

The Fortnightly Rant

Attack of the Florida Men

You don't become the nation's oldest newspaper by turning up your nose at technical innovations. So, when it comes to new wrinkles, we're old hands. We also try to live up to that old yankee creed, "use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without." So, to conserve scarce resources such as editorial brain power, we rely on an AI algorithm to select the topic for our Fortnightly Rant.

This time around, it spit out this: "the 2024 Presidential Election." Naturally, the first thought that sprung to mind was...

Well, it wasn't really a thought, it was more of a groan. Two groans, actually. One in self-pity, as we strapped on the waders to descend yet again into that fetid, too-familiar sewer. And one in sympathy for our poor, long-suffering readers—presuming that any of them will still follow.

We briefly considered touting a Constitutional Amendment that would strip away all power from the Chief Executive, on the theory that, were it thus neutered, that increasingly troublesome office would wither away.

That scheme evaporated faster than you can say Anthony Scaramucci. Even if such a change were to somehow take place—which, leaving aside the dubious merits of the proposal, would presuppose a functioning government capable of voting the amendment up or down—the vast schools of insatiable lampreys now attached to the executive office would simply detach themselves and hasten to wherever the power went.

Alas, it is no use. No feckless fretting, nor *deus ex machina*, will rid us of this troublesome topic. The 2024 Presidential Election looms, and amongst the contestants are three—possibly four—Florida men.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis

We'll begin with the Governor, in honor of the office if not the man. After three terms as a Congressman, Ron DeSantis won the Governorship in 2018. His margin of victory was a mere 0.39 percent of the total vote—yet more evidence that every vote counts.

In 2022, it was another story entirely. As an incumbent, DeSantis beat Democrat Charlie Crist like a rented mule—or perhaps a Guantanamo detainee. DeSantis got nearly 60 percent, Crist barely made 40. So: DeSantis's term runs until 2027. This is where things get interesting.

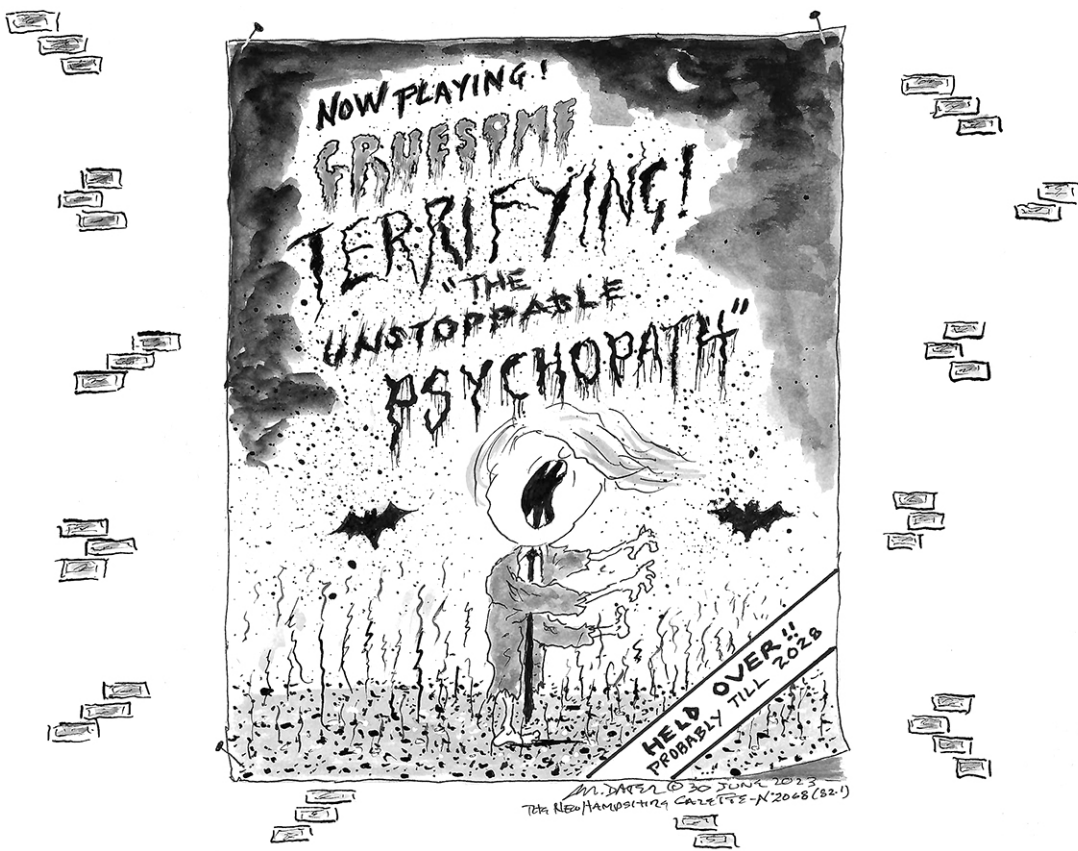
Florida has a "resign-to-run" law: if you hold one elected office, you can't run for another—at least, not until you resign from the first.

Unless, apparently, you're Ron DeSantis. In April, the GOP-dominated legislature passed a bill that, among other things, created an exemption in the "resign-to-run" law: incumbent office holders may now run for president or vice president. How convenient.

"But...but...but," a stickler for law and order might sputter in indignation, "DeSantis announced his candidacy a month ago. That new bill doesn't become law until July 1st."

Don't underestimate the brazenness of Florida GOP. Most of the law doesn't take effect until July 1st. The DeSantis Exception was written so as to take effect immediately upon being signed by the beneficiary, who, by strange coincidence, happens to be Florida Governor Ron DeSantis.

Though he is inexplicably popular in his home state, polls show DeSantis running a distant second in the GOP primary. Perhaps it takes a Florida Man to fully appreciate a Florida Man.



Miami Mayor Francis Suarez

When Francis Suarez announced his candidacy on June 15th, the nation spoke as one: "Who?"

It's not that Miami is some obscure hamlet. It's that no Mayor has ever gone directly to the Oval Office. Buffalonian Grover Cleveland came the closest, and he detoured through Albany as Governor of New York. An unlikely career track ought to be the least of Suarez's worries, though.

Within his own bailiwick, name recognition is Suarez's birthright. His father Xavier was mayor four times. His last term was cut short, though, after a judge ruled too many dead people had voted—some via absentee ballots witnessed by an "F. Suarez." Francis has denied any wrongdoing.

Suarez has proposed abolishing taxes in Miami. The missing revenue would instead be conjured up via block chain, in a scheme dubbed MiamiCoin. One MiamiCoin is currently worth \$0.000163.

Senator Rick Scott

Senator Rick Scott [R-Fla.] has not yet announced that he's running for president, but on Tuesday, he did the next best thing.

In a video posted on Twitter, Scott said, "Let me give you a travel warning. If you're a socialist, communist, somebody that believes in big government, I would think twice—think twice—if you're thinking about taking a vacation or moving to Florida. ... We like freedom, liberty, capitalism—things like that."

This may be the funniest, least self-aware thing anyone has ever said. If all the Social Security recipients were to leave Florida, there'd be nothing left but sun-baked ghost towns.

And without Medicare and Medicaid—which the Senator's for-profit health care company Columbia/HCA was fined \$1.8 billion for defrauding—it's unlikely he'd be enjoying his current net worth—about a quarter of a billion dollars.

Former President Donald Trump

For our grand...no, make that grotesque finale, we turn to the bankrupt casino owner, failed airline promoter, fake college founder, former steak peddler, known tax cheat, suspected money launderer, and former leerer at beauty pageant contestants; the one and only, *El Supremo* himself, to this day certainly the most famous ketchup-hurler of all time, the One True Florida Man among Florida Men, Donald John Trump.

Say what you will about this bloated and deranged buffoon—for all his obvious malfeasances, he has yet to spend a night behind bars.

This, despite the fact that every week some new item is added to the mountain of existing evidence. If it isn't some snippet of a voice recording, it's a tweet from the Mischief-in-Chief himself. You can tell it's authentic—it's IN ALL CAPS AND MISSPEALED!!! WITH EXCLAMATION POINTS!!!

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How For-Profit Health Care Companies Make That Profit

by Jake Johnson

A pair of new stories examining the increasingly common but shadowy U.S. insurance industry practice of refusing to pay for certain treatments drew outrage Wednesday from patient advocates and Medicare for All proponents, who said the reporting further reveals the harms of for-profit healthcare.

The investigative outlet ProPublica focused its attention on the "galling" secrecy around insurance companies' claim denials, which frequently leave patients with massive medical bills and little clarity as to why their claims were rejected.

"How often insurance companies say no is a closely held secret," ProPublica's Robin Fields reported. "There's nowhere that a consumer or an employer can go to look up

all insurers' denial rates—let alone whether a particular company is likely to decline to pay for procedures or drugs that its plans appear to cover."

"In 2010, federal regulators were granted expansive authority through the Affordable Care Act to require that insurers provide information on their denials. This data could have meant a sea change in transparency for consumers," Fields added. "But more than a decade later, the federal government has collected only a fraction of what it's entitled to. And what information it has released, experts say, is so crude, inconsistent, and confusing that it's essentially meaningless."

The data that is available indicates claim denials are on the rise. According to a February KFF study of Affordable Care Act plans, "near-

ly 17 percent of in-network claims were denied in 2021."

Elisabeth Rosenthal of KFF Health News wrote in a column last month that declining to pay for patients' treatments is "a handy way for insurers to keep revenue high."

"Millions of Americans in the past few years have run into this experience: filing a healthcare insurance claim that once might have been paid immediately but instead is just as quickly denied," Rosenthal wrote. "If the experience and the insurer's explanation often seem arbitrary and absurd, that might be because companies appear increasingly likely to employ computer algorithms or people with little relevant experience to issue rapid-fire denials of claims—sometimes bundles at a time—without reviewing the patient's medical chart. A job title at

one company was 'denial nurse.'"

ProPublica noted Wednesday that "some advocates say insurers have a good reason to dodge transparency."

Citing Wendell Potter, a former Cigna executive who now supports Medicare for All, ProPublica reported that "refusing payment for medical care and drugs has become a staple of their business model, in part because they know customers appeal less than 1 percent of denials."

"That's money left on the table that the insurers keep," Potter told the outlet.

With their companies' profits booming, the CEOs of the top seven private health insurance giants in the U.S. took home a combined \$335 million in compensation last year.

Medicare Advantage providers—

private insurers paid by the federal government to cover patient care—have become notorious for denying claims for medically necessary treatments as enrollment in the program continues to surge.

As The Lever's Matthew Cunningham-Cook reported Wednesday, "Medicare Advantage insurers are threatening the foundational premise of the government's healthcare safety net for seniors and people with disabilities: that people in Medicare should get the care that is recommended by a doctor."

"A 2022 investigation by the inspector general of the Department of Health and Human Services found that in 2019, 13 percent of the total prior authorization requests

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from page one

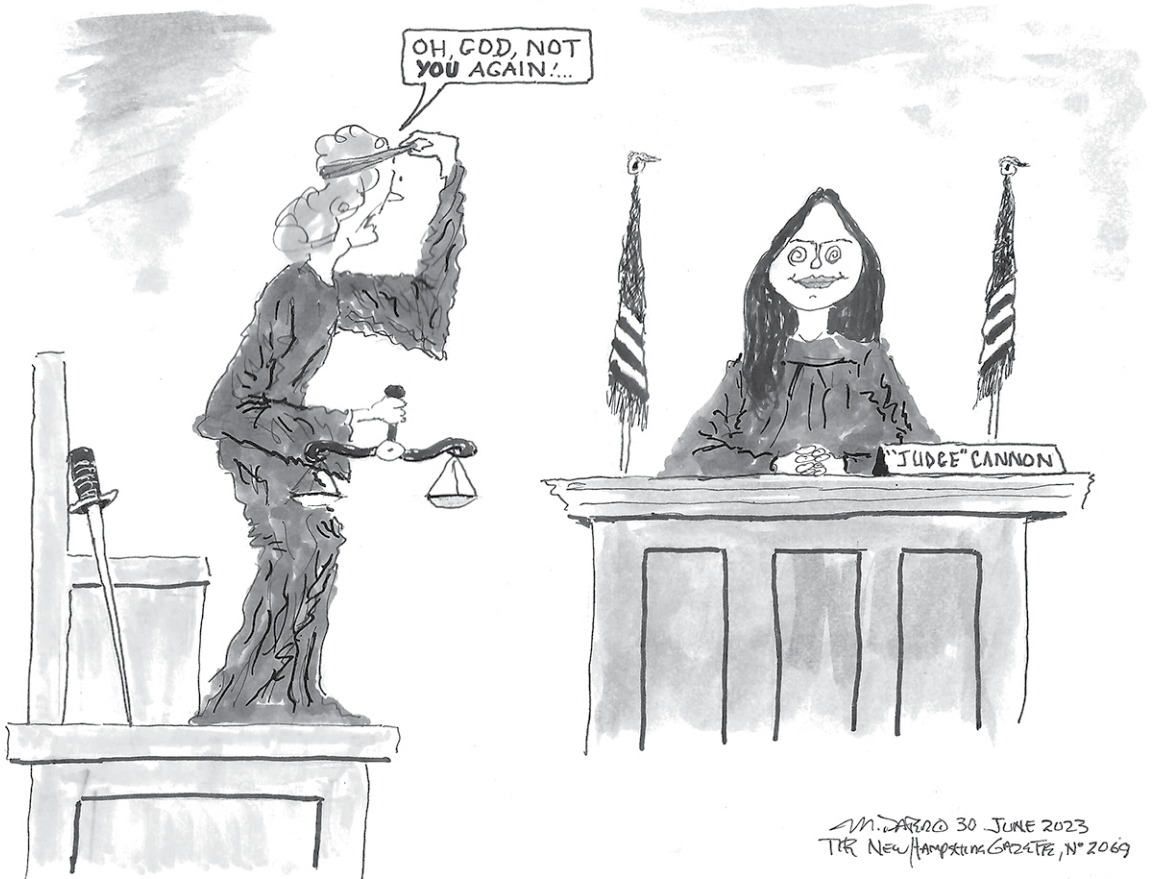
denied by Medicare Advantage plans would have been covered under traditional Medicare, leading to an estimated 85,000 additional care denials,” Cunningham-Cook wrote. “That year, Medicare Advantage plans also wrongly denied 18 percent of payment claims—covering an estimated 1.5 million claims—reducing the likelihood that doctors will recommend the costliest yet often most effective care, for fear of not being paid.”

Social Security Works, a progressive advocacy group that backs Medicare for All, tweeted in response to the new reporting Wednesday that “private insurance companies, including Medicare Advantage plans, are designed to

generate profit.”
“How do they do that? Take our money and then deny our care,” the group added.
Cunningham-Cook opened his piece with the story of Jenn Coffey, a former Republican state representative in New Hampshire “who, like many GOP faithfuls, believed private insurers could solve the health-care crisis if they were allowed to do things like sell policies across state lines.”
But Coffey’s views were shaken when UnitedHealth, her ultra-profitable Medicare Advantage provider, “constantly rejected or second-guessed the care options her doctors suggested for her cancer recovery and for a rare and painful secondary disease that has no standard treatment plan,” Cunningham-Cook reported.



Listen up, lovers: time is not on your side. According to the Guttled Ghost of the Award-Winning Local Daily, the City of Portsmouth is about to break out the bolt cutters—all this hardware has got to go. Aside from the sentiment, most of these padlocks are of little intrinsic value. Whoever hung the antiques here, though, ought to retrieve their property ASAP.
UPDATE: On Tuesday, the beleaguered source cited above reported that the Seacoast Repertory Theatre “has pitched the idea of taking possession of the park’s padlock-adorned fence...to use on the set of its upcoming run of performances of the musical ‘Hair,’ and display the locks outside the theater in the future.” Might this Hail Mary succeed? The reader’s guess is as good as the editor’s. Probably better, in fact (see below).
POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVE OUTCOME: Considering the outlandish nature of current events lately, we’re not ruling out the possibility that Bill Paarlberg’s Piscataquid! might extend a mighty tentacle from the depths and drag the fence to its undersea lair, locks and all.



“Now I’ve realized that you can’t fix or repair the system,” Coffey told The Lever. “The insurance companies don’t offer anything. They serve as a roadblock.”
“The only way forward,” she added, “is Medicare for All.”

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“Unprecedented Assault”:
Republican Bills Would Create
Loopholes for PFAS Polluters
by Olivia Rosane

Five new bills being considered by Congress this session could help industry find a way out of cleaning up dangerous “forever chemicals,” warns the Environmental Working Group.
The bills, introduced by Sens. Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.) and John Boozman (R-Ark.) May 4, would protect five key sectors from

liability if the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) moves forward with labeling certain per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) as hazardous substances under the Superfund law: water utilities, landfills, agriculture, airports, and fire training facilities.
“But far more than even these significant loopholes is at stake,” Melanie Benesh, vice president for government affairs at the Environmental Working Group (EWG), said. “Their bill would open the door to even more loopholes for companies that have used PFAS or other hazardous substances, making it much harder to clean up contaminated communities.”
PFAS are a class of widely used chemicals found in everything from firefighting foam to nonstick cookware. They are called forever chemicals because they do not break down easily in the environment, and they have spread to contaminate the drinking water of potentially more than 200 million Americans.

A growing body of research links them to a host of health threats including cancer, immune suppression, and reproductive or developmental problems.
In recent years, regulators at the state and federal levels have taken steps to limit the spread of PFAS in the environment and clean up what’s already there. To that end, EPA proposed listing two PFAS—perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS)—as hazardous substances under the Superfund law, officially the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, in August 2022.
Such a listing would trigger reportings of large releases of PFOA and PFOS and enable the EPA to require a cleanup and, in some cases, demand the polluter pay for it. Green groups at the time, including EWG, praised the move as historic, but argued the federal government could go further.
Now, EWG says Lummis and

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Boozman's bills would not only weaken this initial attempt to regulate PFAS, but the strength of the Superfund law all together.

"More than PFOA and PFOS are at stake," Benesh wrote for EWG's website. "Since passage of the Superfund law, Congress has never created the kind of exemptions proposed by Lummis and Boozman. Their proposal would be an unprecedented assault on one of our benchmark environmental laws and open the door to similar loopholes for everything from PCBs to dioxin."

In a statement, Lummis and Boozman argued that their bills would protect sectors that either did not contribute to PFAS contamination or were required to use substances containing PFAS.

"There is no doubt we need to consider the environmental impacts of PFAS chemicals but suing entities who did not contribute to the contamination is overkill, especially considering some of these entities, such as ranches and water facilities, are just downstream receivers," Lummis said.

However, EWG argues that these

extra liability protections are not necessary.

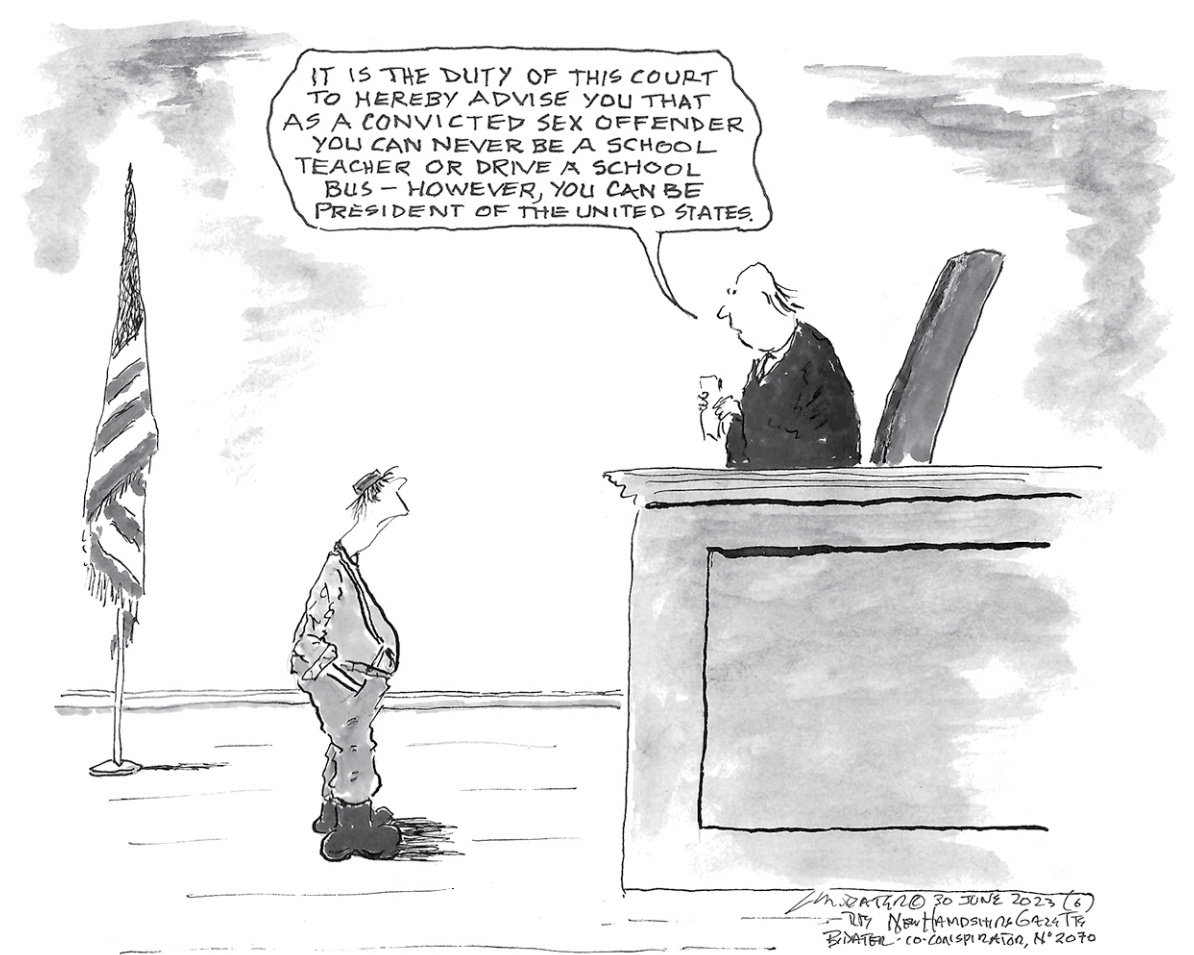
"The EPA already has leeway over which polluters it holds responsible for cleanup," Benesh observed. "The agency has successfully used this discretion for over 40 years to ensure polluters pay the lion's share of the cleanup under Superfund."

In this case, the EPA has already promised to focus on manufacturers and government facilities rather than water utilities, farmers, fire departments, airports, or landfills. It also tends to settle quickly with innocent parties, which then protects them from being sued by outside groups.

What's more, the bills would act as a "slippery slope," as Benesh explained:

"The Lummis-Boozman bills apply to just five sympathetic sectors. But those aren't the only ones clamoring for an escape from liability.

"For example, when Congress voted on the PFAS Action Act in 2021, Republicans offered amendments exempting medical devices, semiconductors, lithium batteries, solar panels, wind turbines, pipeline safety equipment, and chlorine



production from Superfund. Now, if the Senate gives loopholes to sectors like water utilities and farmers, these other polluters will only be more emboldened to ask again for their own loopholes."

Benesh said it was important to guard the Superfund law against a death by a thousand industry paper-cuts.

"We must protect Superfund to ensure contaminated communities get the cleanup they need and deserve," Benesh wrote.

Olivia Rosane is a staff writer for Common Dreams. This work is licensed under Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0). Feel free to republish and share widely.

Strafford County Power Grab

[Note: The following letter arrived a few hours after our Mash Notes, &c. had already been sent to the stalwarts of our Proofreading Department. We

ruled out holding it for the next issue; it was too time-sensitive. Rather than disrupting our proofreaders' workflow—not to mention re-paginating—we decided to treat the letter as news. — The Ed.]

To the Editor:

New Hampshire is a bastion of common sense and mutual cooperation in a time of national upheaval and distrust, but maybe that time has elapsed.

HB75 is a copy and paste of a HB270, a bill that was retained in committee in February of this year. It proposes a districting of Strafford County's county commissioner seats, from three seats pulled from all of Strafford County—which is usually three Democratic seats—to two more-than-most-likely Republican seats and one strong Democratic seat. This was not done in the normal process. The public was not given reasonable notice of the bill. It was rushed to Committee of Con-

ference, with entirely Republican members, which then quickly and quietly voted to pass the bill.

Additionally, the map chosen for creating the district did not seem to use non-partisan metrics; nor have the members of that committee released the metrics they used to make their decision. Though there are over 9,000 ways that Strafford county could be redrawn, the chosen and proposed map includes counting Durham and Dover Ward 4 as contiguous, ignoring that Madbury sits in between. It is not the most compact of districts, it does not look to keep cities intact or community identities together, but it does give Republicans two seats where they previously had none.

Granite Staters are a proud people that are unafraid of reaching across the aisle to do things necessary to

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to page six



So far as we know, the Constitution does not mention a right to hang unauthorized hardware from city infrastructure. That fact, and a full-time, taxpayer-funded legal staff, tend to suggest that the City will prevail in the matter of Portsmouth vs. Padlocks. On what grounds, though, can the City bar people from lounging around in folding chairs amid a display of flag code violations? Asking for some friends.

Murph's Fortnightly Quote

"...we have put property ahead of people. We have put competition ahead of cooperation."

— George Carlin (1937-2008)

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Dispatch From the Ewing Zone
To the Editor:

On Tuesday, June 13, 2023, evidence was presented that Vice-President Biden accepted a \$5 million bribe for influencing our nation's foreign policy. Biden apparently "earned" his money by getting a Ukrainian Prosecutor fired; Biden brags about it: <https://tinyurl.com/bdzef5u>.

There are apparently 17 recordings of discussions with the Bidens about the bribe. The FBI had this information before the 2020 Presidential election and withheld it from the public which, in ignorance, elected a crook who sold our nation's foreign policy for his personal gain.

Only whistleblowers and Congressional pressure on the FBI secured release of this vitally important information for U.S. Citizens and Voters.

Rather than discussing the Biden's \$5 million bribe, our corrupt media mostly only wanted to report President Trump's indictment on politically motivated charges related to Presidential documents. Trump will probably ultimately be vindicated based on the Presidential Records Act, the inappropriate attempt to criminalize a non-criminal act, and historical precedent, e.g., the Presidential records case against President Clinton.

Trump didn't destroy or expose classified records like Hillary Clinton who also violated a subpoena for those records.

Trump didn't steal classified records from a secure room (SCIF) like Senator Biden who transported the stolen classified documents through multiple insecure locations ultimately to his insecure garage, accessible by family and guests.

Various Presidents, Vice Presidents, and others have mishandled classified documents.

Only Trump has been indicted. The purpose of Trump's indictment is less about convicting Trump than in interfering with the 2024 election and defeating Trump's re-election bid.

Biden and the Democrats have made Americans, and people everywhere, poorer, less safe, less free, and threatened by nuclear war. Biden's

political prosecution of his chief rival, Trump, is an attempted diversion from the Democrats' dismal record.

Don Ewing
Meredith, N.H.

Don:

We must admit, our first instinct upon reading your letter was to laugh. After all, next to hydrogen, spurious Republican claims about Democratic shenanigans are the most common element in the universe. NASA recently deployed to James Webb Space Telescope in an effort to pinpoint the origin of this material. Evidence points to January 3, 1979, the day Newt Gingrich was sworn in as a Member of Congress.

We had, of course, heard talk of this alleged bribe before we received your letter. "Damning evidence of Democratic corruption at the highest levels of government!", and all that jazz. Some people were apparently never taught that the first rule of being taken seriously is not to lie all the damn time.

Regrettably, though, in modern politics, questions of truth and falsehood have become irrelevant.

Accusations of a \$5 million business bribe aren't intended to raise doubts about his integrity so as to reduce Joe Biden's support among Democrats. That would be old-fashioned, even quaint.

One reason GOP office-holders and their phalanxes of hired mouthpieces pretend to believe this story is to keep the Republican base riled up. For this purpose, plausibility is actually a drawback. The more believable a lie is, the less shock and awe it generates. Biden took a bribe? Big deal. Where are the space-lasers? How much adrenochrome does he take in his coffee?

Most of all, though, this endless barrage of bull is about throwing sand in the eyes of the Fourth Estate. If you can keep those idiots busy producing reactions to hogwash, the reporting they do on crooked judges will get lost in the sauce.

What's infuriating is that Steve Bannon explained this strategy five years ago—and it's still working today.

In 2018, The New Yorker's David Remnick wrote:

"Steve Bannon, once Trump's chief ideologist, put the matter well earlier this year when he told Michael Lewis, 'We got



elected on Drain the Swamp, Lock Her Up, Build a Wall,' he said. 'This was pure anger. Anger and fear is what gets people to the polls.' Bannon added, 'The Democrats don't matter. The real opposition is the media. And the way to deal with them is to flood the zone with shit.'"

We did a double-take on your reference to the 2020 election: "the public which, in ignorance, elected a crook who sold our nation's foreign policy for his personal gain." If you had written 2016, we'd have to agree with you.

Of course, that's not what you meant. You meant what you wrote—which is pretty much an exact description of the opposite of the truth.

Your case might be stronger if your blustering hero didn't go on TV every day and confess.

The Editor

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What Are We? The Taliban?

To the Editor:

It appears that looming book bans around the United States are like the Taliban in Afghanistan. They keep many people—particularly women—in the dark and out of the community.

Many book bans are about LGBTQ issues. We have to be watchful as citizens, allies, and members of other groups. I know that as a child and an adult I went to books to explain things I didn't want to ask about. New worlds open up through books. I understand better what Egypt was like under British colonial rule, and I understand better what a transgender child might feel like from reading novels.

If a child is reluctant to talk to you about their gender, or has questions they're asking about who they are, let another trusted adult or a book be sources of information. Don't have schools act like police. While I'm glad that the following laws didn't pass the N.H. legislature, let's be sure they won't next year:

- SB 272, the parental "bill of rights,"
- HB 417, treating gender affirming care like child abuse,

- HB 619, banning gender discussions in schools, and
- HB 514, remove LGBTQ books from school libraries.

Our kids need safe places to explore and to try different identities. They have to learn about themselves, receive healthcare, and knowledge about others with whom they will live.

Judy Ullman
Portsmouth, N.H.

Judy:
What this country needs is a new exchange program. Let's convene a schmooze-fest for Taliban clerics and high-ranking Republicans, moderated by experienced facilitators—maybe Frank Luntz, or a team of consultants from McKinsey. Sooner or later, maybe they'll see that they have more in common than they think.

The bigger we can make this event, the better. That shouldn't be a problem. There's plenty of open space in Texas and Saudi Arabia. And let's not throw in the towel too soon. Give them plenty of time. As for the expense, have you seen the defense budget? This would be a good investment.

The Editor

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The Party of Lawless Disorder

To the Editor:

Jack Teixeira is the 21-year-old member of the Massachusetts Air National Guard who took home classified documents from the Air Base. He shared them online to impress his friends. He is currently in a jail cell awaiting trial for unauthorized retention and transmission of national defense information and the unauthorized removal and retention of classified documents or material. I have not heard one Republican politician call for him to be released, let alone claim the government has been weaponized against him.

I mention this because Donald Trump removed boxes of classified,

secret, top secret and secret compartmentalized documents from the White House as he was leaving office. These are documents he was not allowed to possess. Some of those documents he shared with people who had no security clearances. Oddly, his party, including many of those running for president, are adamant he should not be held accountable and claim he is being indicted for political reasons. They say the government has been weaponized against him. Nonsense. The government spent 18 months asking him to return these documents including getting a court to order the return. He refused to comply. He hid the documents from his own attorneys knowing they would tell the court he had no more documents.

If Donald Trump had returned the documents when ordered he would not have been indicted. It is time his party put the rule of law and the nation's security above this corrupt man.

Walter Hamilton
Portsmouth, N.H.

Walter:
The rule of law? His party? Don't hold your breath.

The Editor

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Search Bedminster Now!

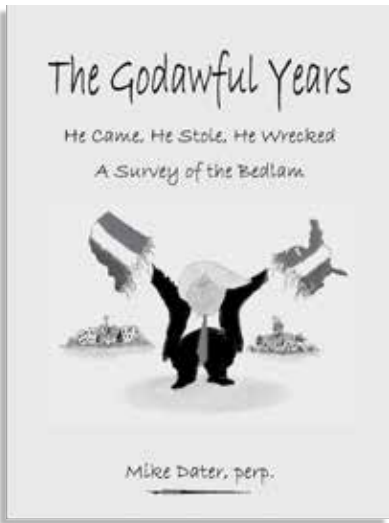
Dear Editor,

I am very concerned by two omissions in the Donald Trump indictment document.

First, the indictment narrates that some boxes of U.S. documents were transported to Trump's golf-residence in Bedminster, N.J. Indeed, it relates how Trump waived a Top Secret map around in front of PAC associates there, trying to impress them. Has the FBI searched the Bedminster facility for more incriminating documents?

Second, the indictment omits identifying Trump's motive. Why did he

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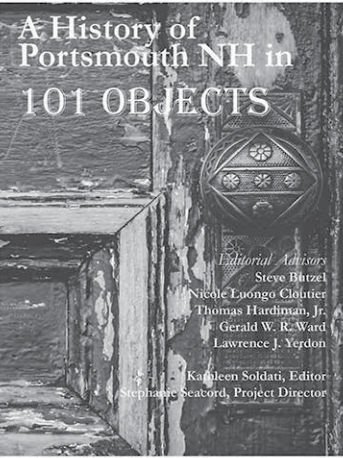
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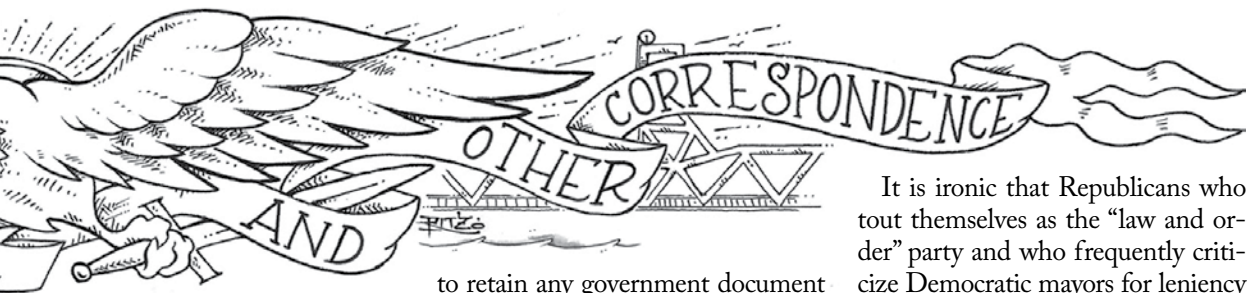
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obstruct returning the documents so fiercely? Was it just his insecure need to boast and show-off? Or was he using (or planning to use) the documents for some self-serving transaction? Those military secrets could garner him a high price from our enemies, and his threat to reveal them could exert our friends.

The investigation must continue.

Bruce Joffe
Piedmont, Calif.

Bruce:

You wonder what Trump's motive is. Whatever you might imagine, it's probably worse.

The Editor

=====

Quo Vadis, Party of Law and Order?

To the Editor:

The reaction of many in the Republican Party to the indictment of Donald Trump on 37 counts of violations of the Espionage Act has served to highlight two characteristics of the modern Party—its bottomless hypocrisy and cult-like nature. The defense of Trump has run the gamut from the ludicrous (that the Presidential Records Act gives him the absolute right to take any classified government document that he wanted) to gaslighting (Democrats have “weaponized” the DOJ to attack Trump while ignoring similar offenses by Biden and Hillary Clinton). At the same time, the crackpot fringes of the Party have added intimidation to the mix by threatening violence should the indictments result in Trump’s conviction. These responses are all part of the Republican playbook to acquire political power that includes outright lies and disingenuous interpretations of facts backed up by intimidation.

Many Republicans have cited the Presidential Records Act to claim that Trump has the absolute right

to retain any government document that he wants. The fact is that the act was passed following the Watergate scandal for the express purpose of limiting the documents that ex-presidents could possess. It does not provide carte blanche for Trump to take anything that he may fancy. Although former presidents may retain personal records under the supervision of the National Archives, it is ludicrous to claim that they can declassify and retain any government document. It is ridiculous to assert that Trump could willy-nilly take classified material related to sensitive military and defense matters (such as the order of battle for an attack on Iran or analyses of nuclear capabilities) and store them in his bathroom. The Presidential Records Act provides no defense for Trump’s actions.

Another Republican talking point is that the indictment is a partisan “witch hunt” by a “weaponized” DOJ to prevent the ex-president from regaining the presidency in 2024. The indictment is the result of a two-year investigation by the DOJ in the face of persistent obstruction by Trump and his associates. The investigation has provided solid evidence that the ex-president possessed documents that he should not have, and that Trump actively obstructed the investigation. A Grand Jury comprised of randomly appointed citizens reviewed all evidence and it was they who indicted Trump, not President Biden or Attorney General Garland. The indictment is the result of a constitutionally ordained due process that is meant to ensure justice for all American citizens. Republicans provide no evidence of corruption in the process. Their cynical gaslighting casts doubt on a legal process and undermines a foundation of democracy for no other reason than political expediency.

It is ironic that Republicans who tout themselves as the “law and order” party and who frequently criticize Democratic mayors for leniency in enforcing the law are so willing to either bend or ignore the law to provide cover for Trump. The DOJ must not flinch in the face of Republican lies and intimidation. History proves that timidity when confronted with authoritarian attack only serves to embolden anti-democratic forces. The modern Republican Party has demonstrated that is inimical to democracy. Our democracy’s survival depends on the defeat of the Trump Republicans.

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

Robert:

Our sincere thanks for this calm, detailed rebuttal of the main defenses being offered for Trump's apparently felonious behavior. The absurdity of the circumstances can have a deleterious effect on our efforts to maintain coherence.

The Editor

=====

Earthquake Within Catalan Independentism In The Municipal Elections.

To the Editor:

In the last autonomic elections in Catalonia in 2021, the three pro-independence parties (ERC from the center-left, JUNTS from the center-right and CUP from the left) won 52 percent of the vote—a kind of unofficial referendum, which showed the desire of the people of Catalonia to be able to decide to leave the Spanish state as a solution to the constant disagreements and the irreconcilable way of living the political, economic and social. This divergence can already be found in 1714, when the Crown of Castile imposed itself by force of arms over the Crown of Aragon. The way in which the Crown of Aragon managed its internal diversity with an autonomy respectful of the different territories that made it up (Catalonia, Aragon, Valencia and the Balearic Islands), and how the Crown of Aragon related to

the Crown of Castile, seeking mutual respect, came to an end.

That 52 percent verdict in a legal election reinforced the mandate of the 2017 referendum for the independence of Catalonia and which unleashed a fierce repression by the Spanish State: judicial threats (hundreds of accused, millionaire fines, prison sentences, politicians dismissed by “lawfare:...”), police threats (harassment of demonstrations, the “Operation Catalonia” carried out by an illegal and secret police group to damage the independence movement, illegal espionage with Pegasus, possible blackmail with the information obtained in this espionage...), media threats (singling out, criminalization and dehumanization of the Catalans and their demands)....

And in this context, the 52 percent victory has not been translated into any concrete policy of the Catalan Government (formed by ERC and JUNTS) towards self-determination but rather into obedience towards Spain, support to all the projects of the Spanish Government, and a totally failed attempt of Catalonia-Spain dialogue (they have met twice in three years). In the end, JUNTS left the Catalan Government which has continued with only ERC.

Then, in the municipal elections of May 28 there has been a large abstention of Catalan pro-independence voters as a measure of punishment to the pro-independence parties themselves. It has been demonstrated that the Catalan pro-independence movement, which is citizen rather than paritocratic, is still mobilized and will not allow the Catalan pro-independence parties to evade their responsibility to carry out the independence of Catalonia. If the citizens had continued to vote, as always, massively for the pro-independence parties, they would have understood that they could continue their renunciation and the postponement of independence until the next generation. 530,000 voters abstained (+10 percent), almost all, 330,000, from the pro-independence parties. The party in the Catalan government, ERC, has lost 300,000 votes

(-37 percent of its votes), the CUP has lost 44,000 votes (-25 percent of its votes) and JUNTS has risen a little (only +3 percent).

Abstention is usually interpreted as a sign of disinterest in politics, but this increase seems rather the opposite, since in Catalonia interest in politics is among the highest in the world according to surveys. This increase in abstention is attributed to the most convinced independentistas who, despite losing their share of power, are trying not to be swallowed by institutional politics and are sending a powerful message to the independentistas parties to rectify their strategy.

Regarding the mayoralty of Barcelona, despite the fact that a pro-independence party, JUNTS, has won the first position, the coalition of JUNTS-ERC has not achieved the government of Barcelona, because in the end a very forced pact of anti-independence (socialists, left and right) has been imposed, which has given the mayoralty to a socialist.

Just at the end of these municipal elections, the Spanish Government announced the calling of state elections for July 23rd. Possibly, as the pro-independence parties have not made any changes to their strategy, pro-independence voters will persist in the strategy of punishing the pro-independence parties to make them react. We will also have to be attentive to see if, in Spain, the right wing of the PP and the extreme right wing of VOX will take power, as the polls predict.

Jordi Oriola Folch
Barcelona, Catalonia

Jordi:

How very interesting. If we read you correctly, the most engaged pro-independence Catalonians are abstaining from electoral politics because they feel their leadership lacks conviction.

What a remarkable contrast to this country. Here, vast swathes of the population abstain from electoral politics because they can't be bothered.

We love to complain about that, but perhaps we should be more careful about what we wish for.

The Editor

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Hey, Elon — We Did It Better a Century Ago

by Charles Thut

Elon Musk recently guaranteed that Teslas will be fully self driving by next year. Although he's made the same promise nine times in as many years, it illustrates the primary innovation that Musk brings to the electric vehicle industry: marketing.

Teslas are not sold simply as low(er) carbon alternatives to traditional cars, but as futuristic solutions to all transportation problems. AI chauffeurs will soon allow their humans to focus on loftier pursuits while they sit in traffic. Once enough autonomous vehicles hit the road, their superior reaction times may even eliminate congestion entirely. Until then, Tesla owners will skip traffic in dedicated tunnels dug by Musk's Boring Company.

Now that other EV manufacturers have caught on, messaging has reached a consensus: technological innovation will soon usher in a transportation revolution. Buying an EV punches your ticket to Musk's techno utopia, in which Americans will navigate from city to city congestion free in clean electric vehicles they don't even need to drive. That's a billionaire building a future I can get behind; for now residents of New Hampshire can only dream of such luxury.

For the first quarter of the 20th century, our community didn't have to dream. Residents of the Seacoast,

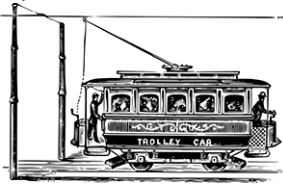
though lacking Musk's towering brilliance, even improved on his invention with two simple ideas. First they connected the EVs together to increase capacity and require fewer motors, then they solved autonomous driving by building metal tracks on which the EVs traveled. Musk has invented, or at least promised to invent very very soon, a poor imitation of a train.

In the early 1900s the Dover, Somersworth & Rochester Street Railway, Exeter, Hampton, & Amesbury Street Railway, and the Portsmouth, Kittery & York Street Railway were an interconnecting system of electric streetcars that served as a link between those cities. The steam powered Boston and Maine Railroad also provided regular passenger service between Portsmouth, York, Dover, Rochester, Epping, Exeter, Newburyport, and too many more cities to name. The street railways ran on 15 minute intervals during peak hours, with half hour and hour service during the rest of the day. Though most people commuted to work and performed errands on foot (the lowest carbon method of transport), they could travel between dense urban cores on frequent, traffic free public transit. They could kick back and read the paper as they traveled, without even having AI drivers.

Such efficient transit made too much sense to last, and competition from automobiles steadily reduced ridership until the streetcars were replaced by buses in the late 1920s. Nationwide, cities that were more reluctant to convert to buses were aided by the GM Streetcar Conspiracy, in which automobile interests including General Motors, Standard Oil, and Firestone Tires purchased local streetcar systems en masse in order to shut them down. The newfound freedom of the automobile allowed for sprawling housing developments far from city centers, from which commuters traveled to work downtown in their cars. Pedestrians

were relegated to dangerous crosswalks on ever-widening roads built to accommodate increasing traffic volume, and downtown shops were paved to make parking lots as stores moved along the commutes.

Since buses now must navigate the sprawl that cars created, their promise has fallen flat. In 1897 the EH&A street railway provided 554,889 rides between Exeter and Hampton alone. The COAST bus, one of the only transit options left in the area, has averaged only 390,000 yearly rides since its launch in 1982, even as population in the region has more than tripled. There is no transit option connecting Exeter and



Passengers queue up for a ride on the Exeter, Hampton & Amesbury Street Railway, in 1901. The streetcar was built by the Briggs Carriage Company of Amesbury, Mass. At right, the Hampton Beach Casino. Photo from the collection of O.R. Cummings, as seen in Transportation, Volume 5 (1951), in the collection of the Exeter Public Library.

Hampton.

Modern automobile interests are once again pushing a transportation revolution. Tesla actually offers a beta version of full self driving, an expansion on the autopilot system available on highways since 2014. Teslas in autopilot mode have been linked to at least 736 crashes and 17 fatalities in the past four years. Musk still argues that the autopilot system is safer than human drivers, but a firm conclusion can't be reached until the public has access to more data.

One thing is certain: cars driven by humans and computers are dangerous. In 2020 firearm related injury finally surpassed motor vehicle

crashes as the leading cause of death for children in the U.S. This statistic is most often thrown around by gun advocates paired with the smug question "so should we ban cars too then?" Whether the children are killed by human or AI drivers, it seems that action to reduce death should at least be considered.

As Elon tells it, the problems with gas powered cars driven by humans are the gas and the humans. The safe, convenient, low emission electric vehicles enjoyed by our communities a century ago might indicate that the problem is the cars.

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benefit members of their community. HB75 is clearly nothing more than authoritarian power grab and has no place in our state. Redistricting is necessary to maintain up-to-date and competitive voting; however, it must be done with transparency and in good faith. Include the constituents impacted by these decisions in on the conversation. Democracy is not optional. Oppose Gerrymandering. Oppose HB 75.

Curtis Register
Durham, N.H.

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Star Island Mail Boat Tours Are Back

The Star Island Mail Boat run, from Pepperrell Cove in Kittery Point to Star Island in the Isles of Shoals, resumed services for the season on June 19th.

This will be the first full season for the brand new M/V Shining Star. The 27-ton, 46-foot vessel is a Mussel Ridge 46 design by New Castle, N.H. native Albert Hutchinson.

The trip takes about 45 minutes.

Along with the mail, the boat carries freight, food, and island employees. Along the way passengers may see seals, porpoises, and even the odd whale here and there, along with seabirds like gannets, loons, and the occasional bald eagle.

The summer population of Star Island hovers around 400. Passengers will have about 45 minutes to wander about before returning, giving ample opportunity to view the largest off-grid solar power array in New England.

Morning trips—when the weather is generally calmest—run on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from now into September. They leave Pepperrell Cove at about 7:45 a.m. and return before 11:00 a.m.

Tickets are \$30 per person, children 12 and under are free.

Extended trips on Tuesday afternoons depart Pepperrell Cove at about 1:15, and return to Kittery Point about 6:00 p.m. They include an afternoon ashore, and a tour of the seal colony on neighboring Duck Island. Tickets are \$40 per person, children 12 and under are \$20.

All trips are by prior reservation. Space is often limited. For more information see SeacoastMaritimeCharters.com or call (207) 337-0446.

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"The real casualty of the Compromise of 1850 was the Whig Party, which would never again occupy

the White House, although Abraham Lincoln was a former Whig. Fillmore, who had never sought, nor desired, the presidency, found himself as the only viable candidate to run on a Whig platform in 1852. No Whig could win the presidency without the support of the southern Whigs, and Fillmore, having supported the revised Fugitive Slave Act, had a southern credential to go with the largely pro-northern compromise. But Fillmore didn't want the nomination, despite having gotten the majority of delegates. He tried, instead, to push his delegates toward Daniel Webster, but

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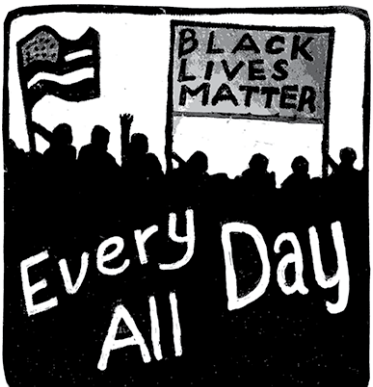
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Phillis Wheatley: “the Surprising African Poetess” *

by W.D. Ehrhart

In 1990, I spent a semester as the Visiting Professor of War and Social Consequences at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. My office was in a building named for Phillis Wheatley. I'd never heard of her, but discovered that she was an African-born slave whose Boston owners had brought her up as a “house servant” and allowed her to learn to read and write. She had even published a book of her poems.

I tracked down some of her work, but didn't find it very interesting. Like so much of the poetry written in English in the later 18th century on both sides of the Atlantic, it was loaded with Christian piety, redemption, and resurrection as well as frequent references to Greek and Roman literature and mythology. And much of it was dedicated to or inspired by people who may have been famous in the 1760s and '70s, but who are remembered now only by early American experts and historians.

Still, years later, when I created a course at the Haverford School for Boys called American War Poetry, I did include her poem “To His Excellency General Washington” because, even if I didn't find much inspiring in her poetry, the very fact that she was able, as a Black woman slave, to write poetry was itself inspirational.

Finally, only this year, I went to see the world premier of a play called “Written by Phillis,” by Paul Oakley Stovall and Marilyn Campbell-Lowe, and staged by the Quintessence Theatre Group of Philadelphia. I also bought a new book, published in 2023 by David Waldstreicher titled *The Odyssey of Phillis Wheatley*.

This renewed interest in Wheatley, it turns out, is typical of her fate since her death in 1784 at the age of 31, and even before her death. At various times over the past 240 years, she has been praised as a literary ge-

nius and proof that racial inferiority was merely a fabricated justification for enslaving millions of human beings, or vilified as a traitor to her race and a sellout to those who enslaved her because she wrote poems in praise of the very whites who participated in or tolerated slavery.

Adding fuel to the latter view, in 1772 Wheatley traveled to Britain with the son of her owner to arrange for publication of her book, *Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral*. She was already well known by then, and was feted by many members of the British nobility and literary community, including prominent members of the growing abolitionist movement. Benjamin Franklin, the most famous American in the world and then living in London, even paid her a visit.

In the wake of a recent case called *Somerset v. Steuart*, the British courts had ruled that a slave brought to Britain could not be forcibly returned to any part of the empire that permitted slavery, and Wheatley's abolitionist supporters urged her to remain a free woman in Britain. But she chose to return to Boston, where her mistress Susanna Wheatley was in poor health and needing care.

Phillis had by then developed a deep personal bond with Susanna, but she may already have known that the Wheatleys were planning to manumit her, which they did soon after her return, and which muddies the argument that she had succumbed to what today we might call Stockholm Syndrome.

She nursed her mistress until Susanna died, and continued to live in the Wheatley house for some time thereafter. But when John Wheatley died, Phillis discovered that the entire Wheatley estate would be inherited by the Wheatleys' two adult children, and Phillis would get nothing. Moreover, without the patronage of Susanna Wheatley, who was well-connected and influential, Phillis was having great difficulty earning a living from her writing.

Being a free Black woman with connections was not easy. Without connections, life was difficult in the extreme. Even for someone as famous as she had become in both Britain and the new United States—she had met Franklin, had had an audience with George Washington, was known to Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Rush, John Hancock, and dozens of other luminaries who had read and even owned her book—she struggled with poverty.

In 1778, only weeks after John Wheatley died, Phillis married a man named John Peters, also a former slave now free, but their life together continued to be a struggle. They gained and lost ownership of both homes and businesses. While she continued to write, her hopes of a second book never materialized. She bore—and lost—at least one child, and maybe as many as three. And at the time of her death, her husband may even have been in debtors' prison.

One can't help but wonder if her brief time as a famous and celebrated poet had little to do with her literary genius—a word so often applied to her—and everything to do with her being a slave. That a slave, a black female slave at that, could acquire the knowledge and skill to write authoritatively about Homer and Terence and Milton and Shakespeare was surely a wonder in the 18th century when millions of whites in America and elsewhere thought Africans were savage, stupid, and sub-human, fit only to labor in the tobacco fields of Virginia and the sugar cane fields of Barbados.

Thus, Wheatley may well have been thought of as an oddity, a curiosity, a fluke of nature to be marveled at, a one-in-a-million miracle. But a free Black woman was something else. A threat. A true equal. Competition. Taking the humanity of Blacks one step too far.

I don't know. I'm only speculating. Maybe it was just bad luck. There was a serious post-Revolutionary



Engraving of Phillis Wheatley, used as the frontispiece of her book, *Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral*.

War economic depression that made life difficult for a lot of people (think Shays's Rebellion). And her poor health had long been an issue, which may have something to do with her difficulties in childbirth and her early death. But it does seem odd that once Wheatley was emancipated, her life seemed to wither like a plant without water.

Whatever the case may be, I am glad that Phillis Wheatley—her first name is the name of the slave ship that brought her from Africa as a seven-year-old, and her last name is the name of the people who bought her—is remembered to this day, and is celebrated and honored in 2023 with both a play and a biography.

And I am sad that thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of human beings with Wheatley's potential never got the chance to demonstrate or make use of it.

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

* The words are Thomas Jefferson's, written on the flyleaf of his copy of Wheatley's poems, now in the Library of Congress.

The Secret History of “Wokeness”

by Jim Hightower

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Humpty Dumpty scornfully declares that, “When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean.”

So what does “woke” mean? It's become the pet political aspersion that today's kooky right-wing hucksters hurl at liberals, but the hurlers would be whopperjawed to learn that it's was actually coined by and for progressives! Indeed, it admonishes people to be awake to the dangers posed by hate-filled bigots and reactionaries like... well, like today's right-wing extremists.

Surprising Historical Tidbit: The first person reported to have used the word was Huddie Ledbetter, the legendary Black blues artist known as Lead Belly. Among his many classic songs was “Scottsboro Boys,” about nine Black teenagers falsely accused in 1931 of raping two Alabama white women. As a Black musician who traveled the backroads of the Jim Crow South, Lead Belly warned others to pay attention when in a viciously racist state: “Best stay woke,” he cautioned.

But—out of blind ignorance, blind arrogance, or both—today's adaptors of the Jim Crow mentality have perverted common-sense wokeness into a verbal whip to lash African-Americans, immigrants, Democrats, women, LGBTQ+ people and all others they don't like (pretty much everyone who looks, thinks, prays and acts different from them). How kooky? They've declared librarians, science, Mickey Mouse, and Bud Light to be their evil enemies. “Don't be woke,” they bark, demanding autocratic, plutocratic, and theocratic laws to coerce compliance with their own retrogressive bigotries.

Bear in mind that this is no longer a fringe cult, but the mainstream of the Republican Party, including its top congressional leaders, presidential wannabes, and state officials. Actually, you can easily comprehend what these Humpty-Dumpties really mean by their “Don't Be Woke” war cry. Just substitute the word “sane” for “woke.”

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they refused. With nowhere else to go, the delegates cast their ballots in favor of Winfield Scott, who secured the nomination for the Whig Party's final appearance in a national election. Thus Scott became the

Whig nominee in 1852, who with William Seward's endorsement was guaranteed to lose all support from the southern Whigs. The party was dead and Franklin Pierce—an unremarkable pro-slavery Democrat—easily won the election in 1852. On January 6th, just two months before taking office, Pierce's

eleven-year-old son, Benjamin, was killed in a train accident. Thus, Fillmore's presidency began and ended in the White House draped in black mourning cloth. Pierce never recovered from this loss and neither did his wife, who would tragically be referred to as a White House ghost. He was a melancholy

president, a sporadically functional alcoholic, who in his one high-profile decision signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, which had the effect of pushing the country closer to civil war.”

—Jared Cohen, *Accidental Presidents: Eight Men Who Changed America* (2019)



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