

The Fortnightly Rant

Doomsday Came Forty Years Ago

A little over forty years ago—on January 18, 1983, to be exact—the U.S. of A. hit the skids.

“Ridiculous,” you may say. “Nothing is that simple.” And you would be right, of course. Nothing ever is that simple.

But, like Schrödinger’s famous feline—which is simultaneously dead and alive thanks to quantum mechanics—you would also be wrong. Though it is absurdly simplistic, our opening statement is also true.

This vexing state of affairs is the consequence of a phenomenon we’ll call quantum politics. What is true for one person may be false to another. Facts are matters of opinion, and opinions are matters of fact. Routine, predictable human interactions—applying for a marriage license, or ordering a wedding cake—suddenly morph into unilateral instances of performance art.

When mundane interactions fail due to odd individual fancies, it can be inconvenient. Sadly, the unpredictable effects of quantum politics scale up all too readily. On a larger scale those effects can be calamitous.

At the state level, for example, in dozens of cases, critical masses of authoritarians hold unchecked power. Long-established boundaries have been thrown out the window: legislators take charge of women’s health care decisions, and taxpayer dollars support religious institutions.

It’s bad enough that individual states have the power to immiserate their citizens. That power is limited in scope, though.

It’s different with the national government, where a perverse refusal to acknowledge reality could lead to global catastrophe.

Imposing unhinged policies on a national level is more challenging. A slim majority of Americans still cling to old verities: there should be a separation between church and state; two and two equals four, &c.

Obviously, though, it can be done. Where there’s a will—and a willingness to radically redefine reality

to suit one’s zealous purpose—there is a way. For a concrete example, see the Supreme Court.

Since its authors always harbored a deep suspicion of democracy, the Constitution assured that determined minorities would have a shot at blocking the will of the majority.

Now, quantum politics has added a nasty new twist: if you can’t win fair and square, try winning by not losing. It’s not that hard—just throw over the chessboard.

This approach has opened up a whole new realm of terrible possible outcomes. Some members of Congress now say defaulting on the national debt would not be all that big a deal. They seem unconcerned that the U.S. dollar is the Jenga stick holding up the world’s economy.

The Knucklehead Caucus may or may not precipitate a global economic collapse. However bad that would be, an environmental collapse will be worse—and it’s on its way already. Day by day the situation becomes more dire. The sooner the nation acts, the less damage we will sustain. One-third of Congress, though, has its fingers in its ears, and is chanting “La-la-la-la.”

As regular readers know, for decades now, this newspaper has made a fetish of briefly recording certain types of events on back page. Some are funny, some are horrifying, and some are simply weird.

Some events will, unfortunately, be forever beyond our reach. We wish we could include the asteroid which wiped out the dinosaurs 66 million years ago—but what was the date? We will never know.

We recently learned, though, of one particular event which augurs to have an impact like the Chicxulub asteroid. In subsequent issues we’ll relegate this Big Bang of Quantum Politics to a small item on the back page.

Today, though, we shall wallow.

Two years in office, and showing early signs of Alzheimers, Ronald Reagan was determined to defy



When, exactly, did our allegedly democratic republic take the fateful turn which led to our present dystopia? We checked. It was January 18, 1983, in the Oval Office. President Ronald Reagan, gazing rather vaguely in the direction of the crown molding, shakes hands with Roy Cohn, whose beady eyes are shifted to his left,*

away from the President. Looking on, in the center, is Rupert Murdoch. Still an Australian citizen, he’s about to help Reagan in the Iran-Contra affair. In return he will reap regulatory rewards, which he’ll use to derail democracy. Photo by Mary Anne Fackelman, the first woman to become a White House Photographer.

Congress’ Boland Amendment and go on supporting the Contras—murderous gangsters he somehow confused with the U.S.’s Founding Fathers.

To commit this violation of the law, Reagan naturally turned to William J. Casey. Not only had Casey won the 1980 campaign—or, more accurately, stolen that election by making a deal with Iranians to continue holding U.S. hostages until Reagan’s inauguration—the WW II-era OSS agent now ran the CIA.

To avoid violating the letter of a law barring the use of CIA assets to aim propaganda at U.S. citizens, Casey drowned its spirit in toxic waste: he re-assigned Walter Raymond Jr.—the Agency’s top covert propagandist—to the National Security Council.

* Coincidentally, it was on January 18, 1788 that the first shiploads of transported British felons arrived at Botany Bay.

In a memo about “utilizing public relations specialists or similar professionals to help transmit the message,” Raymond “recommended funding via Freedom House or some other structure that has credibility in the political center. Wick, via Murdoch, may be able to draw down added funds for this effort.”

Charles Wick was the director of the U.S. Information Agency—the nation’s overt propaganda arm. It’s \$2 billion budget was supposed to be spent burnishing the image of the U.S. and trashing the Soviet Union—for a foreign audience.

Murdoch was, of course, Rupert Murdoch. At that time Murdoch was still an Australian, but he had his eye on the U.S.

Robert Parry wrote, in a piece published at *Consortium News*, on December 31, 2014, “Wick... arranged at least two face-to-face meetings between Murdoch and

Reagan, the first on Jan. 18, 1983, when the administration was lining up private financing for its propaganda campaign, according to records at the Reagan presidential library in Simi Valley, California. That meeting also included lawyer and political operative Roy Cohn and his law partner Thomas Bolan.”

Murdoch became a U.S. citizen in 1985, making him eligible to own U.S. broadcasting licenses. Due to conveniently-relaxed media ownership regulations, he was able to found Fox Broadcasting in 1986. Reagan appointees abolished the Fairness Doctrine in 1987. Nine years later Murdoch founded Fox News.

Looking back over these events, we have to wonder—why did it take this long for us to see the leading Republican presidential candidate get hauled into court to face 34 felony charges?

The Alleged News®

All Quiet at 111 New Hampshire Avenue

We used to love mocking what we called the Award-Winning Local Daily. What shall we call it, now that it’s no longer printed here in Our Fair City?

These days, poking fun at the AWLD would just be cruel. Let’s just call it the *Portsmouth Herald*—while we still can.

Economists love to talk about The Invisible Hand of the Market. They rarely mention that it’s insatiable, too. The Invisible Hand’s greedy fingers have been wrapped around the *Herald’s* operating budget since Lord Kenneth of Fleet bought it about 1960. The Inevitable Result: erosion of local news coverage.

Now, in the latest cost-cutting measure, the *Herald’s* press on New Hampshire Avenue has shut down for good. The bean-counters have determined that it will be more profitable to print the daily in Auburn, Mass., southwest of Worcester, and the Sunday paper in Providence, Rhode Island. That’s eighty or ninety miles away for a crow. For a box truck, it’s probably two hours on a good day. Deadlines will be that much earlier; meaning some of the news—such as it is—will be arriving one day later.

On March 22nd, the paper carried the news of its own diminishment, in a piece written by Executive

Editor Howard Altschiller. It was a fine send-off, considering the grim topic and the constraints imposed by his position.

Altschiller included, deadpan, the Gannett chain’s logic, as explained in the bloodless language of the company’s 10-K filing with the Security and Exchange Commission:

“For the years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021, as part of our synergy and ongoing cost reduction programs, we ceased operations of 11 and 21 printing operations respectively...”

“By clustering our production resources, utilizing excess capacity for commercial work, or outsourc-

ing where cost-beneficial, we are able to reduce the operating costs of our publications while increasing the quality of our small and mid-size market publications that would typically not otherwise have access to high quality production facilities. We believe we are able to reduce future capital expenditure needs by having fewer overall pressrooms and buildings. We also believe our superior production quality is critical to maintaining and enhancing our position as the leading provider of local news coverage in the markets we serve.”

See? It’s all for the best, says management.

Altschiller, a consummate professional, manages to refrain from throwing in any wisecracks—that’s admirable discipline at a difficult time.

Then he brings in a ringer:

“John Tabor, Seacoast Media Group’s former longtime publisher, who convinced then owners Dow Jones to purchase the new press for roughly \$8 million in 2004, said he was ‘stunned’ when he heard about the press closure.

“As the newspaper business shrinks, it’s print or be printed,

The Alleged News®
from page one

and we'd always managed to be the printer and it was very lucrative for us," Tabor said. "We were a publisher's printer and through the years had published dailies from Laconia, Conway, Nashua, the *Union Leader*, *Lowell Sun* and hundreds of smaller weekly and niche publications. It was a good business to be in, and we did quite well, and that's why I was stunned (by the closure announcement). The press was high quality and the people were high quality."

To his credit, throughout the piece Altschiller liberally quotes from some of those 34 workers. Sharan Moore, on the job for 25 years, eloquently described running such a machine: "I like that smell and the feel of the press starting up.... There's an energy. It's like there's a freight train taking off and you can feel it, you can feel it through your whole body and it just kind of takes over. I'm going to miss it. I'm going to miss it a lot."

==

Shed A Tear For Gannett Boss Reed
By Dan Kennedy

I guess we'll have to start referring to Mike Reed as Gannett's \$3.4 million man.

According to Gannett's just-released proxy statement for 2022, Reed, the newspaper chain's chair and CEO, received nearly \$3.4 million in total compensation last year, down from \$7.7 million the year before. That's a decline of 56 percent, but it's still a healthy pay package for someone who has wreaked so much destruction on the local news business. It's also 66 times more than the median salary (\$51,035) earned by Gannett employees in 2022, as Don Seiffert observes at the *Boston Business Journal*. Seiffert broke the news about Gannett's latest numbers on Friday afternoon.

The main difference in Reed's compensation package is that he received just \$2 million in stock awards in 2022, down from about \$6 million in 2021. His base salary was cut slightly as well, from \$900,000 to \$859,615, but he also received a bonus of \$513,652 in 2022, which



A skeptical bus keeping a wary eye on the northern end of Brewster Street.



In the course of their routine duties, i.e., scanning every U.S. flag within their field of vision for any signs of wear, tear, neglect, abuse, or commercial exploitation, the Flag Police spotted the tattered flag shown in the screenshot above on Wednesday morning. Taken from a small video, the image resolution is poor. It is clear enough to show, though, that the entire bottom edge of the flag is badly tattered. The video was posted at Seacoastonline.com—the website of the beleaguered Portsmouth Herald. Though we do have a history of mocking the local daily, we generally prefer to refrain from kicking anyone who's down. If it were entirely up to us, we might let this infraction go. The Flag Police are, however, relentless.

he did not get in 2021. Finally, he got a 401(k) match of \$6,184 in 2022, something he didn't get in 2021. I guess we can refer to that last as rubbing-it-in money, since Gannett suspended 401(k) matches for its employees last October. If they were restored later on, I haven't heard about it.

Gannett's chief financial officer and chief accounting officer, Douglas Horne, received nearly \$2.2 million in 2022, up from about \$1.75 million the year before. And all but one of Gannett's nine non-executive board members continued to receive in excess of \$200,000 for their part-time work—which, as I reported last August, was at least generous, and perhaps excessive, when compared to other publicly traded companies. You'd think that would especially be the case for Gannett, whose stock price opened 2022 at \$5.54 a share and closed the year at \$2.03. (It's now down to \$1.87.)

Gannett is our largest newspaper

chain, but it's hard to say exactly how large. At one time it published more than 200 dailies and a slew of weeklies, but it's been closing weeklies in droves over the past few years. Just last week, Sara Fischer of Axios reported that Reed was predicting the closure of more papers moving forward. Just recently a knowledgeable industry observer told me that they wouldn't be surprised if Gannett got down to about 30 dailies, including its flagship, *USA Today*, and zero weeklies in the not-too-distant future.

Gannett's annual meeting is scheduled for June 3. If the past is any indication, though, the only complaint will be that Reed hasn't cut enough.

Dan Kennedy is a professor at Northeastern University's School of Journalism. This article from his blog, *Media Nation*, is published under Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 United States License.

The GOP 'Billionaires Pay Zero Tax' Is Not for Family Farmers and Ranchers
by Bob Lord

Under America's current loophole-ridden tax law, rich people—even billionaires—can pass unlimited investment gains to their descendants without paying a dollar in income tax. These rich don't even have to do any fancy planning. All they have to do is die, a step everyone, of course, takes eventually.

This particularly lush loophole comes from a tax law provision known as the "stepped-up basis rule," and it works like this: Say Jeff Bezos died and left his Amazon shares, currently worth over \$100 billion, to his kids. The Bezos kids would be treated under our income tax law as if they bought the shares for their value on the date of dad's death. They could sell the shares at that value and pay no income tax.

But that doesn't mean those kids would pay no tax at all. Dad's estate would face an estate tax liability

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equal to 40 percent of the excess of the value of his estate, including the Amazon shares, over \$13 million. Estate tax avoidance planners could, to be sure, help Mr. Bezos avoid much of that estate tax, possibly even all of it. But doing so likely would mean the kids couldn't avoid income tax on his investment gains.

“...billionaires...won't need to choose between avoiding income tax and avoiding estate tax. They'll be able to avoid both.”

This can all get super-complicated. The tricks tax avoidance planners play to shelter wealth from estate tax can make it difficult to avoid income tax. Not impossible, mind you, just really difficult. But not if 41—and counting—Republican U.S. senators have their way.

Under legislation these 41 Republicans have just re-introduced, billionaires like Mr. Bezos won't need to choose between avoiding income tax and avoiding estate tax. They'll be able to avoid both. Entirely. And without a lot of effort. They won't even have to hire high-priced tax avoidance planners.

The new Republican bill, formally entitled the “Death Tax Repeal Act,” completely repeals the estate tax. Those strategies billionaires use to avoid estate tax—strategies that typically expose their investment gains to income tax sometime after their deaths—would no longer be needed.

In fact, those strategies would become counterproductive. All billionaires would have to do to avoid both income and estate tax on their investment gains would be to not sell their investment assets during their lifetimes.

But wait? What if our tax-averse billionaires need some cash? Not a problem. As ProPublica has reported, billionaires have a handy, tax-skipping strategy for getting cash known as Buy-Borrow-Die.*

The sponsors of the new Billionaires Pay Zero Tax Act don't mention, of course, their billionaire patrons in their advocacy. They refer instead to all the “family-run farms, ranches, and businesses” upon which the estate tax would “wreak havoc.” What they don't say: Only 50 farms and businesses in the entire country likely would have been subject to es-

* By living on borrowed money, the ultra-wealthy keep their taxable income low.



THE BLIND LEADING THE SIGHTED

Readers are probably wondering by now, “where are all our Mike Dater cartoons?” We regret to report that Mike has been on temporary medical leave. We expect him to return before long. In the meantime, we offer the item above. Originally published 17 years ago today, it seems, unfortunately, more on-point than ever.



Our Wandering Photographer strolled over in the direction of the old shoe factory on April Fools Day. For him, of course, that could mean any day of the year. During his perambulation, he stumbled across some old friends: the Bones family, shown here wrestling the ol' barbecue grill out from under the shed, in anticipation of some luscious spare ribs.

tate tax in 2017, according to Center on Budget and Policy Priorities research. And the Center did that research before lawmakers in Congress doubled the exemption from estate tax in the 2018 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

The Billionaires Pay Zero Tax Act sponsors also don't mention that our U.S. tax code already has provisions that protect the very few families with farms and businesses subject to estate tax. If the bill sponsors truly cared about family farms, ranches, and businesses, they could have proposed legislation to expand these protections but leave the estate tax intact.

These lawmakers might have proposed, for instance, a lengthening of the 15-year period the inheritors of family farms, ranches, and businesses currently have to pay their estate tax due. Or they might have proposed an expansion in the “special use” provisions that allow estates to value farm property according to its use as a farm, rather than at its mar-

ket value. A bill taking that approach likely would have drawn bipartisan support and actually had a chance of becoming law in this Congress.

Why have Republicans purporting to be concerned about family farms, ranches, and businesses rejected this extending-protections approach and instead introduced a bill whose benefits will flow overwhelmingly to the ultra-rich?

Here's my guess: The actual intended beneficiaries of the bill don't happen to be family-owned farms, ranches, and businesses. But GOP lawmakers know full well that saying you don't think billionaires should have to pay any tax at all, ever, doesn't make for good messaging.

Saying that would be like naming your bill the “Billionaires Pay Zero Tax Act.”

Bob Lord is Senior Advisor, Tax Policy at Patriotic Millionaires and an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow. This work, from CommonDreams.com, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License.

Repeal Of Interest And Dividends Tax Disproportionately Benefits Wealthy N.H. Households

by Phil Sletten

In 2021, the Legislature enacted a phaseout plan for the Interest and Dividends Tax, which is collected from a percentage of income generated by wealth, that would eliminate the tax by 2027. This change will result in less state revenue for public services.

However, in the state budget currently being constructed by the House Finance Committee, this tax would be repealed entirely in 2025. Repealing this revenue source reduces state tax liability much more for New Hampshire's wealthiest and highest-income households, on average, than for most Granite Staters, who will likely see minimal or no impact on their taxes.

The New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration

Murph's Fortnightly Quote

“...what it now means to be conservative might be described as: simply opposing liberals.”

Danielle Kurtzleben,
NPR report, January 30, 2023

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except that it ain't so.”

— Samuel Langhorne Clemens

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Facts, Rationality, and Respect
To the Editor,

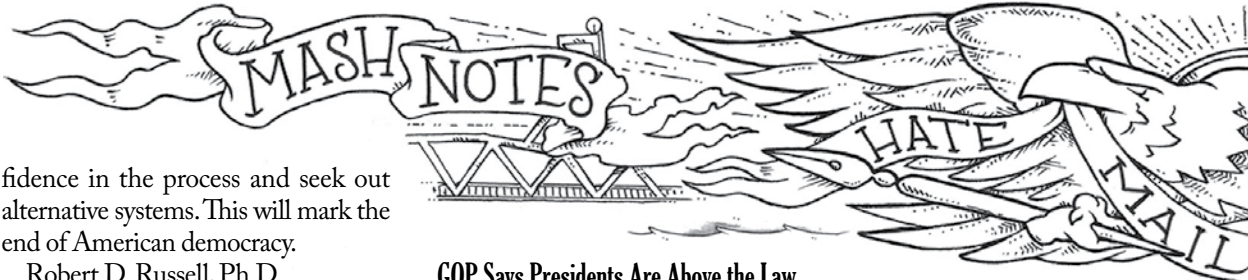
During a thirty plus year career teaching in higher education, I have engaged in numerous dialogues with students and colleagues as part of learning and problem-solving processes. This experience suggests that successful dialogue relies on three critical principles. First, parties to the discussion must agree on a common set of facts before any evaluation or analysis can begin. Without this, there is simply no basis for mutual understanding or reaching a common conclusion. Second, the examination of the facts must be guided by rational analysis and critical thinking in a give and take process. Without this, no realistic conclusion can be reached. Lastly, the entire discussion process must be characterized by respect for the ideas and thoughts of all participants. Without respect, conflict rather than compromise is likely. Although this process did not always result in agreement, it always provided learning and insight.

This reason-based model is not confined to academic contexts. It can help improve decision-making and problem-solving in most contexts, including policy making in government. Trump and his minions, however, have gone through the looking glass, turning the model inside out so that Republican political discussion often resembles drug-induced hallucinations rather than the sober deliberations of serious politicians. Trump Republicans do not seek agreement on proven fact; instead, they cite “alternate facts” or deny the obvious through outright lies. Trump himself is an inveterate liar so that it is impossible to separate truth from lies in his statements. His “Big Lie” regarding non-existent election fraud is the most egregious prevarication ever perpetrated by an American politician. The lie was and continues to be repeated and supported by Trump minions on Fox News who, as recent evidence indicates, knew the falsity of the claims. The ludicrous Marjorie Taylor Greene among others continues to promulgate the lie while promoting a parade of preposterous claims such as “Jewish

space lasers” causing California wildfires. Tucker Carlson devoted several days of his show claiming to show that Trump supporters on Jan. 6th were merely “peaceful protesters,” expecting his viewers to ignore the violent facts of the day. Lies and false narratives have become Republican standard operating procedure used to distort and deny facts, replacing it with an engineered false reality. Goebbels would admire the effort.

Republican reality distortion has been uncritically accepted by the Trump base who are awash in untruths and delusional internet conspiracy theories. Their buy-in to preposterous theories and outright lies clearly indicates a lack of rationality and critical thinking. As I have stated, they are more akin to a tribe than independent members of a democratic electorate. Their support for Trump is accompanied by a disdain and lack of respect for political opponents as is typified by their rude descriptions of President Biden.

Our democratic system relies on bargaining and compromise to create policy and legislation, but the rational model underlies the bargaining process. Effective bargaining can operate only in a context that accepts fact-based reality. Political groups may have different values and disagree on what constitutes effective policy but the dialogue necessary for an effective compromise must be driven by reality, rational discussion and mutual respect. If one group persistently distorts facts to suit their advantage, dialogue has no basis. If one group persistently promotes irrational and unproven explanations, rational consideration is destroyed. If one group persistently disrespects its opponents, compromise will be replaced with confrontation. Trump Republicans characterize all these dysfunctions. In plain words, they are a threat to democracy not only in terms of potentially violent acts as exemplified by the Jan. 6th insurrection, but also through an insidious, slow-moving process that destroys the ability of government to govern. As government action becomes ever more feckless, citizens will lose con-



fidence in the process and seek out alternative systems. This will mark the end of American democracy.

Robert D. Russell, Ph.D.
Harrisburg, Pa.

Robert:

Alas and alack, you have accurately captured the state of things.

You have our sincere sympathy. This must be terribly disturbing for you, having spent a lifetime in a more or less rational environment.

We, on the other hand, were blessed right out of high school with a stint in the U.S. Army. Lesson number one: banish all thoughts of rationality from your mind—they will only get you in trouble. A round of blue collar jobs followed: driving trucks, assembling parts in factories, &c.

The job that best prepared us for this moment, though, was being part of an electrical resistance survey team in the Great Basin: walk across the high desert with five gallons of salt water on your back. Stop every two thousand feet, pour a little water into the ground, bury a piece of aluminum foil, connect a wire to it. Wait for the walkie talkie to tell you walk on and do it again. Samuel Beckett would have loved it.

For all their flaws [a list will be made available upon request], we can see how institutions of higher learning might be seen to represent one of the highest pinnacles of human civilization. Capitalist ideology, however, has deemed them—and just about every other entity that is not a profit-making corporation—superfluous. If they stand in the way of profit, they are expendable. You were fortunate to have lived in a golden age.

To preserve its hegemony, capitalist ideology has found it necessary to enlist, encourage, and empower every gullible hooligan it can. True, this strategy is destroying the habitat of the goose that's been laying golden eggs since we gave up hunting and gathering. That's irrelevant, though. The important thing is next quarter's profits.

The Editor

GOP Says Presidents Are Above the Law
Dear Sir:

In a letter to Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, the Republican Chairs of the House Judiciary, Oversight and Administration Committees wrote; “You are reportedly about to engage in an unprecedented abuse of prosecutorial authority: the indictment of a former President of the United States and current declared candidate for that office.” They also wrote that his actions would “unalterably interfere in the course of the 2024 presidential election.”

According to these Republicans Donald Trump, as well as every other current and future president, cannot be indicted for crimes they may have committed even after leaving office. Since they provide no exemptions in their letter, this immunity would apply to any and all past and future crimes that a former president may commit. Ignore the fact that there is nothing in the Constitution that provides for such immunity to any president or former president.

Simply because no past president has ever been indicted should not prevent any current past president from being indicted for crimes that they may have committed or will commit in the future. If former President Clinton or Obama evade taxes, should they not be prosecuted just like any other citizen? The only consideration for investigating and indicating a former president or candidate for president should be the facts and the evidence. Simply because there is no precedent for indicating a former president or presidential candidate should have no bearing on applying equal justice for all.

As I recall, many of the same Republicans who claim that Mr. Trump should be immune from indictment because he is a current presidential

candidate, or as a former president, are the same people who were calling for Hillary Clinton, the Democratic nominee for president in 2016, to be “locked up.” Forget an indictment, trial and conviction, go directly to jail. And, that Mr. Trump on Fox Business on October 8, 2020 called for former President Obama to be indicted. I do not recall Republicans claiming that indicting Obama would be an “unprecedented abuse of prosecutorial authority,” or calling for Ms. Clinton to be “locked up as” interfering with the course of the 2016 election.”What hypocrisy.

Rich DiPentima
LTC, USAFR, Ret.
Portsmouth, N.H.

Rich:

If we were a few decades younger, we'd be tempted to run for President. Permanent exemption from all prosecution? Sign us up!

That wouldn't actually work for us, of course. If we were in the Oval Office, the ACLU membership card in our editorial wallet would nullify that ad hoc provision of the law, as interpreted by today's GOP.

Thinking about this reminds us of something: So-and-So's Law...? We can't put our finger on it. If anyone can point us to the original, we'd be grateful. Here it is, as best we can recall. "In this country, we have two classes of people: there are those who are protected but unrestrained, and those who are restrained but unprotected."

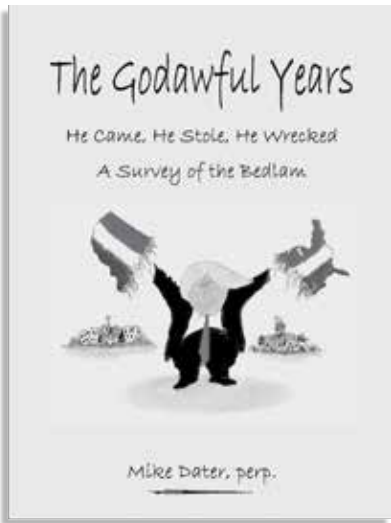
The Editor

Celebrating Susan Condodemetraky

Dear Editor:

The *Laconia Daily Sun* obituary on March 29 so well celebrates the life of Susan Condodemetraky of Belmont. What an incredible and responsible life she led! I didn't realize her devotion to learning the languages of oth-

You Suffered Through Them...
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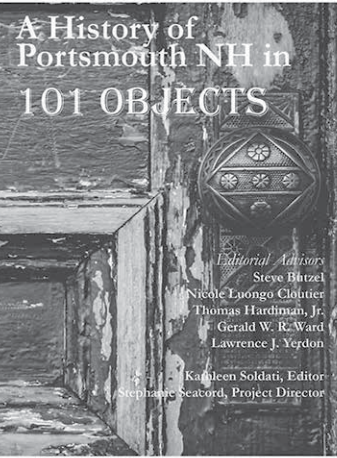
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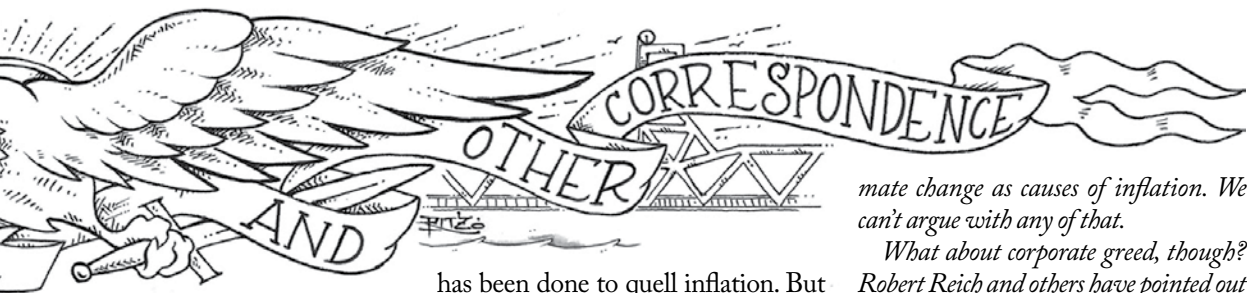
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ers: Thai, French, Spanish, German, Laotian, Cambodian, world-travelers that she and family were.

With local activist friends Chet and Martha, Medora, others in the Clamshell Alliance, she advocated for safe energy, rather than corporate-pushed nuclear energy plants [such as] our local one being in Seabrook. Now Seabrook is less well-known as a town is it is a nuclear plant.

Now we know, from the Ukrainian experience with Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, that the radioactivity of such a plant makes it a war-time danger. Ukraine and Europe (really all of us) must hold our breaths (literally), waiting to see if Zaporizhzhia can be safe while fought over. Its six reactors' cooling systems need electricity for continuous cooling. Now electricity for Zaporizhzhia has become intermittent. When the Ukrainian nuclear plant Chernobyl melted down in April, 1986, its radiation swirled around the planet, even being detected in Northern Vermont.

Susan understood and cared about so much. Bless her kind soul and may she still look out for us all in her spirit-life.

Lynn Rudmin Chong
Sanbornton, N.H.

Lynn:
Your letter intrigued us—we had to look at the obituary to which you referred. Quite a life, indeed—even before it began: “Her parents immigrated from Austria in 1939 to escape Nazi occupied Vienna, leaving with just the clothes on their backs.”

The Editor

Rate Hikes and Inflation

To the editors:

The Federal Reserve has raised the federal funds rate eight times in 2022 & 2023—so far. They claim that this

has been done to quell inflation. But inflation persists—we have hardly seen any stemming of inflation during the 15 months of rate hikes, and no reason to believe that the rate hikes have had any dampening effect on inflation.

Inflation is caused by demand exceeding supply. Our current inflationary cycle is caused by the severe shortages on the supply side: supply chain disruptions due to Covid, the war in Ukraine, and climate change disruptions, as well as slight increases in demand due to low interest rates.

One definition of insanity is: “doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” If eight large increases in the federal funds rate does as little as it has to lower demand and halt and reverse inflation, isn't that a perfect example of insanity? Isn't continuing the rate hikes clearly stubborn adherence to a misguided theory?

Instead, the rapid, large, increases in the federal funds rate has caught some banks off-guard, a few catastrophically so, so that some have failed and others are teetering on the brink.

The government should stop the ineffective raising of the federal funds rate, as well as put in place controls and oversight to prevent further repetitions of irresponsible bank behavior. Failure to do so hurts us all.

Paul Cully
Dover, N.H.

Paul:
No one will ever mistake us for economists, but it is our policy never to let our own ignorance dissuade us from an argument.

It appears to us that inflation peaked nine months ago, at 9 percent. Now it's down to 6, a reduction of about one-third. So, the Fed has not been entirely ineffective.

You cite supply chain disruptions caused by Covid, the war in Ukraine, and cli-

mate change as causes of inflation. We can't argue with any of that.

What about corporate greed, though? Robert Reich and others have pointed out that profits these days are, quite literally, out of control. We don't know what the Fed can do about that, though.

Congress, if it represented the people and had any gumption, would tax the living bejeezus out of our corporate overlords, and use the proceeds to provide working people with a panoply of exotic luxuries such as guaranteed health care, affordable child care, and free or heavily-subsidized tuition.

As we said, you should take the above—except maybe that last sentence—with a grain of salt.

This much we're sure of: when the Fed jacks up rates, it raises the cost of living for ordinary borrowers. Meanwhile the fat cats go about their business as usual.

Or, as Billie Holiday put it, “Them that's got shall get “Them that's not shall lose, “So the Bible says and it still is news.”
The Editor

Trump Threatens Death and Destruction

Dear Editor:

Over the past week, as former President Trump's legal jeopardy has increased, his rhetoric and behavior have become even more dangerous and menacing. The risk he represents to our democracy is greater now than it was before, or on, January 6, 2021.

Last week Mr. Trump, while attacking Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, suggested that his possible indictment would result in “death and destruction.” Mr. Trump also posted a picture of himself holding a baseball bat next to a photo of Mr. Bragg with his hands up.

In probably his most violent insurrectionist behavior to date, at a rally in Waco, Texas—the location of the Branch Davidian disaster in 1993 which gave birth to the modern anti-government militia movement—Mr. Trump paid homage to

the January 6, 2021 Capitol insurrectionists. At that rally, Mr. Trump stood on stage with his hand over his heart while loudspeakers played, not the national anthem, but a song recorded by January 6th insurrectionists. All the while footage from the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol played on a screen behind him. If that is not a dog whistle call to violence, I do not know what is.

As an American and a retired military officer I am greatly offended, concerned, and angry that a former president would place the national security and safety of our Republic at such grave risk. This behavior is un-American and is a disgrace to our Constitution, the rule of law and the Office of the President of the United States. If Mr. Trump continues on this path his prediction of “death and destruction” will take place and our nation will be torn even further apart and people will die. And of course the winners of this will not be Mr. Trump or his followers, but our adversaries in Russia and China who welcome America being destroyed from within.

Rich DiPentima, LTC, USAFR, Ret.
Portsmouth, N.H.

Rich:
When you put it like this you make it seem that #45 is doing rather poorly at upholding the dignity of his former office. But, that's on him, not you.

The Editor

Don't Feed the Trumpster Fire

Dear Editor,

Since trump [sic, passim] announced, erroneously, that he would be indicted last Tuesday, news media have been speculating breathlessly.

Newsflash: trump thrives on media attention. As long a people talk about him and think about him, he has influence. When the media report on what he says, on what he posts on his blog, and speculates on what he may or may not say, on what he may or may not do, trump gets attention that empowers his influence. Media attention fuels a trumpster fire that few can resist looking at.

Responsible reporters and pundits

who want this alleged criminal to be accountable through our system of justice must stop speculating on his every word and action, and let the system do its function in the dispassionate, objective way it is designed to work.

Bruce Joffe
Piedmont, Calif.

Bruce:
But...but...there's profit to be made!
The Editor

Ewing Solves School Shooting Problem

To the Editor:

It's long past time that we stopped enticing deranged people to shoot children in schools. School “Gun Free Zones” make sick, evil people confident they can get the revenge and/or fame they crave.

Politicians, celebrities, banks, government buildings, etc. are protected by trained armed people. I'd rather we protected school children. The only way to protect them is with responsible, trained, armed people embedded in the schools.

Unfortunately Democrat politicians are more interested in ideologically driven anti-gun laws, which only harass law-abiding citizens, than in actually saving children's lives.

Anti-gun laws don't stop criminals. If outlawing guns worked, then Chicago and California would be our safest city and state. If universal background checks would reduce school shootings, advocates would present a long list of shootings that they would have prevented. They can't.

Even if we took all guns away from people, guns would easily flow into our country via Biden's open border. Bad people do bad things; let's deter them from attacking schools.

Most murderers have either a history of violence or mental illness or both; they shouldn't have access to guns. Parents, mental health professionals, and police must treat this seriously and realistically; they must ensure that all violent people, including youths, are put on the NCIC database so at least they can't purchase guns legally.

Finally, officials and the media must stop giving these deranged people the fame they crave; their names should

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What do we choose to remember with memorial markers, buildings and community projects?

Open Door
April is Volunteer Month
The fountain in Market Square is dedicated to Portsmouth's spirit of volunteerism.

To learn more about memorials and what else we choose to remember go to PortsmouthGenome.org
Join the conversation.
A Portsmouth Peace Treaty Forum project.

HUD-VASH HELPS VETERANS GET AND STAY HOUSED. YOU CAN HELP, TOO.

HUD-VASH is a partnership between the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the VA's Supportive Housing unit. It helps homeless Veterans with housing, employment, recovery (both mental health and substance abuse) and independent living.

HUD-VASH is no longer accepting donations of used furniture, &c. The Homeland Heroes Foundation in Salem, N.H. does: homelandheroesfoundation.org.

HUD-VASH does have a dedicated fund for purchasing new items veterans may need. Donations to that fund may be sent to The VA Medical Center, 718 Smyth Rd., Manchester, N.H. 03104-7007. HUD-VASH should be included on the subject line. Every penny will go into home goods for veterans.

For more information, contact:

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Let There Be Light

by W.D. Ehrhart

Anyone who was alive and sentient back in 1966—the year I graduated from high school and joined the U.S. Marines—will surely remember that perhaps the least popular man in America (white America at least) was loudmouthed full-of-himself Cassius Clay, who had defeated Sonny Liston for the heavyweight boxing championship of the world only to announce that he was henceforth to be known as Muhammad Ali, proud member of Elijah Muhammad’s Nation of Islam.

He further alienated himself from mainstream America—even many Black Americans, including former heavyweight champ Floyd Patterson—when he refused to be drafted into the U.S. Army at the height of the American War in Vietnam and declared himself a conscientious objector.

How amazing it was, then, to see Muhammad Ali nearly three decades later lighting the Olympic Torch at the 1996 games in Atlanta, Georgia, while Americans of every religion and race and belief stood and applauded, an amazing outpouring of good will and affection for a man who had once been vilified and hated by a lot of Americans.

Historical analogies are never perfect, and this one certainly isn’t. But

I was reminded of the remarkable transformation of Muhammad Ali as I have observed the outpouring of praise and affection for Daniel Ellsberg following his announcement that he has inoperable pancreatic cancer. Once called “the most dangerous man in America” by Henry Kissinger (he should talk, but we’ll let that one go for now) and facing one hundred and thirty-five years in prison for violating the Espionage Act of 1917, he has long since been vindicated for his actions back in the early 1970s.

Only a few years ago, the attorney who represented the *New York Times* back when publication of the *Pentagon Papers* was under attack from the Nixon Administration said that Ellsberg “deserves only praise for his heroic conduct.” Like Muhammad Ali, Daniel Ellsberg’s actions and conduct long decades ago have since been re-considered and re-evaluated in the light of what we now know about the history of those times.

And since he announced his terminal diagnosis, he has been receiving praise and plaudits from sources all over the country and the world: AP, CBS, NPR, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, Reuters. The *Petaluma Argus-Courier*, for goodness sake! The list goes on and on.

Ellsberg, we now realize, is a true American hero, described by many

people as a “national treasure,” an exemplar of doing the right thing no matter the personal cost.

Ellsberg got lucky. Because Richard Nixon and his henchmen were such perfect exemplars of doing the wrong thing no matter how despicable or illegal, the charges against Ellsberg were dropped and he never was convicted of any crime.

But few people seem to want to listen to him when he speaks up in defense of Julian Assange or Chelsea Manning or Edward Snowden. These people, too, blew the whistle on the underhanded, illegal, and reprehensible activities and actions of a government that supposedly acts in our name and in our interests, yet Manning was tried, convicted, and sent to prison; Assange has been hounded by the U.S. government to the point of insanity; and Snowden is living in permanent exile rather than going to prison.

This is especially ironic since the only people who do not know what our government is up to are the American people themselves. Do you think the Vietnamese didn’t know what we were doing to them until Ellsberg exposed the truth? Do you think the people of Iraq didn’t know what we were doing to them until Chelsea Manning exposed the truth?

And as for Snowden, the reforms made as a result of the Church

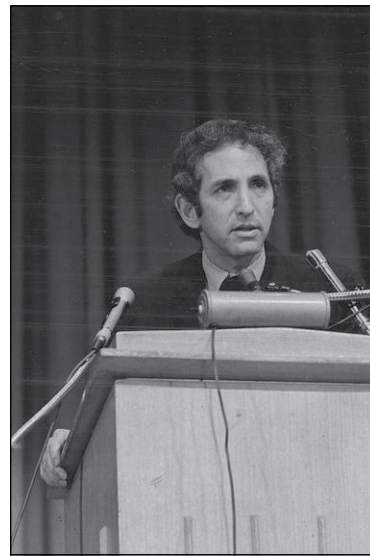
Committee hearings back in 1975 were supposed to have put an end to domestic spying by government agencies, but thanks to Snowden, we learned that domestic spying was and (almost certainly) still is going on at a level far exceeding what was happening in the ‘60s and ‘70s.

The only people in the dark, then and now, were and are the American people. I wonder if a time will ever come when Assange, Manning, and Snowden are viewed in the same heroic light as Ellsberg. I’m not holding my breath.

Recently, I heard an interview Ellsberg did with Christiane Amanpour of CNN. She was eager to ask Ellsberg all about the *Pentagon Papers*. She had all sorts of questions about that. But she had no questions about Assange or Manning or Snowden, though Ellsberg has a lot to say about all three of them.

And each time Ellsberg tried to talk about U.S. policy in the Russia-Ukraine War, or the threat of nuclear war with China over Taiwan, she quite deliberately cut him off and dragged him back to events of half a century ago, saying, “I want to get back to the *Pentagon Papers*.” Let’s talk about something safe. Let’s talk about something that is no longer controversial.

Never mind that the world faces today the real possibility of nuclear war on at least two fronts. Never



Daniel Ellsberg at a New York City press conference, January 1, 1972. Photo by Bernard Gotfryd.

mind that whistleblowers are called “whistleblowers” because they blow the whistle on government lies, government deception, and government corruption, and expose them to the light. Never mind that Daniel Ellsberg has a lot to say about the world we live in today.

We now know that, at 92, Ellsberg won’t be around much longer. He is indeed a National Treasure. And a very wise man. We ought to be listening to him while we still can.

W. D. Ehrhart is a retired Master Teacher of History & English, and author of a Vietnam War memoir trilogy published by McFarland & Co.

A Minneapolis man has been found guilty by a federal jury of orchestrating a sex trafficking conspiracy in which he trafficked multiple minor girls.... Following a 10-day trial... Anton Joseph Lazzaro, a/k/a “Tony Lazzaro,”



32, [right] was convicted on one count of conspiracy to commit sex trafficking of minors and five counts of sex trafficking of minors.

— U.S. Attorney’s Office, District of Minnesota, Friday, March 31, 2023

Mash Notes, Hate Mail, &c.

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never be disclosed.

Anti-gun laws are intended to make naive people believe useful action will be taken. But children will continue to be killed until our society understands, as undesirable as it seems to some, the necessity of protecting schools with responsible, trained, armed, and embedded protectors.

Don Ewing
Meredith, N.H.

Don:

You write, “If outlawing guns worked, then Chicago and California would be our safest city and state,” implying that California is unsafe, de-

spite restrictive gun laws. What? Do you think we don’t have access to The Google? The CDC says only six states, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, New York, and Connecticut, have lower rates of gun deaths.

Now let’s look at Tennessee. According to the Sevier County, Sheriff’s Office, “Tennessee does not require a permit to carry a firearm, whether openly or concealed. If you want to carry a gun openly or concealed in public in Tennessee, you don’t need a permit. As of July 1, 2021, Tennessee is a permit-less carry state.”

Only nine states have higher rates of gun deaths than Tennessee, again according to the CDC.

And, according to news reports, some of the adults at the Covenant School in

Nashville, site of the recent school shooting, were, in fact, armed.

As for the dreaded City of Chicago, your knee-jerk recitation of that hackneyed old stereotype sparked our curiosity.

A Brookings Institute study of gun violence says “increases in gun homicides are largely concentrated in disinvested and structurally disadvantaged neighborhoods that had high rates of gun violence to begin with.” You can imagine our surprise.

“In Chicago, for instance, gun homicides in 2019 and 2020 were concentrated in neighborhoods far from the city center that have long suffered from severe disinvestment as a result of white flight, and are now centers of over there, pal 🐼

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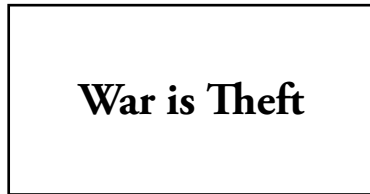
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The Alleged News®
from page three

data indicates that, for tax year 2020, more than half of the Interest and Dividends Tax revenue was paid by Granite State households with more than \$200,000 in interest, dividend, and distribution income, which excludes income from wages, salaries, capital gains, or other income sources.

Households with more than \$200,000 in these forms of income pay about \$10,000 or more to the state through the Interest and Dividends Tax. To be liable to pay \$10,000 in this tax to the state, a taxpayer would have to own an estimated \$4,048,000 (assuming a 5 percent annual return) to \$13,403,974 (assuming a 1.51 percent annual return, the average S&P 500 stock dividend yield in 2020) in wealth.

In either scenario, a tax filer has to have millions of dollars in assets that generate income.

The approximately 87 percent of Granite Staters who do not live in households paying this tax may have never heard of it, and their households' incomes are much more likely to be impacted by other taxes.

For example, for a single-family home assessed at \$200,000 in Manchester, a homeowner would have paid an estimated \$4,900 in property taxes in 2020, regardless of their income or investment assets. A homeowner with millions of dollars in assets that generate enough to pay \$10,000 through the Interest and Dividends Tax will have that amount paid reduced to \$0 over time, while property taxes would likely be unaffected, or continue the general trajectory from the last decade of property tax growth outpacing inflation in New Hampshire, for a homeowner whether or not they have millions in investments.

The Interest and Dividends Tax was enacted 100 years ago, in 1923, and had a tax rate of 5 percent from 1977 to 2022. The tax rate applies after certain exemptions: For individuals, the first \$2,400 of Interest and Dividends Tax income is exempt, with additional exemptions for older filers, people who are blind, and those who have a disability making them unable to work. Joint filers do not need to file for this tax until they collect at least \$4,800 in interest, dividend, or distribution income.

Starting in 2023, the tax rate began dropping by 1 percent annually. The delayed phaseout means much of the revenue losses from repealing this tax will not appear until the next state budget, which is currently being discussed in the Legislature.

The negative impact on revenues will increase yearly with each rate reduction until it has been eliminated entirely by 2027, and the full impact would take effect two years earlier under the House Finance Committee's proposal.

The governor's revenue projections estimate that the Interest and Dividends Tax will bring in \$135 million this fiscal year, which is approximately the average of the last three years. In the aggregate, revenues will fall by about \$67.8 million below that annual average in the next two fiscal years due to the planned tax rate reductions.

This projected loss during the next budget biennium is more than the state contributed to the Community College System of New Hampshire this year. Assuming a relatively consistent tax base, the eventual annual loss of \$135 million from the tax's repeal is equivalent to the current revenue used to fund the Department of Corrections or the equivalent of the combined budgets for the Department of Fish and Game, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Employment Security, as well as the state veterans home.

Last fiscal year, which saw a boost from Interest and Dividends Tax revenues likely related to stock market performance, the Interest and Dividends Tax accounted for about 7.9 percent of General Fund revenues, which are the most flexible funds policymakers have available to finance services in the state budget.

Economic modeling from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy indicates that more than half of the dollars from Interest and Dividends Tax elimination would benefit the top 1 percent of households by income. National-level analysis from the Congressional Budget Office and Moody's Analytics suggests that tax reductions for higher-income households, including permanent reductions to dividends and capital gains taxes, are less effective at stimulating economic growth than aid targeted at households with low and moderate incomes.

Stimulus provided to individuals and families with low and moderate incomes enters the local economy more quickly than higher-income households, as households with limited resources more readily spend this aid to afford basic necessities.

By eliminating this tax completely in a future budget, policymakers are setting the stage for difficult choices, as the phaseout of the Interest and Dividends Tax will have substantial effects on resources available for services.

With an elevated risk of a recession in the coming years and a potential rise in the need for services, public resources must be carefully raised and deployed to help ensure sufficient funding for programs serving Granite Staters, and to support a more resilient, equitable, and inclusive economy.

Phil Sletten is the research director at the New Hampshire Fiscal Policy Institute, a nonprofit, independent policy research organization based in Concord and focused on the state budget, New Hampshire's economy, and policies affecting Granite Staters, particularly those with low and moderate incomes. Learn more at nhfpi.org. This work was published at NewHampshireBulletin.com, and is being republished here under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

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"If the American dream is to come true and to abide with us, it will, at bottom, depend on the people themselves. If we are to achieve a richer and fuller life for all, they have got to know what such an achievement implies. In a modern industrial State, an economic base is essential for all. We point with pride to our "national income," but the nation is only an aggregate of individual men and women, and when we turn from the single figure of total income to the incomes of individuals, we find there was a very marked injustice in its distribution. There is no reason why wealth, which is a social product, should not be more equitably controlled and distributed in the interests of society."

—James Truslow Adams,
The Epic of America,
as quoted by Robert C. Hauhart,
Seeking the American Dream.

One Idea for Actually Stopping Child Labor Abuse

by Jim Hightower

With new outrages erupting every day, I find some comfort in knowing that We the People have at least eliminated certain particularly-ugly plutocratic abuses. Child labor, for example—outlawed in 1938, right?

Well, outlawed, yes; stopped, no. Recent reports reveal that thousands of children, ages 12 to 17, are toiling illegally at dangerous jobs, in manufacturing, construction, food processing, etc. To be clear, there's nothing wrong with teenagers working—they help their families, gain experience, or just earn a few bucks. Indeed, I worked part-time throughout my high school and college years, and while I did gripe some, overall it was positive.

So, this is not about children working—it's about corporate child abuse, plain and simple. For example, last year Packers Sanitation Services was caught "employing oppressive child labor" in meatpacking plants to clean saws, head splitters, and other butchering machines. In a typical incident, one 13-year-old was badly burned by the caustic cleaning chemicals they used during long night shifts—which ran from 11pm to at least 5am!

Once caught, top executives of Packers Sanitation tried to sanitize their reputation by proclaiming they have "zero tolerance for any violation" of child labor laws. Oh? Ask that 13-year-old. These executives would be comical, except they're completely disgusting and morally repugnant. Yet, our worker protection laws are so weak that Packers' multiple violations, involving 102 children in this one case, resulted in a fine of... \$1.5 million.

That's not even peanuts for this nationwide giant, which is owned by Blackstone, a trillion-dollar Wall Street huckster shop run by well-manicured executives who pretend they know nothing about the children they endanger for profit.

How about we make a few of the teenage children and grandchildren of Blackstone profiteers work some midnight shifts cleaning meatcutting machinery? I'm guessing they would stop the abuse overnight. Copyright 2021 by Jim Hightower & Associates. Contact Laura Ehrlich (Laura@jimhightower.com).

Mash Notes, Hate Mail, &c.
from page six

concentrated poverty with predominantly Black residents." Well, well.

Break out of your Fox News mindset and you might see opportunities, rather than doom: "reactive approaches for policing the symptoms of segregation and disinvestment distract from the deeply rooted need to invest in the community infrastructure that keeps neighborhoods safe, such as quality housing, youth workforce development and employment programs, green space, and civic and community-based organizations. Luckily, the influx of federal resources flowing into communities from the American Rescue Plan Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs

Act offers an unprecedented opportunity to properly invest in disinvested communities and advance the community-based safety alternatives proven to promote a more holistic, life-affirming vision of safety."

The Editor

What's God Got to Do With It?

Dear Editor,

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy says the Trump indictment has "irreparably harmed" the country. What on earth is he talking about?

Prosecution of misdemeanor or felony crime is harmful, illegal, unconstitutional, wrong?

The answer to his befuddling statement is found in a message on a popular T-shirt: "Trust God. Not

government."

McCarthy is trafficking in the popular libertarian philosophy, which is also the evangelical church argument, that government is evil. The fundamentalist church and its anti-civic bedfellows, patriotic libertarian Republicans, are the only forces for good on earth.

The problem with this is that our patriotic ancestors in 1776 were not fighting against government and law, they were fighting against "King's government" and "King's law." And those bad laws of King George III are listed in painful detail in the Declaration of Independence.

Our ancestors wanted "People's government," and "People's law." When laws are made by the people,

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