

The Fortnightly Rant

“Only in America...”

Our headline today comprises a phrase which has long been used to preface anecdotes which cast the nation in a flattering light.

That usage of the phrase, though, may soon become inoperative. In fact, as with the party once known for law and order, the meaning of the phrase “Only in America” seems destined for reversal.

The House of Representatives just elected a new Speaker, Rep. Mike Johnson, of Louisiana. Citizens who have longed for a functioning national legislature may have been tempted to breath a sigh of relief. Those familiar with Hollywood tropes, of course, knew better.

In well-done horror flicks, audience members may yell at the big screen, “the threat is in the house!” Out here in the allegedly real world, the House is now an actual threat.

The first clause of the First Amendment says “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion...” For a couple of hundred years, the nation’s reading comprehension level was sufficient for most people to understand that meant there was a separation between church and state.

Yet according to CBS News, in a podcast last month Johnson referred to “the ‘so-called separation of church and state’ and said ‘the founders wanted to protect the church from an encroaching state, not the other way around.’

“If anybody tries to convince you that your biblical beliefs or your religious viewpoint needs to be separated from public affairs, you should politely remind them to review their history and you should not back down.”

At this newspaper, we believe in religious tolerance. That is to say, given its prevalence in American life, we’ve learned to tolerate those who

hold religious views. This has been becoming easier over time, of course. NPR reported earlier this year, “Just 16 percent of Americans surveyed said religion is the most important thing in their lives... down from 20 percent a decade ago.”

That being said, some religious beliefs seem to cry out for mockery—and Johnson’s are among them. In 2015, before he became a Congressman, Johnson, a lawyer, founded Freedom Guard, which *Wikipedia* describes as “a nonprofit legal ministry designed to represent Christian clients in lawsuits.”

As Freedom Guard’s chief counsel, Johnson sued the State of Kentucky after it “withdrew millions of dollars of tax breaks from the Ark Encounter theme park in Williamstown, Kentucky because Ark Encounter required park employees to affirm that they held Young Earth creationist beliefs.”

Ark Encounter’s main attraction is a 300-cubit ark. The following description of it came from a Yelp review: “Well, let me start this out by saying I consider myself a Christian. But I consider myself a reasonable Christian. This place isn’t reasonable. There were not t-Rex’s on the ark [but] half of the animal cages were filled with dinosaurs. ... There are also statues and art of biblical figures fighting dinosaurs. I don’t remember that in the Bible either.”

Johnson’s nuttiest religious belief has nothing to do with dinosaurs on boats, though. In his first speech after he was elected Speaker, he said, “God is the one who raises up those in authority.”

What, then, are we in for from God’s anointed Speaker? Well, if you’re rich, prepare to be richer. Apparently that’s the way the Bible says it ought to be.

Joe Biden wants to give Israel an

additional \$14 billion in military aid. Because clearly the Palestinians have not been suffering enough.

On Monday, Speaker Johnson and his GOP colleagues said they’re OK with that—provided they can offset that expenditure by cutting \$14 billion from the IRS’s budget. The IRS commissioner estimated that such a cut would cost taxpayers \$90 billion over ten years by reducing the agency’s ability to audit corporations and the wealthy. It is a perennial article of faith among Republicans, of course, that the rich have not been coddled enough.

Lest readers jump to the conclusion that Rep. Johnson is self-dealing here, trying to shield his own private Scrooge McDuck vault from IRS agents, let us reassure them. If his financial disclosures can be believed, he has no bank accounts. A regular St. Francis, he is. At least, so sayeth Wednesday’s news reports.

Not to get all RICO about this, but according to *Politico*’s Heidi

Przybyla, Ginni Thomas, wife of Supreme Court Justice and free RV enthusiast Clarence Thomas, teamed up with future election-denier Cleta Mitchell in 2009 to build “a vast network of advocacy around the Supreme Court using nonprofit tax laws,” to act as a political machine for the Federalist Society’s Leonard Leo. They succeeded in creating a “billion-dollar network of groups, most registered as tax-exempt charities or social welfare organizations.”

“As a result of Mitchell’s successful effort,” Przybyla writes, “IRS audit rates plunged as the division became overwhelmed by hundreds of new nonprofits supposedly doing charitable and educational work but actually doing mostly political work.”

You have to admit, it’s an elegant scheme. Neuter the IRS so your rich friends can better afford to subsidize the lifestyles of Supreme Court justices, and pack the Court with justices who see nothing

wrong with neutering the IRS. Everybody wins—except us schmucks, of course.

Journalists like to assume an imperturbable pose of having seen it all before. The reader can imagine what it’s like for those of us with an institutional memory of the battles at Lexington and Concord. That said, we’re this close to freaking out. We haven’t even gotten to the part where Speaker Johnson wrote the play-book that Congress almost followed to overthrow the 2020 election, and that he’s third in the line of Presidential succession. No time to worry about that, though. Unless this dinosaur-believer gets his cats herded quick, the government’s going broke before the month is over.

Only in America, to be sure.

For some reason that brings to our heathen mind a verse from the Bible:

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”

— Proverbs 16:18



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Worst-Case Scenarios? Not Bad Enough

Extreme Weather Is Outpacing Even The Worst-Case Scenarios Of Our Forecasting Models

by Ravindra Jayaratne

In the wake of the destructive Hurricane Otis, we find ourselves at a pivotal moment in the history of weather forecasting. The hurricane roared ashore with 165 mph winds and torrential rainfall, slamming into the coastal city of Acapulco, Mexico and claiming the lives of at least 48 people.

The speed at which Otis intensified was unprecedented. Within 12 hours it went from a regular tropical storm to a “category 5” hurricane, the most powerful category and one which might occur only a few times worldwide each year.

This rare and alarming event, described by the U.S. National Hurricane Center as a “nightmare scenario,” broke records for the fast-

est intensification rate over a 12-hour period in the eastern Pacific. Otis not only caught residents and authorities off guard but also exposed the limitations of our current predictive tools.

I specialise in the study of natural disasters with the goal of improving our ability to predict them and ultimately to save lives. It is critical that we address the pressing concerns related to the tools we use for forecasting these catastrophic events, all while recognising the significant influence of rapid climate change on our forecasting capabilities.

The predictive tools we rely on

At the core of weather forecasting are computer programs, or “models,” that blend atmospheric variables such as temperature, humidity, wind and pressure, with fundamental physics.

Since the atmospheric process-

es are nonlinear, a small degree of uncertainty in initial atmospheric conditions can lead to a large discrepancy in final forecasts. That’s why the general practice now is to forecast a set of possible scenarios rather than predict the single scenario most likely to occur.

But while these models are instrumental in issuing early warnings and evacuation orders, they have fundamental limitations and carry a significant degree of uncertainty, especially when dealing with rare or extreme weather. This uncertainty arises from various factors including the fundamentally chaotic nature of the system.

First, the historical data is incomplete, since a hurricane such as Otis might occur only once in several millennia. We don’t know when an east Pacific storm last turned into a category 5 hurricane overnight—if

ever—but it was certainly before modern satellites and weather buoys. Our models struggle to account for these “one in 1,000-year events” because we simply haven’t observed them before.

The complex physics governing the weather also has to be simplified in these predictive models. While this approach is effective for common scenarios, it falls short when dealing with the intricacies of extreme events that involve rare combinations of variables and factors.

And then there are the unknown unknowns: factors our models cannot account for because we are unaware of them, or they have not been integrated into our predictive frameworks. Unanticipated interactions among various climatic drivers can lead to unprecedented intensification, as was the case with Hurricane Otis.

The role of climate change

To all this we can add the problem of climate change and its impact on extreme weather. Hurricanes, in particular, are influenced by rising sea surface temperatures, which provides more energy for storms to form and intensify.

The connection between climate change and the intensification of hurricanes, coupled with other factors such as high precipitation or high tides, is becoming clearer.

With established weather patterns being altered, it is becoming even more challenging to predict the behaviour of storms and their intensification. Historical data may no longer serve as a reliable guide.

The way forward

The challenges are formidable but

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from page one

not insurmountable. There are a few steps we can take to enhance our forecasting and better prepare for the uncertainties that lie ahead.

The first would be to develop more advanced predictive models that integrate a broader range of factors and variables, as well as consider worst-case scenarios. Artificial intelligence and machine learning tools can help us process vast and complex datasets more efficiently.

But to get this additional data we'll have to invest in more weather monitoring stations, satellite technology, AI tools and atmospheric and oceanographic research.

Since even world experts and their models can be caught out by sudden weather extremes, we also need to educate the public about the limitations and uncertainties in weather forecasting.

We must encourage preparedness and a proactive response to warnings, even when predictions seem uncertain. And of course we still have to mitigate climate change itself: the root cause of intensifying weather events.

Hurricane Otis provided a stark and immediate reminder of the inadequacies of our current predictive tools in the face of rapid climate change and increasingly extreme weather events. The urgency to adapt and innovate in the realm of weather forecasting has never been greater.

It is incumbent upon us to rise to the occasion and usher in a new era of prediction that can keep pace with the ever-shifting dynamics of our planet's climate. Our future depends on it.

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Dr. Ravindra Jayaratne is a Reader in Coastal Engineering at the University of East London. This



The Flag Code is not ambiguous. Section 7 (i) states quite clearly, "When displayed either horizontally or vertically against a wall, the union should be uppermost and to the flag's own right, that is, to the observer's left. When displayed in a window, the flag should be displayed in the same way, with the union or blue field to the left of the observer in the street." The Flag Police, fittingly, are never uncertain. Frequently, though, they are perplexed. Certainly that was the case for the indefatigable Officer Krupke when, while making his rounds, he discovered the Flag Code violation depicted above. That mild discomfort is all too familiar for those who uphold the Flag Police motto: "Eternal vigilance is the price of upholding the fetishization of material objects which symbolize the values of a purported republic in the absence of any perceptible functionality."

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The Factor That Won't Fit in the Model
 Without wishing to suggest that we know better than Dr. Jayaratne—who has been studying tsunamis, storm surges, extreme waves and glacier lake outburst floods for 20 years—we do believe there is one important factor that his model does not seem to incorporate. As long as our national and global political systems are controlled by the corporations profiting from fossil fuels, his work will be for naught.

—==—
Fighting Billionaires' Control of the Media: Individual News Vouchers
 by Dean Baker

Mark Twain famously quipped that everyone always talks about the weather, but no one ever does anything about it. (This was before global warming.) In the same vein, it is common for people to rant about billionaires, like Rupert Murdoch and Elon Musk, controlling major media outlets and using them to advance their political whims. But, no one seems to do anything about it.

There is a reason for inaction. For the foreseeable future, it is hard to envision a political scenario in which

the ability of the rich and very rich to own and control major news outlets will be restricted. That means that if the goal is to prevent Elon Musk from owning *Twitter* (or "X," as he now calls it), then we will likely be able to do little more than rant. (That is not entirely true.)

However, we can go the other way. We may not be able to stop the rich from owning major media outlets, but we can give a voice to everyone else. This can be done through a system of individual vouchers, where the government gives each person a sum, say \$50, to support the news outlet of their choice.

One \$50 voucher will not go far but thousands and millions of vouchers can support a lot of people doing journalism. The billionaires and the news outlets they control may still have more money, but there will be outlets they don't control that will have the resources they need to do serious reporting that has a major impact.

If anyone doubts this point, just look at the work done by *ProPublica* or the *Intercept* in recent years. These two non-profit news outlets have broken story after story that were largely ignored by the major newspapers and television chains. (There are also many other great non-profit

news organizations.)
ProPublica's reporting is the reason that we know about Justice Clarence Thomas' right-wing billionaire friends who buy him lavish vacations. But this important story is just the tip of the iceberg for the in-depth reporting they have done for more than a decade. The *Intercept* has also broken a wide range of stories that were neglected by corporate-owned news outlets, notably on political corruption and dubious foreign policy ventures.

The high-budget news outlets may spend tens or hundreds of millions pushing fluff stories and acting as public relations vehicles for their favored politicians, but serious news outlets can do important reporting on a fraction of their budgets. They don't need to pay buffoonish news anchors millions of dollars a year. This is why a voucher system makes so much sense.

An individual voucher system also gets around the problem of having the government decide what news should be reported. It will be up to individuals to decide which outlets get their support.

The government would only set broad parameters, comparable to what it does now with the I.R.S. determining which organizations

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It would be the same with the news voucher system. The agency administering the system would just determine whether the organization is in fact engaged in collecting and distributing news. It would be up to individuals to determine which organization gets their support.

At this point, there is little prospect of getting this sort of voucher system through at the national level, however, it can be done at the state or local level. Just last week, Washington, D.C. city council members Janeese Lewis George and Brianne Nadeau introduced a bill that would set aside \$11 million (0.1 percent of the city budget) for individual vouchers to support local news reporting.

The way the program is structured is that the value of the voucher, or

coupon, that each individual gets would depend on how many people use it. If only a thousand people used the vouchers, each person would have \$11,000 to give to the news outlet of their choice. If 100,000 of DC's residents (its population is just under 700,000) used the vouchers, each one would have \$110 to support the local news they value.

A condition of getting the money would be that all the material produced would be posted on the web and available at no cost. The idea is that the public pays for news once, we don't give people a subsidy through the voucher and then allow them to collect a second time by charging to get around a paywall.

A voucher program to support local news in D.C. may seem a long way from challenging the Murdochs and the Disneys for control of the media, but it is an important first step. And, what can be done in D.C. can be done in other cities. Mark Histed, with the group Democracy Policy Network, has been working with groups in other cities who have similar plans.

The point is that this has to start somewhere, and if this sort of voucher system can work in one city, it can work in others. And, if it is successful



SOPRANO POWELL AND BASSO CHESEBRO DEBUT AT THE MET



What could be better than spending a pleasant afternoon with a few friends, down by the river overlooking the tugboats? This past Saturday, for example, October 28th. Wait...what month was this...? Three days later, during the Halloween Parade, the temperature was a brisk 40°.

and the public values it, then we can envision a similar program could be introduced nationally at some point.

If this still sounds small bore, it is worth paying a bit of attention to what the right has managed to do over the years. The privatization of Medicare began under Reagan in the 1980s, as private insurers were allowed to get a slice of Medicare dollars. The privatization was expanded gradually over the years so that the current incarnation, Medicare Advantage, now covers 44 percent of all beneficiaries. More than half of new enrollees sign up for Medicare Advantage.

If we need another example of the success of the right in starting small and building up, we can just look at the current Congress. We have states like Wisconsin, that are relatively evenly balanced in votes in national elections. (Obama won

twice, Trump won in 2016, and Biden won in 2020. It has one senator from each party.) Nonetheless, its congressional delegation has six Republicans and two Democrats.

This wasn't the result of a magic trick. The Republicans worked to get people elected to the state's legislature over the years. These legislators then gerrymandered districts (both their own and the congressional districts) to ensure that Republicans would have a share of seats that vastly exceeded their share of the votes. This resulted from years and decades of getting people to run for relatively boring positions in the state house or state senate. It has now paid big dividends for them in national politics.

It would be great if we could do something tomorrow that would drastically reduce the income and power imbalances that have exploded

in the last half century. But the list of items that would do this and have a remote chance of getting anywhere politically is pretty close to zero.

Our choice is whether to do things that have an incremental impact and can grow through time, or empty ranting into the wind. The D.C. local news voucher program fits in the first category. People who really want to do something to reduce the power of billionaires should get behind it.

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Dean Baker is Senior Economist at the Center for Economic and Policy Research. Its website, cepr.net, where this article appears, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

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Murph's Fortnightly Quote
"That is a green light for Israel to carry out a much larger massacre than the one they were revenging."
 -Jonathan Ofir, Israeli-born musician residing in Denmark

"Democracy is not the multiplication of ignorant opinions."
 - Beatrice Webb
john@wordpraxis.com

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Let's Meddle With Some Primal Forces
To the Editor:

In a previous letter, I noted that ideological posturing both on the left and right are preventing collaborative action on serious issues. An example is the culture war over public education. The far right has mounted an organized attack on public education, criticizing educational content ostensibly based on critical race theory and gender identity. This strategy is facilitated by a campaign to ban books related to these topics. The focus on critical race theory is particularly disingenuous. CRT emerged from research in law schools and graduate programs to explain the lack of racial progress following the civil rights legislation of the Johnson administration. It is unlikely that most of the far-right scolds of public education have ever read any of the arcane CRT-based research. Rather, the CRT critics object to any effort to teach the malicious effects of slavery if it contradicts conservative ideology even if the teaching is based on historical fact. Likewise, courses designed to explore gender issues are uniformly opposed on ideological bases rather than their factual content. The bottom line is that the far right is more concerned with promoting a conservative ideology rather than the truth.

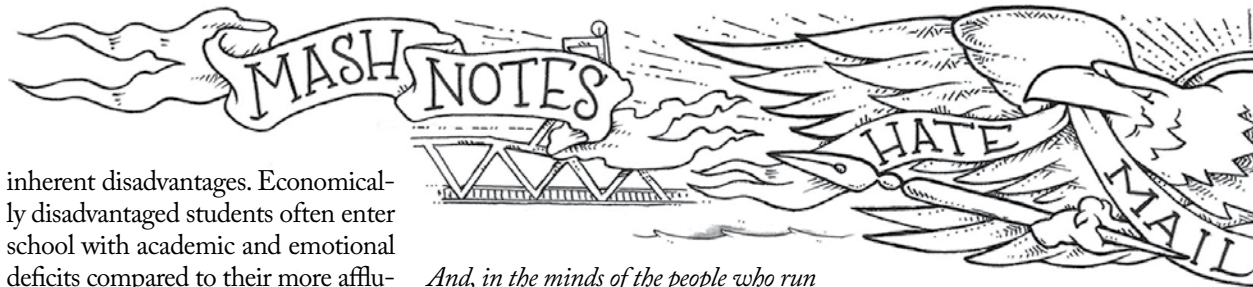
Progressives are not innocent of injecting ideology into educational content. Some diversity, equity and inclusion projects based on the ideas of DiAngelo and Kendi reduce entire races to simple characterizations and make unsupported generalizations regarding the behavior of individual group members. Their ideas are ideology not social science. DEI issues are important but should be taught as objectively as possible. They should not be designed using the Progressive ideology *du jour*. This is not false equivalence. It is simply to note that extremes on the left and right are operating from flawed ideological presuppositions that obstruct truthful inquiry and promote conflict.

Ideological debate carried out by the ignorant on the right and zealots on the left obscure understanding and collaborative action on pressing

public education issues. The fact is that public education in the U.S. is in trouble. For several years prior to the pandemic, test scores of American students in reading and math were in decline compared to other countries. The decline has primarily occurred among Black, Hispanic, Native American and low-income White students. School closures during the pandemic have exacerbated the decline. Some estimates are that students have lost from one to two years of educational progress due to pandemic closures. Public school teacher morale is at an all-time low. They are criticized by the left and right regarding the cultural issues discussed above and are often held falsely accountable for poor student performance. They endure this criticism while being significantly underpaid in comparison to their educated peers. The result is that many skilled educators are leaving the profession and fewer college students are opting to major in Education.

The consequence of educational decline is obvious. Declining test scores indicate that students will be less capable of competing in the high-tech industries that now comprise the global economy. As experienced teachers become rarer, there are fewer skilled professionals to stem the decline and train students in the critical thinking skills necessary not only for economic success but for making effective life decisions.

The situation calls for a major effort to renovate public education, especially for low-income students. Students who graduate from affluent suburban schools generally do well on performance tests and go on to prestigious colleges and achieve advanced degrees. This includes middle class black students who perform at the level of their peers when the educational context is conducive. The fact that poorer educational performance is overwhelmingly concentrated among lower income students whether Black, Hispanic, Native American or White indicates that the issue is better understood as a class rather than racial problem. Solutions need to be devised on this basis to help low-income students overcome



inherent disadvantages. Economically disadvantaged students often enter school with academic and emotional deficits compared to their more affluent peers. Pre-school programs need to be made comprehensively available to help counter both behavioral and academic deficiencies. High quality programs and teachers need to be available in schools primarily comprised of low-income students. And an effort must be made to change the culture of low-income families that may undervalue educational excellence. This is not blaming the victim. It is recognizing that family culture matters and must be considered in a comprehensive effort to improve educational outcomes among lower income students. There is only so much that dedicated teachers within well-resourced schools can do to educate students that have not been taught to value education. But before any effort can be made to solve these problems, we need to focus on realistic, fact-based analyses rather than engage in feckless ideological conflict.

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

Robert:

"The situation calls for a major effort to renovate public education," you write, "especially for low-income students." We agree completely.

That effort will never be made, though, under current conditions, and no arcane research is required to explain why: the same societal forces that have slowed racial progress will decline to cooperate. Wouldn't be prudent. Wouldn't you really rather have a voucher?

DiAngelo and Kendi are bit players in this game, mere distractions only. The real player here is Arthur Jensen in "Network," as played by Ned Beatty: "You want to provide the same educational opportunities for everyone, Black or white, rich or poor? You're proposing to meddle with the primal forces of nature!"

Ordinary people have to struggle like hell just to keep their heads above water.

And, in the minds of the people who run this country, that's exactly as it should be. Keeps wages down, and profits up.

As another famous fictional personage once said, "It's not personal. It's just business."

This is not to say we, the people, should not demand a complete renovation of public education—minus the vouchers. We should. That, and more. Lots more. Oprah voice: "You get medicare, and you get medicare, and you get medicare," ad infinitum.

The Editor

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"Wars are never won. Victory is a myth..."
Dear Editor,

Here are some quotations taken from recent news reporting on the Gaza situation.

"Biden is green lighting a far-right leader's policy in Israel that holds all Palestinians responsible for Hamas."

Biden's acceptance of this despotic narrative contradicts everything his party stands for. It would be like America punishing all Mexicans for cartel activity in American cities. Trump and a few other Republican candidates have already said they will implement this same kind of military campaign south of our own border.

"Hundreds in the American Congress have literally said nothing about the loss of Palestinian lives while loudly bemoaning the loss of Israelite lives." "Congress held a vigil bemoaning Israeli deaths only, not Palestinian deaths."

This kind of silence indicates a discriminatory worldview related to religion, ethnicity, national origin, human rights, and wealth that a democratic society is not supposed to have. Palestinian lives do not matter in America the same way poor Black lives do not matter.

And finally, an impressive word of wisdom from a neighboring Arab na-

tion: "Wars are never won. Victory is a myth invented by political leaders to justify the loss of many lives." (Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan).

Kimball Shinkoskey
Woods Cross, Utah
Kimball:

We generally share Thomas Paine's stance on monarchy, but thanks to you, we'll cut Queen Rania Al Abdullah some slack.

The Editor

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It's Time For an "Unfit to Serve" Tour
Dear Editor:

It isn't often that I feel vindicated but today my hat is off to Max Boot at *The Washington Post* for declaring that "Trump's generals have one last duty to perform, they must tell American voters what they saw first hand: their former boss is unfit to serve as commander-in-chief."

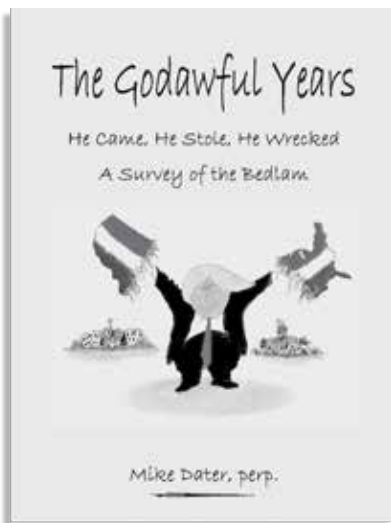
Boot was referring to retired Marine Gen. John Kelly, Trump's longest serving chief of staff, former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, and former national security advisor H.R. McMaster. I would add a fourth, recently retired Gen. Mark Milley, former Chair of the Joint Chiefs.

Max Boot believes the generals have an obligation to tell voters about "the unique threat Trump poses to American democracy" and that they should launch an "Unfit to Serve" tour, "revealing the horrors they witnessed." I couldn't agree more.

I'm retired Navy myself so I fully understand and appreciate the reluctance of military affiliated personnel to involve themselves in politics. However, these are unprecedented times. We have a twice impeached former president presently awaiting four criminal trials totally 91 charges across four states plus an assortment of civil trials pending. Donald Trump poses a

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Of course, you never know these days what kind of imaginative argument might come swooping down out of the belfry.

The Editor

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Media Pile-On Misses the Point

To the Editor:

I'm sick of the media obsession with President Biden's age and not his remarkable accomplishments. With only a 50-50 "majority" in the Senate and a narrow House majority, the President achieved more in less than a single term than presidents have normally managed in two full terms. A letter isn't long enough to summarize Biden's many achievements.

The long overdue Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides the largest investment in transportation infrastructure since the building of the Interstates in the 1950s. It also expands access to broadband internet and to clean drinking water.

The Inflation Reduction Act allows Medicare for the first time to negotiate the price of prescription drugs. It caps the monthly cost of insulin for seniors at \$35, to end Big Pharma's profiteering on the backs of seniors. It also invests in combating climate change through supporting solar and wind energy, electric vehicles, etc. The Department of Energy estimates it will both drive clean energy generation and reduce greenhouse gas emissions significantly.

The CHIPS & Science Act invests in scientific research and increased domestic manufacturing of microchips, so we don't have to depend on China. We all remember what happened during the pandemic when car manufacturers couldn't import enough chips.

Biden's age and decades of experience in Congress and as Vice President are an advantage. Age and experience give him foreign and domestic policy expertise, and the tools to get stuff done for Americans—as he's demon-

strated repeatedly. I'm looking forward to a second Biden term.

Susan Mayer

Lee N.H.

Susan:

Marlin Perkins's voice: "Ever fearful of being singled out for criticism by a big-name columnist or—worse—yet—becoming the subject of an attack campaign by a phalanx of right-wing propaganda mills, career-minded journalists at corporate media companies quickly develop an ability to blend in with the herd."

Negotiating drug prices, capping the cost of insulin, supporting common-sense energy policies, promoting domestic manufacture of critically-important components... these are all, without question, important achievements.

What is maddening is that any of these things needed doing in the first place.

The Editor

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Let's Really Railroad the Former Guy

Dear Editor,

Recent reports state that trump [sic] and his lawyers are asking to delay his four separate criminal trials until after the election, so as not to "cripple his chances of being elected."

That justification is false, and it is dangerous to our democracy. In fact, the opposite is true. Voters need to know whether a presumed candidate for President of the United State is guilty of any of the 91 serious criminal charges against him *before* the election.

Court trials, conforming to our system of justice, are the best and only way we can know whether an accused person is guilty or not guilty. An innocent candidate for office could be presumed to want the trials' results before the election. A criminal candidate can be presumed to want to delay his trials until after we have voted.

Delaying trials cripples our chances of knowing if the candidate is a crook.

Bruce Joffe

Piedmont, Calif.

Bruce:

Yet another reason why this country needs high-speed rail. Can't you just see *The Former Guy* in a private rail car—gold-plated, of course—shuttling back and forth between Atlanta, Washington,

D.C., and New York City? We could fund it with a confiscatory wealth tax on billionaires.

The Editor

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We Need a Better City Council

To the Editor:

While I consider myself a progressive Democrat, local elections are usually not about partisan issues. Party affiliation can be a help to voters, but more important is the quality of the candidate and their willingness to ask hard questions and make hard decisions.

In recent elections, a political action group, Progress Portsmouth, endorsed candidates that were favorable to a developer that has sued our city for millions of dollars. It is important that voters ask for candidate's definition of progressive. I certainly hope that former mayor Steve Marchand stays out of this election, considering his 2021 campaign violations, and because he does not live here anymore.

The current council has been weak and ineffective regarding the entire McIntyre project resulting in significant costs to taxpayers. At the same time, they often remained silent instead of asking important questions during council deliberations, leaving the public in the dark.

I am planning to vote for candidates who put residents first not businesses and developers. Our zoning laws are there for good reasons, and variances should not be awarded just because a developer wants to increase their profit. That is not a real hardship.

The candidates that I plan to endorse should have these top three issues: maintaining our good city services, keeping our tax rate increases reasonable (thereby affordable), and support restrictions on new development. They also need to involve our neighborhoods more in decision-making.

That is why I am planning to vote for some of the former Becksted 5 including Rick Becksted. I am also considering current city councilors who

Mash Notes, Hate Mail, &c.

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severe risk to national security and he is clearly unfit, unqualified, and an undeniable threat to our democratic form of government, our way of life.

Donald Trump has shown only disdain for our Armed Forces for as long as we've known him, particularly for those killed, wounded or captured, referring to them publicly as "losers" and "suckers." Gen. Kelly described Trump as having "nothing but contempt for our democratic institutions." Is this the kind of president we want in the White House? I think not.

I agree with Max Boot, unequivocally, the generals must speak up and tell Americans the truth about former President Trump. Our past presidents must speak up as well. Present and former members of the United States Congress must speak up. And, most importantly, veterans and veterans organizations, all veterans who are serving and who have served this nation in uniform, must speak up; we must not allow this misfit to denigrate and malign and slander our soldiers, sailors and airmen who daily put their lives and limbs on the line to keep our country free. None of us has the privilege of remaining silent any longer.

David L. Snell

Franklin, N.C.

David:

We hold brass hats in about the same regard that we do so-called monarchs [see reply above]. As for Max Boot, we've never thought he had enough sense to pour... never mind.

Having thus established our chronic closed-mindedness, we agree wholeheartedly with your letter. We will joyfully join all generals, right-wing writers, reformed politicians, and repentant preachers in a grand kumbaya moment to just say "No" to the Mango Man from Mar-a-Lago.

The Editor

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

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.

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Supporting Subscriber

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can stand up to aggressive developers and who do not delegate city policy to the city manager, but set those policies. Finally, I am also considering some of the new candidates to give the council some fresh ideas.

Regardless of your political view, please do not rely on social media alone to decide on a candidate, and be suspicious of mailer sources you do not recognize. Attend candidate forums either in person or by Zoom, and check out the questions and answers provided by the candidates to media outlets, e.g. Seacoastonline, &c.

Peter Somssich / former Portsmouth Democratic Chair
Portsmouth, N.H.

Public Education Reflects Our Future Community



Dear Editor,

I am Leigh Hudson, I am running for Portsmouth School Board because public education reflects our future community and what we invest in it is what we can expect in return. Students are our future leaders, business developers and the success of our community.

The school department believes that too. It's evident in the evolving "Portrait of a Graduate" vision. A graduate that can succeed through adaptability in a collaborative diverse environment and do so with empathy. It's evident in our school's mission statement, "The purpose of the Portsmouth schools is to educate all students by challenging them to become thinking, responsible, contributing citizens who continue to

learn throughout their lives."

We fog that vision and tarnish the mission when 43 percent of the special needs instruction budget is used for out-of-district placements. The associated tuition and transportation expenditures are a multiple of the in-district per student cost. While families are involved in these placement decisions, it brings into question how well intentioned we are in serving our students.

My son is one of the 16 percent student demographic with disabilities. He has MECP2 duplication syndrome, a rare neurogenetic disorder with developmental delays, motor skills challenges, speech issues, autism, and more. My son's first

year Portsmouth School District experience was a mix of wonderful faculty executing education or therapies but thwarted by accessibility issues that made our family question the "educate all students" mission.

I seek to lead school improvement efforts that ensure all students achieve their highest abilities, including those with significant disabilities, by leveraging best practices of inclusionary schools. Choosing not to only perpetuates exclusion in the community, and acceptance of that in key including employment, skills training, and health services. We fail our future community.

When we are not purposefully inclusionary, we are unintentionally exclusionary.

Leigh Hudson (he/him)
Portsmouth, N.H.
e: leigh4portsmouth@proton.me

Has A Taste for Ewing-Skewering

To the Editor:

I look forward to your cutting down Don Ewing's letters with your sharp wit so I was saddened to read that you're not going to publish any of his letters... Hopefully others will feel as I do and you'll reconsider.

M.D.
Bow, N.H.
M.

As it turns out, you are not our only reader who had an ear for our dulcet duets with Don Ewing. Before we could reconsider our decision to stop publishing his screeds, a certain sine qua non would be required: he would have to resume his practice of sending those screeds to us.

The Editor

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Biden DOJ 'Bending Over Backwards' to Protect Corporate Criminals: Report

by Jake Johnson

An analysis released Monday shows that the Biden Justice Department prosecuted just 99 corporate offenders last year, despite pledging to crack down on white-collar crime following years of lax enforcement during former President Donald Trump's White House term.

Corporate prosecutions have declined sharply since 2000, a trend that President Joe Biden has failed to reverse, the consumer advocacy group Public Citizen observed in a new report.

During Biden's first year in office, corporate prosecutions fell to 90, just below the 94 that the Trump administration recorded in 2020 and far below the 304 prosecutions in 2000.

"The Biden Justice Department's light-touch approach to enforcement encourages corporate scofflaws to push the limits of what's legally allowed to maximize their profits—risking our health and safety,

our environment, our finances, and our communities," Rick Claypool, a research director for Public Citizen and author of the new report, said in a statement.

"The Justice Department is still bending over backwards to protect corporate offenders from the consequences of their lawbreaking, and it's creating ideal conditions for the next corporate catastrophe," Claypool warned. "The worst corporate-caused crises of the 21st Century—the 2008 financial crisis and the opioid epidemic—are stories about enforcement agencies failing to fight systemic criminal misconduct before it was too late."

The Biden administration's rhetoric on corporate crime and the policies it has implemented in a purported attempt to deter wrongdoing and hold bad actors to account have not translated into much, if any, measurable progress.

Public Citizen found that corporate leniency agreements—deals that companies reach with the Justice Department to avoid or defer prosecution—fell to just 11 last year, the lowest level since 2004.

"But whether the shift can be seen as a sign of strengthened corporate

enforcement is a separate question," the group said. "If the DOJ's interest in prosecuting corporate crime was truly waxing, one would expect to see increasing prosecutions accompany the decreasing leniency agreements."

"Instead," Public Citizen added, "the near-record low number of corporate prosecutions combined with plunging corporate leniency agreements means the federal government concluded 110 criminal cases against corporations in fiscal year 2022—fewer than any previous year since 1994, when it concluded 106."

The new report points to several examples of companies that escaped prosecution through leniency agreements last year and in 2021, including Credit Suisse, Uber, and Stericycle.

"A society that punishes the crimes of the poor while permitting the crimes of the powerful is not a just society," Public Citizen's report says. "The principle that no one should be above the law includes corporations."

The report was published weeks after the Biden Justice Department faced backlash for announcing that it would not pursue charges against companies that voluntarily disclose wrongdoing committed by businesses they are acquiring.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) wrote in a letter to Attorney General

Merrick Garland and Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco earlier this month that the policy "would incentivize corporations to engage in illegal activity of all kinds—knowing that they could simply wipe the slate clean during a merger."

Jake Johnson is a senior editor and staff writer for Common Dreams. This work is licensed under Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0).

Big Banks Funneled \$1.8 Trillion to Carbon Bombs Since 2016

by Olivia Rosane

Major banks funneled more than \$150 billion in 2022 toward "carbon bomb" fossil fuel projects that would blow through the world's chances of limiting global heating to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

The data, published by *The Guardian* Tuesday, shows that major banks in the U.S., Europe, and China funded the companies behind these projects with a total of \$1.8 trillion between 2016 and 2022, with U.S. banks contributing more than half a trillion of that total.

"Criminal," Nuclear Consulting Group chair Paul Dorfman tweeted in response to the news.

"We need to rapidly decline our production of fossil fuels and support for fossil fuels, whether that's regulatory or financial."

The "carbon bombs" are 425 fossil

fuel extraction projects identified by *The Guardian* and other nonprofit and media organizations and compiled in an online database in 2022. Each bomb has the potential to release more than a gigaton of carbon dioxide over its lifetime. At first, it was calculated that igniting all 425 bombs would release emissions more than double the remaining carbon budget that scientists say humans can spend and still have a 50 percent chance of limiting warming to 1.5°C. However, research published Monday calculated that the remaining carbon budget is actually around 250 gigatons of carbon dioxide, not the 500 previously believed. The carbon bombs would release a combined total of more than 1,000 gigatons, or four times the revised number.

"The budget is so small, and the urgency of meaningful action for limiting warming is so high, [that] the message from [the carbon budget] is dire," study co-author Joeri Rogelj of Imperial College London told *The Guardian* Monday.

JPMorgan Chase led the pack with more than \$141 billion invested between 2016 and 2022, followed by Citi with \$119 billion, Bank of America with \$92 billion, the Chinese ICBC with \$92.2 billion, and

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A Gordian Knot

by W.D. Ehrhart

I was among a small unit of U.S. Marines who entered Hue City, Vietnam, on January 31st, 1968, at the beginning of what turned out to be the Tet Offensive. The city had been secretly occupied by Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army forces (VC/NVA), and it took us nearly a month to drive them out. By the time we were done, the city was largely in ruins.

A year and a half later, and immediately after public revelation of the massacre of hundreds of unarmed Vietnamese civilians by units of the U.S. Americal Division at a place known as My Lai, the Nixon Administration accused the VC/NVA of murdering anywhere from 3,000 to 5,000 innocent civilians during their occupation of Hue City.

This accusation has since been absorbed wholesale by American popular culture and even many historians as fact, although there is no documentary or photographic evidence supporting the claim. There was supposedly a written list of those to be murdered that turned up briefly in 1969, but has since disappeared.

I personally believe that this is all “urban mythology” designed to demonstrate that, yes, well, maybe we Americans got carried away now and then, but look how bad the other guys were; there’s no comparison.

During a visit to Hue City in 1990, I spent time with a former VC medic who had been in the battle, and I asked him about the so-called “Hue Massacre.” He told me that several hundred Vietnamese had been executed. The VC/NVA had rounded up collaborators who had been working for the Saigon government and the U.S. military and were taking them to the mountains west of the city, but U.S. forces had cut off the escape routes faster than the VC/NVA had anticipated.

The choices were therefore: try

to herd several hundred captives through American lines, turn them all loose, or kill them. I vividly remember him saying to me, in English, “Look what the French did to their traitors who collaborated with the Nazis. What did you expect us to do?”

But how then does one account for the mass graves that were subsequently unearthed around the city? Let me tell you something, folks. This was a big city. We were fighting house to house, floor to floor, room to room. We didn’t have the luxury of ringing the doorbell, waiting until someone answered, and then asking who was home.

You kicked in the door, flipped in a grenade, stepped in and emptied half a magazine on full automatic, and then looked around to see who was there. A lot of civilians were killed in the process, not because we targeted them, but only because they got caught in the middle of one of the most ferocious battles of that ugly war.

And when the fighting was over, all those dead civilians had to be disposed of. You don’t just leave them lying around, and in many cases there was neither time nor opportunity for families to reclaim their dead. Many of the dead had been dead for days and weeks, and were already decomposing, presenting a terrible health risk.

But regardless of how they died or who killed them, however, they were still innocent and still dead. This is what happens in urban warfare waged in built-up and heavily populated areas. And Gaza is one of the most densely populated places in the entire world.

There seems to be incontrovertible evidence that Hamas actively targeted civilians in a murderous rampage on the first day of their assault. Even if that were not the case, I would have no fondness or sympathy for Hamas, an organization that makes no secret of its desire to

remove the state of Israel from the face of the earth.

But—always that “but”—Yitzhak Rabin, who signed the Oslo Accords and was working toward a peaceful solution to the Israel/Palestine dilemma, was not murdered by a Palestinian, but by an ultranationalist Israeli. Netanyahu came to power soon after Rabin’s assassination, and during his long off-and-on tenure, he has made it perfectly clear that he harbors pretty much the same wish for Palestine as Hamas has for Israel.

At least some members of the Netanyahu government are just as bloodthirsty and uncompromising as Hamas, and with no apparent reluctance, Netanyahu feeds those extremists the red meat they demand, undermining the Palestinian Authority, constantly opening new Israeli settlements in the West Bank, building walls to separate Palestinian farmers from their livelihoods, and generally making life miserable for ordinary Palestinians with checkpoints, searches, restrictions of movement, and a thousand and one disruptions to daily life.

Meanwhile, let’s assume that Hamas did indeed deliberately and brutally target innocent civilians on the opening day of their attack. There is, as I have said in writing previously, absolutely no justification for that. None. Zero. Zilch. Not even a history of similar behavior by terrorist groups such as the Irgun and the Stern Gang. Murder is murder, and innocent civilians are just that.

But—again that “but”—a dead Palestinian child in the rubble of a building destroyed by a 500-pound bomb dropped from an Israeli F-16 is still just as dead as an Israeli child shot by a Hamas gunman. That the pilot may not have been targeting that Palestinian child is not likely to be of much comfort to the child’s parents. Urban warfare will inevitably produce dead civilians.

In his poem “Olympic Hopscotch Leap,” the Palestinian poet Mosab

Abu Toha describes an errant Israeli drone missile that vaporizes his infant niece: “We look around and find only / her milk bottle.” And this taking place not in the midst of a Hamas offensive, but on a “hot night of Ramadan” while the family drinks tea. Day after day, month after month, year after year. To argue, “well, yeh, but the other guys are worse,” just doesn’t cut it.

So what is the path forward? How do Israelis and Palestinians extricate themselves from this Gordian Knot. As I wrote in an earlier essay, “Is Peace Possible?” I’m not optimistic. But my Jewish friend Wayne Karlin, a Marine veteran of the Vietnam War who has lived in Israel, is more hopeful than I am.

Wayne recently sent me a position statement from a group called Combatants for Peace, which he describes as veterans of the Israeli Defense Forces, former members of the Palestinian resistance, ex-prisoners, and members of families who have lost people on either side. The statement ends: “This is not a time for revenge or collective punishment of the innocent. The only solution is ending the occupation. We call for non-violence, a renewed sense of humanity, and better days ahead for all of our children.”

President Biden has declared repeatedly in recent weeks, “We stand with Israel.” What the heck does that mean? Maybe we ought to be standing with organizations like Combatants for Peace, Peace Now, Standing Together, The Parents Circle, and other groups of Israelis and Palestinians dedicated to finding a peaceful and permanent solution to endless oppression, violence, and hatred that has been life in this part of the world for well over a century.

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

“In a capitalist system, profitability is the most important current,” Fichtner told *The Guardian*. “You can try to swim against the current, it’s possible, but it’s very, very difficult.”

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Olivia Rosane is a staff writer for Common Dreams. This work is licensed under Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0).

Instead of Utility Greed – How About Some Energy Sanity?

by Jim Hightower

Which is the “greenest” state in America?

You might think California, or maybe Oregon. But go 3,000 miles east, and you’ll come upon the physical beauty and ecological vitality of the Green Mountain State: Vermont. Indeed, its very name is derived from the French term for green mountains: Verts Monts.

And now, Vermont’s green ethic is being advanced in a very innovative way by perhaps the least likely source: The state’s biggest electric utility! These outfits are usually rank profiteers, with their only green concern being the extraction of more dollar bills from consumers.

But, says Mari McClure, CEO of Green Mountain Power, “call us the un-utility.” She is flipping the industry model—instead of having thousands of customers hooked on a system of massive, centralized, increasingly-expensive and unreliable power plants—GMP is decentralizing. Not just symbolically, but by literally putting its power source in customers’ homes, businesses, schools, &c.

Specifically, Green Mountain will install television-size storage batteries statewide in homes and buildings, each one soaking up wind and solar energy when the weather is right, releasing stored power when needed. This turns out to be far cheaper than building central power plants, having to constantly replace miles of electric lines downed by storms, and paying for widespread power outages.

Plus, it delivers priceless customer goodwill by doing away with infuriating outages that shut down people’s lights, refrigerators, medical equipment, etc. “We don’t want the power to be off for our customers ever,” says McClure.

Indeed, power outages cost U.S. utilities about \$150 billion a year... while costing customers even more. That’s a failed system! Green Mountain Power is showing that decentralization is a path away from business-as-usual greed—literally generating energy sanity.

The question to ask is: What’s your utility doing?

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BNP Paribas with \$71.9 billion. Last year alone, the banks directly or indirectly funded the projects with around \$161 billion. This comes despite greenwashing rhetoric from financial institutions pledging to act on climate.

For example, JPMorgan has

promised to set goals to reduce the emission intensity of its portfolios for key sectors, including oil and gas, electricity, and auto making. ...

In a worse-case scenario, nothing will be done to limit emissions, these carbon bombs will be exploited and burned, and weather will turn ever more extreme. However, if world leaders do succeed in rapidly phasing out fossil fuels, these projects

could become stranded assets for the companies and banks that invested in them, and if this happens all at once, it could trigger a financial crash, University of Witten-Herdecke sustainable finance research fellow Jan Fichtner told *The Guardian*.

To avoid this, the world must work to make fossil fuels less profitable, Fichtner said.

