

## The Fortnightly Rant

### Government by ChatGOP

Putting out a newspaper is, on the most basic, practical level, simply a matter of repeatedly doing a series of mundane chores. Rebecca West, one most respected writers of the 20th century, put it this way: "Journalism is the ability to meet the challenge of filling space."

Like some happy Sisyphus, tending to these repetitive, unending chores generally keeps us occupied, calm, and out of the gin mills.

From time to time, though, we are nearly overwhelmed by the existential weight of our unique position: steering the most-senior news organization in the mightiest nation in history through a period of turbulence more extreme than any other in modern memory.

How could anyone—never mind little old us—ever hope to adequately meet such a daunting challenge? At such times, we derive some comfort from considering Washington D.C. Maybe we're not doing so badly, after all. Thus encouraged, we forge ahead.

Sadly, we don't have a prescription to remedy the situation down there at Dysfunction Junction. We do have, however, a fresh diagnosis.

To explain it we must begin with the latest Big Terrible Idea. No, forget about Collateralized Debt Obligations. Those are ancient history. We're talking about ChatGPT.

ChatGPT claims to run on "Artificial Intelligence." Hah!—as if that was even real. AI, as the cool kids call it, is nothing but a vast collection of bytes: tiny magnetized spaces on a chip or a disk, flipping back and forth between two possible states: either a one, or a zero.

We're so old we can remember when computers took up a whole room, and ordinary people had the sense not to trust them. Humans

immediately set about using those big computers to make computers smaller and smaller. Now most people drive cars that have enough computing power to guide them to the moon—if they could afford the gas—and they think nothing of it.

The only thing making these microscopic spaces more useful than dryer lint is how they've been organized by human beings. That's our big flashing "Warning!" sign, right there. Typical uses include helping health care administrators figure out how to increase billing while reducing expenses, without killing the patient before he's gone broke.

Computers are now small enough so that they can be profitably used not just to make even newer computers even smaller, but to make them more devious.

"Hi. I'm a computer. But I'm a computer that can pretend to be talking to you. I once fooled a guy—a Harvard guy—into thinking I was sentient. Pretty good, huh? "Now, how can I screw you?"

As soon as it was released, ChatGPT began creeping everywhere, like kudzu down south. On Wednesday, even its advocates were urging Congress they ought to think about putting up some kind of guardrails.

Guardrails, hell—what we really need is a time machine, so we could go back and head off the pernicious technology that got us into this revolting predicament.

We refer, of course, to ChatGOP. ChatGOP doesn't run in an infinitesimal, hypothetical space. It's a creeping—and creepy—collection of idiocies, generated in think tanks, propagated by politicians, and passed along by corporate stooges masquerading as TV journalists.

ChatGOP is a 40-year accumula-



tion of small, individual falsehoods. Standing alone, they make no sense. They can even flip back and forth like a computer byte: true, false—hey, what's the difference? With ChatGOP, it's all just BS anyway.

As it was with the bytes, so it is with this BS. The critical thing is how humans have organized it—or how it organized itself: An infinite number of financial opportunities are involved in the process of running a country. Consequently there is never a shortage of people who would like to be involved. Birds of a feather flock together, and vultures congregate. Over time, inevitably, a system will emerge.

So now here we are, stuck right where ChatGOP put us. A crucial fortnight has begun.

The President wants to spend the money that Congress told him to. Congress insists, though, that he can't—because... because... just because. If the President can't get Congress to let him do what they already

told him to do, then this whole moronic house of cards will likely come crashing down. At which point, we are morally certain, those so-called cards will be revealed—surprise!—to be heavier than anyone thought.

Which shall it be? Business as usual? Or a sure-fire catastrophe of unpredictable dimensions?

Hard telling, not knowing. Rather than sit here fretting about whether the presses will still be running on June 2nd, or June 16th, we're just going to try to describe, as best we can, how ChatGOP finagled us into this rotten situation.

It prepared the ground—literally—with decades of computerized gerrymandering, thus ensuring that Congressional candidates would vie for office by being more reactionary than their opponents.

Meanwhile, it blanketed the nation for decades with inane propaganda. Subsidized by corporate plutocrats, it was specifically designed to gin up support for policies

that benefit those plutocrats, at the expense of everyone else. Shocking, we know.

The inevitable result: we have a Dunning-Kruger caucus in Congress. The Members can't tell if a stove is hot without burning a hand.

Finally, the pièce de résistance: make a craven weakling the Speaker. His gavel has a ransom note attached: cater to the whims of the Dunning-Kruger caucus, or it's back to Bakersfield for you.

The sane, responsible Members—we're grading on a curve—agree: the debt ceiling must be raised. If a couple of the Nation's Dumbest choose to scratch some whimsical itch, though, we plunge into the abyss. The Director of National Intelligence recently warned that "China and Russia would likely take advantage of a U.S. debt default to portray the U.S. as a dysfunctional, chaotic and unstable nation."

God forbid they should tell the truth about us.

## The Alleged News®

### The Rebel Girl Still Frightens Reactionaries—Even From the Grave

On May 5th we published something quite surprising. A news release from the New Hampshire Historical Marker Program said, "Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a well-known labor, women's rights and civil liberties activist," had finally been honored by an historic marker "in downtown Concord, near the site of her birthplace."

Less surprisingly, now it's gone. It was removed on Monday, in a dubious and irregular procedure, after a panic attack among Republicans in high places. Why? Because:

"One gets a sense of the energy and fire of some of those turn-of-the-century radicals," Howard Zinn wrote in *A People's History of the United States*, "by looking at the police record of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn."

Flynn's friend and fellow radical, the writer Mary Heaton Vorse, pro-

vided detail, writing in 1926, "She began this amazing record by getting arrested on a street corner when she was fifteen. Her father was arrested with her. He never has been arrested since. It was only the beginning for her. The judge inquired, 'Do you expect to convert people to socialism by talking on Broadway?' She looked up at him and replied gravely, 'Indeed I do.' The judge sighed deeply in pity. 'Dismissed,' he said."

Flynn joined the year-old Industrial Workers of the World [I.W.W.] in 1906, and was a full-time "Wobblie" organizer by the age of 17. She has long been said to have been the inspiration for the Wobblie song, "The Rebel Girl."

It's been suggested others might deserve that honor, but the evi-

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#### The Rebel Girl

Words and music by Joe Hill

There are women of many descriptions  
In this queer world, as everyone knows,  
Some are living in beautiful mansions,  
And are wearing the finest of clothes.  
There are blue-blooded queens and princesses,  
Who have charms made of diamonds and pearls,  
But the only and thoroughbred lady  
Is the Rebel Girl.

#### Chorus:

That's the Rebel Girl, that's the Rebel Girl!  
To the working class, she's a precious pearl.

She brings courage, pride and joy  
To the fighting Rebel Boy;  
We've had girls before, but we need some more  
In the Industrial Workers of the World,  
For it's great to fight for freedom  
With a Rebel Girl.

Yes, her hands may be hardened from labor,  
And her dress may not be very fine;  
But a heart in her bosom is beating  
That is true to her class and her kind.  
And the grafters in terror are trembling  
When her spite and defiance she'll hurl;  
For the only and thoroughbred lady  
Is the Rebel Girl.



Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in 1910, when, as a full-time organizer for the International Workers of the World [I.W.W., or Wobblies], she successfully led a fight for free speech in Spokane. We are able to share this copyright-free image with our readers thanks to an institution run on Communist-adjacent principles, known as the Library of Congress.

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dence seems clear-cut. “The Rebel Girl” was written in 1915 by itinerant Swedish-American miner and I.W.W. songwriter Joe Hill. It was one of his later works; in November of that year, after a highly controversial murder trial, Hill was executed by a Utah firing squad. Evidence discovered a century later makes it all but certain Hill was innocent. On the night before his execution, Hill wrote a note to Flynn. Written with a pencil, in an unwavering hand, it ended, “I would like to kiss you good-bye, Gurley, not because you are a girl, but because you are the original Rebel Girl.”

Installation of the new historical marker seems to have drawn less attention than the fairly predictable reaction to it. In the May 5th *Boston Globe*, Steven Porter reported that two members of the Executive Council “said at a meeting this month they are livid” over the sign.

Councilor Joseph Kenney seemed particularly incensed. Porter wrote that Kenney called Flynn “anti-American,” adding, “Kenney said honoring Flynn is especially offen-

sive to veterans like him and his father who served in the U.S. military and ‘fought against people like her.’ He said the sign has no historical value in New Hampshire.\*

“I think it’s an embarrassment that we have a program that allows us to put communists on historical markers and then say, ‘Oh, that’s part of our history,’ he said. ‘It’s not part of my history.’”

The panic attack among right wing political bigwigs included an interlude when State and City officials mimicked Abbott and Costello in their “Who’s on First” routine. Once it was determined that the land was the State’s, the marker was removed in short order. Its current whereabouts are unknown to us. Barring evidence to the contrary, we must assume it went down Orwell’s “Memory Hole.”

It could have been worse. The Rebel Girl marker stood for a week or so. In April of 2001, State Senator Burt Cohen managed to get a bronze plaque honoring New

\*This newspaper’s readership, we are proud to report, includes quite a few veterans who were literally fighting Communists half a century ago. Their consensus, as we understand it, is that the war was a mistake at best, and probably a crime.



Our Wandering Photographer, lurking in the vicinity of the municipal sewage pumping facility on Sunday afternoon, May 7th, encountered the dissolute young panhandler seen above. Glassy-eyed, hand out, the diminutive Dickensian figure seemed to ask, “Please, kind sir, won’t you please help?” Replying “Are there no workhouses?”, the brute kept walking.

Hampshire members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade mounted on a wall in the State House. It was removed after just a few hours.

Councilor Kenney is wrong about communism not being part of “our history.” Communism has been part of this state’s history for about a century. We have in mind a few certain and specific details—hard evidence of open and unabashed Communist activity—that would likely blow the minds of Councilor Kenney and his fellow Commie-phobe colleague David Wheeler.

We find ourselves in an odd position, though. Our normal role—and it’s one we relish—is to merrily blab about such things so that everyone else might enjoy along with us the unrelenting weirdness of this world.

To pinpoint these home-grown New Hampshire relics now, though, would be reckless. Beautiful, irreplaceable, and mysterious, they are like rare, old-growth trees deep in a forest. Their location, we believe,

is better left unsaid. If Kenney, or Wheeler, in their official capacity, did not try to remove them, some other vigilante might take action on his own.

Arnie Arnesen summed up this frenzied commotion perfectly. On Monday she tweeted: “even today they fear the Rebel Girl.”

It’s been quite an impressive performance for a woman who’s been dead for nearly 60 years.

As usual, when looking back at history, the U.S. of A. keeps its left eye shut. We’ll happily wallow in the Revolution. That’s easy, because we won—otherwise our heroes would have been hanged as traitors. We’re even enamored of our bloody Civil War. Why else would we still be fighting the damned thing? Yet mentioning the struggle that brought us most of what makes life in this country livable—the eight-hour day, child labor laws, the right to collective bargaining, and the weekend, for example—is *verboten*.

**This Just In †  
“Don’t Like the Rules? Change Them!”**

In a story datelined Monday, May 15th, the *Concord Monitor* reported that the Flynn marker had been removed that same day. Conveniently, it would seem, State guidelines on historical markers had been revised just days before to make that removal possible.

“On Friday,” Jamie L. Costa wrote, “the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources changed their guidelines and policies to align with the removal of the marker, which previously stated a marker could only be removed if it contained errors, is in a state of disrepair or required refurbishment.

“Now, the policy reads that ‘markers proposed for revisions beyond the correction of errors shall identify

† Our general policy is not to chase late-breaking news. We make an exception in this case because... well, because we felt like it. Readers are advised not to expect this sort of service all the time.

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elements that include, but are not limited to, existing inaccuracies, lack of historical context or references that could be seen as inappropriate.”

“Inappropriate.” And who, one might ask, shall be the judge of that?

According to Costa, Governor Chris Sununu emailed the paper, saying, “All policies and guidelines were followed in removing this controversial marker.” Well, sure—it’s easy to follow the rules, if you have the power to make them.

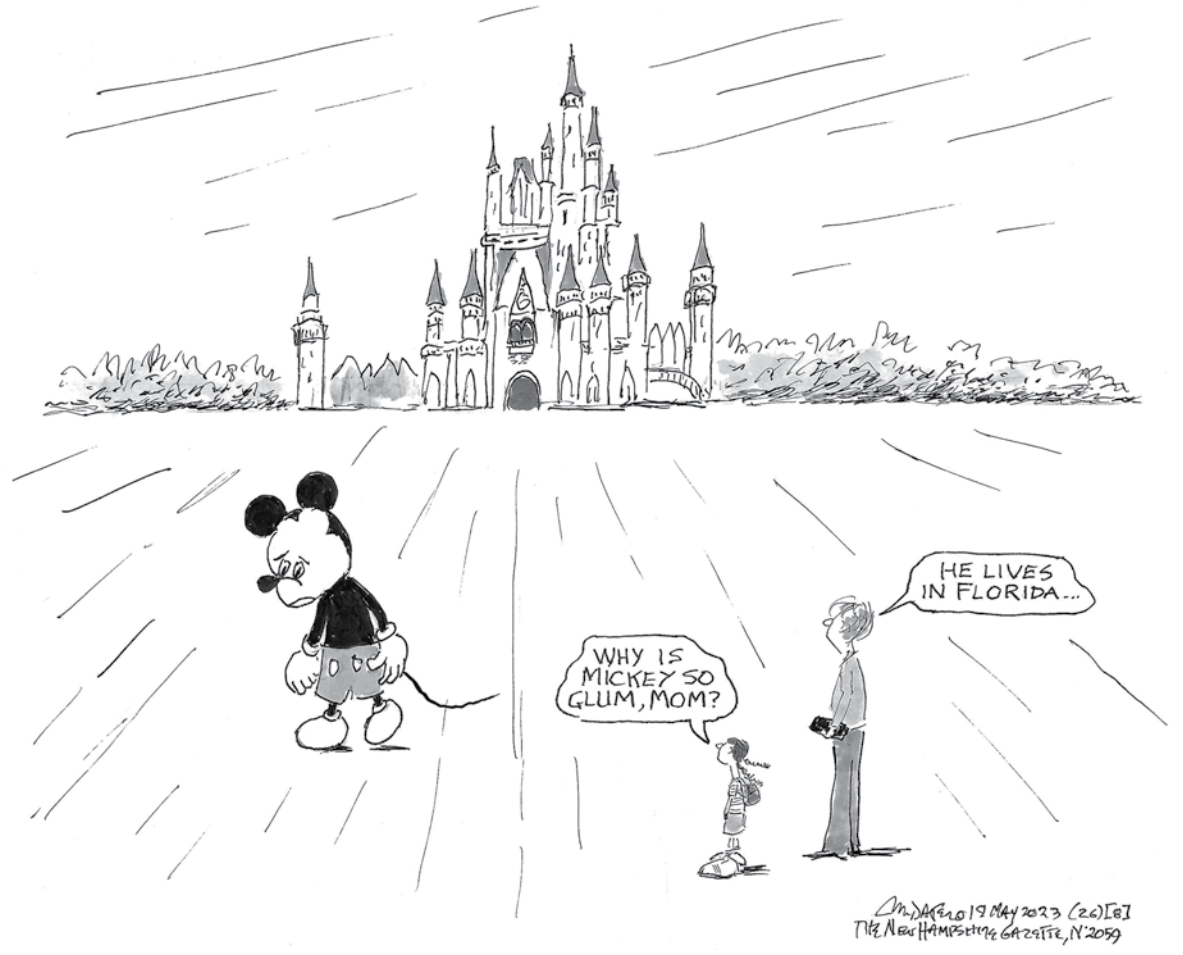
In preparing the ground to throw Elizabeth Gurley Flynn down the Memory Hole, though, the forces of reaction may have missed a relevant detail. On Wednesday morning, NHPR’s Rick Ganley reported that the State Historical Resources Council had not been consulted prior to the removal of the Flynn

marker. Historical Resource Council member James L. Garvin said in a sound bite, “I think that this... was done in haste, and did, in fact, not follow the procedures that were adopted in January.”

The *Monitor’s* report of the 15th noted that Arnie Alpert and Mary Lee Sargent, whose petition got the marker installed in the first place, are “looking into whether they have any legal recourse to move forward with a lawsuit.”

We know nothing about administrative law, but the procedural deficiency noted by Garvin would seem to give Alpert and Sargent some grounds for such a suit.

As Yogi Berra said, “It ain’t over till it’s over.” Elizabeth Gurley Flynn may not be done with the State of New Hampshire just yet.



*The Flag Police have taken under advisement a proposal to adopt a sliding scale in regards to Flag Code enforcement. This initiative comes as a natural response to the accelerating disparity in the distribution of capital. Things are bad enough now. At the rate things are going, the time will come when only those of vast wealth will be able to buy a flag. The poor—should they wish to publicly declare their fealty to the nation which guarantees their freedom in the abstract, leaving them otherwise subject to the whims of their bosses—will eventually be reduced to drawing flags on scraps of discarded cardboard. Due to lack of resources and the uneven distribution of skills, any such home-made flag will likely be in violation of the Flag Code from the moment of its creation. The newly-proposed enforcement guidelines would grant significant leeway to these heartfelt patriotic gestures. Flags owned by well-capitalized corporations, however—especially large, prominently-displayed flags—would be held to the highest standards. This one, for example, which has a substantial rip between the fly ends of the top two stripes, would most definitely be subject to citation.*

**Pharma’s Rampant Corporate Lawlessness’ Cost \$40 Billion in 2019: Report by Jake Johnson**

The U.S. pharmaceutical industry’s aggressive and often unlawful efforts to prevent competition and keep drug prices elevated cost American patients, insurers, and federal health programs more than \$40 billion in 2019 alone, according to a report released Tuesday.

The new report—put out by the American Economic Liberties Project (AELP) and the Initiative for Medicines, Access, and Knowledge (I-MAK)—focuses specifically on pharmaceutical companies’ antitrust law violations, which the groups say are a key reason why U.S. drug prices are astonishingly high compared to those of other rich nations.

Examining the 100 top-selling drug products in Medicare Part D—which covers prescription medicines—and Medicaid, the report estimates that Big Pharma’s anti-

trust violations “increased Part D gross spending by 14.15 percent, or \$14.82 billion, and increased Medicaid gross drug spending by 9.05 percent, or \$3.15 billion, in 2019 for the top 100 drugs in each.”

Assuming that pharmaceutical companies’ antitrust violations similarly affected retail brand drug spending, the report estimates that “U.S. patients and payers spent an additional \$40.07 billion on pharmaceuticals in 2019.”

“American families are paying far too much for prescription drugs, in large part due to rampant corporate lawlessness,” said Erik Peinert, research manager and editor at AELP.

The report highlights 10 illegal anticompetitive schemes that U.S. pharmaceutical companies deploy to juice their profits and keep prices high, including horizontal collusion, patent fraud, no-generics agreements, and sham citizen petitions aimed at delaying approval of po-

tential competitor drugs.

“This report documents the many ways Big Pharma is manipulating and breaking the law to expand corporate profits at the expense of patients and taxpayers,” said Peinert. “The Federal Trade Commission has begun fighting back, but it needs more assistance from Congress and other agencies to crack down on these illegal practices...”

The researchers behind the report offer several specific examples of how large pharmaceutical companies have used their power and dominance of certain markets to push up prices.

The nation’s insulin market, they argue, “has been distorted by multiple overlapping anticompetitive schemes in recent years,” including the “illegal listing” of products and “collusion” among top manufac-

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**Murph’s Fortnightly Quote**  
“Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s needs, but not every man’s greed.”  
— Mahatma Gandhi

“Folks will say anything, and next time round they’ll believe it.”  
— Mary Stewart  
john@wordpraxis.com

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**The Rule of the Gun**

Dear Editor:

One of the more common responses of gun rights supporters, besides offering “thoughts and prayers” after another mass shooting, is that “this is the price of freedom.” According to a 2019 report by the Pew Research Center there were 96 democracies in the world including the United States. The only nation among this group where an epidemic of gun violence is the “Price of Freedom” is the United States. There have been over 200 mass shootings in the United States this year, with over 250 deaths and counting. (ABC News, May 2, 2023)

This begs the question, why are other countries able to maintain freedom for their citizens without the scourge of gun violence? People in other democratic nations enjoy as much or even more freedom than people in the United States, without being afraid to go to school, the store, church, shopping, a concert, or just being out among people without the fear of being gunned down by someone with an AR-15. Their price of freedom does not include having to live in constant fear and being exposed daily to the news of another mass shooting in their country.

Americans seem to think that we are the freest people on the planet. In other democracies, women have the freedom to make their own reproductive decisions. People can vote without obstruction and teach real history. Books are not banned from schools and libraries, and the majority actually rules.

If “the price of freedom” in the United States is represented by the slaughter of children in schools and mass shootings anywhere, anytime, then I think we need to reconsider what freedom really means. Because not being free to live a life without fear of gun violence is not freedom at all. It is living under the rule of the gun.

Rich DiPentima  
Portsmouth, N.H.

Rich:

*At first glance your letter brought to mind a certain popular opinion regarding public discourse, to wit: it is a waste*

*of your breath and other people's time to raise your voice against a perceived social problem, unless you are also prepared to offer a practical solution.*

*For the record, we reject that supposed principle. It says, in effect, this is how things are, and this is how things shall remain. Changes in the status quo are unacceptable, unless and until they survive some nebulous debate—the terms of which, by definition, favor the maintenance of the status quo. In short, sit down and shut up.*

*This is all beside the point, of course, because you did offer a solution—and a fine one, at that. If we read you right, you're proposing that we reconcile the glaring contradiction inherent in our actual circumstances, compared to our lofty language, by the simple expedient of speaking the truth.*

*Of course, if you were to insist on doing that in public, you would run the risk of being shot.*

The Editor

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**Republican Hacks Attempt Extortion**

To the editor;

The statutory debt limit has been raised 78 times since 1960 (three times during the Trump administration) to avoid default on government debt. This year, however, radical House Republicans are threatening default when the debt limit is reached in June unless the Biden administration agrees to a laundry list of extreme budget cuts. The Republicans either do not understand the consequences of a default or are willing to burn down the economic house to achieve their political objectives.

Debate over the size of the debt is a valid political issue but the debate should be a part of the normal budgeting process. Holding the American people hostage by threatening default on previously legislated expenses is not acceptable. The consequences of default are dire. In 2011, when agreement on increasing the debt limit appeared to be deadlocked, the stock market lost 17 percent of its value. Fortunately, a last-minute agreement was reached, but if the U.S. should default today, the stock market decline would be considerable. Goldman Sachs has



estimated that 10 percent of economic activity would cease immediately after default. Say goodbye to the value of your IRA and retirement savings and hello to a recession on the level of the Great Recession of 2008. Other sources estimate that upwards of three to seven million American jobs would be lost due to default.

Confidence in U.S. Treasury debt would plummet accompanied by a large rise in interest rates on government debt. Increasing rates on mortgages and credit card debt would follow. The cost of servicing existing treasury debt would increase significantly, making the debt burden worse not better. As confidence in treasuries declined, the value of the U.S. dollar would also decline threatening its status as the preeminent global currency. The cost of global exchange would become more expensive. Financing America's large trade deficits through the sale of Treasury debt to foreigners would become impossible to sustain, further depressing the standard of living in the U.S. Such a situation would be much to the delight of Russia and China who have long advocated the abandonment of the dollar as the standard for global trade.

Default could have additional unpredictable consequences on fragile world economies. It would follow three years of a global pandemic, supply chain breakdowns, global inflation and Russia's war on the Ukraine. Global economies are still struggling to recover from these shocks. Another global financial shock may have disastrous effects.

Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy claims that the House's “Limit, Grow and Save Bill” that defines the desired budget cuts is serious legislation that will lead to the control of the budget deficit. It is not. As he undoubtedly knows, the bill is dead on arrival in the Senate and would be vetoed by Biden. The bill is empty political theater and nothing more than an

extremist wish list.

McCarthy fails to discuss the Republican contribution to the debt limit crisis. The 2017 Trump tax cuts that delivered 80 percent of its benefits to corporations and the richest Americans has cost the government \$1.7 trillion in lost revenue. If the Bush tax cuts, which also primarily benefited the rich, are factored in, \$10 trillion has been added to government debt. Without Republican tax cuts that primarily accrued to the richest Americans, today's debt crisis would not exist. In a very real sense, our national debt has been used to finance the economic gains of the rich.

Both political parties need to engage in serious dialogue regarding government debt, but the refusal of the Republican Party to increase the debt limit needs to be recognized for what it is—an unconscionable extortion that places the prosperity of all Americans at risk perpetrated by ignorant, self-serving political hacks.

Robert D. Russell, Ph.D.

Harrisburg, Pa.

Robert:

*It is a pleasure to present our readers with such an argument: calm and coherent, yet forthright and forceful. In honor of such sterling self-control, we tip our green eyeshade in your direction, sir.*

The Editor

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**They Say They Care. They Don't.**

To the Editor:

The GOP members of the U.S. House of Representatives voted to raise the debt ceiling only if government funding for everything except Medicare, Social Security, the military and ethanol were cut back to what they were in 2019.

Inflation is 21 percent higher than in 2019 so Speaker Kevin McCarthy and his party voted to cut all other programs by 21 percent. The GOP

is constantly taking photo ops at the Mexican border to complain about immigration, yet they voted to cut spending on the Border Patrol by 21 percent. They complain about our illegal drug problem, but they voted for 21 percent spending cuts for the DEA, FBI and Customs.

In 2019 the war in Afghanistan cost \$52 billion. The war is over, but cutting defense spending is off the table. The administration said the cuts would cost 81,000 health care jobs at the Veterans Administration. Clearly, the GOP cares more about defense industry jobs in their district than their own veterans.

Kevin McCarthy says these cuts will save \$2 trillion over 10 years which is the same amount the Trump tax cuts created in deficits. His party did not care about deficits then. They do not care about the country now.

Walter Hamilton  
Portsmouth, N.H.

Walter:

*Jeezum crow... when you put it like that, it's almost as if Republicans—despite their constant pious posturing—don't give a bleep about the Ninth Commandment. (As all our readers will instantly recall, that's the Commandment that—paraphrasing from the original stone tablets—says “don't tell lies.”)*

The Editor

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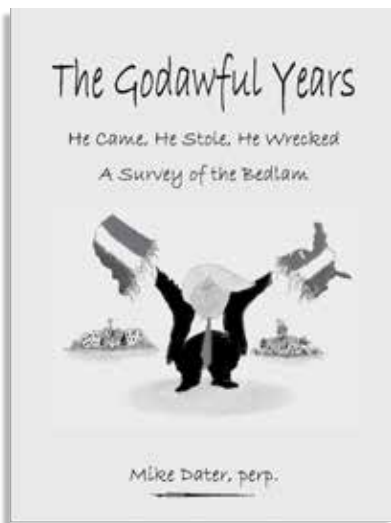
**Ewing's Latest 288-Word Hate**

To the Editor:

Democrats talk about Democracy, but they only care about Democracy when the people elect them. For example, after voters elected Republicans to cut the bloated spending fueling today's painful inflation, in an unprecedented move less than two weeks before the new Congress was sworn in, the formerly Democrat [*sic, passim*] controlled Congress (with a few un-

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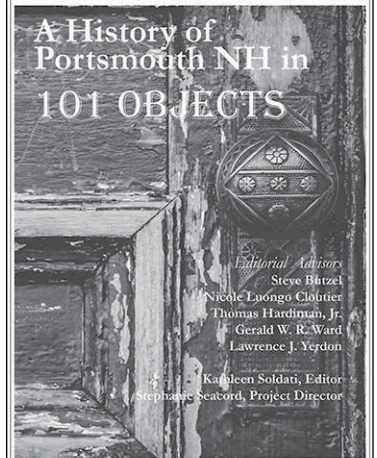
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marketed to right wingers are universally fraudulent.

Take, for example, the insurance policies for gun owners which are marketed by Sean Hannity. They purport to protect the policy-holder against lawsuits filed by surviving family members of the deceased. Specifically, we'd like to know why Hannity never reads quotes from satisfied customers: "He cut in line at Subway—what did he think was going to happen? Sean Hannity had my back, though, so I'm still a free man!" These policies are obviously a scam, because they're completely unnecessary. Go ahead and shoot the guy—no one's going to hold you accountable.

We particularly like the ads that promise a secure old age, thanks to an "investment" in precious metals. Such brilliant advice. How does that work? Do you go to the supermarket and wave a piece of paper at them? Or do you bring silver dollars, and a hacksaw to make change?

You, though, are clearly a discerning customer. Congratulations! Judging from this letter, it appears that your solid-titanium Official GOP Epistemic Bubble™ remains perfectly intact.

The Editor

Remember the Liberty!

Dear Editor:

June 8th marks the 56th anniversary of the attack on the U.S.S. Liberty (GTR-5), in international waters, approximately 17 miles off the Gaza Strip. I was aboard one of Liberty's sister ships on that decisive day, the U.S.S. Jamestown (GTR-3). Having departed Singapore we were enroute to our assigned station off the coast of Vietnam.

Every administration since Lyndon Johnson has down-played the attack and national media cooperates by rarely mentioning the event. The reason is clear. Liberty was not attacked by an adversary but by our "friend and ally," Israel. Without warning or provoca-

tion, Israeli Air Force Mirage fighters strafed Liberty, resulting in 820 rocket and cannon holes topside. After the fighters, Mystere bombers dropped napalm. While the crew battled fires, Israeli torpedo boats fired five torpedos at Liberty with the clear intent to sink her. Fortunately, four missed, but the one that didn't left a 40-foot hole in her starboard side, killing 25 men.

When the smoke had cleared, 34 sailors were dead or missing and 171 were wounded including the Captain (CDR William McGonagle) who, though severely wounded, refused to leave the bridge. Only the bravery and resolve of the captain, officers and crew prevented Liberty from sinking with all hands.

Liberty managed to send an SOS to our 6th Fleet and two aircraft carriers (the America and the Saratoga) launched Navy fighter-bombers to aid Liberty but they were recalled. When Rear Admiral Lawrence Geis (Commander of U.S.S. America's battle group) protested the recall, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara retorted, "President Johnson is not going to war or embarrass an American ally over a few sailors" (Chicago Tribune - Web Edition - October 2, 2007).

Liberty is one of America's most decorated warships, earning a Congressional Medal of Honor, two Navy Crosses, 38 Silver or Bronze Stars, a Presidential Unit Citation and 205 Purple Hearts, and if you don't see this letter, it's unlikely you've ever heard of the Liberty. The Medal of Honor is traditionally conferred by the President in a ceremony at the White House. Commander McGonagle was handed his by the Secretary of the Navy at the Washington Navy Yard.

For 56 years, no U.S. President or Congress has attempted to hold Israel fully accountable for this murderous and unconscionable act of aggression, accepting the blatant lie it was a case of mistaken identity.

It's painful for Liberty survivors

and families of those lost never to have experienced satisfactory closure to this totally unnecessary loss of life and ship. To keep faith with them and their loved ones, we who served in uniform on that fateful day think often of the U.S.S. Liberty, the captain, officers and crew; we pause, and we remember. RIP Shipmates...

David L. Snell  
Franklin, N.C.

David:

Thank you for this timely reminder. It has served to prompt us to begin a piece about the U.S.S. Liberty which we hope to have ready in time for our paper of June 2nd. For now, we'll leave it at this:

Wikipedia has a page euphemistically titled, "The U.S.S. Liberty Incident." It includes the following sentence: "Both the Israeli and U.S. governments conducted inquiries and issued reports that concluded the attack was a mistake due to Israeli confusion about the ship's identity." What it fails to say is that those inquiries were inadequate, and the subsequent reports were misleading.

The Editor

In Defense of "The Rebel Girl"

To the Editor:

Fact: "The Ford-F Series is our best-selling truck for 46 consecutive years." Henry Ford's politics, however, are now seen by some as negatively as those of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Have Henry Ford's politics had a negative impact on that sales record? Probably not.

In 1938, Ford admired Adolf Hitler and Germany. In 1938, he accepted the Grand Cross of the German Eagle, the Nazi regime's highest medal for a foreigner. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's equivalent behavior came after decades of working for America's labor class, traveling to Russia, receiving an award for her devotion to her choice of economic philosophy, communism. Now we buy communist-China-made products galore (as well as Ford trucks).

Ford's historical marker—"where stood the home in which Henry Ford was born on July 30, 1863, the farmhouse... owned by Ford's parents, William and Mary Ford"—gets no

complaints. Markers honor people who made outstanding contributions. We see no historical markers for Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, or convicted serial killer Aileen Carol Wuornos.

Now, we honor Concord-born Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. She began early, working for labor rights, women's rights, the right to vote, and access to birth control. She was a founding member of our American Civil Liberties Union. Her marker should not be removed in a knee-jerk reaction to "trigger words."

Lynn Rudmin Chong  
Sanbornton, N.H.

Lynn:

Yup—yet another un-needed reminder that, as the saying goes, "every accusation is a confession." Right wingers love to accuse the left of stifling free speech and "canceling" conservative voices. How is this not an example of that?

The Editor

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, In Her Own Words

"We... never thought it would be possible, that there would be social security or unemployment insurance. Those were the results of the 30's. The great struggle that came out after the decline of the IWW. Also, we never heard of vacations with pay. We never heard of vacations, let alone vacations with pay. We never heard of seniority as it is understood today. There were no pensions for retirement of workers. There were no welfare funds of unions. There were no health centers of unions, and there were no trade union schools such as there are today. All of these things have come with the unions that have come into existence since the period of the IWW."

"... the hatred against the I.W.W. was so great... that editorials in papers would say, 'They should be arrested at dawn and shot before breakfast, without a trial.'"

"There is less violence against labor today, but there are more legal restrictions. There are more attempts to invade the rights of labor by repressive legislation..."

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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](http://PortsmouthGenome.org) Join the conversation. A Portsmouth Peace Treaty Forum project.

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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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from page three

turers in violation of RICO law, as well as “exclusionary rebates to drive patients toward brand products and away from substantially cheaper authorized generic versions.”

The groups estimate that Medicare Part D and Medicaid “would have spent approximately 50 percent less on three of the four major insulin brands (Levemir, Novolog, Lantus) in 2019 but for the anti-competitive strategies used by the major insulin manufacturers.”

The report also accuses AbbVie and Allergan—which the former acquired in 2020—of engaging in a “sustained, consistent pattern of illegally blocking generic and biosimilar competition in violation of the anti-trust laws.”

In the case of Bystolic, a blood pressure medicine, “Allergan entered illegal pay-for-delay agreements to prevent and delay generic competition” for the drug before 2019.

The groups estimate that Part D and Medicaid would have spent 90 percent less on Bystolic and its generic equivalents in 2019 had Allergan not entered the pay-for-delay agreement, which the FTC says cost U.S. consumers and taxpayers \$3.5 billion a year in the form of higher drug prices.

The report also points to a whistleblower lawsuit alleging that Janssen Pharmaceuticals—which is owned by Johnson & Johnson—committed patent fraud to prolong its monopoly on Zytiga, a prostate cancer drug.

“The patent system is at the root of enabling many of the antitrust violations we identified and which are leading to higher drug prices,” said Tahir Amin, an executive director of I-MAK.

To combat the pharmaceutical industry’s abuses and lower costs for patients, the American Economic Liberties Project and I-MAK recommended that lawmakers and regulators act to completely ban pay-for-delay agreements, modify patent laws to “ensure that drug

companies cannot use bad-faith patent strategies to perpetually extend monopolies,” and ramp up penalties for antitrust violations, among other changes.

“Until Congress and the United States Patent and Trademark Office ensure stricter standards that would prevent the granting of many of the types of patents that are leading to these violations in the first place,” Amin said, “Americans can expect to see their drug prices continue to rise.”

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

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**Pagan Workers May Pay In Order To Accommodate the Pious**

by Debbie Kaminer

The Supreme Court may soon transform the role of faith in the workplace, which could have the effect of elevating the rights of religious workers at the expense of co-workers.

On April 18, 2023, the court heard oral arguments in *Groff v. DeJoy*, a case addressing an employer’s obligation to accommodate religious employees’ requests under federal law. The dispute involves a Christian postal worker who quit his job and sued the U.S. Postal Service after he was unable to find coverage for his Sunday shifts. Current law requires employers to make accommodations for workers’ religious requests only if doing so doesn’t impose more than a minimal cost on their business, known as the “de minimis” standard.

After listening to the oral arguments in the case, I believe it’s very likely the court will overturn the de minimis standard and require employers to accommodate more religious requests. As Justice Gorsuch stated, “I think there’s common ground that de minimis can’t be the test, in isolation at least, because Congress doesn’t pass civil rights legislation to have de minimis effect, right?”

In my view, as a scholar of employment discrimination, the only

questions are how far the justices will go—and who will ultimately pay the price.

**Religious rights in the workplace**

Employers are required to accommodate the religious needs of employees under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, so long as they can do so without imposing an “undue hardship.”

Congress didn’t define what that term meant, and it took another dozen years for the U.S. Supreme Court to do so in *Trans World Airlines v. Haridson*. The court determined that Title VII does not require employers to bear more than a “de minimis” or minimal cost in accommodating religious employees.

Relying on this narrow decision, employees requesting religious accommodation in the workplace have generally fared poorly in the courts. Supporters of more religious accommodation in the workplace have tried many times to amend Title VII to redefine undue hardship as a “significant difficulty or expense.”

From 1994 to 2013, over a dozen bills attempting to codify this definition were introduced in Congress, with none coming close to passage. After failing to persuade Congress to amend Title VII, religious advocates turned to the Supreme Court. However, the court’s decision to hear this case is highly unusual, since it suggests it is considering overturning its own long-standing precedent.

The other key issue in the case is whether or not a religious accommodation that imposes on co-workers can count as an undue hardship on the employer.

Since *Trans World Airlines v. Haridson*, most federal appellate courts have determined that accommodations affecting religious employees’ co-workers—such as those requiring them to take over undesirable weekend shifts—can be an undue hardship, even if the business is not directly harmed. In practice, that has made it easier for an employer to avoid accommodating a religious request.

**Business interests vs. religious rights**

Ultimately, the *Groff* case pits business interests against religious rights. That presents a unique dilemma for the current court led by Chief Justice John Roberts, which is both

the most pro-business and the most pro-religion court in recent memory.

One way to resolve these two apparently competing interests would be to overturn the de minimis standard and require employers to provide greater accommodation to religious employees while allowing employers to sometimes shift this cost to co-workers.

Based on what the justices said at the hearing and their discussion about accommodations that affect worker morale, I believe it’s likely that that’s exactly what the Supreme Court is going to do. That would have the effect of dramatically limiting employee rights.

Take, for example, one common type of accommodation request, which is time off from work for religious observance.

In those cases, either co-workers can bear the cost of accommodation, by covering for the religious employee without necessarily earning more income, or the employer can bear the cost of accommodation, by hiring additional workers, paying premium wages or suffering a loss of productivity. If the Supreme Court determines that a cost to co-workers alone can never be an undue hardship under Title VII, employers would likely shift the cost of accommodation onto co-workers—for example, requiring them to work an undesirable weekend shift.

Unless an accommodation also leads to a significant difficulty or expense on the business itself—such as through a loss of productivity or efficiency - harm to co-workers would never be a justification for denying an accommodation, as it has been in most federal appellate courts.

**Co-workers bearing the brunt**

Co-workers could also be harmed in cases involving accommodation of religious expression. This is of particular concern in cases in which religious expression demeans LGBTQ+ people.

In 2004, the 9th Circuit determined that it would pose an undue hardship and be demeaning to co-workers for a religious employee to post in his cubicle the Bible verse “If a man also lie with mankind ... both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death.”

Yet if the Supreme Court broad-

ens the definition of undue hardship and determines costs to co-workers alone never create an undue hardship, employers might be required—by a civil rights law originally aimed at prohibiting employment discrimination—to accommodate religious expression that demeans LGBTQ+ employees.

Assuming the Supreme Court decides this case as expected, the losers would be co-workers who will bear the brunt of the increased religious accommodation requirement. And the Roberts court would maintain its status as one of the most pro-business and pro-religion courts in modern times.

*Debbie Kaminer, is Professor of Law, Baruch College, CUNY*

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**What’s a Luddite?**

by Andrew Maynard

The term “Luddite” emerged in early 1800s England. At the time there was a thriving textile industry that depended on manual knitting frames and a skilled workforce to create cloth and garments out of cotton and wool. But as the Industrial Revolution gathered momentum, steam-powered mills threatened the livelihood of thousands of artisanal textile workers.

Faced with an industrialized future that threatened their jobs and their professional identity, a growing number of textile workers turned to direct action. Galvanized by their leader, Ned Ludd, they began to smash the machines that they saw as robbing them of their source of income.

It’s not clear whether Ned Ludd was a real person, or simply a fragment of folklore invented during a period of upheaval. But his name became synonymous with rejecting disruptive new technologies—an association that lasts to this day.

Contrary to popular belief, the original Luddites were not anti-technology, nor were they technologically incompetent. Rather, they were skilled adopters and users of the artisanal textile technologies of the time. Their argument was not with technology, per se, but with the ways that wealthy industrialists were robbing them of their way of life.

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# Tweedledum and Tweedledee?

By W.D. Ehrhart

So now we find out that Republican mega-donor Harlan Crow paid the private school tuition of a boy Clarence Thomas and his wife were raising “as a son.” We can add this to Thomas selling his mother’s home to Crow, who promptly sank thousands of dollars into the house to refurbish it, and then let Thomas’s mother live there rent-free. Oh, and there are the decades of luxury vacations, luxury cruises, and luxury private jet travel, courtesy of Harlan Crow. None of this was, as required by law, reported by Thomas.

And then there’s his wife, Virginia “Ginni” Thomas, a stridently vocal political activist who openly supported and participated in the “Stop the Steal” efforts after the 2020 presidential election. She’s got all sorts of connections with Crow, the Federalist Society, Steve Bannon, Leonard Leo, and other far right Republican operators (what else can one call them?), many of whom have managed to funnel \$\$\$\$\$ into Ginni’s bank account.

All of this is explained away by the Thomases and their supporters with hair-splitting semantics about the boy being only their legal ward, not their actual child, and other explanations like Crow was just giving some gifts to his friends like any old pal would do, no need to report any of that.

Meanwhile, Senator Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) insists this is just partisan politics and part of a longstanding attack on Justice Thomas (Thomas? Justice? Talk about irony). This is the same senator who is about to publish a book called *Manhood: The Masculine Virtues America Needs*. The same senator who raised his fist in support of the January 6th insurrection-

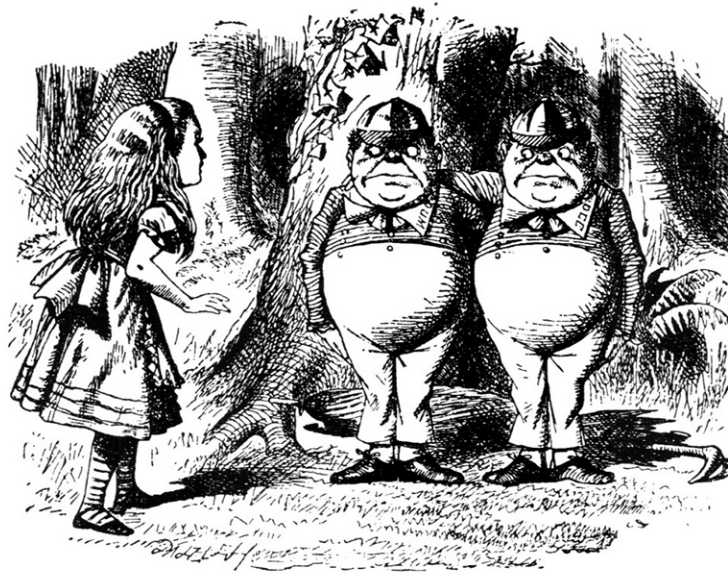
ists, but then a few hours later ran away from the people he supported as they attacked the Capitol (it was caught on tape. Google it. See for yourself. As King Arthur says to his knights in front of the French castle in *The Holy Grail*, “Run away! Run away!”) And he’s going to teach us about manhood and masculinity.

Don’t get me wrong. I don’t have a very good opinion of Democrats either. I voted for Bill Clinton because I thought maybe replacing the World War II generation (not so greatest, as it turns out) with my generation might result in some significant changes. But instead, Clinton turned the Democratic Party into Republican Lite, and his pathological philandering handed the White House over to the worst president this country ever had until Dolt .45 showed up.

Then along came Barack Obama. Even if he’s actually African American, not African-American, I never thought I’d see the day. But then he proceeded to appoint some of the very Wall Street manipulators who brought on the 2008 Crash to high positions in the Fed and Treasury, fire more drone missiles than all previous presidents combined, and lockup whistleblowers and journalists at an unprecedented rate.

And now we’ve got Uncle Joe. I voted for him, too, though mostly for a single reason: he’s not Dolt .45. He did make the only good decision about Afghanistan that this country has ever made since 1979, and he’s up against Republican legislators who are hellbent on coddling the super-rich, screwing workers and the poor, and doing their best to make sure that Biden accomplishes as little as possible.

But the only viable candidate the Democrats can come up with is a



John Tenniel, from *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871).

guy who’s six years older than I am? I’m 74, for cryin’ in a bucket. If he gets re-elected and doesn’t croak before the end of his second term, he’ll be 86 years old. Maybe he’ll still have all his marbles. All I can say is: here’s hoping.

Still, I’m going to have to vote for him. What else can any thoughtful person do? As a party, the Democrats are about as flawed and corrupt and hypocritical and beholden to the moneyed interests as can be. Prior to the rise of Dolt .45 and the MAGA Movement, I would have said they’re not much better than the Republicans, and that would have been largely true.

Now I’m not so sure. Now that the irrational, hate-filled, homophobic, misogynistic, Islamophobic, racist, gun-toting, book-burning politics of Margery Taylor Greene (R-Ga.), Lauren Boebert (R-Colo.), Thomas Massie (R-Ky.), Josh Hawley, and so many others of their ilk from the local to the national level have entered the American political mainstream, the difference between the two parties can no longer be called

a choice between Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

I began this piece by looking closely at Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. Let’s look at other members of the court. Republican presidents have seated Clarence Thomas, John Roberts, Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Barrett. Democratic presidents have seated Sonya Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, and Ketanji Jackson. And this contrast goes right on down through our federal judicial system to the appellate and district courts. Reason enough, in and of itself, to vote for Democrats.

Far more often than not, I have to hold my nose when I vote for a Democrat. But given the choices I have at every election, I’d have to cut off my nose to vote for a Republican, and we all know that cutting off your nose to spite your face is just plain stupid.

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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.*

# Chicken Little Attacks America’s Teachers

by Jim Hightower

I’m a child of privilege. Not the privilege of money (I come from a family of small-town working people). But it was my privilege to grow up in the public schools of Denison, Texas.

There I received the rich blessings of dedicated classroom teachers, a diverse student body, playground socialization, librarians, coaches, cafeteria and custodial workers, student politics, vocational training... and a deep appreciation for the unifying value of community and the Common Good.

That’s why I’m flabbergasted by today’s clique of corporate profiteers, theocratic zealots, and laissez-faire knuckleheads who’re lobbying furiously across the country to demonize, defund, and dismantle this invaluable social benefit. If ignorance is bliss, they must be ecstatic!

Public schools do have some real problems: Politicians constantly slashing education budgets, professional burnout created by understaffing and low pay, the devastating strain of a killer pandemic, and a new-normal of assault-rifle murders. But the profiteers, theocrats, and knuckleheads aren’t interested in those, instead focusing on what they say is the fatal flaw in public education: Teachers.

Yes, the claim is that diabolical educators are perverting innocent minds by teaching America’s actual history, showing students that the full diversity of humankind enriches our society, and presenting our Earth as something to be protected, not plundered. And worse—*Omigod!*—many classroom teachers are union members! So, teachers suddenly find themselves political pawns in the GOP’s culture war. “Our schools are a cesspool of Marxist indoctrination,” squawked Sen. Marco Rubio, and Donald Trump squealed that schools are run by “radical left maniacs” and “pink-haired communists.” These right-wing Chicken Littles are demonizing America’s invaluable educators because they need someone for people to hate, providing cover for their unpopular plot to privatize education. But hate can easily backfire on hatemongers—and local teachers are a whole lot more popular than conniving politicians and profiteers.

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## The Alleged News®

from page six

Today, this distinction is sometimes lost.

In December 2015, Stephen Hawking, Elon Musk and Bill Gates were jointly nominated for a “Luddite Award.” Their sin? Raising concerns over the potential dangers of artificial intelligence.

The irony of three prominent scientists and entrepreneurs being labeled as Luddites underlines the disconnect between the term’s original meaning and its more modern

use as an epithet for anyone who doesn’t wholeheartedly and unquestioningly embrace technological progress.

Yet technologists like Musk and Gates aren’t rejecting technology or innovation. Instead, they’re rejecting a worldview that all technological advances are ultimately good for society. This worldview optimistically assumes that the faster humans innovate, the better the future will be.

This “move fast and break things” approach toward technological innovation has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years—especially

with growing awareness that unfettered innovation can lead to deeply harmful consequences that a degree of responsibility and forethought could help avoid.

Why Luddism matters  
In an age of ChatGPT, gene editing and other transformative technologies, perhaps we all need to channel the spirit of Ned Ludd as we grapple with how to ensure that future technologies do more good than harm.

In fact, “Neo-Luddites” or “New Luddites” is a term that emerged at the end of the 20th century.

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ADMIRAL FOWLE'S PISCATAQUA RIVER TIDAL GUIDE (NOT FOR NAVIGATIONAL PURPOSES)

Portsmouth, arguably the first town in this country not founded by religious extremists, is bounded on the north and east by the Piscataqua River, the second, third, or fourth fastest-flowing navigable river in the country, depending on

whom you choose to believe. The Piscataqua's ferocious current is caused by the tide, which, in turn, is caused by the moon. The other player is a vast sunken valley — Great Bay — about ten miles upriver. Twice a day, the moon

drags about seventeen billion gallons of seawater — enough to fill 2,125,000 tanker trucks — up the river and into Great Bay. This creates a roving hydraulic conflict, as incoming sea and the outgoing river collide. The skirmish line

moves from the mouth of the river, up past New Castle, around the bend by the old Naval Prison, under Memorial Bridge, past the tugboats, and on into Great Bay. This can best be seen when the tide is rising.

Twice a day, too, the moon lets all that water go. All the seawater that just fought its way upstream goes back home to the ocean. This is when the Piscataqua earns its title for xth fastest current. Look for the red buoy, at the upstream end of

Badger's Island, bobbing around in the current. It weighs several tons, and it bobs and bounces in the current like a cork. The river also has its placid moments, around high and low tides. When the river rests, its tugboats

and bridges work their hardest. Ships coming in laden with coal, oil, and salt do so at high tide, for more clearance under their keels. They leave empty, riding high in the water, at low tide, to squeeze under Memorial Bridge.

Table with 7 columns for days of the week (May 21 to May 27) and rows for tide data and historical events. Each day column contains a tide chart and a list of historical events.

Table with 7 columns for days of the week (May 28 to June 3) and rows for tide data and historical events. Each day column contains a tide chart and a list of historical events.

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