

The Fortnightly Rant

Which Side Are They On?

This will sound crazy but the day may come when we're grateful that Ginni Thomas was once the spouse of a Supreme Court Justice.

That feeling of gratitude would be contingent, of course, on certain further developments.

First, there would have to be an appropriate public response to the bizarre recent revelations about the Thomases. At a bare minimum these would include Congressional hearings, with all their officious folderol, preferably expedited, and culminating in the resignation of Justice Clarence Thomas. Ideally, this action would be followed by an appropriate form of chastisement for having trod upon his ethical obligations.

If we seem premature in this judgment, we would remind the reader that this is a newspaper, not a court of law. We deal in the preponderance of evidence—and man, there is a ton of that.

A decade ago the nation learned that the Heritage Foundation—a top-tier Right Wing propaganda mill—had paid Ginni Thomas substantial sums over a five year period. When her husband Clarence filled out his financial disclosure forms, he “forgot” to list that \$680,000. Since the Court, due to the exalted status it arrogates to itself, is allowed to police itself, nothing was ever done about that sketchy omission.

Like many D.C. wives, Ginni Thomas started a little business to keep herself busy while her hubby was off Justicing. Her shop, Liberty Consulting, touted the personal “experience and connections” she could place at the disposal of her clients, whom she advised on “governmental affairs” and political donations. Here again, the nation could only

rely on the honor of Justice Thomas, to recuse himself from any cases which might involve Ginni's clients—whomever they might be. Once again, viewed from the right perspective—which is to say, the Right perspective—there's nothing to see here, no smoking gun.

On January 6th, though, there was that little matter of the noose and the gallows; a fatal tableau erected to impress upon the Vice President what the consequences would be if he failed to do the Right thing, i.e., throw out the votes of 81 million people and install a deranged and corrupt incompetent in the White House.

Amid all the commotion of that day, it was easy to overlook Mrs. Thomas. The more people have dug, though, the more they have found. It's now pretty clear that former Lifespring cult member Ginni Thomas and President Trump were in the habit of doing the Vulcan mind meld.

Not that there's anything wrong with that.... Except, yeah, there is, if they're conspiring to overthrow an election. That's still a no-no. But what, you may ask, does this have to do with Justice Thomas?

On January 19th of this year, Thomas was the only Justice to vote in favor of Donald Trump's request to block Congressional investigators from gaining access to messages involving the attempt to overthrow the government—a treasonous action in which his wife Ginni had apparently taken some part.

So, yeah, on that count alone, he's gotta go. Or, we could quit pretending we're a nation of laws. Either one. Hey—we could let the people decide! How cool would that be?



THE REAL SUPREME COURT

Ginni getting Clarence bounced off the bench would be the best thing she ever did. All the more so because—if some way could be found to get around Moscow Mitch McConnell's patented pocket veto—his departure would provide an opening for a replacement.

Since we've clearly strayed into Dreamland here—these days one can only take so much of the real world—we might as well stump for an ideological opposite.

Thanks to Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, the public can now imagine a Justice with prior experience as a public defender. That's a reasonable baseline. To truly begin the herculean task of shifting the Court into a position where it might begin to fairly render justice to all, though, would require moving the goal post.

How about a young, female, Native American version of Ralph Nader? Or Stacy Abrams, just as she is? Does she have a law degree? You know what? We don't care. Put her up there.

Republicans in the Senate love to howl about Democrats wanting to put radical leftists on the Court. It's time someone gave them something to howl about.

“But, but... no one an inch to the left of dead center could ever be confirmed,” Dick Durbin would sputter. He has a point there. No one knows better than the leaders of our threadbare Democratic Party just exactly what cannot be done. They've been studying the matter for decades.

Perhaps we'd have to settle for replacing loathsome, rotten deadwood with someone who is just not crazy and dishonest. So be it. If we can't go as far as we'd like, we'd settle for going in the right direction for a change. It might lighten the nation's mood. God knows we need it.

While we're thinking happy thoughts, let's imagine that this Ginni affair has ripped the lid off the toxic can of mutant worms that is our U.S. Supreme Court. Her husband has retired. The balance of power has gone from a slam-dunk

6/3 in favor of corporations and the Federalist Society, to a considerably less dire 5/4.

Democrats would no doubt find it hard to adopt entirely foreign manner of thinking, but what if they then pressed their advantage? With the balance of power shifted one notch in favor of the people, why not push for a 5/4 majority?

They could start with a certain whiny, superannuated, beer-loving frat-boy on the bench whose ethics are overdue for review. After Christine Blasey-Ford made her allegations against Brett Kavanaugh, an FBI tip line took 4,500 calls. Of that number, the Bureau investigated ten. It then deep-sixed any “relevant” information in Trump White House. Another slightly more rigorous look at those calls might uncover evidence proving that shouting, red-faced Brett Kavanaugh barked a few falsehoods under oath. Worth a try.

Just about anything would be worth trying if it could produce a Court that put the people first.

The Alleged News®

Foul-Mouthed Governor Tells the F___ing Truth, Then Recants

In a shocking performance at a Washington, D.C. gala, New Hampshire's Republican Governor told the f___ing truth.

Due to its unexpected nature, the event made headlines around the world—which, given Governor Sununu's political ambitions, was likely his intent.

Typically, when he's back home among the rubes voters, Chris Sununu presents a folksy, more wholesome image. On Saturday evening's Gridiron Dinner, though, before 600 Washington insiders in formal evening wear, he was exceptionally foul-mouthed. Rep. Jamie Raskin [D-Md.], quoted in the *Washington Post*, said he had not heard a “Republican use the F-word that much since the Nixon administration.”

The Gridiron Dinner is an annual celebration of the unwarranted self-esteem shared by Washington insiders and the journalists who

supposedly report on them with ruthless impartiality. The event is a held every March, in years without a pandemic. True, there is a pandemic this year. However, by mutual agreement among politicians and journalists who matter, that is no longer a matter of any concern.

The most coherent account we could find of the Governor's obscene remarks was published in *Politico's* Playbook. Apparently the Governor set up his audience by saying Trump was “probably going to be the next president” and referring to his tweets with neutral euphemisms. Then, as “the room quieted to see where he was going with this, he paused, then yelled: ‘Nah, I'm just kidding! He's F___ING CRAZY!’ The ballroom roared with laughter.”

The Governor went on to say, “The press often will ask me if I think Donald Trump is crazy. And I'll say it this way: I don't think he's so crazy that you could put him in a

mental institution. But I think if he were in one, he ain't getting out!”

Having reaped a weekend's worth of free publicity from his vulgar stand-up act, Sununu flip-flopped. During a radio interview Monday morning he code-switched, going from comedian to gaslighter. Sununu told WGIR's Chris Ryan, “It's all a joke. Look. I don't think he's crazy.... Anyone who is trying to make this anymore than it is doesn't understand what the Gridiron Dinner is all about.”

In other words, anyone who believed him when he told the truth would have to be a simpleton.

This is state-of-the-art political alchemy in action: now you see it, now you don't. What does anything mean? Everything and nothing.

Apparently this brand of chicanery amps up the Republican base while driving away all others. If it wasn't working, they wouldn't do it. So what if it turns the political land-

scape into a toxic morass? Better to be King of the Dung Heap than just another citizen.

This guy bears watching. What does Sununu really think about the cognitive status of Dolt #45? We'll take him at his word on Saturday night. Now that we know what the Governor knows, we'd like to know when he first knew it. Perhaps some other journalist, one with enough access to get his ear, would ask him for us.

Our best guess is February 9th. According to Michael Warren Davis, writing in *The Spectator World*—the online U.S. edition of what claims to be “The World's Oldest Magazine”—that was when “Corey Lewandowski took to the airwaves with a bizarre announcement: Donald Trump is looking for someone to primary New Hampshire governor Chris Sununu.

Davis wrote that “Lewandowski, who briefly ran Trump's 2016 pres-

idential campaign, was speaking to Boston radio host Howie Carr. ‘The president is very unhappy with the chief executive of the state of New Hampshire, Chris Sununu. ... And Sununu, in the president's estimation, is someone who's never been loyal to him. And the president said it would be really great if somebody would run against him.’”

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An Experiment in Free Thought
The Governor's recent example got us to thinking about the power of simply stating rarely-spoken truths. Sununu, in D.C., was picking quite a low-hanging piece of rotten fruit. Let's see if the principle holds true with something from up higher up in the tree: the Sancity of the Ballot.

In every editorial department of the nation's surviving newspapers, it

The Alleged News®

is a fundamental principle that every eligible citizen damn well ought to vote. If they don't, they should feel ashamed for having neglected a civic duty. What's more, the thinking goes, they have forfeited their right to express any opinions about the status quo. A journalist daring to question this dogma in print would be putting in jeopardy what might once have been a potentially promising career. [Nowadays, of course, every career in journalism is doomed, but we'll burn that bridge when we get to it.]

Thanks to our seniority—and the utter absence of any rosier prospects—we are immune to any such threats; thus it is our duty to raise them. We can well imagine how, under present circumstances, some people might abstain from voting in order to avoid feeling ashamed.

How many times can a person take part in an apparently hollow ritual without developing the suspicion that he's being taken for a chump? After a while, particularly

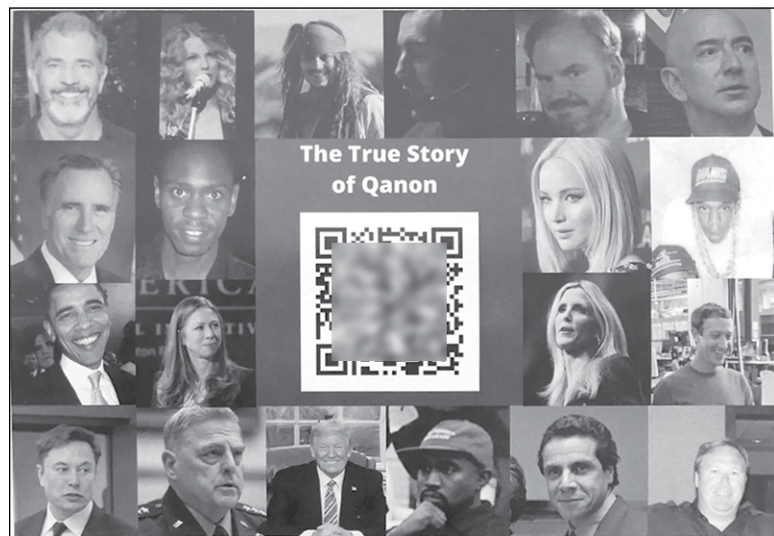
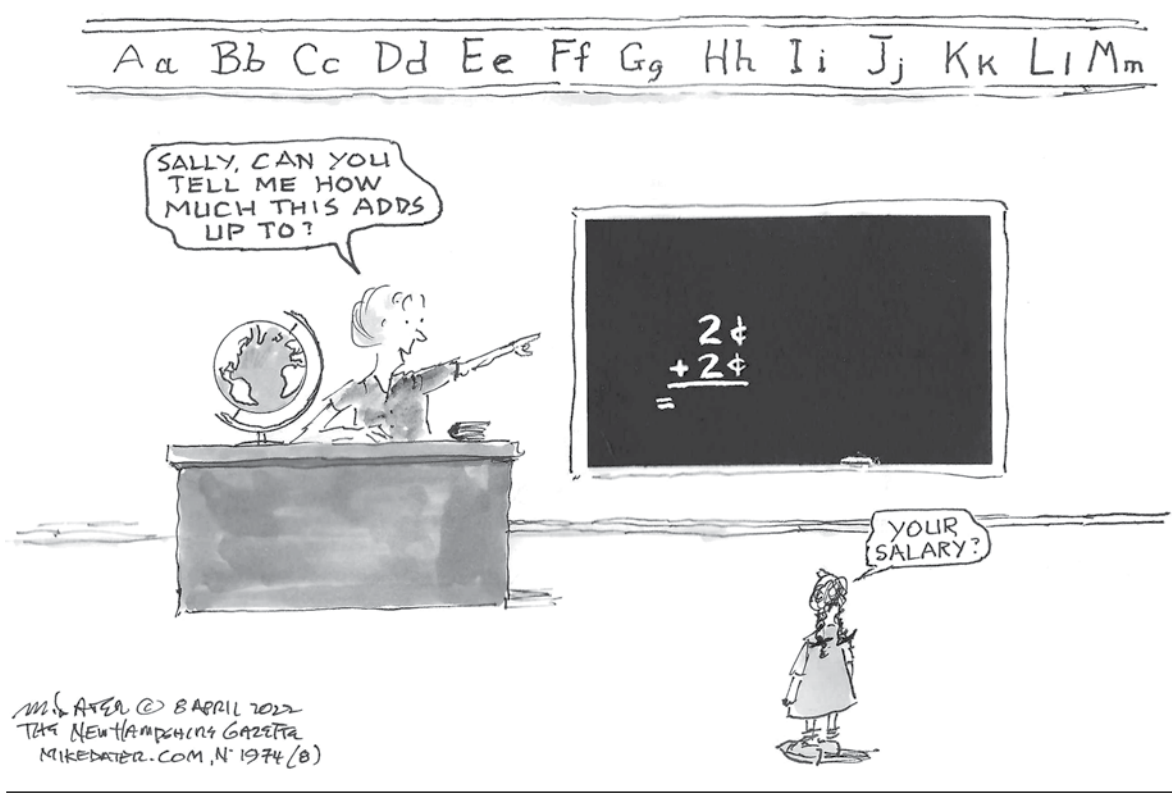
for the sufficiently downtrodden, why shouldn't voting feel like walking up to a schoolyard bully and saying, "Go ahead, hit me."

We do not advocate abandoning the electoral process—far from it. Vote with a vengeance, we say. The question is how that might be accomplished.

We're just pointing out that in a system which forces students into debt while allowing the wealthy to dodge taxes, where hedge-fund jockeys can buy up whole neighborhoods and jack up the rents, where an entire industry exists just to deny medical care, and politicians are too feckless to change a damned thing, it's ironic that members of the Gridiron Club are still paid big bucks for cranking out boilerplate paeans to the wonders of democracy.

Meanwhile, bitter screeds which harp on the limitations of voting within the current system are confined by market forces to certain ancient and obscure venues, where they will be read only by true *cognoscenti*.

More Truth From an Unlikely Source
Having delivered ourselves of, and



Recently people all around New England have been finding big QAnon postcards like this in their mailboxes. On the other side, under a headline reading "The True Story of Qanon," is a 125-word message, apparently coming from a person whose grasp of reality might best be described as tenuous: "I was a child victim of the Cabal spoken of in Qanon... They put a mind reading device in me and tortured me and spied on me my whole life. On Good Friday this world will end..." Bearing the return address PO Box 1076, Portsmouth, N.H. 03802, it seems to have been sent by a neighbor of ours. There but for fortune....

subjected readers to, the intemperate tirade above, we have a reward—a footnote from a white paper by Jeremy B. Rudd, published last year by the Federal Reserve System.*

"Mainstream economics is replete with ideas that 'everyone knows to be true, but that are actually arrant nonsense. For example, 'everyone knows' ... [Deleted here: three examples comprehensible only to those fluent in the argot of 'the dismal science.' — The Ed.]

"None of these propositions has any sort of empirical foundation; moreover, each one turns out to be seriously deficient on theoretical grounds.... Nevertheless, economists continue to rely on these and similar ideas to organize their thinking about real-world economic phe-

nomena. ...

"Is this state of affairs ever harmful or dangerous? One natural source of concern is if dubious but widely held ideas serve as the basis for consequential policy decisions."

It is at this juncture that Rudd inserts the following footnote:

"I leave aside the deeper concern that the primary role of mainstream economics in our society is to provide an apologetics for a criminally oppressive, unsustainable, and unjust social order."

London-based economist Chris Marsh tweeted March 18th, "6 months since the famous Fed paper by Jeremy Rudd, and yet he's not been heard of since."

The Marriner S. Eccles Federal Reserve Board Building is quite commodious. Perhaps there's an *ou-bliette* somewhere on the premises.

Aid Groups Warn More Variants Will Emerge If Congress Kills Global Covid Funds

by Jake Johnson, Common Dreams
An international coalition of humanitarian groups warned Tuesday that "more variants will emerge"

if Congress fails to approve new money for the global coronavirus response, a message delivered after senators announced a Covid-19 funding package without any money to fight the pandemic beyond the borders of the United States.

"We are deeply disappointed by the Senate's short-sighted decision to cut off all global Covid funds."

"Until we commit to providing the necessary resources to combat Covid-19 globally," reads a joint statement signed by the ONE Campaign, Save the Children, Oxfam America, Public Citizen, and dozens of other groups, "more people will contract the virus and the death toll will continue to rise."

The humanitarian coalition noted that U.S. federal agencies responsible for global relief "are running out of funds," echoing the concerns of the agencies themselves. For months, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has been sounding the alarm over dwindling money for its global vaccination efforts.

The Pentagon, meanwhile, is overflowing with money—and law-

* "Why Do We Think That Inflation Expectations Matter for Inflation?" (And Should We?), by Jeremy B. Rudd. <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/feds/why-do-we-think-that-inflation-expectations-matter-for-inflation-and-should-we.htm>. Rudd is Senior Adviser to the Program Direction Section of the Fed's Division of Research and Statistics. He's got a Ph.D. in Economics from Princeton and an A.B. in Economics from Harvard, so he's not just some upstart.

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Sometimes Old is Good

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makers are currently mulling whether to pile even more funds into the department's coffers.

"We are deeply disappointed by the Senate's short-sighted decision to cut off all global Covid funds," the aid groups said Tuesday. "If passed, this package would send the signal that Congress has not only turned its back on the rest of the world, but it risked the safety and security of the American people and contributed to prolonging the pandemic."

The coalition released its statement after key senators' announced Monday that they reached a deal on a \$10 billion coronavirus funding package aimed at helping the U.S. purchase additional coronavirus test kits, therapeutics, and vaccines amid growing fears of a new wave of infections.

"Without global vaccination funding, we are simply not tackling the problem of Covid."

The proposed legislative package, which would be funded largely by repurposing previously approved pandemic response money, contains \$10 billion total, less than half of the \$22 billion in coronavirus aid that the Biden administration has re-

quested to keep domestic Covid-19 programs afloat.

As the *New York Times* reported late Monday, the legislation "does not include \$5 billion in funding for the global vaccination effort that had previously been proposed, after senators spent the weekend haggling over a Republican demand to claw back money Congress previously approved."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said in a floor speech Tuesday that he is "disappointed that some of our Republican friends could not agree to include \$5 billion for global response efforts."

Schumer nevertheless urged Congress to quickly approve the \$10 billion package, arguing that it "will give the federal government—and our citizens—the tools we need, that we depend on, to continue our economic recovery, to keep schools open, keep American families safe."

The Senate majority leader said the legislation as crafted has the support of President Joe Biden.

But the bill, negotiated principally by top Senate Democrats and Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah), could face trouble in the House, where progres-



What's the matter, Bunky? Having trouble finding RiverRun Bookstore? Look closer—it's right in the middle of the photo, under the bucket of that excavator. Despite the commotion on Daniel Street, this weekend will be a great time to stop by. April is the store's 20th Anniversary Month! Tom and the rest of the crew are celebrating from Friday the 8th through Sunday the 10th. Everything in the store will be priced 20 percent off.

sive lawmakers have warned they may oppose any Covid-19 funding measure that lacks adequate money for the global pandemic response.

"My position has not changed," Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-Ill.) tweeted Monday afternoon. "If the Senate cuts global vaccine funding from the Covid supplemental bill, we will have a big problem in the House."

Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.), chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, similarly declared Monday that "a deal without global aid funding and a real plan to invest the money we need will run into problems in the House."

"I have said this for months and will say it again," Jayapal wrote on Twitter. "Without global vaccination funding, we are simply not tackling the problem of Covid."

Lawmakers' haggling over several billion in critical global coronavirus aid is taking place as Congress also debates Biden's request to add \$31

billion to the U.S. military budget next fiscal year, bringing the total to an unprecedented \$813 billion.

As *Politico* reported Tuesday, "Debate is heating up on Capitol Hill on funding the military, and Democrats are facing a dilemma—back President Joe Biden's historically high Pentagon budget or spend even more."

"This is insane," responded Matt Duss, a foreign policy adviser to Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), who has criticized the president's latest Pentagon budget request.

"Meanwhile, Congress is having a hard time finding \$5 billion for the global Covid response, a genuinely urgent national security priority which would also offer a huge boost to U.S. diplomacy," Duss added. "Unfortunately the poor of the Global South employ fewer lobbyists."

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"Vote Early And Vote Often"
Judging by an AP report, it appears that GOP Congressional candidate Matt Mowers has cribbed the 19th century Democratic rallying cry quoted above.

The wire service says Mowers voted twice in 2016: first by absentee ballot in New Hampshire's First in the Nation™ Presidential Primary Election,® when he was running Chris Christie's failed primary campaign. Then he voted again back home in New Jersey, registering under his parents' address.

"Mowers' campaign website features a section dedicated to 'election integrity,'" AP noted, "stating that new laws are needed to 'provide every American citizen with the certainty that their vote counts.'"

"He also echoes the long-standing Republican criticism about out-of-state voters, endorsing an effort by the state's legislature to make sure 'only legal residents of New Hampshire are entitled to vote.'"

Murph's Fortnightly Quote
"The war—what is more opposite of music?
The silence of ruined cities and killed people."
— Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine

"A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."
— Martin Luther King, Jr.
john@wordpraxis.com

"You can pray until you faint, but if you don't get up and try to do something, God is not going to put it in your lap."
— Fannie Lou Hamer (1917 – 1977), Indianola, Mississippi, September, 1964
— Not-So-Random Thoughts from an Oregon Subscriber

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Putin and Lost Opportunity

Dear Editor,

The sad and perhaps tragic thing about Vladimir Putin is the opportunity lost. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and his rise to power, it was widely accepted that there would be an economic integration with the West and that Western institutional norms, in terms of the criminal justice system and democratic processes, would follow. In the United States, governmental accommodations were developed to facilitate cultural and commercial exchanges. Chamber of Commerce affiliates offered workshops, and universities and colleges developed special programs with their Russian academic counterparts.

I was a member of the staff at Mount Wachusett Community College at the time and recall our vice president and members of the criminal justice staff visiting Russian colleges. In exchange, Russian professors arrived at the Gardner campus. They sat in on classes, toured area grammar, and high schools, had lunch engagements with faculty and staff, and friendships developed. But Putin's poisonings and killings of rivals and journalists, and his crimes against humanity with genocidal wars in Chechnya, Syria, and now Ukraine have sealed his fate. He is an outcast on the world stage and no amount of outsized yachts or palatial estates will repair his reputation or fate.

Genevieve Fraser

Orange, Mass.

Genevieve,

We suspect that for most of us in the West, Putin's personal fate can't be tragic enough.

The biggest mistake the Russians made in those days was letting Wall Street show them how things are done.

The Editor

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You Call That Urgent?

Dear Editor,

I can't connect Biden's *urgent* call for fighting this "great battle for freedom: between democracy and autocracy, between liberty and repression, between a rules-based order and one governed by brute force," with the U.S.' and NA-

TO's reluctance to give Ukraine the weapons it begs for, that are needed to stop Russian bombs from falling on civilian homes, schools, hospitals, and civic buildings.

Yes, the West should fear nuclear war. So should the East. Whether Putin is totally rational or partially insane, there is no credible scenario that he would allow his country to be polluted with nuclear fallout just because the Ukrainians are downing his bombers before they can discharge their load of destruction and death.

David fights Goliath with one hand tied behind his back, and whenever the Big Guy bloodies his face, we shout, "Atta boy, David! Take another one for democracy, liberty and the rules-based order!"

Is that how to answer what President Biden has called, "the test of all time"?

Sincerely,

Bruce Joffe

Piedmont, Calif.

Bruce:

The trouble with gambling on a good outcome here is the consequences of getting it wrong just that once.

The Editor

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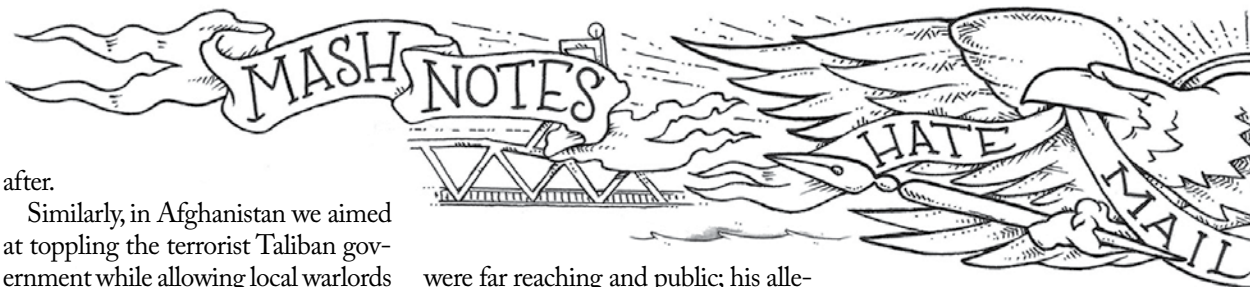
Why Ukraine is Different

To the Editor:

In a recent Letter to the Editor (March 11, 2022) the author warns about U.S. intervention in the Ukraine based on our track record to "Save Democracy." He mentions our previous involvements in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan as examples where thousands of our soldiers were killed, but no democracy was achieved.

While I fully agree with his assessment, I would however like to note that there is a major difference this time with respect to the Ukraine. None of the three earlier named countries had anything close to a democracy nor any intention of establishing one.

In Vietnam we defended a country controlled by a corrupt military dictatorship, in Iraq we helped to get rid of a dictator, but the rival Sunni and Shiite opposition leaders never intended to govern by democratic means there-



after.

Similarly, in Afghanistan we aimed at toppling the terrorist Taliban government while allowing local warlords to regain their autocratic rule and power over its citizens. We knew that this will happen all along, but we had other geopolitical interests.

In contrast, during the past 30 years of its new sovereignty the Ukraine has continued to develop into a truly democratic system with fair elections and backed by strong support from its citizenry. The massive heroic resistance that the current Russian invasion has experienced, both from the Ukrainian army, but also from nearly all of its Ukrainian civilians, is evidence to the will of the entire country to defend its free democratic principles of rule. There is no doubt that the entire nation stands behind its freely elected president and government in fighting this aggressor.

Thus, although I do not want to state that the U.S. should get involved in this war, but if it needs to do so, I would at least feel comforted by the fact that we Americans at least got it right this time.

Dr. Imre Somssich

Cologne, Germany

Imre:

It's as clearcut a case as one could imagine. Putin's war is inexcusable.

At the same time, though, it's pretty much what some very knowledgeable people expected—George Kennan, for instance.

So many wasted opportunities to learn a lesson....

The Editor

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McCarthyism v2.0

by Wim Laven

In 1954 one of the greatest frauds in U.S. politics culminated in 36 days of televised hearings. Sen. Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin had come to prominence by leading the campaign to expose communists in government, elected or appointed. His accusations

were far reaching and public; his allegations harmed countless individuals.

The cruel truth, however, was that Joseph McCarthy never made a successful case against anyone; he managed to push several people out of their jobs and influenced public opinion by selling lies.

There is a general expectation that politics is a dishonest practice; even Donald Trump's legendary "30,573 false or misleading claims" (as tracked by the *Washington Post*) seemed to fall within allowable limits given his ability to lie and keep his base.

Lies that Joseph McCarthy told ruined lives.

Some of Trump's lies were of this deadly variety. Like when he tried to extort President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy for dirt on his political opponent's son. Trump was impeached for the extortion, but many features of the conspiracy were lost in the shuffle. Paul Manafort, for example, had charges of money laundering and financial fraud frozen by the Ukraine's chief prosecutor in order to protect needed military assistance. The depth of the malfeasance in withholding \$400 million in aid is now apparent. Let's not forget that Trump, Manafort, and the GOP, blamed the Ukraine for Russian hacking.

Now comes the next McCarthy.

Kevin McCarthy, House Minority leader, lives up to his namesake. He delivers on the most dangerous political dishonesty. In the moment where the impact and sensitivity to Trump's corruption is most profound, he returns to attack his political opponents and democracy itself. Do not underestimate his words:

"Why is he still chair of the committee and why is he still even on the committee? In a new Congress, if it's a new majority, he will not be."

His attacks against House Intelli-

gence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff only serve to perpetuate a lie that services his political power and interests. In his congressional career McCarthy has not committed to anything. He rode the coattails of the Tea Party agenda while it worked; he tested the politics of telling the truth about the January 6th insurrection for 48 hours when he appropriately blamed Trump: "The president bears responsibility for Wednesday's attack on Congress by mob rioters. He should have immediately denounced the mob when he saw what was unfolding."

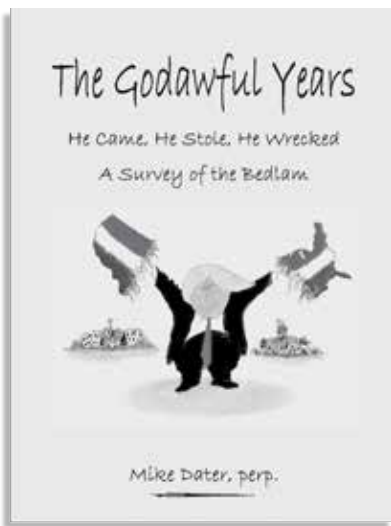
Just like when McCarthy abandoned the Tea Party's commitment to reducing taxes and the national debt when the Trump GOP chose a tax giveaway to the wealthy, he will jump onto any political opportunity he identifies. He sees great potential to leading the charge in the next conspiracy. He rewrites the insurrection at the Capitol, Trump's second impeachment, and doubles down in condemning those who sought justice in charging Trump's corruption in the first impeachment.

While Joseph McCarthy was ultimately censured by the Senate, it is hard to imagine Kevin McCarthy receiving such a well-deserved reprimand in the House. Kevin McCarthy has helped the GOP resist decency, delayed reactions to overt bigotry, and only participated in delicate wrist slapping when forced to.

With widespread gerrymandering and voter suppression designed to favor Republicans, Kevin McCarthy is positioning himself to take the Speakership from Nancy Pelosi. His mandate, however, would be incredibly dangerous. He toes and amplifies the Republican lies, but also embraces the politics of vengeance and extortion.

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Emboldened by a Republican base that has not accepted Trump's loss (as of 12/21 only 21% admitted Biden had a legitimate victory) I fear the politics that threaten retribution. We have had 7 years of "Lock her up" chants, increases in hate crimes and politically motivated violence, and candidates are now taking pages from Vladimir Putin's playbook and campaigning with the promise the opponent will pay. McCarthyism v2.0 has already been installed in the Republican party operating system, and it is off to a corrupting start.

Wim Laven, Ph.D., syndicated by PeaceVoice, teaches courses in political science and conflict resolution.

Grocery Workers Who Are Food Insecure
by Andrew Moss

Though labor unions continue to rack up significant victories, the most recent being a successful organizing vote at a Staten Island Amazon facility, there are still immense challenges facing workers in an economic and political landscape strongly tilted in favor of employers.

In California, some 48,000 grocery workers in 540 stores stretching from central California to the Mexican border authorized a strike on March 27 against two major chains, Kroger and Albertsons. Whether or not the strike is now in effect as you read this column, or whether it's been averted (or is still pending the outcome of bargaining), the strike authorization itself represents a powerful response to untenable conditions for workers. These conditions underscore the deep inequality continuing to erode the quality of life for millions of people.

This past year, financial stresses impacting grocery workers have drawn increasing attention. A recent survey of workers employed by Kroger-owned

supermarkets found that almost two-thirds of the workers surveyed reported being unable to meet basic monthly expenses, and of this group, a significant number (39 percent) indicated that they were unable to pay for groceries and 44 percent reported being unable to pay rent. Fourteen percent said that they were either currently homeless, or had been homeless in the preceding year. A *New York Times* account began with the story of one young worker at a Kroger-owned store who has been selling blood plasma to make ends meet.

These circumstances, defined by low wages and company policies favoring part-time scheduling, contrast sharply with reports of substantial profits and payouts to investors, as well as high executive compensation. Kroger, the largest grocery chain in the nation, with 465,000 workers, earned \$4.05 billion in 2020, recently adopted a stock buyback program benefiting its investors, and rewarded its CEO, Rodney McMullen, with \$22.4 million in compensation in 2020. That executive pay is 909 times greater than the median pay of Kroger workers (\$24,617).

For its part, Kroger defends its compensation for workers, pointing to a 2017 increase in average hourly wages from \$13.66 to \$16.68—as well as to benefits that include health care, retirement savings, and tuition assistance. Still, this average wage, when placed in the context of today's cost of living, is a far cry from the pay that full-time senior workers made 30 years ago, when hourly wages (the equivalent of \$28 an hour today) would help sustain a middle class existence.

At issue is the concept of a living wage, a sufficient level of compensation that allows individuals and families to maintain a decent standard of living, providing enough for food,

housing, medical expenses, transportation, education, child care, and other essentials—and still provide enough to handle unforeseen expenses that can tip a precarious household into eviction and hunger.

That precariousness is the subject of a new Oxfam America report, "The Crisis of Low Wages in the U.S.," which notes that almost one in three American workers, or 51.9 million people, earns less than \$15 an hour. The report reminds readers that the federal minimum wage hasn't budged from \$7.25 an hour since 2009, and that the federal tipped minimum wage has remained at \$2.13 since 1991. Considering that \$15 an hour in itself hardly constitutes a living wage in many parts of the U.S., the report documents the vast extent of working poverty in a country where the top 0.1 percent of earners make 196 times that of the bottom 90 percent.

This is why recent union victories, and the resurgence of interest in unions, have become critical. As political scientists Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson explain in their landmark book, *Winner-Take-All Politics*, unions represent a significant "organizational counterweight to the power of those at the top." Of all progressive organized interests, they note, "labor is the only major one focused on the broad economic concerns of those with modest incomes."

The pandemic has helped raise awareness of the essential roles that millions of low-wage workers play in fields as diverse as health and home care, agriculture, construction, and food manufacturing and distribution. That awareness can certainly help a union like the United Food and Commercial Workers in its struggle on behalf of those 465,000 workers who voted to authorize a strike.

But awareness alone won't make up for a decline in union membership that has taken place over many decades, a decline propelled in large

measure by hostile legislation and vast corporate resources spent on union busting. Much hard work lies ahead—as does the need for an ascendant narrative affirming the role that unions play in levelling the economic and political playing field of America. It is a narrative that speaks to a collective reality—but also to the individual reality of each and every worker: a world in which a person surrounded by an abundance of food at work can be compensated enough, and fairly enough, to share in that abundance at home.

Andrew Moss, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is an emeritus professor (English, Nonviolence Studies) at the California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.

Who Speaks For The World?

by Lawrence S. Wittner

Russia's brutal war upon the nation of Ukraine should remind us that, for thousands of years, great powers have used their military might to launch military assaults upon smaller, weaker societies.

Since World War II alone, these acts of aggression have included France's colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria, Britain's military intervention in the Middle East and Africa, the Soviet Union's military conquest of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan, China's invasions of Tibet and Vietnam, and America's wars in Indochina, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Today, great power crimes against humanity, often driven by imperial arrogance and ambition, remain a plague upon the world

Centuries ago, farsighted thinkers began suggesting that wars of aggression could be prevented by establishing a federation of nations to safeguard the peace. Writers such as Dante Alighieri, Immanuel Kant, Alfred Tennyson, and H.G. Wells promoted the idea of moving beyond individual nation-states to create a government representing all of humanity.

By the 20th century, even officials of national governments began to take this idea seriously, particularly after the vast slaughter of World Wars I and II exposed the terrible consequences of

international conflict and great power imperialism. The result was the formation of the League of Nations and, when this international confederation proved too weak to cope with the world crisis of the 1930s and early 1940s, the United Nations.

Launched in 1945 with the primary goal of saving future generations from "the scourge of war," the United Nations moved the world closer to a peaceful, governed planet. The signers of its Charter agreed to "refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state." Its General Assembly provided a forum for discussion of global issues by all nations, large and small. Its Committee on Decolonization supervised the end of colonialism across vast swathes of the globe.

In addition, the United Nations smoothed the path for political settlements of numerous small wars, issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, established an International Criminal Court, and developed significant programs for economic development, world health, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

Even so, despite these concessions to civilized norms, the great powers were not willing to give up their traditional dominance of world affairs. Structurally, this was expressed through the UN Security Council, with five imperial powers being granted permanent membership and veto power. Behaviorally, it was expressed by their powerful armies, by their wars of aggression against smaller nations, by their development of nuclear weapons, and by their insistence upon their right to retain and use them. Again and again, their rulers showed that they really did think that they had the right to run the world.

Are the people of the world condemned to live forever under the heels of the great powers? Or is it still possible to take another step along the road to a peaceful, humane planet?

At the moment, the United Nations

Mash Notes, Hate Mail, &c.

to page six

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One For All, And All For One

by Jean Stimmell

I was mesmerized by a scene I saw on TV at the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine: A group of neighbors with rifles guarding a suburban street leading into Kyiv against approaching tanks, their faces illuminated by fires they had lit in trashcans to keep warm, fearless and immovable, belting out in unison the Ukrainian National Anthem.

When everything is on the line, we forget our differences and come together as one. Of course, we do: as social animals, it has been bred into us. That's why we have survived as a species.

Although much less dire, I once was in a similar situation in the Navy during the Vietnam War. Our ship shuttled tanks, supplies, and sometimes troops along the coast and up the rivers of Vietnam. Occasionally, we had a significant crew turnover when guys rotated home; on one such occasion, almost a quarter of the crew was new.

On our return trip from the Philippines, all hell broke loose in a crude kind of diversity training, representing as we did, a cross-section of the nation: East coast, highly educated, college dropouts and midwestern kids who hadn't finished high

school; hip city slickers and country folks right off the farm; We had Native American, Hispanic, and Black sailors, along with staunch segregationists from the south.

It started with some pushing and shoving, harsh words, and a few fist-fights, but, after day after day at sea, a certain equilibrium was achieved. We had other things on our minds. Sometimes, we had to be offloaded by helicopter because of enemy ground fire; once, shuttling around the Mekong Delta, the crew didn't set foot on dry land for three months while garbage mounted up in the 120-degree heat, and we were reduced to saltwater showers.

We were a scruffy lot but did our jobs like well-oiled machines. If we got stuck on a sand bar in a river, we lowered landing boats to push us free. And it was up to us to defend our own perimeter when offloading cargo solo at desolate spots in the jungle.

On November 1, 1968, shortly after I had returned to civilian life, Vietcong divers partially sunk our ship on the My Tho River. According to the official records, the 25 killed in action in the mining of Westchester County were "the U.S. Navy's greatest single-incident combat loss of life during the entire Vietnam War." ¹ The death toll

could have been much worse! But reacting quickly, amidst the screams of the injured in pitch-black darkness, the crew rose to the occasion, turning valves to pump water into ballast tanks, preventing the ship from capsizing.

Staying alive in Vietnam was a mighty unifying force, putting on hold the cultural war raging back home in America. Today we are at war again—and I'm not talking about Russia, or our cultural polarization, which, while severe, is only a symptom of a deeper problem: the autocracy that rules our nation.

Like Russia, we have our own super-rich oligarchs: At the top of the list, according to Forbes, are Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Bill Gates, who now own more wealth than half of our population. ² Worse yet "ProPublica found [in most] recent years, Musk, Bezos, and many of their fellow billionaires paid zero federal income taxes even as their fortunes soared." ³

Like oligarchs everywhere, their unlimited resources enable them to tip elections in their favor. Conversely, as confirmed by Pew research, the average citizen has virtually no influence. Dark money and the fossil fuel industry spare no expense in shifting the blame away from themselves for causing our nation's massive inequal-



The U.S.S. Westchester County, a Korean War-era, Terrebonne Parish-class Landing Ship, Tank, being offloaded by a Boeing CH-47 helicopter somewhere in the Mekong Delta, some time in 1967. The official name for the big Boeing was "Chinook." GI's naturally preferred the term "shitbook." Westchester County is long gone, but shitbooks are still flying.

ity—and the existential dangers of climate change—by spreading propaganda, distrust, and polarization.

These corporate titans now pit populists against progressives in the same manner that plantation owners pitted poor whites against Blacks—while the elite merrily made money off both groups. Today the war we must fight is against this rampant inequality and looming environmental disaster.

That's the new war we must fight. Like the Ukrainians are doing, we must stand shoulder to shoulder to

stop it. Our families and loved ones are on the line, along with all our fellow inhabitants of Space Ship Earth.

- 1 <https://www.historynet.com/uss-westchester-county-attacked-during-the-vietnam-war/>
 2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_wealthiest_Americans_by_net_worth1
 3 <https://www.thenation.com/article/economy/pandemic-rich-rich-er/>

from page five

is the major governmental structure that transcends the desires of a particular nation's rulers and acts in support of all humanity. When it comes to peace, climate change, world health, women's rights, refugee resettlement, the eradication of poverty, and a host of other issues, the United Nations invariably defends the interests of the entire world. Given this vital role on a planet still riven by the belligerence of rogue nations, hasn't the time arrived to strengthen it?

Some of the ways to strengthen



the United Nations have been evident for years.

One of the most obvious is to remove the permanent membership and the veto power of the great powers in the UN Security Council. There is no logical reason for them to have these privileges. Furthermore, they have often abused them.

Another is to create a UN Parliamentary Assembly, with elected delegates from throughout the world. Such an assembly would enhance

the world organization's democratic and participatory character by adding an entity chosen by people, rather than by governments.

Yet another is to give the United Nations power to levy taxes to cover its expenses. A UN tax on currency speculation (the "Tobin tax"), for example, would end the organization's impoverishment, free it from the need to beg for emergency funds from the great powers, and enable it

to adequately fund vital global programs.

These kinds of UN reforms are based on the principle that no single country or small group of countries adequately represents the world and its multiplicity of peoples. The world can—and should—speak for itself.

Dr. Lawrence Wittner, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is Professor of History emeritus at SUNY/Albany and the author of *Confronting the Bomb* (Stanford University Press).

Excerpt From the Inaugural Address of William Henry Harrison

"Fellow-citizens, being fully invested with that high office to which the partiality of my countrymen has called me, I now take an affectionate leave of you. You will bear with you to your homes the remembrance of the pledge I have this day given to discharge all the high duties of my exalted station according to the best of my ability, and I shall enter upon their performance with entire confidence in the support of a just and generous people."

—Delivered March 4, 1841. President Harrison—"Old Tippecanoe"—died one month later, probably of typhoid fever. Later analysis established that the White House water supply was downstream of a sewage outfall.

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Going Green, or: Poetic Justice

by W.D. Ehrhart

I've just purchased a piece of the State of New Jersey. Really. It's ten feet by ten feet and located in a lovely pine forest. Sooner or later—I'm 73 now, so I wouldn't hold out too much hope for "later"—it will become my final resting place when I shuffle off this mortal coil and join the Choir Invisible. My wife will eventually be there with me, too, though she's younger than me and thus has a better shot at "later." But why South Jersey? I've never lived there and have no family connection to the area.

All my life, I've been completely disgusted with modern burial practices. My parents have both been dead for over three decades, but I could dig them up this afternoon and they'd look just about as good as they did when we planted them, what with having been embalmed, then stuck in a satin-lined casket, and then placed in a concrete vault. Talk about inefficient use of land.

Indeed, for decades I've provided in my will that I be cremated because at least that way I'm not taking up space that might otherwise be put to good use. But it turns out that cremation isn't great for the environment either because it takes a

huge amount of energy to cremate a body, and meanwhile the heat that's produced doesn't get used to warm somebody's house or drive a locomotive or bake a casserole or anything. Talk about inefficient use of energy.

But very recently, I learned about a cemetery in the pine barrens of South Jersey that does "green burials." I didn't even think that was legal, but it is. And it turns out that there is a whole nationwide network of green burial cemeteries and funeral homes (<https://www.greenburialcouncil.org>). That's how I've wanted my body disposed of all of my life. After all, I've been walking around on Planet Earth all these years, sustaining myself by eating the plants and the animals that share this life with me. And what do the plants and the animals get in return?

So as soon as I heard about this cemetery, which has been around since the 17th century by the way, I started digging. Well, not literally, but I started checking around, drove down and looked the place over, and liked what I saw. Now I own a piece of New Jersey.

And I'm working with a funeral director who has done this sort of thing before. So when the time comes, they'll just wrap me in a

shroud, dig a hole, stick me in it, and shovel the dirt back in. Chow down, worms and flowers! Have at me! It's your turn now.

If I sound a bit flippant, the truth is that I find the thought of natural decomposition very comforting. The way it ought to be. The natural order of things.

This is the stuff of poetry: from the Old English "Soul and Body I" to the medieval "A Disputacioun betwix Pe Body and Wormes" to Edgar Allen Poe's "The Conqueror Worm."

And there's another piece to this that I just can't help enjoying, a delicious irony, a kind of poetic justice that is immensely satisfying. Way back in 1975, when I was living in Philadelphia, I drove over to visit a friend of mine in Maple Shade, New Jersey. And since I was going to visit Kathy, another friend asked me if I would take something over to her and save him a trip.

I had just bought a used MG Midget, but the temporary license had come off in a heavy rainstorm. So this Maple Shade cop and about six of his buddies in three cars cornered me and roused me out at gunpoint. I don't think the sheriff and his posse liked long-haired hippie-looking guys in convertibles, but



W.D. Ehrhart visiting his future home, Steelmantown Cemetery, N.J.

I didn't dare mouth off to this Wyatt Earp Wannabee because if he strip-searched me, I'd be in a lot of trouble since what I was delivering wasn't entirely legal.

So I just showed him my sworn affidavit attesting that my car was properly registered and tagged, and otherwise kept my mouth shut. There wasn't anything he could actually charge me with or run me in for. But Marshall Dillon actually said to me, "Get out of New Jersey. And don't come back." I almost choked. I had a really hard time biting my tongue on that one. But I also really didn't want to end up in prison, so I didn't say a thing.

But now I find myself, nearly half a century later, about to become a permanent resident of New Jersey, and there's nothing Sergeant Striker of the Maple Shade Police Department can do about it. So I get to be buried the way I've always wanted to be buried, the worms and the flowers get a free lunch, and Deputy Dawg gets to go suck an egg. Sweet.

W.D. Ehrhart is an ex-Marine sergeant who holds a PhD in American Studies from the University of Wales at Swansea, and taught for many years at the Haverford School for Boys.

Supreme Thieves in Robes of "Justice"

by Jim Hightower

As we know, "government ethics" can be a very slippery concept.

That's why We The People have insisted that every public official—from Congress critters to dog catchers—swear to abide by some minimum standard of proper behavior. Not that all will honor it, but a code of ethics provides a measure of legal action against those who are grabbers and grifters.

How bizarre, then, that the nine members of our august Supreme Court, America's highest legal authority, have discretely refused to apply ethical rules to themselves, claiming that their group don't need

no stinkin' code, because...well, they are supreme! Chief Justice John Roberts himself assures us that each justice will always make the right ethical call because, "They are jurists of exceptional integrity and experience."

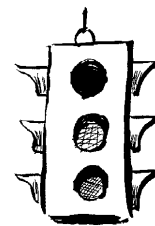
Does he think we have sucker wrappers around our heads? Some of these black-robed "honorable" regularly engage in petty thievery, taking corporate-funded junkets to luxury resorts, getting free membership in exclusive golf clubs, and accepting assorted "gifts" from special interests. Clarence Thomas is the current king of handouts, taking thousands of dollars' in freebies, including even such pedestrian gim-

mies as car tires and cigars. Thomas, a 31-year lifer on the court, draws \$230,000 a year from taxpayers. Can't he buy his own cigars? No one would buy stuff for him—except to influence his decisions!

Most damning, though, is the Grand Larceny of the Court's six right-wing extremists, who've turned what's meant to be a citadel of democracy into a Republican rubber stamp for plutocracy. They've stolen the integrity of the Court itself, rigging their procedures and rulings to profit moneyed interests, suppress voting rights, hogtie workers, and generally run roughshod over the needs and democratic ideals of America's majority.

To help stop this disgraceful corruption of justice by so-called justices—go to FixTheCourt.com.

Populist author, public speaker, and radio commentator Jim Hightower writes *The Hightower Lowdown*, a monthly newsletter chronicling the ongoing fights by America's ordinary people against rule by plutocratic elites. Sign up at HightowerLowdown.org.



Thinking About the Uses of Nuclear Weapons

"What is the only provocation that could bring about the use of nuclear weapons? Nuclear weapons. What is the priority target for nuclear weapons? Nuclear weapons. What is the only established defense against nuclear weapons? Nuclear weapons. How do we prevent the use of nuclear weapons? By threatening the use of nuclear weapons. And we can't get rid of nuclear weapons, because of nuclear weapons. The intransigence, it seems, is a function of the weapons themselves."

— Martin Amis, *Einstein's Monsters* (1987), "Introduction: Thinkability"

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