove politics from redistricting, the commission has been only partly successful. In the last round of redistricting, one Democratic commissioner, Seattle politician Brady Walkinshaw, played the role of an obstructionist.

That obstruction managed to push the final vote on the commission's proposed map past midnight, and thus just past a statutory deadline in late 2021. That sent the results to the state Supreme Court for review. The justices, mercifully, declined to meddle with the map.

Also, while the commission proposes

the overall framework to the legislature, this order of operations still allows for some amount of political back-and-forth on implementation. That back-and-forth often leads to lawsuits and charges of bias, for example, politics.

Still, the Washington State Redistricting Commission appears to have made

“**We have already done our share to get Democrats in the House. There's no juice to squeeze in the lemon here.**

—State Senate Majority Leader Jamie Pedersen (D-Seattle)

the process a little bit less of a naked power play by the party in power.

Van Werven charged that “national Democrats ... have led the way on gerrymandering in blue states such as Illinois and New York,” where they have “done everything possible to eliminate Republican congressional districts.”

Note the “national.” The former GOP chairwoman's criticisms of state-level Democrats were real but muted. Facing an institutional barrier created by the voters, Washington Democrats may be seen cheering from the sidelines in the larger gerrymander tug-of-war, pitting the nation's two most populous states against each other, red Texas vs. even larger, and blue, California. But Washington state political leaders have wisely decided to sit this one out. ★

Jeremy Lott is the author of several books, most recently The Three Feral Pigs and the Vegan Wolf.

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NATIONAL SECURITY

China's stranglehold on rare earth elements threatens America's national security

Trump's tariff war could jolt the US out of inaction

By Jamie McIntyre

At a recent hearing of the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party, ranking member Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL) came prepared to show and tell “why rare earths are so important,” holding up a small metal object, the size of a thimble, between his thumb and forefinger.

“They are in something we take for granted every day, namely, rare earth magnets,” Krishnamoorthi said, putting down the magnet and placing a small spinning disc on the dais in front of him.

“This is a simple motor that spins because of rare earth magnets. But it’s not just in this gadget. It’s in everyday items, including this toothbrush and even this drill,” he said, one in each hand. “It’s basically in everything you can possibly think of. These rare earth magnets power almost all items that involve motors in our daily lives.”

The market for rare earth magnets, which are 15 times stronger than



At a recent hearing, Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL) shows everyday items containing rare earth exports in the form of magnets used in their circuitry.

old-fashioned steel magnets, has been growing exponentially for the past two decades. As Krishnamoorthi said, they are in everything that moves by electricity.

And China, he said, “produces 90% of the world’s rare earth magnets.”

In April, China cut off the export of rare earth elements to the U.S. in retaliation for President Donald Trump’s 34% “reciprocal” tariff on Chinese imports.

The effects were immediate.

Ford was forced to halt production of certain advanced vehicles at its Chicago facility, its oldest plant in the U.S.

But the shock to the U.S. defense industrial base was even greater.

“Our country, with the largest economy in the world, sits atop many rare earth minerals vital to our future prosperity, but China has a near monopoly, 90%, on the ability to process them.”

—Rahm Emanuel, former U.S. ambassador to Japan

China maintains a near monopoly on a slew of rare earth elements, including dysprosium, gadolinium, germanium, gallium, lutetium, scandium, yttrium, and yttrium.

But one in particular, samarium, is perhaps the most vital to the U.S. defense industry.

Samarium is essential in making the heat-resistant magnets required for F-35 stealth fighters, which need magnets that can function at extremely high temperatures generated by jet engines.

There are some 50 pounds of samarium magnets in a single F-35, and according to one estimate cited by RAND, each plane has a total of 920 pounds of various rare earth elements.

As a result of recent trade negotiations, China has since relaxed restrictions on some rare earth elements used for non-military purposes, but it’s maintaining a chokehold on anything related to national security.

This has forced defense manufacturers to scramble for alternate, and far more expensive, sources of rare earth minerals, which are needed for everything from drone motors and night-vision goggles to microelectronics and missile-targeting systems.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that one U.S. company was quoted a price for samarium 60 times the going rate.

As the Trump administration works to reach a trade deal with China, the ban

on magnets is a key sticking point.

"I won't go into detail, because they're confidential conversations between two governments, but they are really focused on rare earth magnets and minerals," U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said on CBS's *Face the Nation*.

"China has put a global control on the world, and so for the United States, we're focused on making sure that the flow of magnets from China to the United States and the adjacent supply chain can flow as freely as it did before the control," Greer said. "And I would say we're about halfway there."

You might think that China's chokehold on critical supply chains is because rare earth elements are hard to find, difficult to mine, and mostly in China.

But it turns out that while they are rare, they're not that rare. They're also not hard to mine, so long as you don't care about the effects on the environment.

It wasn't that long ago that the U.S. was the primary source of samarium magnets, a result of research by General Motors in the 1980s.

By the 1990s, the U.S. was manufacturing the magnets in Indiana and mining the rare earth elements in the desert at Mountain Pass, California, near the Nevada border.

The mine violated environmental restrictions, and the cost of cleanup made it unprofitable, so it shut down.

Meanwhile, China, unencumbered by environmental concerns, began to realize it was sitting on a gold mine.

As then-Chinese Finance Minister Deng Xiaoping famously said in 1992, "The Middle East has oil, China has rare earths."

"These rare earths are not that hard to mine. It doesn't take lots of big, sophisticated equipment," Keith Bradsher, Beijing bureau chief for the *New York Times*, said in a recent podcast. "It's called bucket chemistry. It doesn't take a lot of resources to do it. All it really takes is a corrupt local politician willing to look the other way as you start digging holes in public lands, and dumping chemicals in them, and pumping out what comes out of the bottom of the hillside."

Rare earth exports from China became plentiful and cheap until a spat between China and Japan underscored the problem of overreliance on Beijing as the sole source for rare earth elements.

In 2010, tensions over ownership of a group of uninhabited islands near Taiwan prompted Beijing to cut off Japan's supplies of rare earth minerals for two months.

Seeking a more stable supply chain, Japan subsidized a mine in Australia.

The U.S. also began to seek to lessen its dependence on China and invested roughly a billion dollars to address the environmental concerns at Mountain Pass and reopen the mine.

But the flood of cheap rare earth minerals from China cut global prices and forced the mine into bankruptcy in 2015 after operating for only one year.

While causing near-term shortages, the current crisis may have a long-term positive effect if it results in the U.S. making a new commitment to developing a domestic rare earth industry.

"Our country, with the largest economy in the world, sits atop many rare earth minerals vital to our future prosperity, but China has a near monopoly, 90%, on the ability to process them," Rahm Emanuel, former U.S. ambassador to Japan, told the House committee last month.

"We must answer CCP coercion with resolve, unity, and resilience. That means building a collective defense among the democratic nations against coercion. It means investing at home and diversifying our supply chains," he said.

The Pentagon has already taken a major step, entering into a multibillion-dollar public-private partnership with MP Materials, operator of Mountain Pass, to build a new rare earth separation facility and a second domestic magnet manufacturing plant at the site.

China's actions have given the mine, the world's second largest, a new lease on life.

The 10-year agreement will make the Defense Department the company's largest shareholder with an investment of \$400 million in newly created preferred stock, and will cement the company's status as a national strategic asset.

"This initiative marks a decisive action by the Trump administration to accelerate American supply chain independence," James Litinsky, founder, chairman, and CEO of MP Materials, said in a press release. ★

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



Portions of stage 2 processing are seen the at MP Materials mine in Mountain Pass, California. The mine is the only rare-earth mining and processing facility in the U.S.

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Business

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (center) poses with fellow heads of state and government during the 17th BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on July 7.



TRADE POLICY

Not so quiet on the Western and other fronts

US-led tariff battle may bring emerging economies closer together

By Nick Thomas

As the threat and reality of U.S.-imposed tariffs around the world continue, the increasingly influential group of countries known as the BRICS bloc is also flexing its muscle.

What started as the emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa has now become an 11-nation trading and political bloc, with Indonesia becoming the latest member state to join in January 2025.

Several other countries, including Saudi Arabia and Nigeria, are partner countries of the bloc. Currently, the member countries account for approximately 45% of the world's GDP and more than half of its population.

And, as the world focuses on what the United States under President Donald Trump may eventually land on with all the threats of global tariffs, the BRICS nations have made their own statement.

At the 17th BRICS summit in Rio de Janeiro in July, the group announced

that, among many other commitments, "We are now extending our commitment to strengthening cooperation within the expanded BRICS, based on three pillars of cooperation: politics and security, economy and finance, and cultural and people-to-people cooperation."

Trump responded to the BRICS summit on July 7 via Truth Social by threatening an additional 10% tariffs on "any country aligning themselves with the Anti-American policies of BRICS." Since then, he has also further threatened Bra-

zle with more tariffs conditional upon greater freedom for convicted former President Jair Bolsonaro, his close ally.

CRUCIAL JUNCTURE?

Some now see the world potentially being at a “critical juncture in history” as a result of such geopolitical and economic shifts. Others are urging more caution, remaining confident in the power of the U.S. economy to hold sway.

While the U.S. retains considerable institutional power through its leadership of global financial bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, the legitimacy and authority of such institutions face increasing challenges from groups such as BRICS, said Irina Tsukerman, president of Scarab Rising, a geopolitical risk consultancy.

“Many states have grown skeptical of the impartiality of these organizations, viewing them as mechanisms for advancing Western economic and geopolitical interests,” Tsukerman said. “As a result, alternative institutions are being created or expanded to dilute U.S. dominance.”

George Oikonomou, a Greece-based economics consultant, said threats to emerging economies such as those in the BRICS bloc will only strengthen cooperation between such countries against the U.S.’s influence.

He noted that the dollar’s hegemony is already declining, given a significant decline in dollar global foreign reserves since the turn of the century. Meanwhile, intra-BRICS trade is growing faster than BRICS-G7 trade, with projections showing intra-BRICS trade exceeding \$500 billion by 2026.

“At this point, someone should really ring the danger bell in the White House,” Oikonomou said. “Multiple indicators suggest the U.S. is losing its grip on global economic leadership. Overall, the intersection of BRICS expansion and Trump’s tariff threats represents a critical juncture in global economic history.”

Others are perhaps more sanguine. For example, the latest BRICS summit failed to make significant progress on a BRICS currency or credible financial

alternatives, according to Saurav Sen, a senior analyst of emerging markets at New York-based Gimme Credit.

“The July 2025 BRICS summit in Rio confirmed what’s been clear for a while,” Sen said. “The dream of a new financial order is running out of steam.”

Indeed, the bloc’s expansion may well result in ever-increasing divergence. Its best hope may be nudging the United Nations to a less Western tilt.

“For now, BRICS is more posturing than policy,” Sen said.

Any perception that the U.S. is a fading power should be tempered by the reality that it is still the world’s largest consumer market. Tariffs may be disruptive in the short term, but they can help address debt problems and lead to global manufacturers relocating production to the U.S.

“While global geopolitical shifts naturally raise concerns, the U.S. has a long track record of resilience and the ability to adapt when needed,” said Philip Batten, president and founder of Ambassador Wealth Management. “It’s important to keep a balanced perspective and not let fear take hold. The challenges are real, but so are the opportunities for strategic renewal and leadership.”

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGING

Whether we are at such a critical juncture or not, most everyone agrees on the global cultural, economic, and political shifts that are happening irrespective of the continued power of the U.S.

One way to temper U.S. dominance is through dedollarization, a move away from the dollar as the dominant trading currency.

“If the de-dollarization of international transactions took place, it would have significant implications, such as U.S. dollar depreciation, higher U.S. borrowing costs, and loss of U.S. geopolitical leverage,” said Brandon Parsons, an economist at Pepperdine Graziadio Business School.

Nevertheless, Parsons added, the reality is that around 90% of international transactions are conducted with the U.S. dollar, and that will not change overnight.

“The US economy is still the largest, and no country wants to lose access to

the U.S. marketplace,” he said. “However, there is potential that high tariffs on exports into the U.S. marketplace could lead to continued efforts toward de-dollarization of international transactions, as well as new trade coalitions that could alter geopolitical influence in regions around the world.”

Logistically, trade lanes are shifting, with BRICS nations investing heavily in alternative corridors. China’s Belt and Road Initiative has funneled over a trillion dollars into infrastructure across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, with many of those nodes forming part of a BRICS-friendly logistics network, according to Robert Khachatryan, CEO at Los Angeles logistics company Freight Right Global Logistics.

“These are not fringe moves,” he said. “They’re rational responses to a world where geopolitical friction is reshaping logistics.”

Sources may be divided on the eventual extent of tariff-driven policies on the world order, but their current scattergun approach is not a cohesive strategy, said Babak Hafezi, adjunct professor of International Business at American University. Such an approach can only strengthen alternatives to U.S. dominance.

“The current policies are not diminishing the power of BRICS but increasing their perceived necessity as an alternative to American economic and political hegemony,” Hafezi concluded.

The U.S. just may not have the influence some people think it has.

“Despite its enduring economic size and technological leadership, the U.S. faces a real erosion of influence in global trade governance,” Irina Tsukerman of Scarab Rising said. “The shift is not absolute but reflects a recalibration of power among rising economies that are demanding a greater voice. If the United States does not adapt its approach to global economic leadership, it may find itself increasingly peripheral to the institutions and mechanisms shaping the next generation of international commerce and finance.” ★

Nick Thomas is a writer based in Denver.

TIANA'S TAKE

Trump made the right call ousting Bureau of Labor Statistics leader, but for the wrong reason



After six months of haranguing the Federal Reserve to slash the federal funds rate despite a persistently strong economy, President Donald Trump finally got a data point proving his case that the labor market is likely softening. The Bureau of Labor Statistics announced in its July jobs report that, despite the economy adding a net 73,000 jobs, major revisions to its May and June figures showed a quarter-million fewer new positions in those months than the agency originally reported.

Trump promptly fired Erika McEntarfer, former BLS commissioner, and subsequently accused the BLS of repeatedly publishing “RIGGED” and “record-setting revisions” to benefit Democrats before and after his 2024 victory. “Those big adjustments were made to cover up, and level out, the FAKE political numbers that were CONCOCTED in order to make a great Republican Success look less stellar!!!” Trump posted on Truth Social.

As was the case with Jim Comey’s tenure as FBI director in 2017, Trump had every reason to fire McEntarfer. And as with his belated termination of the utterly clownish Comey, Trump was right about firing the less clownish, but still incompetent, McEntarfer.

But Trump did so for the wrong reasons.

Though McEntarfer was indeed an appointee of former President Joe Biden, a bipartisan consensus of 86 senators, including Vice President JD Vance, a former senator, confirmed the economist as BLS commissioner in January 2024. Under her half-year tenure, the BLS’s revisions actually occasionally favored Trump, such as the infamously awful (and incorrect) October 2024 report saying the Biden administration only oversaw 12,000 new jobs added to the economy.

And recent revisions haven’t been quite record-setting; in an aggregation of jobs reports going back to World War II, statis-

tician Nate Silver found that the May and June revisions were, respectively, only the 66th and 54th largest in the BLS’s history, with no other jobs reports published under McEntarfer’s tenure cracking the top 100 worst revisions.

But McEntarfer failed to solve the more important question of why still-sizable revisions were necessary: namely, the BLS’s cratering survey response rate.

The monthly jobs report, the first major economic record released to summarize the month prior, relies on two separate surveys, the Current Employment Statistics program and the Current Population Survey. The BLS is responsible for administering the CES, also known as the payroll or establishment survey, to some 119,000 businesses. The Census Bureau administers the CPS or household survey to 60,000 households. Whereas the CES tracks the broader macroeconomic trends of overall employment, average hours worked, and corresponding average earnings, the CPS zooms in on more demographic data.

Furthermore, while the CES supplies the gold standard economic gauge of nonfarm payroll employment, the CPS’s broader measure includes agricultural workers and self-employed workers.

Because the jobs survey is meant to be preliminary, we always expect some margin for revision. After all, our monthly schedule of a jobs report release on the first Friday of every month means that the BLS beats the South Koreans and the Canadians with publishing our preliminary employment report by about a week or two, and Norwegians by at least three weeks. Every other major OECD peer doesn’t release their monthly jobs report until at least a month after the BLS releases ours for a given month. But the BLS is relying on increasingly insufficient data to do so.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, around 83% of households contacted by the Census Bureau by telephone or in person responded to the CPS. When McEn-

tarfer took office, the response rate fell to 70%, and by July, it plunged to 67%.

In absolute terms, the CES response rate was even worse, falling from 60% before the pandemic to barely 42% this spring. But to her credit, McEntarfer presided over a stabilization of the CES response rate, which is actually at the same level as when she was confirmed.

Trump is not wrong to fire McEntarfer for failing to improve the response rate. But that’s not the end of the story.

Trump must hold accountable the Commerce Department, which oversees the Census and its free-falling CPS response rate. And Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick has not been a passive observer in the 3% decline in the CPS response rate; he has actively made it worse.

Back in February, Lutnick terminated the Bureau of Economic Analysis Advisory Committee and the Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee. This was not to fulfill Trump’s cost-cutting ambitions. The committees, which had an annual combined budget of \$200,000, which is dust mites in D.C. terms, relied on unpaid economists volunteering to help improve and verify the accuracy of the federal government’s economic data, crucially inviting private sector and even foreign economists to bounce new ideas off career government wonks.

In particular, FESAC was laser-focused on improving the response rates of surveys conducted for the BLS, Census, and Bureau of Economic Analysis. In the year before FESAC’s untimely demise, the committee weighed plans to digitize and modernize the CPS and CES for economists from the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, Goldman Sachs, and the national statistics offices for the United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada.

Nobody inside or outside the BLS or the Commerce Department can explain why Lutnick killed FESAC and BEAAC. What we do know is that if Trump wants the U.S. dollar to remain the world’s reserve currency and the long end of the bond yield curve to decrease before we have to refinance more of our debt, investors must maintain trust in the government’s employment data.

Trump’s next nominee better have a solution, and Lutnick put a plan in place to replace the statistical advisory committees. Otherwise, McEntarfer’s successor won’t last any longer. ★

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

Life & Arts

Books The campus novel comes for Oxford's woke era, P. 46

On Culture Journalism's addiction to musts, P. 50

Film *Superman*, *Fantastic Four*, and the quest for depth in superhero movies, P. 51

Also: Budapest's golden age ★ Remembering the madness of 2020 ★ Chow hall hijinks ★ The working vacation lie



Pamela Anderson
and Liam Neeson
in *The Naked Gun*.

COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES

“It is culturally acceptable once again to laugh at a police officer mowing down bicyclists, mucking up a crime scene, and beating up witnesses without feeling the slightest twinge of social responsibility.”

Peter Tonguette on *The Naked Gun* and the return of the cop comedy, P. 48



BOOKS

Budapest In the Middle

By Will Collins

On a visit to Budapest in the 1930s, an unimpressed H.L. Mencken remarked that the former imperial capital had the feeling of “an empty ballroom.” Having been shorn of half its territory after World War I, Budapest’s grandeur was an awkward fit for a country of 8 million people caught between the rising totalitarian powers of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. However, before things took a turn for the worse, the city enjoyed an Indian summer of high living and international intrigue through the 1930s and into the early years of World War II. The strange autumn of Hungary’s capital and the war’s inevitable intrusion are the subjects of *The Last Days of Budapest*, a vivid new history from the British writer Adam LeBor.

Certain European cities have truly ancient roots, but Budapest’s origin story dates closer to the founding of Chicago than Rome. The city has a few notable ruins — a northbound highway runs right by the old legionary fort of Aquincum — but Budapest only emerged as a major urban center in the late 19th century. Most of the city’s iconic architecture, from its bridges to its Parliament to the grand Neoclassical, Baroque, and Beaux Arts buildings that dot the downtown, is a product of this boom. A worthy companion and prequel of sorts to LeBor’s book is Hungarian American historian John Lukacs’s *Budapest 1900*, which describes the city at its economic and cultural apogee. Hungary’s fin-de-siècle peak was not a distant epoch but a living memory for many of the city’s World War II residents.

A further legacy of Budapest’s late 19th- and early 20th-century golden age was the city’s cosmopolitan character. As the pre-World War I capital of one-half of

the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Budapest attracted people from across Central and Eastern Europe. Hungarians can boast of many fine qualities (LeBor includes an appreciative aside on the women of Budapest), but entrepreneurship is not one of their outstanding national talents. Industrial and commercial concerns were often managed by ethnic Germans, Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, who were considered fully assimilated and patriotic Hungarians, at least for a time.

As Europe hurtled toward war in the 1930s, Budapest seemed to enjoy a charmed life. The conservative autocrat Adm. Nicholas Horthy ruled as regent, but Parliament continued to meet, political parties contested elections, and official censorship was unobtrusive. The anti-Jewish laws of this era were minor inconveniences compared to what was happening elsewhere. Somewhat miraculously, Budapest was basically untouched by the early years of World War II. Though he opportunistically aligned himself with Hitler to recover Hungary’s old imperial territories, Horthy declined to take part in the invasion of Poland and provided generous assistance to fleeing refugees. Allied bombers were given free rein over Hungarian airspace as long as they didn’t bomb Hungarian targets.

Thanks to Horthy’s strategic ambiguity, Budapest became a hotbed of espionage and intrigue. The Polish Underground set up shop, Zionist operatives smuggled Jews out of occupied Poland and Slovakia, and the British Special Operations Executive sent agents to recover downed flyers and aid anti-Nazi resistance fighters. Inevitably, LeBor compares the city’s atmosphere to *Casablanca*, a film directed by the exiled Hungarian Jew Michael Curtiz (formerly Mihály Kertész).

As his cast of characters expands, LeBor runs into a bit of trouble. *The Last Days of Budapest* suffers from a rare problem for historical nonfiction: a surplus of good material. Entire books could be written about Andor Grosz, the smuggler king of Budapest;

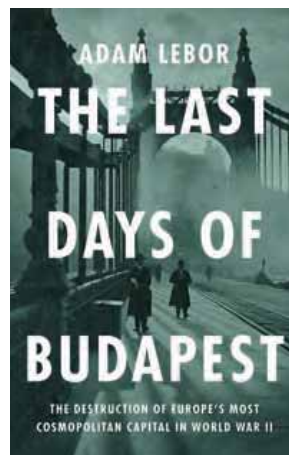
the Swiss consul Carl Lutz, who used his diplomatic status to save thousands of Hungarian Jews; and Princess Cajo Odescalchi, a leading figure in Hungary’s anti-German underground. Readers unfamiliar with old *Mitteleuropa* may find it difficult to keep track of all the aristocrats, smugglers, British agents, and Budapesters about town. There are also a few irksome recurring lines; the phrase “demi monde” seems to accompany every reference to Budapest’s brothels, nightclubs, and casinos.

One thing *The Last Days of Budapest* does well is capture the sense of unease looming over the city, even as it seemed to have escaped the worst of the war. As Hitler tightened his grip on the continent, Hungary’s strategic position became gradually untenable. Shortages and rationing put a crimp on Budapest’s famous nightlife. The Hungarian army was dragged into the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and began to suffer grievous losses. Able-bodied Jewish men were drafted into labor battalions and sent East to work under brutal conditions. Many never returned.

An interesting and under-discussed turning point in World War II was the death of Istvan Horthy, Nicholas Horthy’s liberal, Anglophile son and heir apparent. Istvan, an experienced pilot, was killed in a mysterious plane crash while inspecting Hungarian troops on the Eastern Front. LeBor argues that Nazi sabotage was probably to blame. Istvan’s death likely ended Hungary’s chances of detaching itself from the Axis powers.

More than a few Hungarians still regard Nicholas Horthy as a hero for leading the country through the turbulent 1920s and 30s. The old admiral was an authoritarian but not a fascist like Hitler or Mussolini. Under his rule, Hungary remained a liberal, enlightened place by regional standards. Many of Nicholas Horthy’s diplomatic maneuvers can be excused on the grounds of *realpolitik*.

However, when the Nazis carried out



The Last Days of Budapest: The Destruction of Europe's Most Cosmopolitan Capital in World War II
By Adam LeBor
PublicAffairs
512 pp., \$32.95

a coup in March 1944, Nicholas Horthy lost his nerve. He acquiesced to the German takeover, withdrew from public life, and largely rubber-stamped the decrees of the puppet government, including the orders behind the Hungarian Holocaust. A halfhearted attempt to evict the Nazis in October was too little, too late to save the city from becoming a battleground between the retreating Wehrmacht and the advancing Red Army.

The fate of Budapest's large Jewish community is sad even by the standards of a tragic era. In the early 20th century, Hungarian Jews were arguably the most well-assimilated in Europe, present not just in the arts and the professions, but at the highest levels of Budapest society. Before the German occupation, many convinced themselves that they could ride out the war in relative peace. This would prove to be a terrible mistake.

What lessons can be drawn from *The Last Days of Budapest*? Eastern European readers might conclude that a certain resigned fatalism is the best outlook on matters of foreign policy. Even today, Hungarians lament that they never pick the right side (see current arguments over Prime Minister Viktor Orban's enthusiastic courting of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin), but it's not clear there was a path out of their country's interwar dilemma. Gallant Poland stood up to the Germans, but this did not spare the Poles from years of Nazi occupation, the horrors of the Holocaust, and their country's subsequent absorption into the Soviet bloc. Small countries caught between major powers rarely have good options.

The precarity of multiculturalism is another lesson of LeBor's book. Westerners often assume that easy-going liberalism is humanity's default setting, but Eastern European history suggests otherwise. Far from inaugurating a new era of enlightened tolerance, modernity unleashed prejudice and resentment across the region on a heretofore unimaginable scale. When the old empires collapsed after World War I, fascism and nationalism rushed to fill the void. The destruction of multicultural Budapest was reproduced across Central and Eastern Europe in villages, towns, and provinces that are largely forgotten in history.

LeBor ends *The Last Days of Budapest* with a hopeful coda, noting that the city's Jewish community has en-

joyed a remarkable revival in recent decades. "Hungary," LeBor writes, "has proved immune to the explosion of anti-Semitism across Europe that followed 7 October 2023." The reason for this happy state of affairs is an uncomfortable one. Unlike its Western European counterparts, Hungary is still a very homogeneous place. It has no large, unassimilated communities of first- and second-generation Muslim immigrants. As Western Europe has lately become more diverse, it has also experienced a resurgence of antisemitism. Even in the most putatively enlightened and tolerant places, violence and resentment often lurk just off stage. The history of Budapest, a city that experienced a cosmopolitan era brought to an abrupt end by World War II, is a chilling reminder of this uncomfortable truth.

Will Collins is a lecturer at Eotvos Lorand University in Budapest, Hungary.

BOOKS

Hindsight's 2020

By Ross Anderson

Is Thomas Chatterton Williams's new book, *Summer of Our Discontent: The Age of Certainty and the Demise of Discourse*, about wokeness, or is it the story of 2020? Yes. Is it a memoir, or is it advancing and building an argument? It's both. Is it a treatise against "anti-racism," or a general rebuttal of mad, illiberal ideas? A bit of each. It's a lot of things and not enough of one.

In his most famous book, *A Self-Portrait in Black & White: Unlearning Race*, Williams used the memoir format to air a core argument. Namely, of the incoherence of race as a contemporary identity, and in favor of color blindness. That's a more ambitious argument, yet that book worked so well — it was so persuasive and moving — because his argument and personal story were so tightly bound together. His life made his case for him, and thus his anecdotes were not a distraction from the argument any more than the argument was imposed upon his story. It was a brilliant memoir and the best brief ever for color blindness. With *Summer of Our Discontent*, however, he's making a less novel version of that argument and

forcing the story to support it. In fact, his interjections of memoir, such as flying from the United States to Paris, speaking at small colleges, attending French public debates, and staying in boutique hotels, are so elite that they make him seem divorced from the madness he is attempting to write the definitive book on.

From the pitch and blurb, you would learn that his latest book is about the mania in the air mid-2020, when people were locked in, too online, seeing mad things happening on their phone, and getting pissed off, and a Blinkist summary would tell you that it hits all the beats you'd expect. There are lockdowns, Portland, George Floyd, the Jussie Smollett incident, the Black Square Instagram campaign, Kenosha, cancel culture, and even Jan. 6. The afterword is about the lingering whiffs of crazy that have come up around Israel in the months and years following Oct. 7.

The actual book, however, is messy. It's a mood poem on 2020, wafting through a series of loose essays about George Floyd or Portland. Each story drifts off into quotes from articles and citations for philosophers and away from the core subject, which isn't actually the general madness of 2020, but rather how much Williams dislikes the "anti-racism" arguments advocated by writers who had their moment then, such as Ibram X. Kendi, Robin DiAngelo, and others.

Reading back on this stuff, it's hard to believe any of it was taken seriously. Nikole Hannah-Jones was never a serious person, and she should have been laughed out of the general conversation the moment she tweeted about Kyle Rittenhouse: "In this country, you can even kill white people and get away with it if those white people are fighting for Black lives. This is the legacy of 1619."

This, and many of the anti-racist points brought up in the book, are obviously stupid, and that's the problem. They're so facially absurd that you don't need Williams to debunk them. Yet, when was the last time you heard from Kendi? Hannah-Jones writes one article every two or so months, and none of them are particularly impactful. DiAngelo has presumably retired to swim, Scrooge McDuck-like, in a giant pool of corporate-consulting cash. All these people have vanished from the discourse, so why should we be invested in what they said five years ago?

And, more than being out of time, some of Williams' arguments are not particularly persuasive, either. In part, it seems this is because he grants too much to his opponents. For example, he writes that the collapse in faith in former President Barack Obama occurred more because of the president's race than his policies. Rather, the racial optimism of the years around 2010 seems like one strand of a general "HOPE"-poster Democratic utopianism. The feelings produced in left-wing quarters about the fact that America under Obama's governance felt more or less like it always had were probably the inevitable disappointment of anyone who hopes for things that are not practicable.

Elitism and a related underlying doomed need for the approval of liberal sophisticates may partially explain Williams' focus on the racial ideas rather than some of the other madnests of 2020. Namely, as a remote-working writer, the race stuff (for lack of a better phrase) infected Williams's own world. But other, race-neutral shades of that madness affected people in more profound ways. Those who were told they couldn't attend funerals for loved ones don't get mentioned, let alone quoted. California pouring sand into outdoor skate parks while Gov. Gavin Newsom (D-CA) dined at The French Laundry Kitchen is also not mentioned despite its enormous radicalizing effect. Neither are the reversals on masking advice. This book is almost exclusively focused on wokeness and "anti-racism."

It's therefore hard to tell who *Summer of Our Discontent* is aimed at. With the extensive, unnecessary throat-clearing — "Let us be painstakingly clear: What happened to Floyd outside the Cup Foods convenience store was an atrocity; it was murder without qualification" — it seems that it's meant for a left-of-center readership who've never heard about white police killing victim Tony Timpa, and who unquestioningly deified George Floyd. But how many of those people would buy a book from Williams? If you're even slightly literate about the American Right and Williams' prior work,

there's little new here.

Unfortunately, as though the complaints listed already weren't enough, *Summer of Discontent* is Williams' worst-written book. He's an immensely talented writer, and you see it in moments such as his chapter on the French response to *le wokisme*, or his retelling of Jan. 6 and the Rittenhouse incident. Both events have been covered to exhaustion, yet his sections on them are impactful in a way I don't think I've felt before. But these moments that speak to his talents are the exception in this latest volume.

Too often, the book is redundant or dry, which would be true even without the avalanche of (often very long) footnotes. The footnotes continually pull you out of the flow, particularly when they run over most of a page, and no editor should allow a book to go to press with footnotes taking up roughly 15% of the word count. Then there is the fact that much of the content is not original to the work. Williams writes about James Bennett's defenestration at the *New York Times*, but there's little here that Bennett doesn't provide better in his long *Economist* essay on the episode, which Williams credits as "an extraordinary document worth reading in its entirety." So why am I reading this? The book's excellent chapter on France is essentially a light rewrite of a piece he wrote in the March 2023 edition of the *Atlantic*. Even readers who think this is a talented author covering topics on which they agree with him will find their eyes glazing over.

Perhaps the book suffers under the weight of its expectations. There have been plenty of pandemic policy books and COVID-19 origin books, but there ought to have been one that truly captured this moment where the world

went mad. And Williams is the kind of writer who could have done so. But, for whatever reason, he has chosen to leave us with something waftier instead.

Ross Anderson is the life editor at the *Spectator World* and a tech and culture contributor for the *New York Sun*.

BOOKS

Whose Oxford Is Gored?

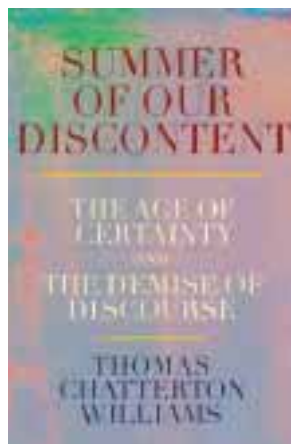
By Andrew Bernard

In his debut novel, *Shibboleth*, Thomas Peermohamed Lambert satirizes how the madness that has beset higher education across the Western world came to Oxford University. And that madness is never aroused to such heights as when its subject is the Jews.

Our protagonist, Edward, is a white(ish — it's complicated) Anglo-Zanzibarian undergrad of Muslim descent who is attracted to his classmate Rachel, a German Jew. All of the other characters in the book have strong opinions about the impropriety of Edward getting too close to the Jewess. "Has she spoken about the crimes of her people in Gaza? The West Bank? Lebanon?" asks Edward's friend Youssef, a posh Egyptian Muslim. Another character, Liberty, a beret-clad American black radical angling for a high-paying diversity, equity, and inclusion job after graduation, tells Edward to interrogate Rachel about her views on Israel. "Ask her how she spent her vacation, and where. Ask her why she and Said broke up. Ask her. Ask the Jew girl."

When Lambert is on target, the book is sharp. In one of the best scenes, Youssef takes Edward to a reception at the "Mixed Heritage Society," where Youssef, who alone seems in on the joke, plucks out lapel badges from a buffet of ethnic and racial labels: "He was enjoying himself. *Berber* had been joined by a smattering of other African ethnicities (*Balanta*, *Dogon*) that Edward at least would never have the temerity to question — but also, improbably, Samoan, and, in a final moment of daring as he turned to face Edward, Cherokee." But even as the book makes fun of the Elizabeth Warrens and Zohran Mamdanis of the world for, so to speak, inflating their ethnic credentials, it also is trying to ask serious questions about identity, and particularly Edward's relation to Islam, to Israel and Jews, to women, to academic life, and to Oxford itself.

The trouble with *Shibboleth*, how-



Summer of Our Discontent: The Age of Certainty and the Demise of Discourse
By Thomas Chatterton Williams
Knopf
272 pp., \$30.00

ever, is that, as satire, it's muddy. On the one hand, Lambert successfully skewers the absurd excesses of identity politics with all of its tedious vocabulary and slogans ("allyship," "doing the work"). On the other, things seem to get very serious when the topic turns to Israel and Jews.

One problem is that Edward is pretty dull, in both senses of the word. "I don't know" seems to be his most common refrain of dialogue, even as everyone around him takes deep and immediate interest in every step of his social life. Another is that the social circle he is attempting to insinuate himself into consists of tiresome, bigoted political activists. Something about Oct. 7, something about the Gaza war, something about Israelis and Palestinians, something about Jews themselves simply fits into too many of the categories of critical theory, "social justice," and grievance politics for a certain kind of keffiyeh-clad campus lefty to resist going camping on the quad. I won't spoil the finale, but it involves an antisemitic assault on Rachel that, if it happened in reality, would make international headlines and result in lengthy jail time for the perpetrators.

It came as sweet relief halfway through the novel when Edward gets dragged along to a night out with the rugby team and then on to the pitch the following morning. I found myself rooting for Edward to abandon his nasty, Jew-baiting, identity-politics obsessed "friends" and have a politics-free pint with the lads down the pub. Alas, he breaks his leg during the match and immediately goes back to arguing about Zionism and Jewish identity with Rachel.

Though Oct. 7 isn't explicitly mentioned in the book, the final act centers on a calamity in the Holy Land and Rachel's decision to speak at "a comradely symposium" about Israel and Palestine at a thinly veiled version of the Oxford Union. So, in case it was not already clear, know that this is a very Oxford novel. Lambert gets a lot of good ma-

terial out of the particular absurdities of the place, with its extremes of class, politics, and daunting academics. Part of the appeal of any such fiction about Oxford or the other place going back at least to Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall* (1928) and continuing through Tom Sharpe's *Porterhouse Blue* (1974) and the 2023 film *Saltburn* is that it's fun to see the well-heeled toffs, scholarship students, and future masters of the universe all behaving badly in the city of dreaming spires.

But here, the badness of the behavior is less of the hedonistic kind and more of the moralistic kind. For instance, after finding that one of the activists has vandalized a bookshop for daring to sell some books by an apologist for imperialism, Edward is told of her plans to target Oxford's largest museum: "Next time we'll go for something at the Ashmolean: hit them where it hurts. You know apparently they have this big hideous painting about hunting animals for sport. You know Hugo Fotherington-Wade at St. Catz? No? Well, he has an MFA in graffiti and related media. So we've got expertise, that's what I'm saying."

Oxford certainly attracts, or produces, such eccentrics in a way that even Harvard does not. Yale might have the Skull and Bones, but that society recruits upstanding bores such as the Bush family. Oxford stands alone as a place where it is made to seem plausible that a future world leader might have inserted his manhood into a severed pig's head at an initiation for one of the university's endless secret drinking societies. (Former U.K.

Prime Minister David Cameron strenuously denied this allegation.)

As a 2014 graduate of Oxford, I had thought that the university had enjoyed a greater immunity to the development of anti-Israel and American-style racial politics described in *Shibboleth* since I left. For one thing, the academic standards for undergrads simply don't permit the kind of mass disruptions that happened at

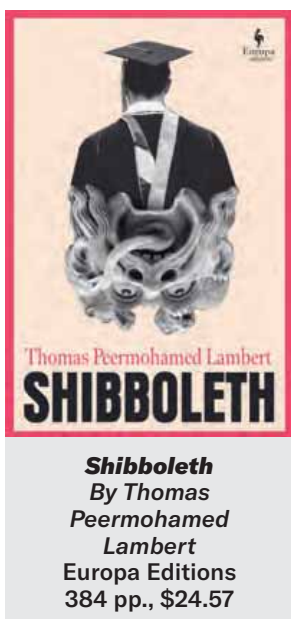
schools like Columbia. Oxford doesn't have the grade inflation or gut courses that permit the semi-professional student activism we see in America: poor performers are expelled or forced to repeat a year. If you want to see real violent extremism, try interrupting a library at Oxford in Trinity Term in the weeks before finals.

A source at the university confirmed my hunch: "I think it's probably true that, in the years immediately after we graduated, the student experience at Oxford became more politically charged, as was the case elsewhere, particularly under the influence of woke liberalism," he told me. "My impression is that teaching remains as rigorous as ever, and, though students do now have to attend various forms of mandatory training when they arrive, lectures and tutorials have remained largely unpoliticized and untouched by critical theory and the like," he added. "I believe that we reached 'peak woke' in the university a while back, and that, while there will always be an activist minority, most students want simply to focus on their studies and get a good degree."

Nonetheless, the very existence of a novel like *Shibboleth* attests to the fact that something clearly has shifted, even at Oxford. And Lambert is mocking something that desperately needs to be mocked, and to his enormous credit, he is doing so while he is still a doctoral candidate at the university. In the United States, the counterreaction to the George Floyd riots and the cultural vibe shift that followed the reelection of Donald Trump may have marked the turning point against "peak woke." But aside from in conservative and heterodox publications, there has been very little acknowledgement of just how ridiculous the discourse around Israel and race has become at our major cultural institutions. *Shibboleth* stands alongside the excellent 2023 film *American Fiction* as one of the few mainstream cultural products I can think of that have tried to do so.

Unfortunately, despite containing some good laughs, I fear *Shibboleth* is simply not a good enough novel to represent this righteous counterattack.

Andrew Bernard is a correspondent for the Jewish News Syndicate.





LIFE IN UNIFORM

Specialist Grundle and the Insatiable Appetite

By Trent Reedy

While back, I told you about Specialist Grundle, the annoying soldier who deployed with us to Farah Province, Afghanistan, in 2004. He was furious about not having been promoted and compensated by claiming superior soldier ability and quoting useless weapons statistics.

I was disgracefully overweight when I began my tour, but the extreme desert heat, small rations, and a horrible bowel disease we called “Farah Flu” quickly and drastically shrunk me. Somehow, Grundle remained fat throughout the tour, and one episode of his incredible eating capacity became a lasting company legend.

When my unit arrived in Afghanistan, our base outside the city of Farah was not yet complete, so we lived in a primitive Afghan mudbrick house. The house lacked sufficient cold storage to stockpile frozen or fresh food, but one day, the cookmaster was excited because a truck arrived with real steaks. To our crushing disappointment, the Afghan truck driver hadn’t turned on the refrigeration unit, and our meat had rotted on the hot desert drive.

Several weeks later, we moved to our base construction site. The high outer walls were finished, but not much else. Our leadership decided to try steak night again. The first sergeant made us a grill by placing a metal mesh atop a 50-gallon metal barrel cut in half the long way. The steaks arrived unspoiled.

The problem was that our chow hall was incomplete. We had tons of steak, but no fridge. Our first sergeant issued

the order as he fired up the grill.

“The steak won’t keep. We’re going to have to eat it all,” he said.

Our first steak night had begun!

All of us soldiers were tired, dirty, and always hungry. I could hardly believe I was finally sinking my teeth into real meat. We had to constantly brush flies away, and cutting the steak with crappy plastic knives was a challenge, but we didn’t care. We were coming alive again.

Then, incredibly, the first sergeant called, “Come on, eat some more steak!”

Throughout the tour, there were rarely seconds, and never on meat.

“It was the first time in the entire deployment I ever saw Grundle happy,” Sgt. Preston, my friend and former team leader, recently recalled. “He had a huge smile on his face, just shoveling the steak in his mouth.”

We all desperately wanted to eat more, but 2 and 1/2 months of low rations had diminished everyone’s capacity to stuff themselves — everyone except Grundle. He hurried to the grill every time the first sergeant put out the call.

“He was like a giddy, happy schoolgirl every time he got more steak,” Preston said.

Grundle was happier than ever. He was even talking and laughing with Sgt. Beckett, whom Grundle hated for receiving a promotion that he wanted.

“He kept eating long after everybody else was done. I would tap it at five f**king steaks,” Preston said.

After the last call for steak, Grundle rushed over to the grill. But he returned empty-handed and furious. All that joy, all his peace with the world, suddenly vaporized in an inferno of rage.

“Motherf**ers! They’re out of steak!” He slumped his big body down on his cot, and slowly, his rage twisted his face to a look of despair. “I’ve never been so hungry in my whole f**king life!”

Everyone laughed at him. He had just eaten three times more steak than anyone else. After the feast, everybody felt blessed, but not Grundle. It had become the worst day of his life, just like every other day for the soldier who burned with anger for having been denied what he saw as his chance for military greatness.

And for the rest of our time in the war, “I’ve never been so hungry in my whole f**king life!” remained a popular catch

phrase before meals, and a tool to further mock Grundle.

*Trent Reedy, author of several books, including Enduring Freedom, served as a combat engineer in the Iowa National Guard from 1999 to 2005, including a tour of duty in Afghanistan. *Some names and call signs in this story may have been changed due to operational security or privacy concerns.*



FILM

Coptimism

By Peter Tonguette

Five summers ago, we were told to wear masks, compelled to take vaccines, prohibited from looking at certain statues (which were helpfully torn down), and scolded for enjoying any movie or TV show that presented law enforcement officers empathetically or humanely. The May 2020 death of George Floyd not only birthed the so-called second “Summer of Love,” but, in the pop culture realm, it resulted in the cancellation of the widely popular reality TV shows *Cops* and *Live PD* and an industry-wide reconsideration of police-oriented entertainment. Few endeavors could signal virtue as pointlessly or gratuitously.

As late as October of that year, the *Hollywood Reporter* surveyed various TV writers about “how they would address the current moment if they wrote a cop show.” The responses ranged from cringe-worthy to legitimately ominous. “Shut down the police station and write what happens next,” said Ramy Youssef of the series *Ramy*. “Give America the ability to visualize a reality without centralized police.” So much for *Hill Street Blues* and *NYPD Blue*, eh?

Meanwhile, Lena Waithe of the show *Twenties* seemed to endorse the Code of Hammurabi, at least as far as TV was concerned. “Create a world where whenever a police officer kills someone,



Paul Walter Hauser
and Liam Neeson in
The Naked Gun.

someone in that police officer's family dies instantly," Waithe said. "So whatever grief they inflict will also be inflicted on them. Maybe we could call it an *Eye for an Eye*."

On this topic, at least, we have come a long way. Not only has *Cops* been restored to its rightful place on American TV sets and *Live PD* been reincarnated as *On Patrol: Live*, but *The Naked Gun* film franchise has been revived without apparent controversy — other than the artistic controversy of rebooting a franchise that conferred cinematic immortality upon Leslie Nielsen for his performance as Detective Frank Drebin, an unusually slow-witted, literal-minded police officer.

On the one hand, the original *The Naked Gun* films, released from 1988 through 1994, could appear to make fun of police work and its practitioners. However, I suspect most police officers understand that the films' object of parody is not law enforcement specifically but dumbness generally. Furthermore, the scolds who tried to wish away police-centric entertainment five years ago would likely understand the danger of

something like *The Naked Gun*: to laugh at Drebin is, in a sense, to make him lovable, and the last thing the police defunders want are lovable police officers.

In the eminently praise-worthy new movie, Frank Drebin Jr. (Liam Neeson) is agreeable in the manner that dopey but well-intentioned people tend to be. He refers to his deceased father as "daddy" — in the universe of the film, that's Nielsen's Drebin — and he expresses touching affection for emblems of vanished cultural eras, including the Black Eyed Peas and the TiVo recording device. Drebin was a parody of an earlier type: the no-nonsense professional who gave the impression of competency but, in fact, had no discernible skills. By contrast, Drebin Jr. is more like a clumsy, aging Saint Bernard: a big, shambling man who wears a dour frown but can turn touchy-feely when the talk turns to romance, owls, or turkey dinners. Once the star of such dramas as Woody Allen's *Husbands and Wives*, Barbet Schroeder's *Before and After*, and, above all, Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, Neeson long ago diminished his credibility by consenting to appear in multiple iterations

of the *Taken* action franchise. At this point, perhaps the best career move, or the only career move, was to make a movie like this one that at least suggests he is in on the joke.

Directed by Akiva Schaffer, the new *The Naked Gun* does not attempt to reformulate the ingredients mixed so well by the Zucker-Abrahams-Zucker team from the original series. Moment by moment, the film propels itself forward with a paper-thin procedural plot: Here, Drebin Jr. finds himself in a standoff against tech tycoon Richard Cane (Danny Huston, an inspired choice), who has developed a gizmo that will draw out humanity's coarsest instincts with the aim of its eventual self-destruction, thus leaving a self-appointed elite free to rule the world unfettered.

One might expect allusions to the easily mockable Elon Musk, but, for the most part, Schaffer resists timely political commentary. Instead, this outlandish plot is merely the means by which the film delivers its bounty of jokes. As in the Nielsen movies, even a standard walk-and-talk scene between Drebin Jr. and colleague Captain Ed Hocken Jr. (Paul

Walter Hauser) serves as the excuse for some background piece of outrageousness, such as a police photographer shooting a mugshot with something of the flair of Francesco Scavullo. At another point, after Drebin Jr. is summoned to the scene of a car crash, he places one hand in a glove but proceeds to root around the vehicle with his other hand; later, at the police station, juveniles who were operating a lemonade stand are led away by officers.

The original films set a high bar for the number of such random asides included, but Schaffer and co-writers Dan Gregor and Doug Mand did their best to incorporate the maximum amount tolerable. Eventually, Pamela Anderson enters the scene as femme fatale Beth Davenport, and if Anderson never makes another movie, she is to be applauded for the abandon with which she scat-sings in a jazz club to distract the bad guy, Cane, as well as the gravitas with which she replies to Drebin Jr. after he asks her if she attended UCLA: “I see LA every day.”

The plot imaginatively updates signature features from the earlier films, supplanting the *Ghost* love scene parody with Nielsen and Priscilla Presley with an equally preposterous ski resort-set romantic montage with Neeson, Anderson, a snowman, and the song “Nothing’s Gonna Stop Us Now” by Starship. (This is the rare movie that does not lose anything when its dialogue is quoted verbatim in a review, as reviews tend to flatten out dialogue, which is exactly the register in which gems such as this are spoken: “You suspect something foul?”/“No, I don’t think a chicken could have done this.”)

Why do we chuckle when Cane asks, “May I speak freely?” and Davenport answers, “I prefer English”? Why do we chortle when Drebin Jr., upon being summoned by his superior, turns up in her bedroom in the middle of the night and speaks in sotto voce so as not to awaken her snoozing husband? Of course, there will always be an appeal to inane dialogue and senseless situations that are presented in a poker-faced manner. That’s why the mockumentary format used by Allen in *Take the Money and Run*, and later perfected by Rob Reiner in *This Is Spinal Tap*, remains so enduringly appealing. However, in the case of the latest *The Naked Gun*, I think we laugh

partly out of relief that the summer of 2020 is over, and it is culturally acceptable once again to laugh at a police officer mowing down bicyclists, mucking up a crime scene, and beating up witnesses without feeling the slightest twinge of social responsibility. At last, our long national nightmare of pretending that we can live without the police is over, and so is the illusion that we can live without movies or shows about the police, even funny or amusing ones.

“You know, Frank, you’ve made me a very happy woman,” Davenport says at the end of the movie. “Me, too,” he answers in his usual way — and let’s make that me three.

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

ON CULTURE

Media in Must

By David Polansky

‘GIVEN the risks of military action, the United States must make a final, good-faith attempt to negotiate a halt to Tehran’s nuclear program early in the Trump administration,” went the teaser text for an article by Richard Nephew in a social media post from *Foreign Affairs* on the first full day of the current presidential term in January. As it happens, the U.S. did exactly that before engaging in military action that has, as of this writing, proven almost laughably risk-free. But what is notable about it now is one particular word: that smug “must,” a word that inserts a tone of authority into all sorts of journalistic writing that possesses neither the power nor, apparently, the knowledge to be issuing imperatives almost as though written in the tone of God.

Confession: I have a certain temperamental allergy to taking orders. One of my least favorite things about being a child was being routinely instructed that I must do or not do certain things. And conversely, one of my great pleasures as an adult is being able to ignore such commands whenever possible. Yes, there are certain non-negotiables, such as paying taxes and wearing pants in public. But outside of those, I delight in the opportunity to decline orders and requests

whenever possible.

Consequently, I am pained as a reader of political commentary to encounter the recurring use of imperatives, which have become so common as to represent a verbal tic among the pundit classes. You know the sort of thing I’m talking about. To take just a recent smattering: America, per a post from the Energy Department, “must lead with innovation.” Or is it that America, according to an article in Project Syndicate, “must lead from the center.” Really, as our friends at *Foreign Affairs* again sum it up, it’s that “America must do more.” There are, of course, many such cases.

As the above indicates, the U.S. tends to be the subject of this mode of discourse, but its applicability is universal — “China must lead the global warming fight,” from *Politico*, “Russia must lose,” from the *Atlantic*, and “America’s allies must save themselves,” from *Foreign Affairs*, yet again. One can almost visualize the writer punctuating these dictums by slamming a fist into their open hand, like a novice high school debater.

One might suppose that this repeated phrasing would indicate some grave urgency, but that would be a mistake. To put it in philosophy of language terms, the illocutionary force of such statements is not to ensure the undertaking of necessary action but to demonstrate the speaker’s own importance. With such devices, every tired hack can sound like the Sanhedrin when it comes to the gravest political events of the day.

The imperative to speak in imperatives is, in fact, so strong that the same publication can easily employ it for mutually exclusive claims, as when the *Economist* insisted that “Israel must fight on,” only to amend this to “the war in Gaza must end.” The important thing, really, is that the rhetorical device remains consistent.

The inevitable Thomas Friedman is likely the heavyweight champion here. The sheer number of times that America must do or have done a thing in his view is staggering: America must start the Earth race, America must lead a green new deal, America must reclaim “world leader” status, America must act, must act, must act, and so on ad infinitum. He has rival correspondents for this position, of course, such as the *Financial Times*’s gormless Edward Luce — “America must relearn diplomacy” — and the

ubiquitous Fareed Zakaria, but it's hard to match his combination of obliviousness and certitude.

With Barack Obama, both during and since his presidency, this mode of speech leapt from the page, or pixel, to high office. Thus, we faced the somewhat surreal image of a world leader exhorting the country to undertake decisions over which he himself notionally held authority. Canada's erstwhile prime minister, Justin Trudeau, borrowed this passive vernacular — housing in Canada “must retain its value” — though, in his case, he seemed genuinely unaware that the things he was describing were actually part of his job remit.

This terminology has now metasized to the point that heads of state, who should really know better, are employing it in reference to other countries as though rhetorical exhortations constituted a policy in and of themselves. The formulation reached its nadir, thus far, when the same Trudeau mistakenly declared that “Russia must win this war.” Even without the gaffes, it is disconcerting to see leaders of major countries behave as though words rather than material incentives are what matter most in international politics.

Part of what is fascinating about this particular tone and phrasing is how divorced it is from real authority. If I routinely spoke in terms of orders that were almost never obeyed and even then only incidentally, I would probably reach a breaking point of humiliation. But for such scribes, impotence is no bar to rhetorical self-importance.

The problem isn't so much the certainty with which these proclamations are issued but the question-begging they entail. Says who? Or else what? Rarely does one see these musts expressed in if-then or because-then terms. After all, the best course of action is usually conditioned on one's preferred goals and against one's material capabilities. But the default perspective for political analysts, consultants, and so on is basically Olympian. So such people have little difficulty speaking in this bossy mode, even when their injunctions pertain to distant countries in which they hold no residency and of which they have limited experience.

Speaking as a parent, I personally have no trouble expressing myself in imperatives. But I typically keep my au-

dience limited, two people, plus I have some ability to ensure my demands are carried out. By contrast, the bureaucrats and members of the commentariat routinely scale up to improbable dimensions. After all, even the world's smaller countries can comprise millions of people. And, indeed, we now see this rhetoric applied even more broadly, as when the heads of international organizations take it upon themselves to instruct not just single states but the entire developed world. Witness, for example, the must-y speech patterns on display at the United Nations, such as a recent speech by Secretary General Antonio Guterres featuring no fewer than 11 musts, including the claim that “business models and practices must be reworked to advance the Sustainable Development Goals.” Must they now? That's nice. Doubtless, we can look forward to being informed what the entire species must do in the event of any future extraterrestrial invasions.

Much of the problem simply comes down to George Orwell's sage warnings in his famous essay *Politics and the English Language* on the connection between imprecise thought and speech. After all, what a writer really means to say when he writes that “X country must find an off-ramp to Y conflict” is that he and his political confreres would much prefer that the conflict cease, and thus his use of imperatives is in fact an expression of this preference. But that same writer either can't or won't state this plainly, and thus makes recourse to some abstract objective claim in lieu of his own agency. In this way, it is the same as expressions involving the judgments of “history” or “posterity” that the speaker or writer seems always to imagine will be on his or her side.

To avoid the appearance of hypocrisy, I don't want to say that such commentators “must” avoid these tired formulations. But it would really behoove them to rediscover the habits of describing politics and geopolitics in terms of clashing interests, even their own interests, rather than objective imperatives. Just say what you want to happen and why, and let the chips fall where they may. Try it, fellas. It'll feel so good.

David Polansky is a Toronto-based writer and a research fellow with the Institute for Peace and Diplomacy. Find him at <https://davidpolansky.substack.com>.

FILM

Can Superhero Movies Matter?

By Derek Robertson

Charmed as his life might be (stable and remunerative employment at a daily city newspaper!), it's easy to feel sorry for Superman.

Having been around for now the better part of a century, the blue unitard-wearing hero's name has become almost metonymic with an idealized, impossible conception of “goodness” (see: everything from the ponderous 2010 documentary about charter schools, *Waiting for “Superman”* to 3 Doors Down's iconic Y2K-era butt-rock anthem “Kryptonite”). Superman is rarely considered in his own right, rather than as a foil to more earthbound, angsty superheroes such as the Randian vigilante Batman, or to Spider-Man, the idealized boy next door.

So as ubiquitous as Big Blue might be, who really knows him, or even cares to? While some of the most critically lauded *Superman* comic books delve into what makes the Übermensch tick, his numerous cinematic iterations have largely avoided this. That is, until James Gunn's *Superman*, an instant box office smash upon its release in July, which cuts right to the chase and asks: Can someone this good, this earnest, this pure, even be *allowed* to exist?

It's to Gunn's credit that in an era of overbearing cultural moralization, *Superman* asks this not as a political question, but a more universal, pop-philosophical one. *Why* Superman is so good — at one point he pauses a super-powered, city-trampling battle to save a single squirrel from being crushed — is relatively unimportant, chalked up to a briefly-explored, yet almost psychedelically idealized Midwestern upbringing. It's how everyone around him responds to his goodness that makes Gunn's film so interesting, from paramour Lois Lane's rapid cycling between admiration and perplexity to archnemesis Lex Luthor's amphetamine-tinged tech-bro rage.

Luthor has always been an ingenious nemesis for the invulnerable Superman: a merely intelligent human, an evildo-



Pedro Pascal in *The Fantastic Four: First Steps*.



David Corenswet in *Superman*.

ing Prometheus out to steal fire from our benevolent cape-wearing god. Here, portrayed by a wonderfully demented Nicholas Hoult, Luthor contains unmistakable echoes of figures like Mark Zuckerberg or Jeff Bezos, men whose bearing or mien don't quite sit within the same reality as the rest of us and are consequently bent on bending that reality to their image.

Luthor's Ahab-like pursuit of Superman recalls a certain viral tweet: "RIP to everyone killed by the gods for their hubris but im different. and better. maybe even better than the gods." In their final confrontation, Luthor sneers at Superman that "my envy is a calling," saying his mission to bring the Kryptonian down a peg is really one to preserve humanity's status as Earth's apex predator. Superman, true to form, says there's nothing to envy. And besides, maybe gadgets aren't everything: "I screw up all the time, but that's being human, and that's my greatest strength. Someday I hope, for the sake of the world, you understand that it's yours too."

In other words, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them

which despitely use you and persecute you. The obvious Christ metaphor aside, Gunn's Superman might remind literary-minded moviegoers of Dostoyevsky's Alyosha Karamazov, a boyish pilgrim with a steadfast moral compass who is nevertheless tempted, challenged, and sometimes hated by a society that seems to fear and indulge him in equal measure. *Superman* wraps these deeply unfashionable themes and aspirations in the pomp, spectacle, and humor that are Gunn's superhero trademark (see: the *Guardians of the Galaxy* trilogy, easily among the best of Marvel Comics' cinematic offerings). It's resonated with audiences to the tune of more than \$300 million in box office receipts, by far the superhero genre's best showing of 2025.

While *Superman* tackles head-on whether humanity can accept such a moral and spiritual challenge, this summer's other superhero blockbuster simply assumes away its existence. *Fantastic Four: First Steps*, the fourth cinematic depiction of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's signature Marvel Comics creations, departs, literally, from our postmodern, anomie-ridden moral reality to an al-

ternate universe, "Earth-828," a nod to Kirby's birthdate. On Earth-828, there is no philosophical garment-rending about humanity's subservience to superpowered gods, no ironic scorn for their do-goodery, and, seemingly, no other superheroes. The film depicts a world where the Four are something like the Beatles, the Kennedys, the Curies, and the Brady Bunch all in one, a globe-bestrident celebrity family responsible for staving off supernatural threats and, seemingly, establishing world peace.

The film's brightly lit, jet-age retro-futurism is a refreshing break from the increasingly drab, made-for-TV quality of Marvel's recent offerings. It contains some of the most genuinely novel action sequences and sci-fi imagery of the bloated Marvel Cinematic Universe to date, from a rollercoaster-like spaceship ride to the classically Kirbian world-eater Galactus striding, like the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man, across New York City. The Four are perfectly cast, and the film hits all the necessary narrative and fan-service beats in a succinct, crowd-pleasing 115 minutes.

And yet... something about the world of this *Fantastic Four* feels inert, not as

far from the in-universe Saturday morning cartoon depicting their adventures as filmmaker Matt Shakman and Marvel's team of writers might think. In a world where superheroes face no real resistance beyond testing their own supernatural mettle against the powers of their enemies, there can be no real conflict, only mere competition; the outcome of a brief, unconvincing moment of Solomonic temptation for team leaders Reed and Sue Richards is never remotely in doubt.

To juxtapose these iterations of Superman and the Four is to realize that their 20th-century Pax Americana idealism *needs* to be threatened by the puerile nihilism represented by more popular R-rated superhero fare, such as *Joker* or the *Deadpool* series, to have any meaning at all. A world where Superman or the Richardses' earnest goodness goes unchallenged isn't just one free of drama, but one free of arete, moral virtue, or catharsis, an idea explored in its own right in some of superheroics' most genuinely artful iterations and which accounts for the leaden lack of feeling *First Steps* inspires despite its pure competency as entertainment.

In that light, Superman might not have it so bad after all, with Luthor's questing jealousy, not to mention the agape disbelief of a cynical humanity, always there to establish the stakes. The Four's true archenemy, Richards's scientific nemesis and mirror image Doctor Doom, is absent in *First Steps* but will appear in a sequel, giving the world's largest entertainment machine another crack at the depth that often eludes it.

"It's too good to be true," one character remarked of Christopher Reeve's Superman in Richard Donner's 1978 *Superman: The Movie*: "He's six-foot-four, has black hair, blue eyes, doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, and tells the truth." The line is more trenchant than its writers could have known. Not just Superman's powers, but his character is literally too good to be true, and his untruthfulness is the source of his seemingly eternal, alien, and yes, as the film insists, subversive appeal, standing head and shoulders above the rest of the superhero class.

Derek Robertson coauthors Politico's Digital Future Daily newsletter and is a contributor to Politico Magazine.



LONG LIFE

The Vacation Binary

By Rob Long

I emailed a young colleague a few days ago to ask about an upcoming project. We were supposed to have a meeting to discuss it this week, but I hadn't received any confirmation.

It's a delicate email to write. On the one hand, I'd like to get the project going as soon as possible. On the other hand, it's August, and I'd like to be able to spend most of it at the beach with a drink in my hand, so I don't want to be the one who instigates a summertime meeting no one really wants to have. But on the *other* other hand, I want to get credit for being "available anytime" — that's how I put it — to get the project underway. That's where the delicacy comes in: I want to appear to be eager and industrious without being either one.

"Just wanted to check in on this," I wrote, "and available anytime to hop on a call. But I know this is a crazy busy time for people so also happy to kick it past Labor Day. Your call entirely."

Pretty much every word of that is a lie, as I'm sure you know. I am not "happy" to "hop" on a "call." I'd rather just laze around for the rest of the summer. This is not a "crazy busy time" for anyone. It's *August*, for heaven's sake. But I don't want to be the guy who gets blamed for holding up progress. Make no mistake: I want it to be pushed into next month. I just don't want to be the guy who pushed it. My guess is that my colleagues, who are mostly in their late twenties, would jump at the chance to dawdle and procrastinate.

When the project manager responded immediately, it was clear I had failed spectacularly. "How about we put something on the books for Tuesday," he said. "And if possible maybe you can send some material around Monday morning so we have something to respond to?"

This was the worst possible outcome.

Not only did I have to get myself into a businesslike setting for a video call on a day I had already earmarked for an extremely early cocktail hour, but I also had to deliver a work product the day before. Tuesday wasn't going to be a meeting. It was going to be my meeting. I cursed loudly and rudely into the air, shouted angry insults at my colleagues while alone in my house, and fumed about the joyless and dour generation that their cohort belongs to. *Don't they know how to read an email like that?* I yelled. *Don't they see an invitation to shirk and delay when it's right in front of them?* Stomp, stomp: *Kids today! All they want to do is work!*

Faced with a failed gambit, I surrendered and dutifully prepared for the meeting. I postponed my Tuesday morning cocktail — well, I postponed my second Tuesday morning cocktail — and connected to the video call at the appointed time. Which was when I discovered that the five other members of the team were calling in from their respective vacation spots — some were at the beach, one was at a lake house, the other was clearly in some place like Santorini — because they had all selected the generic "office" background from their Microsoft Teams video call options. They all looked like they were industrious workaholics toiling away from the exact same location, while lazy old me was clearly on August vacation, and if you looked carefully at the corner of the screen, also having a Bloody Mary.

The meeting was short, and when I asked where everyone actually was I got a mini-lecture from the 20-year-olds (we all seem to get a lot of them, don't we?) about the efficiency of remote work, about how there's Wi-Fi everywhere, about how you can "get a lot done" working half-days from Shelter Island.

"So you're all at work during your vacation?" I asked. They all nodded. "Then it's not a vacation," I said. "Except," I continued, revealing my Bloody Mary from behind the notebook I was pretending to use, "for me." And I took a healthy sip and pressed "LEAVE MEETING" and left my colleagues to reflect on this foundational truth: You are either at work or you are on vacation. You cannot be both.

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

BARONE

Learning from America's immigrant past



When debating current issues, it's helpful to avoid inaccurate depictions of past policy, especially on immigration, in which both opponents and advocates of President Donald Trump's policies have views based on not altogether accurate renditions of the past.

Many opponents of Trump's policies seem to believe the president wants to cut off legal immigration altogether: shut America's gates. But in recent times, around 800,000 individuals have taken the oath to become American citizens. In addition, about 1 million people have been granted green cards each year, making them eligible for citizenship. That's not a closed gate.

You may argue that we should open the gate wider. I'm inclined to take that view, with the proviso that we reduce the number of extended family members eligible and increase the number of skill-based slots.

You may also argue, as some Trump backers do, that we should reduce legal immigration, with some even calling

for cutting it down to zero. But I'm not aware that there's any realistic prospect for drastic reductions even with a Republican-controlled Congress. Current debate revolves around how, or if, to enforce the law against those not legally here.

One error made by critics on both sides is to say that the United States, until the passage of the restrictive immigration act of 1924, had open borders. And that the bulk of immigrants in those years were, in the words of the Emma Lazarus poem inscribed in the base of the Statue of Liberty, "your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore."

Lazarus's poem was published posthumously. It was an earnest attempt by an affluent New Yorker to seek tolerance for her fellow Jews and for other immigrants that accounted for the vast and apparently unanticipated flow of immigration in the years after the dedication of the Statue of Liberty in 1886 and the opening of the Ellis Island screening station in 1892.

But as Vincent Cannato points out in *American Passage*, his definitive history of Ellis Island, America had never had unrestricted immigration even before the federal government took over the function from inspecting states in the 19th century.

State and then federal authorities inspected arrivals for infectious disease, particularly tuberculosis, and for being unable to be self-supporting, in the language of the day, "likely to become public charges." After Ellis Island opened in 1892, Cannato writes, "Congress's list of reasons immigrants could be excluded at the nation's gates [grew] longer as the years passed." Policy became marginally more

restrictive even before 1924.

Even so, the vast majority of those arriving were admitted. The main reason: the steamship companies refused to carry those who couldn't afford steerage fares and refused to board those who appeared likely to be rejected on arrival, because rejectees would have to be returned to their home port free of charge. (The same principle obtains today. Airline gate agents demand to see your passport and visa before allowing you on a flight to destinations requiring visas.)

How this worked out in practice is depicted vividly in Steven Ujifusa's recently published *The Last Ships From Hamburg: Business, Rivalry, and the Race to Save Russia's Jews on the Eve of World War I*. This tells the story of Albert Ballin, himself Jewish, who rose to become managing director of the Hamburg-American Line and became a friend of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Under Ballin's leadership, the company set up an inspection station of its own in Brest, on the western border of Czarist Russia, even as that regime was sanctioning violent pogroms against Jews. Those who passed Hamburg-American's standards were sent by rail to the busy port of Hamburg and then to New York.

Jews were just part of the flow of immigrants from the multiethnic Russian, German, and Austro-Hungarian empires in the Ellis Island era from 1892 to 1914. Interestingly, that flow included relatively few ethnic Russians, Germans, Austrians, and Hungarians but vast numbers of people who, in an era of rising nationalist sentiment, were from minority ethnic groups — Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenes, Serbs, and Croats.

One of the things that attracted these second-caste people to America was the civic equality it promised and largely practiced, at least in the North (almost no immigrants settled in the racially segregated South). These were people, it turned out, who were eager to work, ready to learn English, sought not to undermine American culture but adapt to it and to participate in America's sometimes rough-and-ready civic politics. ★

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

“One error made by critics on both sides is to say that the United States, until the passage of the restrictive immigration act of 1924, had open borders.”

YORK

On the Democratic protests in Texas and Nebraska



You've seen reports about the unpopularity of the Democratic Party these days — stories with headlines such as “Democrats Get Lowest Rating From Voters in 35 Years.” It's true: Large numbers of voters disapprove of the party and, even though they don't love Republicans either, trust the GOP more to handle many basic issues.

On the other hand, some elements of the Democratic Party are filled with passionate intensity. We're seeing two examples of that now.

The first is in Texas. Gov. Greg Abbott (R-TX) called a special session of the legislature this summer to deal with the question of redistricting, which is, of course, always a contentious topic. In Texas's case, the legislature is dominated by Republicans, who have an 88-62 majority in the state House and a 19-11 majority in the state Senate.

Rather than deal with a defeat on redistricting, which would result in more Republican congressional seats, Democrats in the Texas House decided to flee the state to block a vote. The rules of the 150-member Texas House require a two-thirds quorum, that is, 100 lawmakers, to be present to do business. The 88 Republicans can't do that by themselves — they have to have at least 12 Democrats show up.

Instead, House Democrats boarded a chartered jet and fled to Illinois, where Gov. JB Pritzker (D-IL) welcomed their arrival. And not just welcomed — Pritzker, who wants to be president and believes Democrats have not been aggressive enough in resisting President Donald Trump, had his staff assisting the Texas Democrats for weeks. “This is a righteous act of courage,” Pritzker said.

It was also an audacious blockade of ... democracy. In one beautifully ironic

moment, the Texas House Democrats posted a photo of themselves outside their private jet wearing T-shirts that said “LET THE PEOPLE VOTE.” Of course, they were acting to prevent a vote in the legislature, not allow one.

We have seen maneuvers like this before. In 2011, Wisconsin Democratic legislators fled the state to stop legislation they didn't like. They stayed away for weeks, but in the end, the bill was passed. The Democrats lost, but the point was to get publicity and create at least the temporary appearance of widespread public support for their action. That's what's going on in Texas now.

The second example of Democratic intensity is in Nebraska, where Rep. Mike Flood (R-NE), of the state's 1st Congressional District, held a town hall Monday evening. It's a Republican district. Flood has been elected twice, with 58% of the vote in 2022 and 60% in 2024. Trump won the district in 2016, 2020, and 2024, most recently with 56% of the vote.

Nevertheless, the crowd at Flood's town hall seemed a little one-sided. Annie Karni, a reporter for the *New York Times* who was there, posted on X that the huge crowd — “I've never seen a crowd like this for a town hall for a House member” — gave a “full standing ovation for a question that accused Flood of being a fascist.” At another point, Karni posted, “This is complete mayhem. Entire auditorium of 700+ people are chanting TAX THE RICH.” And finally, “The town hall ends with Mike Flood thanking the crowd for coming, over jeers of VOTE HIM OUT. VOTE HIM OUT.”

So what was that about? A few points. One obvious observation is that the majority of voters in the district who support Flood and Trump did not come to Flood's town hall. That's not a big surprise — it took place in Lincoln, not in the more rural areas of the district.

It also seems unlikely that many Republicans of any stripe attended. It is generally safe to assume that a Republican crowd does not break out into chants of “tax the rich”. They also don't call Trump a fascist. The same is mostly true for independents and moderate Democrats. So, without doing a detailed census of every attendee, it's probably safe to say that, as far as the political spectrum is concerned, they were the type of people who call Trump a fascist and chant “tax the rich.”

Now, the political commentariat will debate what significance the event might have. Already, *Politico* Playbook has called the crowd “a stand-in for the 2026 electorate.” That's unknowable at this point, but it is certainly what Democratic strategists would want you to believe: The public's anger at Trump and his party, the story goes, is boiling over and will result in a huge victory for Democrats in next year's midterm elections.

Maybe that will happen. It's impossible to say with a lot of confidence for Trump, because while he is a second-term president, he is not a consecutive second-term president, and it's hard to know if that will have any effect. But the president's party usually loses seats in midterm elections, and with Republicans' narrow, narrow advantage in the House, it is more likely than not that the GOP will lose control of the House.

But if Republicans do lose the House, it will not be due to the “Trump's a fascist,” “tax the rich” chanters who showed up at Flood's town hall. It will be due to more moderate voters losing faith in Trump and his party's ability to solve the problems they were elected to solve. What happened in Nebraska, and in Texas, too, is just show business. ★

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

CARNEY

Swamp Undrained: Trump-cozy lobbying firm sets K Street revenue record



Donald Trump, when he ran against Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden, promised that he alone could fix the problem of self-dealing insider enrichment. That promise has proven hogwash, and the latest lobbying filings put a number on the falsehood: \$20.4 million.

That's the lobbying revenue Ballard Partners reported for April through June of this year, the first full quarter of the second Trump administration. This is a record: the most lucrative quarter ever reported by a lobbying firm, even when adjusted for inflation.

What is Ballard Partners? It's the lobbying firm launched by a former attorney for the Trump Organization, and from which Trump hired Attorney General Pam Bondi and White House chief of staff Susie Wiles.

Ballard's clients, including foreign manufacturers, Chinese Communist Party-connected companies, and Big Tech, have won narrow favors from the Trump administration. That is, Trump isn't draining the swamp so much as he's redirecting the flow of the murky sludge into the pockets of his friends and supporters.

Ballard led the league in second-quarter lobbying revenue according to second-quarter filings required by the Lobbying Disclosure Act. Its \$20.4 million haul was not only a record for any lobbying firm, it was also nearly five times the firm's number in last year's second quarter and about triple its previous best quarter on record, according to data from the Center for Responsive Politics.

How'd this happen?

Ballard has registered more than 169 clients since Election Day last year. That is, corporate America understood that it

could sway Trump by hiring his former lawyer, who used to employ two of his administration's most powerful women.

Ballard's clients include many of the old firms that aligned so closely to Obama and Biden and for companies Trump has attacked: Amazon.com; GE Healthcare; JPMorgan Chase; Major League Baseball, which moved its All-Star Game out of Georgia because Biden called the state's election reform racist; the Motion Picture Association of America; the NFL, against which Trump led a boycott in his first term; Axel Springer, the parent company of Politico; and PBS to name a few.

With more than 250 clients and 34 lobbyists, it's hard to imagine Ballard is delivering great value for its average \$30,000 monthly retainer. But some Trump administration actions show that the firm's access to the president really can translate into profit for its clients.

TikTok hired Ballard after Trump called for its banning, and Trump eventually reversed his position, even refusing to enforce a law requiring a ban. There are plenty of other cases like that.

Consider the Ballard crypto client Ripple Labs. Ballard's lobbying filings report that the firm lobbied Congress and the White House on cryptocurrency regulation and legislation.

Trump, on March 2, posted on his Truth Social website in favor of a "U.S. Crypto Reserve" necessary to "elevate this critical industry after years of corrupt attacks by the Biden Administration." Trump then touted an executive order "to move forward on a Crypto Strategic Reserve that includes XRP, SOL, and ADA."

Those are three cryptocurrencies, and XRP is created by Ripple Labs. In other words, Trump was pledging that

Uncle Sam would buy a ton of Ripple's currency, which has no value except insofar as it is perceived by others to have value.

Politico reported that Trump's post followed a direct request from a Ballard lobbyist. Reportedly, Trump briefly punished Brian Ballard because the lobbyist didn't disclose that XRP was a client.

Pirelli, the Italian tiremaker, is another Ballard client apparently aided by Trump. In December 2024, Pirelli's stock was downgraded by Bernstein, a renowned stock researcher. The primary reason, one stock newsletter explained: "Potential tariffs under a more protectionist U.S. administration could substantially impact Pirelli's earnings."

Two weeks after the downgrade, Pirelli hired Ballard Partners as its lobbyist at \$30,000 a month for "Issues regarding trade/tariffs." Pirelli, according to the LDA database, hadn't employed a lobbying firm at all this century.

As expected, Trump quickly announced across-the-board tariffs on all Mexican goods. Then, in March, Trump announced that these tariffs wouldn't apply to some automotive parts from Mexico and Canada. Soon thereafter, Bernstein revisited Pirelli's situation and announced that it was now reversing its downgrade of the company because of the news that "Pirelli's Mexican plants qualify as USMCA-compliant and are exempt from new tariffs."

Pay the president's friends, get profitable policies: This is how Washington worked before Trump promised to fix it. What's changed is the dollar amount and who's getting paid. ★

Tim Carney is the senior political columnist at the *Washington Examiner* and a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.



PROTESTS AGAINST IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES CONTINUE TO PLAGUE MAJOR U.S. CITIES

Everyone must follow laws. They ensure safety for both the individual and the people around them in nearly every aspect of American life:

- We have traffic laws to protect ourselves and other drivers.
- Parents and teachers must follow certain laws to keep children safe in various environments.
- Businesses of all sizes are subject to a set of laws regarding taxes, safe workplaces, employees' rights, and equal opportunity hiring structures.
- Even highly educated professionals like doctors and lawyers are subject to the laws that govern their specific industry.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents are simply trying to enforce the laws already on the books.

Why is that a problem? After all, laws are made to protect us.

WHY IS ENFORCING IMMIGRATION LAWS SO INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT?

Many media outlets, as well as some very high-profile individuals in government, have made enforcement of immigration laws so taboo that the average American citizen is afraid to discuss the topic for fear of being labeled an extremist.

The United States has one of the most generous immigration policies of all developed nations. So generous, in fact, that we find ourselves living in a nation with an estimated 15-20 million illegal immigrants. We must stop allowing the media to manipulate the facts. Enforcing immigration laws serves the best interests of our nation. Suggesting that violation of ANY law is acceptable undermines the authority of law enforcement and encourages more illegal activity.

Call your Senators and Congressional Representative (Capitol Switchboard: (202) 224-3121). Tell them you fully support the actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement as they continue to enforce immigration laws within the United States.



Please Join Our Efforts!

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LAFFIN

Tim Scott's Christian economics



Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC) knows his Bible. Having spoken with him a number of times in recent years, I've grown accustomed to the senator casually dropping Bible verses in ordinary conversation.

On the phone the other day, Scott responded to my question, "How's things in D.C.?" by saying, "We're blessed and highly favored. But the truth is, it's sunny but partly cloudy," echoing Psalm 84's "blessed and greatly favored" and the Angel Gabriel's greeting to Mary in Luke's Gospel as "highly favored one."

Scott lives and breathes scripture. He speaks about his upbringing in a poor, single-parent household and his journey to the Senate in explicitly Christian terms. He met his wife through church — they recently celebrated their first anniversary, which he described to me as "a fulfillment of Proverbs 18:22 — 'He who finds a wife finds a good thing.'"

It's only fitting that Scott's new book, *One Nation Always Under God: Profiles in Christian Courage*, due out in August, highlights figures who, in his words, give form to the "tapestry of Christianity and faith that has peppered and seasoned this nation" since its founding.

Crucially, Scott sees the Christian faith not as a private matter, but as the driving force behind America's prosperity and moral leadership. Getting to know America apart from its Christian inspiration is like getting to know Scott apart from his faith — it's possible, but it misses the heart.

"We must look at our nation through the prism of a Judeo-Christian foundation," Scott said. "Because that is the bedrock of the most prosperous society on the planet, defined not only by what we have but by what we give. We are the most generous nation on earth.

And why? Because we have this



Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC)

notion that all men are created equal and we are given inalienable rights by God. They don't come from government. Only from God do we find that all are created equal, as well as the responsibility to stand up for those who can't stand for themselves."

Scott's faith-driven vision doesn't stop at rhetoric — it shapes his work in the Senate, where he sees conservative economic policy as a way to live out Biblical principles. Scott, who became Chairman of the Senate Banking Committee in January, understands economic policy through an explicitly Christian lens and sees the Trump administration's economic agenda as a fulfillment of this worldview. While there is wide divergence on economic policy among Christians in America — Evangelicals tend toward conservative economic views, for instance, while Catholics and black Protestant churches tend to embrace stronger social safety nets, union rights, and minimum wage increases — Scott believes the policies guiding the Trump administration closely reflect the call in Matthew 25 to serve the least of these without diminishing the dignity of work. He thinks his party needs to be making this case more explicitly.

"We had a tax code that punished

wealth and punished opportunity," Scott said. "But now we give breaks to single moms working for tips at a restaurant. We now encourage police officers to work overtime without having full taxation. We tell senior couples that they're going to have \$12,000 in additional deductions on their Social Security benefits. We say to the person buying a car that we're going to make their interest on that car deductible. And we solidified and made permanent the tax cuts from the first Trump administration, along with allowing for depreciation to be permanent. Those are fabulous parts of our agenda. And we should be shouting it from the rooftops."

Scott's role as Chair of the National Republican Senatorial Committee makes highlighting the most popular aspects of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act is an important task for him between now and the 2026 midterm elections. Democrats have promised to make the Medicaid reform in the OBBB central to their midterm efforts. Following the law's passage, famed Democratic strategist James Carville called Medicaid reform a "mass extinction event." But Scott believes his party should unapologetically make the Christian case for fiscal sanity. He encourages conservatives to reclaim the moral high ground on economics, especially as related to the soaring national debt.

"For the national debt, you have to go to Proverbs 22:7, that the borrower is a slave to the lender. And then we need to ask ourselves, who are we borrowing money from?" Scott said. "If we have an adversarial relationship with China, and yet we continue to ask them to float our bonds, that's probably not in our best interests. Romans 13:8 tells us to owe nothing to a man but love.

America ought to have these

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GREEN

Who is Mahmoud Khalil?



Should Mahmoud Khalil be deported? Khalil, 30, was one of the lead organizers of Columbia University's vile demonstrations supporting the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas massacres, rapes, and kidnappings. In March, Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents arrested Khalil in Manhattan.

The government alleges that Khalil breached the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1945 by supplying false information on his 2024 green card and is seeking to deport him on the grounds that his remaining in the United States could have "potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences."

After being held for 104 days at LaSalle Detention Center in Louisiana, Khalil was released in June when a federal judge ruled that he was neither a flight risk nor a danger to the public. However, his deportation proceedings and \$20 million claim for damages against the Trump administration are continuing.

The Trump administration is right to seek the deportation of foreign nationals who are actively hostile to the U.S. Khalil's hostility is not in doubt. His defenders say his speech rights were violated, but the rights of a U.S. citizen are not the same as the duties of a green card holder. After Oct. 7, Khalil actively supported Hamas, a proscribed terrorist organization, on Columbia's campus. He distributed Hamas propaganda, including a leaflet that said "Our Narrative ... Operation Al-Aqsa Flood" with the logo of the "Hamas Media Office," and was caught on film justifying Hamas's savagery as "armed resistance" and "legitimate under international law."

Khalil was the lead negotiator for Columbia University Apartheid Disinvest, the student pressure

group that organized a frequently violent campus occupation and supported "liberation by any means necessary, including armed resistance." CUAD's multiple breaches of Columbia's rules should have been reason enough for canceling Khalil's green card. But Columbia indulged a racist mob, and now has to pay a \$221 million settlement with the Trump administration for breaching federal law, too.

Khalil's case is complicated by his 2023 marriage to a U.S. citizen, which secured his green card, and his parentage of a U.S. citizen. His son was born while he was detained in Louisiana. I'm no lawyer, but it looks to me like we're stuck with him. So let's look at the kind of foreign national for whom our top universities roll out the student visas and hand out the credentials.

Khalil was born in Syria in 1995. His grandparents are of Palestinian origin, and he was raised in a refugee camp in southern Damascus. He claims to be a "double refugee," a descendant of stateless Palestinians on his father's side and a stateless asylum-seeker in Lebanon after fleeing Syria in the early stages of its civil war in 2013. This is misleading. Khalil also says his mother's family descended from Algerian immigrants to the Ottoman Empire. He is an Algerian citizen.

Under Algeria's citizenship law of 1970, the son of an Algerian mother and a stateless father can claim citizenship in the 12 months preceding his coming of age, provided that his "habitual and regular residence" is in Algeria at the time of application. Khalil has never described himself as an Algerian resident. In 2013, he said he was in Beirut earning his B.A. in computer science from the Lebanese American University. Secretary of State Marco Rubio argues that Khalil

misrepresented himself on his green card application. Perhaps the State Department and ICE should look into how Khalil obtained Algerian citizenship.

In 2016, Khalil worked for Jusoor, a Beirut-based nongovernmental organization. The BBC called Jusoor a "Syrian-American non-profit." *New York* magazine coyly described it as an "education non-profit for youth." Read Jusoor's website, and it's clear that its analysis of the Syrian civil war aligns with that of the jihadists who currently control the Syrian government. Khalil ran Jusoor's youth program. In 2016, one of the volunteers was his future wife, Noor Abdalla, the daughter of Syrian immigrants living in Flint, Michigan.

In 2018, Khalil worked for the Syrian office of the British Embassy in Beirut. Andrew Waller, who worked with Khalil, called him a "former British government employee who was vetted and well-liked." Khalil ran a program bringing foreign students to British universities and, according to the *Guardian*, played a "support



role" in which he "helped to inform and shape British foreign policy on Syria

through his knowledge and Arabic skills." From there, Khalil successfully applied for a master's at Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs. In 2023, six months after entering the U.S. on an F-1 student visa, and after a seven-year, long-distance correspondence, he married Abdalla.

The government argues that Khalil's 2024 green card application was fraudulent because he omitted his work shaping Britain's Syria policy and his six-month internship at UNWRA's U.N. office in New York City, for which Columbia, incredibly, gave him 3 course credits. Perhaps he will be caught on these technicalities. But there are other, more intriguing questions about Khalil.

Once Rubio has established how Khalil got an Algerian passport, here's another puzzler: How did Khalil, a self-described double refugee and full-time student, pay for his two-year Columbia master's degree, which costs over \$70,000 a year? ★

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

CONCHA

Can Jon Stewart be the 2028 Democratic nominee? Given the competition, why not?



The final delegates put the next Democratic nominee for president over the top to clinch the nomination. The crowd is electric inside the Palace of Auburn Hills, Michigan, before exploding in applause after the state of New York announces its favorite son is going to take on Vice President JD Vance for the presidency.

"There it is. Jon Stewart is now officially the nominee!" MSNBC's Rachel Maddow gushes. "He is the man who will take back this country from tyranny!"

Now, before you pooh-pooh the idea of a fake anchor of a fake news show on Comedy Central being the new leader of the Blue Team, think about the precedent and the weakness of his competition.

First, the precedent:

Ronald Reagan won his party's nomination in 1980 and the presidency in a landslide.

Clint Eastwood was once elected mayor of Carmel, California.

Fred Grandy, who played a guy named Gopher on *The Love Boat*, won two different House races in Iowa.

Volodymyr Zelensky, a former comedian and actor, won Ukraine's presidency in 2019, also in a landslide.

Arnold Schwarzenegger won two gubernatorial elections in the blue state of California as a Republican.

Actor Fred Thompson won a Senate seat in Tennessee and even ran for president in 2008.

Actor and comedian Al Franken won a Senate seat in Minnesota and probably would have run for president in 2020 if not for sexual harassment allegations.

We could go on, but you get the point. It's not so far-fetched for Stewart to capture the Democratic nomination, especially given the most



Jon Stewart

recent precedent of President Donald Trump's jump from *The Apprentice* to the presidency.

And then there's what could be the former *Daily Show* host's competition for the nomination. Does anyone really think there's one candidate out there on the Left that can generate more free media than Stewart in the same manner Trump did in 2015-2016 against 17 others in easily cruising to the GOP nomination?

Rhetorical question.

Look who the likely contenders will be:

A) Socialist Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), who supports open borders and a path to citizenship for all those entering the country illegally. She also staunchly opposes funding for Israel's Iron Dome, which has saved countless lives. And on spending, she wants to commit trillions of taxpayer dollars to tackle climate change.

B) Gov. Gavin Newsom (D-CA), who presides over a state with the highest taxes in the country, almost completely shut down his state over COVID-19 for years while breaking his own rules time and again, and totally botched preparation and response to California wildfires earlier this year. Even his own residents don't want him to run: A recent Emerson College/Inside California Politics poll found that 59% said they

don't think Newsom should run in 2028.

C) Former Vice President Kamala Harris, who has never received one vote in a primary despite running for president twice. She lost the last election decisively to Trump, has basic communication skill problems when speaking outside of a teleprompter, and is forever tethered to the Biden administration, arguably the worst of our lifetimes.

D) Pete Buttigieg, a failed mayor of South Bend, Indiana, and an even bigger failure as former President Joe Biden's transportation secretary. He once took paternity leave for two months during a supply chain crisis without telling anyone. He recently grew a beard to appear tougher and more manly. He also launched a \$1 billion pilot program to "build racial equity in roads." He comes across as if he were programmed by ChatGPT.

E) Gov. JB Pritzker (D-IL), a Fred Flintstone doppelganger. Similar to Newsom, he is presiding over a blue state that is seeing such a mass exodus due to high crime and taxes that it will likely lose electoral votes after the 2030 census. Similar to Ocasio-Cortez, he supports mass amnesty for illegal immigrants.

F) Gov. Andy Beshear (D-KY): If watching paint dry is your thing, Beshear is just the candidate for you. Seen as a relative centrist, being a Democratic governor of a red state. And centrists simply do not get the same media attention that an Ocasio-Cortez or Stewart would receive.

G) Rahm Emanuel, who left Chicago as mayor with an 18% approval rating. He's also seen as a relative centrist.

There may be a few others — Govs. Gretchen Whitmer (D-MI), Josh Shapiro (D-PA), Wes Moore (D-PA) — but

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HARSANYI

RFK Jr.'s war on vaccines and public health continues



Robert Kennedy Jr. is trying to convince Americans that vaccines will hurt them. No matter what superficial throwaway statements he offers the public to the contrary, that's the obvious goal.

In the newest front in his cause, the Department of Health and Human Services Secretary has canceled \$500 million in mRNA research, an effort President Donald Trump once called a "modern-day miracle." The HHS head, who in 2023 said no vaccine was "safe and effective," says he still supports "safe, effective vaccines."

It should be noted that the notion of RFK Jr., a progressive until five minutes ago, acting as a steward of tax dollars, is ludicrous. If RFK's mission was to control spending, there are plenty of places to look within his agency, including scores of beloved Nanny State programs administered by the HHS. The primary charge of the CDC, for instance, is to prevent communicable diseases, not to lecture us about cereal or corn syrup — one of the few worthwhile public-private ventures to help stave off debilitating national pandemics.

Twenty-two research projects focused not only on COVID-19 vaccines but also on influenza, respiratory syncytial virus, and other communicable ailments, which are being canceled. It should be noted that new research often leads scientists to unexpected results and uses, as well. However, Kennedy contends that "mRNA technology poses more risks than benefits for these respiratory viruses."

How does he know? Maybe the technology that uses fragments of the genetic code to manipulate the body to defend itself against infection and disease won't produce any significant breakthroughs. But RFK Jr wants

Americans to believe that RNA, a molecule in every living cell, isn't just ineffective but dangerous.

The real purpose of the cancellation is to preemptively undermine the credibility of research, which almost surely goes on in the private sector that sees value in it. In the past, RFK argued for the need for greater research to understand vaccines before recommending them, yet in this case, he demands less research. The pattern is clear.

Example: After visiting Texas children who were needlessly struggling with measles earlier in the year, Kennedy also visited "two extraordinary healers" named Dr. Richard Bartlett and Dr. Ben Edwards, who "have treated and healed some 300 measles-stricken Mennonite children using aerosolized budesonide and clarithromycin." The purpose of the juxtaposition is to create the impression that alternative medicine is enough.

If you want to use that therapy, go for it, I guess. As far as I can tell, there's no evidence that inhaled steroids such as budesonide or oral antibiotics like clarithromycin are effective in treating measles; many doctors think it's junk science. Bartlett was disciplined by the Texas Medical Board in 2003 for "unusual use of risk-filled medications" of this variety.

But RFK Jr., you'll notice, didn't bother to wait for the research to praise those doctors or their methods. A quack who once claimed that the Polio vaccine causes cancer that killed "many, many, many, many, many more people" than Polio itself and lied about the connection between autism and vaccines long after the hoax had been exposed — grossly comparing it to a "holocaust" — doesn't give one whit about any inquiry that proves or disproves the efficacy of vaccines, live attenuated or inactivated or mRNA. He's reflexively against it.

Not long ago, RFK Jr. fired the entire Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices and replaced it with his people to create the impression that he had more fairly represented the scientific debate over vaccines. "A clean sweep is needed to re-establish public confidence in vaccine science," was Kennedy's reasoning. The former committee members, he argued, had too many "conflicts of interest," a euphemism for working or advising "Big Pharma." Imagine creating an advisory board for an industry without including people who understand how it works.

Granted, I'm a layman. But I don't believe COVID mRNA vaccines are detrimental (as a lot of people seem to think), nor does it seem that they are miraculous, as proponents like Trump claim. My problem with the COVID-19 regime was the compulsion, not the efforts to mitigate a pandemic, nor the development of new technology that might head off future ones. Pharma companies can't compel you to inject anything. Only the state can do that. And the Luddite demonization of pharma, which saves and improves the millions of lives, is still one of the big mysteries of the modern age.

Now, the same people who claim that public health institutions can't be trusted believe everything the new head of HHS tells them. It's a shame that so many groups like the American Medical Association, all in on the authoritarian COVID regime, have burned the public's trust and goodwill. However, it needs to be stressed whenever possible, RFK Jr. is no better than the hacks who undermined our trust in science under former President Joe Biden. In some ways, he is worse. ★

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

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conversations in church and find out if we can say with full confidence that we owe no man nothing, or if we owe them too much.”

The new Medicaid work requirements present an opportunity to fix the perception problem with the OBBA Act, in Scott’s view. Overall public support for the bill is underwater — a Kaiser Family Foundation survey found that 60% said they believed cuts to Medicaid are primarily about “taking health care away from people who need it.” But 68% of those same respondents support the bill’s work requirements, including 66% of independents and even 51% of Democrats.

The reason for the discrepancy? Scott believes it has to do with another Biblical principle: the nation’s longstanding

embrace of the dignity of work.

“I think there’s dignity in work,” he said. “What we did in Medicaid is very consistent with the Biblical principle that if you can do for yourself, you should. So we put in place work requirements that, say, if you are able-bodied, you don’t have a disability, you don’t have a child at home, you should look for a job, volunteer, be in school. How this change is “anti-Biblical” as some critics say, I don’t know. Frankly, Bill Clinton had a higher standard than we do. Clinton said 100 hours a month. Ours says 80 hours a month.”

Scott doesn’t think Republicans have a monopoly on the Christian faith, however, and he was eager to mention Democratic colleagues in the Senate with whom he regularly prays and studies the Bible. This included Sen. Chris Coons (D-MD), who Scott believes

has a sincere relationship with Jesus despite disagreements over how best to turn Biblical principles into policy.

“This might not be popular to say, but the truth of the matter is that Christ is so far beyond politics it’s not even funny,” Scott said. “And anyone who suggests that only Democrats or Republicans are really Christian, that’s just inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Scott’s belief that faith comes far before politics is part of the reason he decided to write *One Nation Always Under God*.

“The profiles of Christian courage captured in my book reinforce the fact that it is our faith that gives us the reason to be the city on the hill,” he said. ★

Peter Laffin is the deputy editor of commentary at the *Washington Examiner*.

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this isn’t exactly the 1927 Yankees. Also, Stewart has shown an ability to effectively debate, most notably in his pointed exchange with Tucker Carlson and Paul Begala, which pretty much led to the end of CNN’s *Crossfire* more than 20 years ago.

Stewart isn’t necessarily seen as a Hollywood elitist. The 62-year-old got passionately involved in hounding Congress to pass legislation as it pertains to providing millions to first responders with possibly fatal or debilitating health issues after 9/11. And he didn’t just throw a check at a charity or record a PSA and call it a day — he literally went to Capitol Hill and brought a ton of media attention with him.

During one hearing in 2019, Stewart was met with some empty seats while speaking to the House Judiciary Committee after some representatives decided not to show up.

“It’s an embarrassment to the country,” Stewart said. “And you should be ashamed of yourselves.”

The clip went viral. The full House Judiciary Committee voted unanimously to advance the bill, which eventually passed overwhelmingly.

Stewart has also been very active in supporting veterans exposed to toxins, having played a key role in getting the PACT Act passed. “I’m not sure I’ve ever

seen this situation where people who have already given so much had to fight so hard to get so little,” Stewart said. “I hope we learned a lesson.”

The Democratic Party is completely in the toilet right now, clocking in at 19% approval in Quinnipiac University’s latest survey. One of the primary reasons is trust: How could anyone have faith in a party that has had fixed presidential primaries for the last three elections?

In 2016, Hillary Clinton was crowned the nominee, with WikiLeaks emails showing the DNC did everything in its power to ensure a surging Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) didn’t sniff the nomination. In 2020, Biden finished fourth in Iowa and fifth in New Hampshire before his competition was convinced to drop out of the race ahead of Super Tuesday because the powers that be saw him as someone who could be sold as a centrist compared to the other candidates, including Buttigieg, Sanders, and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA). And in 2024, Biden was shoved aside after flopping in his debate against Trump, again by party powers, and Harris was installed without any input from the public.

While we’re on the trust question, how could voters trust Democrats after the lockdowns and school closings they advocated so passionately for during COVID-19? And how could voters ever

trust this party again after the attempted cover-up of Biden’s failing cognitive health, arguably one of the biggest political scandals in history?

For Stewart’s part, agree or disagree with him, he has an authenticity gene that others, most notably Newsom, Buttigieg, Ocasio-Cortez, and Harris, lack. He also obviously has great comedic timing, which plays well to a press that isn’t interested in doing deep dives in tax or foreign policy, and instead goes for the easy, cheap zinger every time — see the media rise of Rep. Jasmine Crockett (D-TX) as an example.

Note: Nobody is saying Stewart will be the 48th president of the United States. While his record of supporting first responders and veterans is admirable, it’s as clear as mud where he stands on China, Israel, or trade policy. He’s been a vocal opponent of Trump’s border wall. He’s never run a business or been an executive of anything, unlike Trump.

But that may not matter in today’s political environment. Establishment candidates are almost seen as toxic. Voters continue to yearn for candor and sharp elbows.

Jon Stewart, your 2028 Democratic nominee?

It’s not as far-fetched as it first sounded. ★

Joe Concha is a senior columnist for the *Washington Examiner*.

Loni Anderson, 1945-2025, Actress lit up our screens

By Daniel Ross Goodman



When Loni Anderson sashayed into America's living rooms as Jennifer Marlowe on *WKRP in Cincinnati*, she didn't just steal the show. She redefined what a TV bombshell could be. With her platinum blonde hair, sparkling dimples, and a wit sharp enough to slice through the static of a flagging Ohio radio station, Anderson, who died last week at 79, became an icon of glamour and grit. For us, children of the '90s, she was more than a sitcom star. She was a voice in our childhoods and a comedic anchor in our adolescence, leaving an indelible mark on screens big and small.

Born Loni Kaye Anderson on Aug. 5, 1945, in St. Paul, Minnesota, she grew up far from Hollywood's spotlight, the daughter of an environmental chemist and a former model. Her early charisma shone through when she was crowned Queen of the Valentine's Day Winter Formal in 1963 at Alexander Ramsey High School, a hint of the pop culture royalty she'd become. But stardom wasn't immediate. After a brief marriage at 19 to Bruce Hasselberg, which produced her daughter Deidra, Anderson balanced single motherhood with studies at the University of Minnesota, even teaching to pay the bills. Acting was her true calling, and she honed her craft in local theater, tackling roles in *Born Yesterday* and *Can-Can* with a spark that foreshadowed her future.

Her big break came in 1978 with *WKRP in Cincinnati*, in which she played Jennifer Marlowe, a

receptionist who was anything but "just" a receptionist. Anderson insisted on making Jennifer the smartest person in the room, using her charm to navigate a male-dominated world while never letting her looks define her. The role earned her two Emmy nominations and three Golden Globe nods, cementing her as a trailblazer. "I never thought I'd be Loni Anderson, sex symbol," she told Fox News in 2021, "but I embrace it." She turned a potential stereotype into a feminist archetype, delivering lines like "Well, Mr. Mayor ... a lot of turkeys don't make it through Thanksgiving!" with comedic precision that left audiences howling.

Anderson's voice as Flo, the soulful collie in 1989's *All Dogs Go to Heaven*, was my generation's first brush with her magic. That animated classic, a VHS staple, was for many of us one of our first exposures to movies, its jazzy tunes and bittersweet story etching themselves into our memories. Flo's warm, maternal presence — voiced with Anderson's signature heart and humor — comforted us through countless viewings, making her a fixture of our childhoods. We didn't know then that the voice belonged to a sitcom legend, but her charm resonated deeply, guiding us through a tale of redemption and doggy heaven.

Anderson's career extended beyond *WKRP*. She starred in TV movies such as *White Hot: The Mysterious Murder of Thelma Todd* (1991), portraying the tragic starlet with depth, and took guest roles on *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* and *Melrose Place*. Her personal life kept her in the headlines, notably her marriage to Burt Reynolds, whom

she met on the set of *Stroker Ace* (1983). Their 1988 wedding was a tabloid spectacle, complete with a seven-carat diamond, but the 1994 divorce was messy, as detailed in her 1995 memoir, *My Life in High Heels*. "You have to do it warts and all," she wrote, showcasing her resilience. She found lasting love with musician Bob Flick in 2008, a union that endured until death.

For my generation, Anderson bookended the '90s with a role that hit home: Barbara Butabi in 1998's *A Night at the Roxbury*. Playing the exasperated mother to Will Ferrell and Chris Kattan's head-bobbing brothers, she delivered deadpan lines that grounded the film's absurdity. I'll confess — *Roxbury* is a secret favorite of mine, a guilty pleasure now out in the open. Her performance helped make it a cult classic for us teenagers, laughing through late-night viewings. She was the cool, sharp mother we all wished for, rolling her eyes at our nonsense.

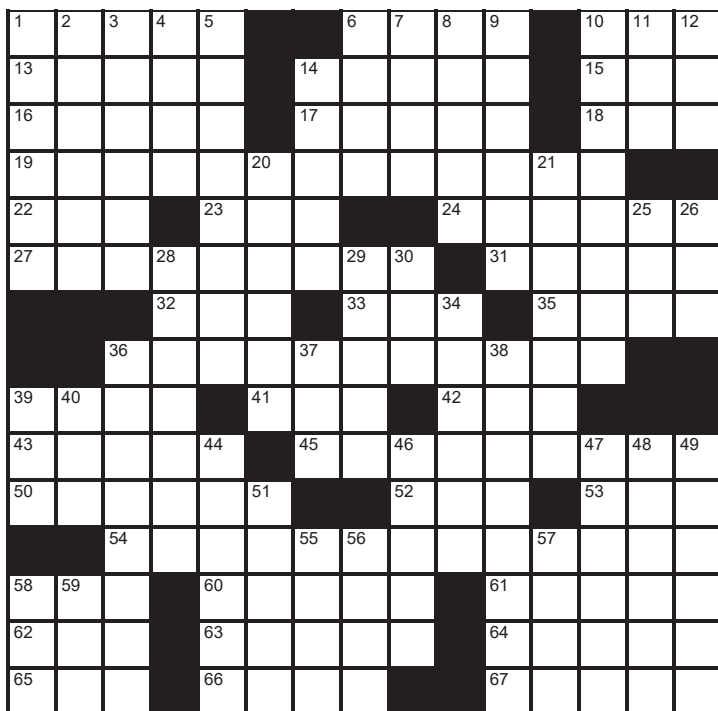
In her later years, Anderson embraced her legacy with grace. In 2023, she joined Morgan Fairchild in Lifetime's *Ladies of the '80s: A Divas Christmas*, a nostalgic nod to her enduring appeal. Fairchild called her "the sweetest, most gracious lady," a sentiment echoed by costars like Barbara Eden, who praised her wit and work ethic. Anderson championed causes like COPD awareness, inspired by her parents' struggles, and was a devoted mother to Deidra and her adopted son, Quinton, from her marriage to Reynolds.

Loni Anderson blended glamour with grit, giving my generation comfort and laughs and audiences of all generations a masterclass in charm and wit. Her legacy shines through in every quip and dimpled smile, a reminder of a star who owned every room. "I've always believed you should live with no regrets," she once told *People* magazine, "because life's too short to look back." And with that, Loni Anderson exits the stage, still fabulous, still unforgettable. ★

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

Edge Case

By Brendan Emmett Quigley



ACROSS

- 1 Follower of Daniel
6 1982 Disney film starring Jeff Bridges
10 Courtroom affirmation
13 Russian range
14 Jelly fruit
15 "Uh-uh"
16 Patron saint of cripples
17 It's an honor
18 White alternative
19 Check and check again borders?
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24 Squish or squash

- 27 Distant regions of the universe
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32 Head of England?
33 George W.'s press secretary
35 "Great shot!"
36 Finagle for political advantage
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41 Driver's helper?
42 Bad-mouth
43 Best
45 Pitched very high
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52 Halloween prankster's aid

- 53 Sis, e.g.
54 Concentrate on redistricting?
58 Air Force One, e.g.
60 Hall's singing partner
61 James Caan's role in "The Godfather"
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63 Botanical seed
64 Wyoming county that includes Jackson Hole
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66 Optician's concern
67 Has capacity for

DOWN

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2 Yankee rival
3 Strauss opera
4 Map abbr.
5 Appraiser
6 Rear
7 Daytona event
8 Tracks
9 Hub near Tokyo
10 Well maintained
11 Calendar square
12 Get behind
14 "___ go!"
20 Drudge ___
21 Novelty
25 SGA's team, on scoreboards
26 Once known as
28 Accept, as a lesser charge
29 Beast of burden
30 Slice of history
34 Dark grayish blue
36 Scold

- 37 Senate declaration
38 Turns one's stomach
39 Lay turf
40 Cry's partner
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47 Enjoys a lot
48 Bit of bait
49 They'll bring out the kid in you
51 Like a smoothie
55 Flabbergast
56 Hair-grooming aids
57 Verse writer
58 Torah reader
59 Actress Marcille

SOLUTION TO LAST

WEEK'S CROSSWORD:
FILES

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