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FALL 2022

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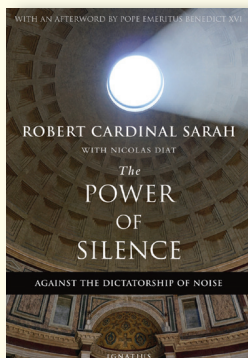
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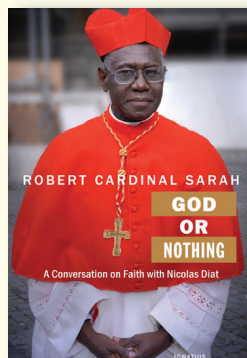
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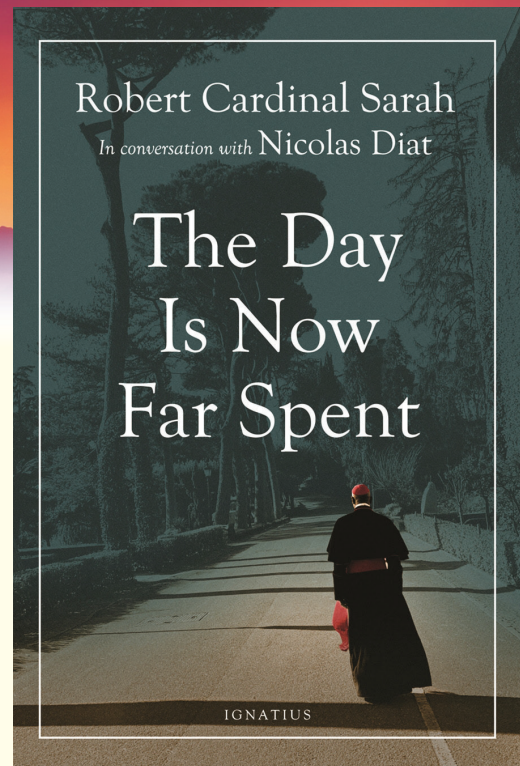
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MOTTO

Politics is too important to be taken seriously.

MISSION STATEMENT

The core purpose of *The American Spectator* is to educate, entertain, and inform readers with smart and witty investigative journalism and editorial writing from a conservative point of view. What distinguishes *The American Spectator* is its wry, youthful, and fresh perspective.

VISION STATEMENT

The American Spectator maintains fidelity to the conservative dogma of happy warriors of generations past while not being stuffy, inflexible, or incurious about new phenomena in politics and culture.



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Fall 2022

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

The American Spectator

PO Box 320399

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Waving Goodbye to the Red Wave

by *Wlady Pleszczynski*

At our annual Robert L. Bartley Gala on October 20, keynote speaker Newt Gingrich delivered his funniest line in characteristic Newt form when he said, “We have today a president who on a good day is an idiot.” Since November 8, that insight has taken on unexpected deeper meaning.

Does it hurt any less today that our lunch was handed to us by a yo-yo? That, just as he did in his basement campaign of 2020, he survived the 2022 midterms in style, certainly much better than Barack Obama and Donald Trump did in their first midterms (as the pressies keep reminding us)? Bill Clinton, who always seemed perched on the edge of disaster, in time became known as the “Comeback Kid.” At the tender age of eighty, Joe Biden will have to come up with something better. “I Did It for Democracy!” Or, “Anything to keep Dr. Jill happy.” Or, most likely, “Who you callin’ senile?” Assuming he remembers.

Yes, it hasn’t been a good strategy to ridicule Joe for being an old fool. When hasn’t he been a fool? Plus there’s the entertainment value when we see him lost and confused upon leaving the podium or calling out the dead while still at the podium. Are we really shocked, shocked, or just hoping that there’ll be a whole lot more of that in the coming months and years? And, wouldn’t you know, the Dems already have a successor in mind for Joe.

He goes by the name of John Fetterman, and he’s considerably younger. Already there’s talk in their circles of running him in 2024, no doubt on the expectation that his unique rhetorical style will allow him to be all things to all people, as in the pre-midterm debate against his Republican

opponent in Pennsylvania. His one negative might be that he’s hardly the fashion plate Joe is, and if he snacks it’s unlikely to be on ice cream.

On the other hand, with a wife like his who needs a Hillary or a Kamala (not that the latter is not overdue for a comeback)? She’s now well positioned to become the voice of all those young, single abortion devotees whose votes saved the day for the Dems and removed red waves from their hair salons’ offerings.

At this point, many wish there were some age-related problems that could be detected in the Republican front-runner. At once he’d be less hated and more widely liked. But we all know that’s not going to happen. One would think that someone with his many gifts and achievements would find ever-new ways to win friends and influence people. Instead, he moves in the opposite direction, making sure that those well positioned on his own side are targeted first.

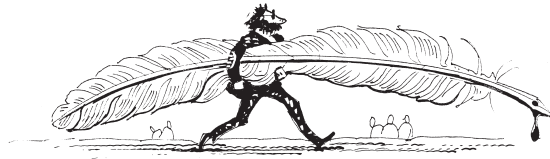
Instead of building a majority, he insists on becoming a majority of one, and if you don’t like it he’ll broaden that into a coalition of one. In their unprecedented fascistic phase, Democrats want to lock him away. (There are enough of them mean and crazy enough to restore the death penalty.) One has to wonder: who will visit him in prison?

In a sane political world, someone as exceptional as Ron DeSantis would be an automatic vice-presidential sidekick to a deserving Donald Trump as he serves a second term, and then perfectly positioned to serve two presidential terms of his own.

But that’s not the world we currently live in. And so we’re led and misled by the likes of the Biden Democrats, praying to their abortion gods, loathing their opponents, rejecting tolerance, and mailing in whatever it takes to win — while the leader of their opposition makes sure his side won’t stand a chance. And to add insult to injury, whom do we suddenly see reappearing after years in hiding to claim that he should be the new guy? Anyone remember Paul Ryan? Heaven help us. 🍷



Wlady Pleszczynski is executive editor of The American Spectator.



Who Run the World?

Regarding the midterms, Beyoncé said it best.

by **Melissa Mackenzie**

Who run the world? Girls! Girls, we run this mutha!” These lines, from Beyoncé’s catchy tune eponymously named “Run the World (Girls),” could also be the title of the Democrats’ greatest election hits since Barack Obama’s tenure. Single ladies make the Democrats’ world go round. Well, that and sophisticated ballot-harvesting schemes.

Republicans, if one believed the polls, were on their way to big wins in the House and modest wins in the Senate in the lead-up to the 2022 midterm elections. That did not happen. Instead, Republicans lost seats they should have won in an economic environment built for a landslide. America is dealing with high gas prices, forty-year-high inflation, a president who humiliated the country in Afghanistan, a housing crisis fueled by interest rates from the Eighties that prices out new buyers, and on and on. In two years, the Democrats created the Seventies all over again, and, even still, Republicans had to scrape for every midterm win.

Republican voters are predominantly made up of boomers and Gen Xers. They’re somewhat more male. Somewhat more married. Democrats, in contrast, have one core constituency: girls!

Single ladies skew plus-37 Democrat. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez *is* the Democrat Party.

The Democrats’ get-out-the-vote effort was relentless. How do I know this? Well, I have a single lady in my household (besides me), and somehow the Democrats thought my phone number was hers. I received texts, calls, and all the rest daily, for weeks, if not for months before the election. This was in Texas, where Beto O’Rourke stood no chance. What did Democrats do in friendlier states? I don’t know, but, whatever it was, it worked.

Polls missed this wave of single ladies. How? Well, the ballot systems put in place during COVID got codified in many purple places, virtually ensuring that no Republican will ever get elected there again because Republicans, if they do vote, vote on Election Day. The Republican strategy going back to Mitt Romney’s Whale failure (some of you will remember what a debacle that was) has been to get Republicans to vote *on* Election Day. That’s great and all, but, just to cite one example, 500,000 votes had already been cast in Pennsylvania by the time John Fetterman stuttered through the debate with Dr. Mehmet Oz. Election Day is too late.

Rather than deal with the balloting issue and confront the inherent fraud, Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell, House minority leader Kevin McCarthy, and Republican National Committee chair Ronna McDaniel, along with the rest of the GOP leadership all the way down, ignored the issue lest they should empower Donald Trump with his contentions of a stolen election. The problem? If it wasn’t stolen, then all the Democrat-led mechanisms implemented to make it “easier” to vote also made it easier to manipulate the ballots. And so, two years and an economic catastrophe later, ballot harvesting became the way to win. Republicans were caught flat-footed because they refused to acknowledge the way that elections work now.



Melissa Mackenzie is publisher of The American Spectator.



The recriminations have begun. The *Wall Street Journal's* editorial page is awash in anti-Trump bilge blaming Trump for the losses of winnable seats because of “candidate quality.” Trump put up some Senate candidates and then spent only \$15 million of his war chest to help them. But McConnell chose to lose winnable seats rather than to help Republicans. He pulled out spending when it was most critical and the candidates were gaining momentum. The spending difference between the Democrats and Republicans in places such as New Hampshire, Arizona, Nevada, and on and on was shameful.

Trump has not helped himself. He snarked about Ron DeSantis a few days before the election, calling him “DeSanctimonious.” It was an attempt at one of his classic, sticky monikers, but this one didn’t work. In fact, it was a failure twice over: The nickname didn’t fit, and it made Trump look petty and self-serving. Trump also threatened that he knew some things about DeSantis that could become public if the Florida governor runs for president. Trump clearly views DeSantis as his biggest threat. All of this, though, could have waited. Spoilsports turn off potential voters.

Did this behavior, on the eve of the election, remind some Republican voters of other behavior by the former president that they’d like to forget and thus suppress the GOP vote? Maybe. It certainly didn’t help.

A divided house cannot stand. The Republican house is divided. The GOP base — the MAGAts, as the Left and GOPe (Republican Establishment) like to call them — wants Trump. The GOPe hates him. Meghan McCain captured the disgust that D.C. Republican elites have for Trump’s voters by saying on Twitter, the day after the election, “Maga is poison.” The Democrats would never call their own base “poison.” Never. Republican leaders, though, hate their own base and demand total obeisance, or else they’ll cut off all access to influence even if it means losing power themselves. The base is so tired of being treated like retarded serfs that they are voting for candidates who value loyalty over policy or even electability.

Will Donald Trump’s irascible behavior cause his base to abandon him in favor of the younger, fresher, less-tarnished Ron DeSantis? There are definitely cracks in Trump’s armor.

Ron DeSantis and Marco Rubio swept Florida, but, as Trump churlishly noted, DeSantis won one million fewer votes than Trump did in 2020. DeSantis’s path to the presidency is through Trump. That path looks like it might be easier now, especially if Trump

gets indicted by the scandalous Merrick Garland Department of Justice. Florida Republicans benefited from a deluge of Republican refugees from New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan, and other Democrat strongholds.

Who will win this war? If this election is any indication, not Republicans.

One notable exception to Republican underperformance? School boards. Even in deep-blue places, woke school board members got tossed out in favor of conservative leadership. Parents are outraged by critical race theory and gender and sexual madness infiltrating curricula while test scores in basics such as math, science, and reading nosedive. A note to Republicans: social issues *do* matter and shouldn’t be avoided.

While Republicans fight, Democrats harvest ballots and drag ballot processing out for days and weeks, inviting integrity questions in Clark County, Nevada; Maricopa County, Arizona; and all the rest of the places where Republicans look like they could win. Waiting on the mail, don’t you know.

Abortion helped motivate the single ladies and the young voters. Montana enshrined a disgusting infanticide regime by rejecting a ballot measure that would have required care for babies who survive an attempted abortion. Michigan and California put abortion rights into their constitutions. On the positive side, incumbent governors who signed pro-life legislation easily won reelection.

America is divided. The Republican Party is divided. The balloting system that Democrats ushered in under the guise of COVID is seriously flawed. Within this division, destructive mediocrities like Joe Biden and John Fetterman thrive. In our great Republic, men like these shouldn’t be let out of rehabilitation centers, never mind run the country.

Meanwhile, all hail the victors of this election! They run the Democrat Party and won, as Trump says, bigly. I’ll give the last word to Beyoncé, for she, besides being the Queen, captures the situation perfectly:

*My persuasion can build a nation
Endless power, with our love we can devour
You’ll do anything for me.
Who are we? What do we run? We run the world!* 🐘



Introducing *The American Spectator's* New Editor

Paul Kengor, a professor, author, and longtime contributor, will take on the role.

by **R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.**

For years, I have always been able to get a laugh or two by referring to myself as *The American Spectator's* Editor-in-Chief-for-Life. However, since I had to give up my left hip to a highly trained surgeon and accept his facsimile, my joke has taken on a new meaning — to wit, I am not getting any younger.

Thus, since 2019, I have been pursuing an editor to replace me. He or she would not completely replace me, for then I would no longer be the Editor-in-Chief-for-Life. Rather, I have been looking for an editor to replace me in the day-to-day travails of editing a magazine while I attended to other matters as Editor-in-Chief-for-Life. After all, in 2019, I still had my memoirs to finish and other literary projects to plan. Moreover, my wife has been importuning me to learn the rumba. Well, now the memoirs are finished, and I even have given them a title: *How Do We Get Out of Here? My Life from Bob Kennedy to Donald Trump*. They will be in the bookstores in a few months. A long-range literary project is taking shape, and my wife assures me that she has a rumba instructor who will go easy on my hip. So, you ask, where is our new editor?

I put together a search team, made up of Wlady, our Board of Directors, and Paul Kengor, the gifted faculty member from Grove City College who also serves as senior director and chief academic fellow at the

college's distinguished Institute for Faith & Freedom. Paul and I conferred regularly, and then, last spring, while we were going over our list of candidates for the job at my favorite restaurant, a lightbulb went off in my cerebrum. "Paul," said I, "why don't you take the job? You know the magazine well, having written for it for years. In fact, you are now working on the official history of the magazine. Indeed, you regularly supply us with some of the most successful writers for our Young Writers Program, probably the most successful such program in the country." Paul took a sip of his wine and looked at me as if to declare, "I thought you'd never ask." After a three-year search, we had our editor. He was at my elbow all along.

Paul is a family man who has fathered almost as many children as he has written books. He is a longtime member of the conservative movement, though he is suitably younger than me, so he will not be visiting a surgeon anytime soon. He is a *New York Times* bestselling author, though those books, along with his others, add to our general knowledge rather than detract from it. He lectures widely, appears on television often, and has never said anything in public for which he has had to apologize. He has won the admiration of our staff, and I am sure he will win your confidence. Paul Kengor is the Editor of *The American Spectator*. ✎



R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr. is founder and editor-in-chief of *The American Spectator*.

Politics



Bill Wilson



The Red Ripple

Turns out American voters are unimpressed with more than just the Democrats.

by Scott McKay



A contributing editor to The American Spectator, Scott McKay is the publisher of two news websites: the Hayride, a politics and culture website based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and RVIVR.com, a news aggregation and commentary site focused on national politics. He's the author of The Revivalist Manifesto: How Patriots Can Win the Next American Era.

I was wrong,” wrote Melissa Mackenzie, publisher of *The American Spectator*, on Wednesday, November 9, 2022. “Terribly wrong.”

“I’m what happens when a conservative believes the polls,” she said. “I had wrongly thought that the polls swinging toward the Republicans meant that the polls were undercounting Republican support, as they have from time immemorial.”

Melissa is certainly not alone. Almost all of us at *The American Spectator* missed the call. We all thought that the red wave would come ashore with a furious assault on the Democrat Party and its collection of misfits, overeducated dunces, fraudulent “experts,” race hustlers, sex hustlers, crony capitalists, rent seekers, and Marxist wreckers who have spent the past two years abusing power to bring America to a depth not seen since the miasma of the late 1970s.

What goes up must come down, and vice versa, we all assumed. It’s basic physics. I myself wrote a piece analogizing the dynamics of an ocean wave as it comes ashore after being triggered by disturbances under the water, the water rising as the wave slows due to friction encountered in shallower water.

Physics very often describes politics, as human behavior is strikingly similar to the behavior of nature. It’s only rational to assume that two years of failure, corruption, nuttury, and tyranny at the hands of Joe Biden (or whichever faceless Obamites handle him like a marionette), Chuck Schumer, and Nancy Pelosi would produce a tsunami on November 8.

So, I was right there with Melissa. I saw the red wave coming. But what did reach land on November 8 was no red wave. It was barely a sea spray.

Three days after the elections, the counting in Nevada and Arizona continued, a shameful and suspicious governmental failure that fueled familiar accusations of cheating, and Republican expectations of as much as a 54–46 Senate majority disintegrated with the close-but-no-cigar defeats of Adam Laxalt and Blake Masters — excellent candidates who in any favorable Republican year should have won handily over very nondescript Democrat incumbents.

With those losses, Republicans were stuck at forty-nine seats, requiring Herschel Walker, thought by some to be the weakest of the major GOP challengers in Senate races, to pull out a runoff victory in Georgia just to recreate the 50–50 parity in the Senate that the cycle began with.

Yes, Republicans won the House — by the narrowest of margins. That's certainly something. It's not a red wave.

What to believe in the aftermath of this? Why were Melissa and I, and so many others on the right, so wrong about the 2022 midterms?

Why couldn't the Republicans summon up all the anger and trepidation about the state of the nation — some 75 percent of Americans surveyed in exit polling believe the country is on the wrong track under Biden and friends — into positive action on Election Day?

There were five schools of thought gaining adherence among the chattering classes. All have some merit; none are completely correct.

Trump Screwed It All Up

This is the narrative favored, obviously, by the Never-Trump gang and the legacy corporate media. It holds that Republicans underperformed because Republican candidates, particularly those whom Trump endorsed, weren't good enough.

And that Trump is — as they've said over and over again — a malign influence on the party and that when he rears his orange head disaster soon follows, with the midterms merely the latest example of the GOP failure that began in 2018.

Is it true? Well ...

Trump still brings a great deal of energy to the GOP. That's undeniable. What's more, that energy has reoriented the Republican Party and the conservative movement toward something that is unquestionably more accessible and sustainable by average Americans, particularly the working class of all races and those without political connections or degrees from "selective" colleges

and universities. There is a real possibility of building out a governing majority based on the America First agenda that Trump sketched out in his time as president; without him, that simply would not have happened.

You know all this already, and, whether you're happy with it or Trump, you can't deny that he's changed the GOP.

So, that's his due. One might even go so far as to say that without Trump, if the GOP had continued to devolve from George W. Bush to John McCain to Mitt Romney to Jeb Bush, it might have even broken up and disintegrated under the weight of corporatism, militarism, and the political subservience that its own voters kept screaming was the wrong approach.

All that said, did Trump screw it all up? Well ...

He might have played a more positive role.

Dr. Mehmet Oz, his endorsee for the U.S. Senate in Pennsylvania, was a blunder. Oz, a Turkish Muslim from New Jersey who made his money selling diet supplements on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* and whose political orientation was clearly not conservative, couldn't have been a worse ambassador to the working-class, blue-collar voting base that the GOP simply must have in the Keystone State in order to offset the Democrat machine vote in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

Trump endorsed Oz because he agreed not to vote for Mitch McConnell to lead the GOP Senate caucus and because David McCormick, the better candidate (McCormick is a Gulf War veteran who served as the CEO of the investment firm Bridgewater Associates and who previously served in the George W. Bush administration), didn't. McCormick had his own problems, but

The axiom about the cycle that involves weak men and tough times is a real thing, and we are in the worst quadrant of that cycle.



Meet our 2022 intern team!

Stephan Kapustka, Quinnipiac University, '21

Christopher Marco, Grand Valley State University, '22

Hunter Oswald, Grove City College, '24

Evan Poellinger, College of the Holy Cross, '23

And veteran members of our Young Writers Program:

Ellie Gardey, University of Notre Dame '21: associate editor and staff reporter

Elyse Apel, Hillsdale College '24: social media coordinator

John Jiang, Wesleyan University '21: frequent contributor

those working-class voters would have related better to somebody who'd served in the American military rather than in the Turkish one, as Oz did.

Oz wasn't the only questionable endorsement. But that wasn't the end of the problems.

Trump may have had the same misconceptions about the red wave that Melissa and I did. A week or so from the election, he began preparing the public-relations ground for his 2024 presidential run, something that was wholly unnecessary given that all the other potential Republican candidates were going to wait on his decision. Trump teased a November 15 presidential announcement just a few days before the election, stealing headlines from GOP candidates and energizing Democrat voters still suffering from the dreaded Trump Derangement Syndrome.

We now know, as we already suspected, that Trump is a turnout engine for Democrat voting unlike anything in recent American history. That he also energizes Republicans makes him politically viable regardless — but it's now apparent that he's a net liability when he's not actually on the ballot. He can turn Democrats out to vote against Republicans, but he doesn't necessarily turn Republicans out to support the party's candidates whether he endorses them or not.

And some of Trump's actions made just before the election and for several days after might indicate why.

Inexplicably, he began the month of November by cracking wise against Governor Ron DeSantis (whose performance in Florida was the clear shining light of the 2022 cycle), calling him "Ron DeSanctimonious" after reading polls showing that Trump held a sizable lead over DeSantis in a hypothetical 2024 GOP presidential primary race. Trump then alleged that he has "dirt" on DeSantis, in a not-so-veiled threat against a prospective challenge by the latter.

The media picked up on those statements and seized on them to fan a controversy and the impression that the GOP is riven by division. Whether it was fatal to turnout is debatable, but it certainly didn't help.

Own goals like this simply cannot happen by the leader of a political party whose job it is to hold a coalition together, not to drop a plunger and blow it apart.

The Establishment Screwed It All Up

This should have been a massive wave election. Given the low job-approval ratings of the sitting president in his first midterm election, and given the favorable generic congressional-ballot numbers, this should have been a plus-five wave in the Senate and a plus-thirty wave, or bigger, in the House. It also should have resounded down to statehouses, and yet the GOP turns out, apparently, not to have been able to beat abysmal Democrat

gubernatorial candidates such as Katie Hobbs, Kathy Hochul, and Gretchen Whitmer.

But at no point during what appeared to be a red wave on the horizon was there any feeling among the American people that the Republican Party deserved much, if any, preference over the Democrats in the eyes of the public.

In fact, Republican assertions that when Trump was in charge, particularly in 2018 and 2019 after his policies had taken hold and before COVID-19 changed everything, the American economy and standing in the world were markedly better, while finding general agreement among at least small majorities of the public, weren't dispositive.

Why? Because there is a strong sense that while most GOP voters are behind Trump, the party's political class most definitely is not. And, as such, the Mitch McConnells, John Cornyns, Lindsey Grahams, and Kevin McCarthys of the world don't get to ride in Trump's slipstream.

So when Trump and McConnell clashed over Senate nominees, with McConnell actively sabotaging winnable races so that GOP establishment detractors such as Blake Masters and Don Bolduc were grossly underfunded compared to the Democrat incumbents they were trying to take down, it was clear that the party was poorly prepared for success even with Democrat failure manifest from Portland to Portsmouth.

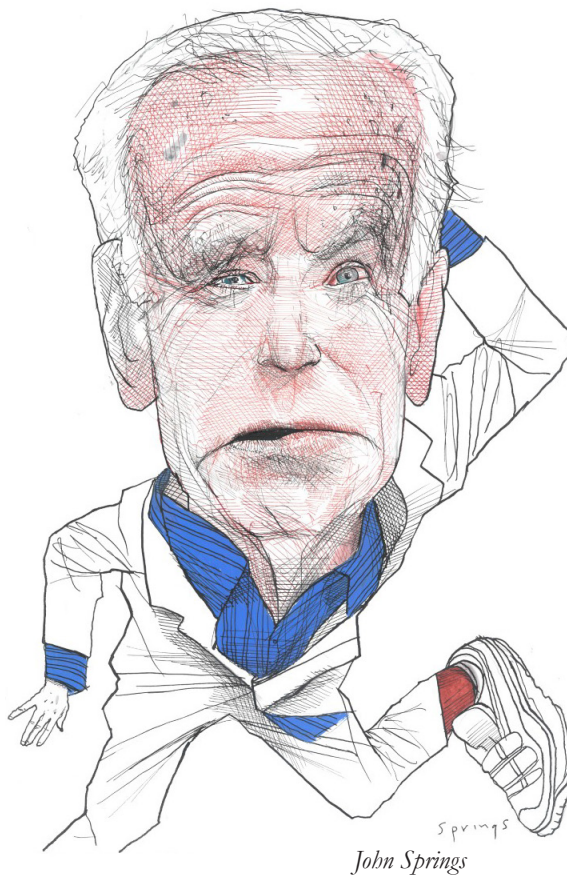
The truth is that there is also manifest failure among Republicans — it's political more than in governance, which is perhaps an even worse sin — and, if the voters were only willing to deliver a mild rebuke, at best, to the Democrats, they do appear willing to deliver one to the Republicans as well.

The voters took a look at the Republican Party, and they don't prefer Mitch McConnell to Chuck Schumer — or, if they do, not by a lot. They don't prefer Kevin McCarthy to Nancy Pelosi — or, if they do, not by a lot.

And they didn't see much of anything out of the GOP that they thought was worth voting for, even if they thought the Democrats were no better.

McCarthy and the GOP House leadership, which at least appears to have managed a small majority and can therefore claim midterm victory, put out a document called the Commitment to America, a detailed program of some 150 policy proposals to change the federal government. It's good, though it got very little play and House candidates almost universally did not run on it. And now, without the Senate, very little of the Commitment to America will make it into law — at least not in 2023.

There is even word that the rank and file are so disappointed in the House underperformance that McCarthy might have trouble attaining a majority to be elected Speaker.



But McConnell is in little danger. He's the least popular politician in Washington, and yet a majority of the GOP's Senate caucus thinks he's swell.

There is a reason Trump rose as quickly as he did as an electoral force. The Republican establishment needs a makeover, and the 2022 elections confirmed that fact.

Dobbs Screwed It All Up

Another favored narrative of the chattering classes held that the *Dobbs* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court that overturned *Roe v. Wade* and brought abortion back to the states for a more local disposition created a massive Democrat voting constituency of women desperate to preserve the "right" to kill the unborn.

Was that a real thing? It apparently was.

Several ballot initiatives in states across the country showed the power that the pro-abortion movement still possesses. In Kansas, an August anti-abortion ballot initiative failed decisively, and the issue played significantly in Attorney General Derek Schmidt's unsuccessful bid to take down Democrat incumbent governor Laura Kelly. In Kentucky, a constitutional amendment ending the right to an abortion failed. In Montana, a measure that would have guaranteed medical treatment for babies who survive failed abortions also failed. And, in Michigan, Proposition 3, which further guaranteed abortion rights in state law, fueled turnout for that state's atrocious governor Gretchen Whitmer as she won a narrow contest over Republican rising star Tudor Dixon.

Single women voted more than two to one for the Democrats, something that stood in the way of a Republican wave. The fruited plain is covered with cat ladies, and that vote is now the foundation of Blue America.

The pro-life position is the correct one, and it's fundamental to the preservation of our country as founded. The pro-life movement has made great and laudable strides in the past decades, and those should be celebrated even if there was a cost in November.

But that work isn't over, and many hearts and minds must yet be won.

And if, someday soon, advancements in medical science might make possible a happy resolution to the abortion issue, it would point decisively to a Republican future.

The Screwed-Up Kids Screwed It All Up

CNN exit polling for the House elections during the midterms had it that while voters sixty-five and older (baby boomers) were 12 points more likely to vote Republican and those forty-five to sixty-four (Generation X) were 10 points more likely, younger Americans went a different way.

Among those thirty to forty-four (roughly, millennials), Democrats held a 4-point advantage.

And among the eighteen-to-twenty-nine crowd (roughly, Generation Z), Democrats were plus-28.

There is an old axiom that describes this, of course. That axiom goes: if you're not a liberal before you turn thirty, you have no heart, and if you're not a conservative afterward, you have no brain.

Generation Z will move to the right as it gains experience — and especially as the inevitable suffering Team Biden will inflict on the country is experienced and processed.

But this is the least heterosexual generation in human history. Generation Z has been bombarded in the schools and culture with every variant of the woke critical-theory cultural-Marxist bent, from transgenderism to critical race theory to third-wave feminism and beyond, and that has taken its toll.

Biden's empty promise of student-loan debt forgiveness and Republican opposition to it was almost certainly a factor in the giant spread among the younger vote as well.

There is no question that this is a far worse problem that anyone credited — and we've all known it was a serious issue for Republicans. It has to be addressed, forcefully, now.

America Is All Screwed Up

There are so many utterly horrid Democrats who will attain or remain in office after this election — from John Fetterman to Gretchen Whitmer to Kathy Hochul to Catherine Cortez Masto — that it should be offensive to average Americans. It's tempting to fall into the trap of believing that there must be wholesale corruption in American elections, but the problem with going there is that there must be proof before it's actionable. As of this writing, there are only rumblings and suspicions of the same.

In Arizona and Nevada, though, the ceaseless and inexplicably slow counting can only be interpreted as prima facie evidence of skullduggery.

Nevertheless, until some proof of perfidy is presented, we'll have to deal with something very unpleasant. Namely, here's the truth that we on the right are going to have to accept: the American electorate in 2022 is awful and must be reformed in some significant way.

The axiom about the cycle that involves weak men and tough times is a real thing, and we are in the worst quadrant of that cycle. We are still in the time in which weak men make tough times. We have not gotten to the point where tough times make tough men.

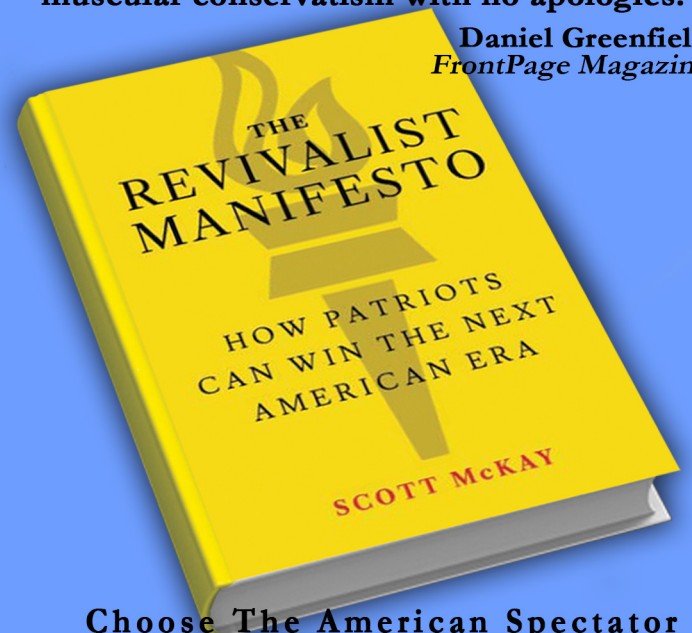
Perhaps in this there is perverse cause for optimism. Because those tough times will do their work. Perhaps for quite a long while.

Gas prices will skyrocket thanks to the Biden administration's running out of oil taken from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. The true shortage of both crude oil and refined petroleum products will soon become unmistakable. Diesel is already rationed, where it's available, and the trucks have begun to cease rolling. Food prices are bad enough. It's worse when the shelves go empty. And it's going to be a cold winter in America. The tough times are coming.

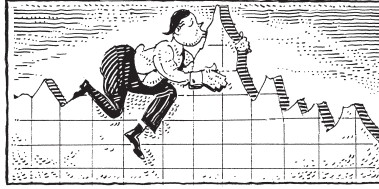
Republicans are going to need to be ready to supply the tough men and women in 2024 if the good times are to return. 🦅

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The \$ecret to Democrats’ Midterm Success

Republicans lost the opportunity to make them pay for inflation.

by Daniel J. Flynn

Democrats’ unstated midterm rallying cry to voters, a takeoff of their guiding mantra from an election thirty years ago, ordained, *It’s not the economy, and you are stupid.*

Distract and deflect sum up in two words the Democratic Party’s winning strategy to deal with the highest price spike in four decades. If the obfuscation on the issue that voters identified as the most important lent credence to the Evil Party moniker for Democrats, then more so did the Stupid Party label fit the behavior of Republicans.

Donald Trump, who, in a series of tweets while president derided Federal Reserve “boneheads” for not lowering “our interest rates down to ZERO, or less,” cooperated in the strategy by shifting focus away from the issues and onto him. He did this by diminutizing the candidates he ostensibly endorsed (e.g., boasting to Ohio voters that “J.D. is kissing my ass” for support), stealing their stage at rallies, and rhetorically fixating on his 2020 grievances rather than on the public’s 2022 problem with prices. Edison Research’s exit polls showed Trump with a 58 percent unfavorable rating among 2022 voters and 39 percent favorable rating, so making 2022 about the past president rather than about the current one’s failures acted as a drag on Republicans and a fuel for Democrats.

Republicans saw in the faint silver lining on the massive inflation cloud an Election Day trouncing of the party in power. The silver lining revealed itself on November 8 as a trick of the light. They never connected the dots for voters from big-government policies to inflation. Either they expected voters to do this themselves or they do not understand economics enough to explain it. People felt the pain of inflation. They could not articulate in the ballot box who caused that pain and how.

So the red wave that greeted the last two Democrats in the White House two years into their presidencies failed to materialize. Instead of losing fifty-four congressmen and eight senators, as Democrats did in 1994, or sixty-three and six as they did in 2010, President Joe Biden’s party added governors, retained control of the U.S. Senate, and lost but a handful of seats in the House of Representatives. The math — Republicans entered the elections with far greater numbers in Congress than they did in 2010 or 1994 and defended twenty-one of thirty-five Senate seats up for grabs — always dictated a lower ceiling on seats gained than in the two aforementioned midterms. But the idea of



Daniel J. Flynn, the author of Cult City: Jim Jones, Harvey Milk, and 10 Days That Shook San Francisco and other books, serves as a senior editor of The American Spectator.

essentially a stalemate election eluded the predictive powers of all but a few political soothsayers.

The consumer price index (CPI) rose from 1.4 percent in Biden's first month in office to 9.1 percent in June 2022. How did such an alarming price escalation not cause voters to use the ballot box to place the party in power in the penalty box?

Edison Research's exit poll conducted for television networks shows that 31 percent of voters chose inflation as the top issue, and those voters broke Republican by more than a two-to-one margin. The AP VoteCast exit poll listed a broader category, economy and jobs, which 47 percent of voters also named as their top concern, again breaking by an almost two-to-one margin for Republicans. So, the degree to which Democrats, aided and abetted by some Republicans, made the election about matters unrelated to the economy benefited Democrats electorally.

Democrats, for their part, attempted to deliberately confuse voters on the reasons for a case of Budweiser bottles jumping to \$24.49, roast beef to \$12.99 a pound, and gasoline to \$3.80 a gallon.

The deflection involved pointing to the usual boogymen. The Biden administration set this tone early this year when the president explained skyrocketing supermarket prices by saying, "Four big corporations control more than half the markets in beef, pork, and poultry." In a campaign commercial, Senator Mark Kelly of Arizona blamed inflation on "price gouging" and "corporate greed." Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York told Chris Hayes on MSNBC, "Inflation is not going up due to government policies. Inflation is going up due to Wall Street decisions."

In a less successful effort, twice-failed Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams attempted to link the *Dobbs* decision to inflation.

"Having children is why you're worried about your price for gas, it's why you're concerned about how much food costs," Abrams said on MSNBC. "For women, this is not a reductive issue. You can't divorce being forced to carry an unwanted pregnancy from the economic realities of having a child."

Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont found more success in deflecting blame by making the argument that since other countries suffer from increasing prices, the United States necessarily finds itself in the clutches of forces beyond our control.

"Inflation is not unique to America," Sanders wrote days before the election. "It is an international crisis. In the European Union, inflation is nearly 11%. In Germany, it is 11.6%. In the United Kingdom it is 10.1%. In Ireland, it's 9.6%. In America, it's 8.2%, much too high, but lower than it is throughout much of Europe."

Sanders neglected to mention that the annual rate of price rises for the most recent figures available measured 3.0 percent in Switzerland, 3.4 percent in Saudi Arabia, and 2.1 percent in China. In contrast, rates hit 268 percent for Zimbabwe, 162 percent for Lebanon, and 52 percent for Iran. This "international" crisis varies in intensity quite wildly from one nation to the next. For instance, the rate exceeds 80 percent in Argentina; in bordering Bolivia, it falls below 3 percent. Clearly, domestic policies profoundly influence the inflation number country to country, and global trends do not dictate giant price hikes everywhere.

Even the U.S. CPI rate dropping from 9.1 percent in June to 8.2 percent in September to 7.7 percent in October reflects policy changes. The Fed's balance sheet shrank from an \$8.933 trillion peak in March to \$8.676 just prior to Election Day. The central bank also raised its federal funds rate six times in 2022 prior to Election Day. While this helped drop the CPI rate, the CPI rate's drop to 7.7 percent, revealed days after the election, likely did not help Democrats much if at all because month to month the rate increased by 0.4 percent, as key a barometer for the public as gasoline increased prior to the vote, and the CPI for All Urban Consumers, relied upon as *the metric*, still increased dramatically from last year even if the year-to-year numbers from previous months eclipse it.

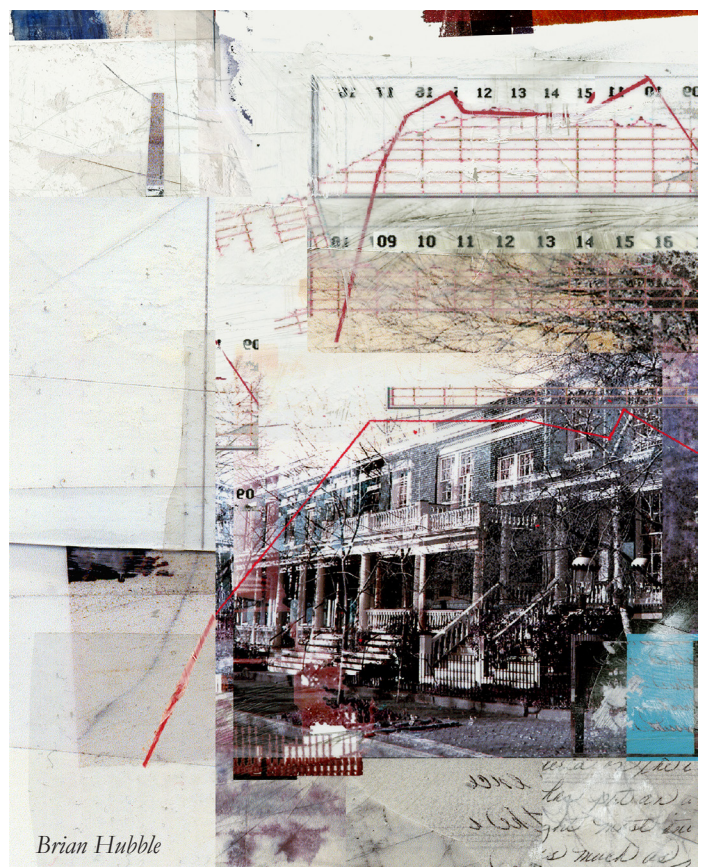
The targeting of individual industries, as Biden, Kelly, and AOC did, ignored the fact that for almost all of 2022 prior to the election the Bureau of Labor Statistics's monthly CPI reports showed all or almost all of the categories and subcategories increasing in price year over year. The price spike did not confine itself to *this* industry or *that* industry. When everything grows more expensive, credibly fingering the culprits as the greedy meat conglomerates or the oil barons would seem a difficult task. Alas, the Bureau of Labor Statistics does not publish the price index that voters study. The checkout-line display and digital fuel-price flip signs do. The impulse to blame the messenger remains strong.

So, when inflation rates vary wildly internationally but nationally spike across the board indiscriminate of industry, this confirms that monetary policies primarily caused monetary problems. The Federal Reserve's balance sheet, which stood below \$3.9 trillion in September 2019, reached just under \$9 trillion in March of this year. In the three months corresponding with the initial lockdown response to the U.S. COVID outbreak, it expanded by \$3 trillion.

Central bankers in most advanced countries created a massive amount of money in a short period of time. This explains Sanders's ability to point to great problems in the United Kingdom, European Union, and beyond. Fiscal recklessness provoked the monetary recklessness. Our central bankers do not operate in a vacuum. The fiscal recklessness of spending huge sums unavailable in the treasury came about because of COVID's suppression of productivity. Whether one finds such emergency measures necessary seems irrelevant to the question of what primarily caused exploding prices. The clear answer, obscured for the entirety of the 2022 campaign, remains money.

The law of supply and demand does not magically stop with money. The rapid creation of so many dollars, particularly at a time when economic activity tanked, clearly impacted the value of dollars.

We did not bake a larger pie. Instead, we cut more pieces from the existing pie. Each piece became less filling than the larger ones that existed before.





The fact that the federal government operated on a deficit just over \$3.1 trillion in 2020 and the Federal Reserve's balance sheet increased by just under \$3.2 trillion that year proves instructive in illustrating the connection between deficits and loose money. Central bankers feel compelled to create money when policy makers spend what they do not possess. The easy money created in response to deficits results in a glut of dollars, which, per the laws of supply and demand, decrease in value. The Fed's easy money from September 2019 to March 2022 — when the central bank finally raised its federal funds rate from essentially zero and ended its quantitative easing — enabled big government and ballooned already big deficits, leading directly to the price rises we currently experience.

So much of the inflation-centered debate of this last year fixated on obscuring that central fact. A separation of words from their meanings, which occurred long ago, facilitated the ability to shift blame to multinational corporations, a Russian dictator, a Chinese virus, and anything but American politicians and central bankers.

“The semantic revolution which is one of the characteristic features of our day has also changed the traditional connotation of the terms inflation and deflation,” Ludwig von Mises pointed out in *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*. “What many people today call inflation or deflation is no longer the great increase or decrease in the supply of money, but its inexorable consequences, the general tendency toward a rise or a fall in commodity prices and wage rates. This innovation is by no means harmless.”

We call inflation's most recognizable symptom “inflation,” which hides the cause of upward prices.

The reason to inflate terms into meaninglessness comes from the same dishonest place as the impulse to inflate the currency. And

in partaking in dishonest means to obscure the reasons for dishonest money, Democrats serve not just their immediate partisan ends but also their long-range policy goals. Inflation bumps middle-class people into wealthy tax brackets. It encourages a culture of spending rather than a culture of saving. Most importantly, it serves as the lifeblood of big government.

In moving away from opposition to big government as the lifeblood of its party, Republicans lost their way, no longer exposing and opposing the causes of pain at the cash register. The GOP helped usher in November's disaster with its campaign tactics and messaging but also with its recent governing priorities. A small-government party knows why it opposes colossal spending, gargantuan deficits, and loose money. One unmoored from the animating principle of limited government cannot articulate a persuasive response to such folly.

The Federal Reserve creating currency for the purpose of putting it straight into the treasury allowed the federal government to spend in excess of \$6 trillion in each of the last three fiscal years after never before allocating as much as \$4.5 trillion. The deficits that accompanied the record 2020–2022 spending spree, unprecedented in the history of any government anywhere at any time, occurred despite the federal government this year and last collecting revenues unprecedented in the history of any government anywhere at any time.

Inflation, like debt and taxation, arrives on the table as the check due for big government. But politicians enamored with growing the federal government — its spending amounts to about a quarter of annual gross domestic product — want to keep that a secret.

That Democrats succeeded in keeping this a secret stands as the secret to their November success. 🐭



Mitch McConnell's Midterm Malpractice

The Senate Republican leader demonstrates that the GOP needs new leaders and better ideas.

by David Catron

The results of the 2022 midterms in the U.S. Senate were far less surprising than the outcome in the House of Representatives. In the upper chamber, there were thirty-four seats up for reelection, plus one special election. The Republicans had to defend twenty-one, while the Democrats had to defend only fourteen. This meant that, in the absence of a red tsunami, it was always going to be difficult for the Republicans to pick up more than a seat or two. Sadly, the prospect of eking out a majority was rendered much harder by Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell.

Now that the midterms are over, except for the interminable counting process in Arizona, Nevada, and California, it's time to reassess the value that McConnell's "leadership" actually brings to the GOP. It has now become all too obvious that he puts his own personal power before the good of the Republican Party. This cycle, he yanked millions in funding from viable conservative candidates in winnable contests and showered money on RINOs in irrelevant races because the latter would support his reelection as Senate GOP leader.

As this is being written, the week of the election, there is only a single state where the outcome is really in doubt. In Arizona, where Republican Blake Masters challenged incumbent Democrat senator Mark Kelly,

the latter won. In Nevada, where Republican Adam Laxalt challenged Democrat senator Catherine Cortez Masto, the latter was saved by a post-election tranche of votes. In Georgia, where Republican Herschel Walker challenged Democrat senator Raphael Warnock, neither candidate garnered more than 50 percent of the vote. A runoff will be held on December 6.

Until that race is decided, the balance of power in the Senate is forty-nine Republicans, forty-eight Democrats, and two nominal independents who caucus with the Democrats. To maintain the 50–50 status quo, Walker must defeat Warnock in the runoff. It needn't have been this close but for McConnell's perfidy. His super PAC sabotaged Masters by yanking \$17 million pledged to the Republican's campaign for advertising. And Masters, when asked about this during a Fox News interview with Tucker Carlson, didn't hesitate to indict McConnell:

McConnell decided to spend millions of dollars attacking a fellow Republican in Alaska instead of helping me defeat Senator Mark Kelly. Had he chosen to spend money in Arizona, this race would be over. We'd be celebrating a Senate Majority right now.... I will leave it to the viewer to decide whether it is just malice or whether it's gross incompetence. But, clearly, Mitch



David Catron is a recovering health care consultant and frequent contributor to *The American Spectator*. You can follow him on Twitter at @Catronicus.

McConnell cares about Mitch McConnell and less about a Senate majority or the people of America.

The Republican Party of Arizona was so worried about the damage done to Masters's campaign that Chairwoman Kelli Ward wrote to McConnell, pleading with him to support the campaign: "We believe if you would shore up your support of Blake Masters publicly and financially, you would help him ... return the Arizona Senate seat into Republican hands." This failed to move McConnell. A separate PAC, the National Republican Senatorial Committee, finally offered some funding to the Masters campaign, but it was too little, too late.

McConnell's neglect of Masters and other non-Establishment candidates angered a number of congressional conservatives, such as Senator Josh Hawley of Missouri, who included it in a litany of complaints about McConnell's leadership during an interview with Philip Wegmann of *RealClearPolitics*: "I did not agree with the decision to bad-mouth our candidates in the middle of the campaign, I did not agree with the decision to leave Blake Masters for dead in Arizona." Hawley's voice is part of a growing chorus of Republican complaints about McConnell.

Arizona is not the only state in which the local Republican Party is unhappy with McConnell's machinations. The Alaska Republican Party actually censured him for spending \$9 million on attack ads slandering GOP candidate Kelly Tshibaka, who ran for the Senate seat now occupied by RINO Lisa Murkowski. McConnell backed Murkowski despite her endorsement of a Democrat for Alaska's only House seat. Why? She would support his reelection as Senate Republican leader. Ironically, Tshibaka may well defeat Murkowski.

This is possible by virtue of Alaska's ranked-choice voting system. Under this scheme, voters rank candidates according to preference. If none wins a majority in the first round, another round occurs — minus the candidate who got the fewest votes the first time. This goes on until two candidates are left. On November 8, Tshibaka got 44.2 percent, Murkowski got 42.8 percent, and Democrat Pat Chesbro got 9.5 percent. If Tshibaka gets the most votes in the next

round, Murkowski is done. This is why McConnell has attacked Tshibaka, whose campaign issued this statement:

No one from Alaska wants big shots from the Lower 48 meddling in our elections, and they certainly don't want D.C. Republicans lying about the candidate who's been endorsed by the Alaska GOP. Alaska Republicans are telling Mitch McConnell to stay out of it. But this goes to show you who Lisa Murkowski is aligned with. She's wearing the jersey of the Washington establishment of Biden, Pelosi, and McConnell, and she's not on Alaska's team.

This brings us to Nevada, which conducted its first all-mail election in 2022. Democrat senator Catherine Cortez Masto held off a strong challenge from Establishment Republican Adam Laxalt. Oddly, McConnell's super PAC did support the GOP candidate in the Silver State, suggesting a lack of judgment considering that Democrats almost invariably prevail in states with all-mail elections. Laxalt enjoyed a very respectable lead on Election Day, but, as the vote counting continued day after day, his lead gradually evaporated.

It was reported that Laxalt will ask for a recount, but he denies it. There is no provision in Nevada election law for an automatic recount. A losing candidate may ask for a recount in Nevada, but it must be requested within three days of vote certification, and it must be paid for by the candidate requesting it.

This brings us back to Georgia, where Herschel Walker may well defeat Raphael Warnock. Walker raised \$3.3 million the day after the general election, and he is a far tougher candidate than GOP donor Kelly Loeffler, whom Warnock defeated in 2020.

So, in the end, where does all of this leave us? Even if Walker wins, the Republicans will remain at a disadvantage in the Senate, where any tie vote can be broken in favor of the Democrats by Vice President Kamala Harris. Consequently, a Republican majority in the House of Representatives is the only hope of thwarting the irresponsible policies of the Biden administration and its accomplices in the Senate, the federal bureaucracy, and the corporate

media. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the GOP will eke out a House majority.

As of this writing, the weekend after the election, the Republicans remain seven seats short of the 218 they need to capture the House majority, and many of the uncalled seats are in Democrat-controlled states like California (where ballot harvesting is legal), Colorado, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, and Washington. Not coincidentally, four of these states have all-mail elections and great difficulty counting and reporting their ballot totals. So it's entirely possible that the Democrats will hold the House and Nancy Pelosi will remain Speaker until 2024.

If that undesirable contingency does come to pass, the GOP will have to do a serious autopsy and take real action to fix itself. The voters, including about half of independents, took a look at us and cast their ballots for the party of higher inflation, more crime, costlier gasoline, ever-increasing chaos at the southern border, and the systematic corruption of the institutions that form the foundation of the free Republic. That was not the fault of the Democrats. It was the result of Republican complacency and unbelievably inept party leadership.

The first steps toward recovery are as follows: First on the list is to get rid of alleged leaders such as McConnell, who has demonstrated that he is primarily concerned with his own personal power regardless of how badly it damages his party and its constituents. Second, the Republicans have to figure out "the vision thing" and how to articulate it in a way that will cause the voters to support it. Finally, the GOP has to catch up with the Democrats on execution — including everything from getting out the vote to delivering on campaign promises.

For a guide on what should be done on the legislative level, the 1994 Contract with America is the perfect model. This may seem trite, but it was a historic success, and a similar plan that addresses today's issues will work if properly sold to the voters and competently implemented. For a model of how to combine that kind of legislative agenda with high-quality executive leadership, look no further than Florida and the best governor in America — Ron DeSantis. Neither the GOP nor the country needs any more septuagenarian leaders. ✎



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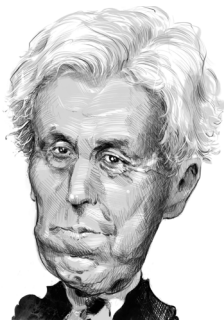
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The Senate's Mitch McConnell Problem

He actively worked against GOP nominees.

by Jeffrey Lord



Jeffrey Lord, author of *Swamp Wars*, is a former Reagan White House associate political director and contributing editor of *The American Spectator*.

Ya can't make it up.
In this year's midterms, the Republican leader of the United States Senate went out of his way to defeat Republican candidates for the United States Senate.

Yes, you read that right.

Here, for example, is this headline from *Breitbart*:

Mitch McConnell Pulls PAC Ads Out of New Hampshire, Effectively Sabotaging GOP Candidate Don Bolduc

The story reported this:

Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) will pull all his super PAC's money out of New Hampshire, effectively sabotaging Republican Senate candidate Gen. Don Bolduc.

The McConnell-backed Senate Leadership Fund will pull all its ads off television starting October 25, Shane Goldmacher of the News [sic] York Times reported Friday afternoon. The decision will rip \$5.6 million away from Gen. Bolduc's candidacy and greatly help incumbent Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH).

And, like clockwork, Bolduc has now lost his race to defeat Democrat incumbent senator Maggie Hassan.

Move now to Alaska. Here's the headline from the *Western Journal*:

Op-Ed: Murkowski, with McConnell's Money, Picks a Democrat Over the Alaska GOP

This gem of a story reported this:

Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, censured by the Alaska Republican Party 18 months ago, is giving the state party's grassroots leaders the back of her hand.

Or maybe it's her middle finger. Murkowski is not only battling back against her own state party, which supported her in 2016 but not this year; she's now going rogue on her Republican donors, who cannot be terribly happy with her move to try to keep House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in power.

Instead of supporting Nick Begich III, the Alaska Republican Party's only endorsed

candidate for Congress, Murkowski said the quiet part out loud: She will vote for Democratic Rep. Mary Peltola, who was ushered into office via the same open primary and ranked-choice voting system that helped Murkowski get to the Nov. 8 general election....

Through Peltola, Alaska's senior senator is supporting Pelosi, President Joe Biden and the failed policies of the Democrats. If Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell is supporting Murkowski at this point, then McConnell himself is sending Pelosi another foot soldier.

And just who was financing Murkowski over the Republican nominee, the state party's endorsed candidate for the U.S. Senate, Kelly Tshibaka?

You guessed it. Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell.

The Alaska GOP was so incensed that it passed a resolution censuring McConnell.

Move back down to the lower forty-eight, and here's the headline from the *Federalist* on McConnell and the Arizona Senate race with Republican nominee Blake Masters:

McConnell Dumps Another Million Into Alaska To Save Murkowski After Ditching Arizona's Blake Masters

In other words, if you were a Trump-supporting Republican Senate nominee

this election cycle, Mitch McConnell would rather that you lost than that he help create a Republican Senate.

For these and other reasons, the opposition directed toward McConnell from

“more members of the party's conference in the Senate appear to be bucking Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.”

Breitbart headlined one of those members like this:

Josh Hawley Says He Will Not Support Mitch McConnell for Senate Majority Leader

Among other things, Hawley said this:

I did not agree with the idea that you go out there and badmouth our own candidates in the middle of an election.

In addition, Florida's senator Rick Scott and Utah's newly reelected senator Mike Lee demanded that the leadership election be postponed.

In short, this is nothing more than a battle between former President Trump and the GOP Establishment as personified by McConnell. Ignoring the wishes of the GOP electorate in three different states, McConnell has gone out of his way to put obstacles in the way of GOP nominees because they are Trump supporters.

This problem will be resolved soon enough one way or another, and may be resolved by the time you read this. But make no mistake: the battle between Trump and the GOP Establishment, no matter how the Senate GOP leadership battle ends, is not going away.

Buckle in. 🐾



these three nominees and, notably, serving GOP senators is on the rise. Donald Trump, of course, is flatly opposed to reelecting the Kentucky senator as the GOP leader.

Florida's newly reelected senator, Marco Rubio, has called for delaying a GOP conference vote on who will be leader, as, per Fox News,

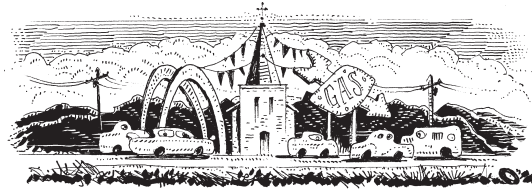
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Florida's Future Is Bright Red

Thanks to Ron DeSantis, not a trace of purple remains on the Sunshine State's horizon.

by **Larry Thornberry**

It should be clear, after the Republican clean sweep in Florida on November 8 and disappointing results elsewhere, that Florida is now the center of the Republican universe. Politically, the state is a brighter red than Santa Claus's holiday suit. Political and cultural changes make it unlikely that Florida's political color will change in the foreseeable.

Not only did Republican governor Ron DeSantis win reelection by almost 20 points, and Republican senator Marco Rubio take down his Democrat challenger by 16, but Republicans swept all statewide offices as well. This makes Tallahassee, save for journalists, FSU professors, and state bureaucrats, an almost Democrat-free zone. Post-election, Florida's delegation to the U.S. House now stands at twenty Republicans and eight Democrats, a pickup of four for the GOP. Republicans maintain significant majorities in both houses of the state legislature.

These lopsided and unambiguous results should put to rest the idea — mostly put about by wishful-thinking Democrats — that Florida was trending purple. This notion was given some credibility after Florida went narrowly for the glib little hustler from Chicago in 2008 and 2012. But even in those years Florida was putting up more Rs than Ds. Republicans have controlled both state houses since 1996, and the state has had a Republican

governor since Jeb (Jeb!) Bush won that office in 1998.

If anyone was surprised by November 8's Florida results, it would have to have been Democrats who assumed that Hispanics would continue to vote reflexively for Democrats. They didn't. Both DeSantis and Rubio carried Democrat stronghold Miami-Dade County, which is more than two-thirds Hispanic. DeSantis won it by 11 points; Rubio by nearly 10. In 2016, Hillary Clinton carried Miami-Dade by 29 points.

Not that many years ago, Democrats smiled when proclaiming that demographics are destiny. But this hasn't worked out the way they wanted and expected. They assumed that the growing number of Hispanics in Florida and across the nation would remain in the Democrat camp, in the words of the old hymn, forevermore. They did for a while, but politically Hispanics have been moving steadily in the Republican direction.

Hispanics now make up 17 percent of Florida voters. Of course, Hispanics are hardly monolithic, but it's fair to say that a large portion of those who qualify for this label are hard-working, family-oriented, culturally conservative people who are hardly keen on the woke policies of the current Democrat Party. Many escaped from socialist hellholes and don't want to see America going



Larry Thornberry of Tampa is a long-time contributor to The American Spectator. His work has also appeared in the Washington Times and the Wall Street Journal.

down that ruinous road. (Democrats insist that they're not socialists. Maybe not. But try making a living on the difference between socialism and the Democrats' agenda.)

Conservative Floridians have long been concerned that all those folks fleeing blue states because of the unlivable wreck leftist policies have made of their former homes might bring their deep-blue politics with them. That doesn't appear to be what has happened. While it's hard to find research that specifically answers the question of whether blue migrants bring their politics to their new addresses, there were reasons before November 8 to believe that new arrivals out of the blue vote more like those from where they've arrived than like those from where they left. There are more reasons to believe this now that the votes have been counted.

The "leftugees" fleeing states such as New York and California tend to be people with enough resources to afford to relocate and who also understand why they had to pull up stakes. This has worked to the advantage of states like Florida and Texas, which offer newbies more personal freedom, a lower cost of living, lower taxes, no state income tax, less crime, a business-friendly environment, more job opportunities, and less leftist cultural engineering. The sunshine is a bonus. If these new neighbors couldn't recognize high taxes, prosecutors who don't prosecute, uber-regulation, and left-wing insanity in schools as the things that made their former homes unlivable, then they would not be nimble enough to find Florida or Texas with GPS.

The only cloud on Florida's political horizon is the almost certain battle between DeSantis and Donald Trump for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination. This is

being written before Trump's promise of a November 15 announcement, the subject of which it is no challenge to predict. Were it that the Donald decided *not* to run in 2024, the news would be only marginally less shocking than the sun coming up in the west one morning.

challenges him. Charming. This battle will be a national as well as a Florida story. So we all need to buckle our chin straps.

DeSantis won the governor's race by the slimmest of slim margins in 2018. But in four years he earned a landslide reelection on the basis of competence and courage. Competence in such matters as hurricane preparedness and cleanup. Courage in standing up to the medico/politico establishment to keep Florida's businesses and schools open during the COVID panic. Courage in standing up for parents against teachers unions and woke corporations with large ears and large contempt for the wishes of a majority of Floridians. And courage in standing up to a leftist media that has cowed many a politician of each party. He has enormous political capital just now, and he's amassed this capital without the drama and childish insults that are Trump's stock-in-trade. The Donald has never faced an opponent with the political assets of Ron DeSantis. It would be a serious mistake to underestimate him.

Many Floridians have told me that they like DeSantis and believe he would be a good president but would hate to lose him as governor. Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez, who would step in if DeSantis resigned to run, is a competent, conservative Cuban-American from Miami-Dade County. Florida would be in good hands with her in the governor's mansion. And many DeSantis fans anticipate and approve of this. This is why, at DeSantis's Election Night victory party, so many were chanting, "Two more years! Two more years!"

Welcome to the center of the Republican universe. 🇺🇸



John Springs

The battle will be joined, and it will be vicious. Trump will not have it any other way. He's already thrown a couple of low blows, calling DeSantis "Ron DeSanctimonious" days before the election (demonstrating once again how devoted he is to Republican candidates not named Donald Trump) and hinting darkly that he knows dirty secrets about DeSantis that he will reveal if DeSantis





Disaster in Arizona

If once is a fluke, twice begins to look disturbingly like a pattern.

by **Stephan Kapustka**

Four years ago, Arizona governor Doug Ducey, a Republican, won reelection by a crushing 14-point margin. That success was far gone in November 2022 when Democrat Katie Hobbs defeated GOP gubernatorial candidate and television news anchor Kari Lake. Blake Masters, the Republican Senate candidate, went down alongside Lake after losing to Democratic senator Mark Kelly.

What explains these GOP losses in a longtime red state that, barring President Joe Biden's win in 2020, has selected a Republican in every presidential election since 2000?

The GOP's grip on Arizona is less firm than Ducey's win would suggest, as Democrats made several gains in 2018. First, Hobbs wrested control of the secretary of state office from Republicans. Given that Arizona does not have a lieutenant governor and the secretary of state de facto fills that role, this loss was an especially harsh blow for the GOP. Second, Democrat Kyrsten Sinema won her seat in the Senate by defeating Republican Martha McSally. That race was a

special election to fill the seat being vacated by the Republican Jeff Flake, who had estranged himself from the party through his anti-Trump positioning. Third, Arizona sent more Democrats than Republicans to the House of Representatives.

The GOP also lost the state's other Senate seat in 2020 when Kelly defeated McSally, who had been appointed senator by Ducey, in a special election.

To many Republicans, it was clear that they needed to try something else.

Kari Lake, whatever else might be said about her, definitely qualified as something else. She has never served in political office but was a news anchor at KSAZ-TV, the local Fox station in Phoenix, for over two decades. Lake, who was formerly a Democrat, had become taken with former President Donald Trump's GOP and brought with her the zealotry of a new convert. This was especially true regarding the 2020 election results, which Trump maintains were rigged in Arizona and elsewhere. More importantly for Lake, she also brought her decades of media training to bear on her old coworkers in the news industry. In viral video after viral video, Lake eviscerated reporters for left-wing biases in much the same way that Trump and Florida governor Ron DeSantis have done, thus endearing herself to grassroots conservatives.

As with those two men, speculation abounded over whether Arizona's prospective top woman might one day ascend to the White House. *National Review's* Rich Lowry went so far as to call her "the next Republican star." It seemed to tempt fate that Lake was locked in a close contest with Hobbs at the time she was so named.

Lake has been compared to and equated with Trump more often than can be adequately expressed in a single article, or a magazine for that matter. But the two couldn't be further apart in one key respect: Lake is a team player. When she had an advantage over Hobbs in the polls and the rest of the Republican slate was lagging behind her, she stepped up to help them.

That combined effort still wasn't enough, however, in a state that took the Trump phenomenon rather poorly, though not nearly to the same degree as Virginia and Georgia did.

Arizona's demographics present two major problems for a Republican Party transformed by Trump. First, it is a heavily urban and suburban state. Over 60 percent of the population lives within Maricopa County, the home of Phoenix. Republicans have long been bleeding suburban voters, but Trump has only accelerated the change. There are simply not enough people in Arizona who live in rural areas to balance the scales for the

A native of Glastonbury, Connecticut, Stephan Kapustka graduated from Quinnipiac University with a degree in political science. He enjoys writing about politics.



GOP. Second, the state has a high number of white people with college degrees. This group, though it was formerly a constituency of the GOP, has drifted left in recent years. This is what caused the former president to lose the state in 2020 in spite of his inroads with Latino voters.

The gubernatorial race was always going to be a close-run affair, though. In her own right, Hobbs was a horrific candidate, a walking caricature of a self-righteous progressive. She refused to debate Lake on the grounds that she didn't want to give her opponent a platform and was mocked mercilessly for cowardice. Hobbs had also come under fire after a former staffer successfully sued the Arizona Senate for racial discrimination.

Senator Kelly, up again for reelection for a full term in the upper chamber, was by contrast an A-list opponent. With gargantuan fundraising prowess and a frankly cool biography as an astronaut, it was unsurprising that he convinced a significant number of Trump supporters to split their tickets for him in 2020 when he ousted McSally. Beating him was never going to be easy.

Republicans nominated the venture capitalist Blake Masters, a close ally of the billionaire investor and Republican megadonor Peter Thiel. Masters had coauthored a book with Thiel on tech startups titled *Zero to One: Notes on Startups, or How to Build the Future*, and he brought a unique policy perspective that sought to build on Trump's disruption of the status quo on the right. Masters supported reducing legal immigration, opposed foreign interventionism abroad, and stated that his goal was to make it possible to sustain a family on only one income.

But Masters did not have Lake's raw charisma, and he made several missteps as a candidate. In the Republican primary, he took a maximalist anti-abortion position before unceremoniously pivoting to a more centrist one in the general election. He also expressed openness to privatizing Social Security, a particularly damaging gaffe in a retiree-heavy state like Arizona that sounded more like the Republican establishment of old than the Trumpian populism that had vanquished it. Masters's plight was made worse by the fact that outside groups aligned with Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell appeared to write off the state after he captured the nomination, and spending by groups aligned with Trump was comparatively paltry.

Democrats thought they had a wedge, and they used it. Kelly expressed little interest in helping Hobbs, content to focus on his own race. Lake, however, would have none of it. She expressed that there would be no excuse making for the voter who wished to support her and Kelly. The Republican ticket and the Democratic ticket, she insisted, were mutually exclusive. Sitting on the fence and picking some from one side and some from the other was not acceptable. She used the slogan "Lake and Blake" to emphasize the need for Arizona voters to support both her and Masters.

It seemed, for a while, like it was working. Assisted by a strong debate performance in early October, Masters began to close in on Kelly, whom he pledged to "send back to space." In *FineThirtyEight's* polling average, Masters trailed the incumbent senator by nearly 7 percentage points at the beginning of October. By the beginning of November, he had gotten within 3 points, and, by Election Day, his deficit was a mere 1.5 points. But it proved to be too little, too late.

Masters was the most visible problem child for the Arizona GOP, but he was hardly the only one. The Republican secretary of state nominee, Mark Finchem, possessed all of Trump's rancor but none of Lake's charisma and ran a nearly single-issue campaign on disputing the 2020 election results. He, too, lagged behind Lake in public polling despite fierce efforts on the part of both to yoke themselves together. Finchem went so far as to suggest that his defeat might put a target on Lake for assassination since the secretary of state in Arizona is second in line to succeed the governor. But he too was defeated.

The bet made by many Republicans was that 2020 was a fluke brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the voting methods derived from it. But if once is a fluke, twice begins to look disturbingly like a pattern. At a certain point, the scoreboard begins to speak for itself, and the results aren't pretty.

That is, save for one bright spot. State treasurer Kimberly Yee, a holdover from the Ducey era, was reelected easily and without much fanfare. It may grate on conservatives to have to pander to the pre-Trump version of the Republican Party. But pragmatism demands that voters be met where they are and only then nudged in the right direction. If there is to be a rebound in Arizona, there are more implausible places to begin it than with Yee.

Arizona Republicans did, evidently, need to try something new after 2020. It just needed to be something other than this. The party needs to find a way to reverse its fortunes in the suburbs, or, at least, to staunch the bleeding. One only needs to look to the Democratic Party of Florida to see how a one-time swing state can move out of reach. With the 2024 presidential election and Sinema's uncertain reelection looming, the stakes couldn't be higher. ❧



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When the Taiwan War Will Happen

Putting a deadline on the unthinkable.

by John Jiang

A coming crisis over Taiwan is now popularly treated as a foregone conclusion. China is increasing its military budget, expanding its fleet, and securing regional allies, all the while saber-rattling over its small democratic neighbor. But uncertainty still underpins the thinking of policy makers in the U.S. and its allies — a conflict is coming, yes, but when and how? And what could be done to avert it?

Time is not necessarily on Beijing's side, and the Chinese Communist Party knows this. The diplomatic avenue to integrating Taiwan is shut, likely forever. Such an approach was perhaps most plausible in the 2000s and early 2010s, when the China-sympathetic Kuomintang (KMT) dominated Taiwanese politics and when China's "reform and opening up" seemed to be developing apace. Since then, however, Taiwanese civic identity has grown, and the independence-minded Democratic Progressive Party has decisively supplanted the KMT in Taiwan's politics. The CCP may speak of working with "compatriots in Taiwan" toward reunification, but the reality is that the party's friends on the island are now few and dwindling.

The economic route to integration looks similarly implausible. Although China remains Taiwan's largest trading partner, trade has fallen as a proportion of gross domestic product. Taipei is also well aware of the fact that its economic ties to the mainland pose a security risk, and it has created headlines (and much consternation in Beijing) with its very public efforts to seek closer trade relations with the U.S. instead. As with the diplomatic route, the longer that China waits, the worse odds it will have for dominating Taiwan without bloodshed.

Hence, as both sides of the conflict over Taiwan have by now understood, any communist takeover of Taiwan will have to be achieved through force. Knowing this, one pivotal question remains: when does China believe it will be most advantageous to begin a war over Taiwan?

Some geostrategists argue that the danger is imminent and will never be greater than it is now. A case to that effect is made in the recent book *Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict with China* by Michael Beckley and Hal Brands, two American professors of geopolitics. The central contention of the book is that China's hard power already peaked in the 2010s, alongside its working-age population, and that its coming decades will be a story of decline, not domination. Feeling that its prospects are dimming, the authors argue, Beijing will make increasingly risky and reckless moves on the world stage — up to, and including, attacking Taiwan.



John Jiang is an alumnus of The American Spectator's Young Writers Program.

There are certainly credible grounds on which to distrust the dominant growth narrative. The country's official population figures don't quite add up, according to some researchers; neither does its official GDP growth rate. If China is in fact ready for a fall, its current property-market meltdown provides the perfect straw to break the camel's back. Japan's downfall three decades ago occurred in very similar circumstances, led by a downturn in inflated asset markets.

Prominent figures in Washington have endorsed the imminent danger narrative. In mid-October, Secretary of State Antony Blinken suggested that Beijing was shifting to a "much faster timeline" for seizing Taiwan. Two days later, Blinken's remarks were followed by a much more explicit warning from Admiral Michael Gilday, head of the U.S. Navy, that America would have to be prepared for "potentially a 2023 window" for a Taiwan crisis.

Despite the warnings, however, China does not appear to be changing its posture to one of imminent war. President Xi Jinping's remarks at the most recent National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party reaffirmed China's commitment to seizing Taiwan but seemed to indicate no greater urgency than in previous years.

Militarily, if not diplomatically, time could indeed be on China's side. The country currently spends a modest sum on its armed forces, at 1.7 percent of its GDP compared to America's 3.7 percent. Compare either of these figures with the late Soviet Union, which was able to sustain a military budget equal to about 15 percent of its GDP for decades before its eventual collapse. In other words, the People's Liberation Army has a lot of room to grow if political pressures require it to do so. The fact that China has made no indication of a plan to increase its relative military spending cuts against the idea that Beijing is becoming desperate.

Nonetheless, Beckley and Brands are correct in identifying the severity of the country's demographic situation. A dearth of young people will constrain the growth of its economy and military in the coming decades. The furious rate at which Chinese manufacturers are installing robots could ward off an economic decline, but, as the Russian invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated, a preponderance of hardware cannot always compensate for a lack of manpower when it comes to war.

There is also the fact that Taiwan itself is far from militarily negligible. The Taiwanese armed forces are currently in poor shape, but so was Ukraine's army in 2014. Putin's invasion, and the redoubled attention on the Pacific by both China and the U.S., may serve to stir Taipei out of complacency. Taiwan has increased its pace of arms imports from America. It may eventually expand its compulsory military-service program — long considered a political impossibility but now looking increasingly like a necessity. While the gross strength of the Taiwanese army may never match that of its neighbor, it still possesses hundreds of tanks and combat aircraft and thousands of artillery pieces, and this may already be sufficient to repel whatever fraction of army forces that China could actually transport across the strait. The longer that Beijing waits, the more that Taiwan's capabilities will grow and the more costly any eventual war will become.

To Subdue Without Fighting

The aforementioned economic, diplomatic, and military constraints mean that China cannot afford to wait forever. But neither can it afford to be hasty. Beijing does not want a war — it much prefers to influence other countries through economic means — and especially not a war with the United States.

War between China and the U.S., even of the likely non-nuclear kind, would be one of the most economically destructive events in modern history. Some estimates suggest that the sanctions alone would directly cause 7.6 percent of China's GDP to disappear, nearly double the economic contraction experienced by America during the Great Recession. Of course, China would also lose the ability to import vital materials and components from the West, destroying many of its domestic supply chains. Even an eventual Chinese victory could cause permanent economic damage, as international firms would shift their manufacturing to safer shores. And that is assuming victory: a defeat would be grounds for regime change, given that the CCP's legitimacy is rooted in restoring China's regional hegemony.

This threat of American intervention means that, despite seemingly close calls like this year's simulated Chinese blockade of Taiwan, the threat of war is still minimal for the next few years. What China will instead seek to do throughout the 2020s is to erode America's military and economic leverage, to the point where direct U.S. intervention on Taiwan's behalf becomes implausible and indirect intervention becomes ineffective.

On the economic front, China seeks to immunize itself against sanctions by stockpiling resources, keeping critical manufacturing at home, pushing for a consumer-driven economy that is less vulnerable to trade disputes, and securing alternate means of buying and selling goods. When the first China–Russia railway bridge opened earlier this year in the midst of the Ukraine war, it was cited as a means by which China could indirectly support Russia's war effort by increasing trade and alleviating its sanctions burden. But Beijing's primary interest lies in keeping its trade options open, as was evidenced when it signed a deal last month for another railroad with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, this time bypassing Russia. The CCP seeks a position of strength in which any trade war would result in more damage to the U.S. and its allies than to China.

Then there is the military. Here, China's intentions are unambiguous; the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is currently deploying new ships equivalent to a European great power navy every year. This buildup is obviously not meant for Taiwan, which possesses a tiny navy composed almost entirely of coastal defense ships. Instead, the scale of the buildup, combined with the continued emphasis on large numbers of relatively small missile ships, has long been recognized as a challenge to the U.S. Navy. Specifically, China has built its navy to counter the U.S. Navy's carrier group doctrine, with the premise that capital ships such as aircraft carriers can be safely taken out at extreme range using massed missile strikes. This does not mean, however, that Beijing is itching to try out its weapons on live targets. The primary intention is, again, to change the U.S. military's cost-benefit analysis over any hypothetical Taiwan intervention — to encourage a passive and cautious response from America, or, even better, no response at all.

If a date is to be placed on a Taiwan war, it is likely to be when China has achieved the goals outlined above and, therefore, believes that the risk of American involvement is sufficiently low or manageable. When might this be? A good starting point is Xi's own proposed deadline: 2027, according to testimony provided last year by the U.S. admiral Phil Davidson. According to Davidson, this is the year by which Xi wants the Chinese military to possess "the capability and the capacity to forcibly reunify with Taiwan, should they choose force to do it." Implied in this forcible reunion is, of course, the Chinese navy's being able to go toe to toe with the U.S. Navy.

Given the current trajectory of the Chinese naval buildup, 2027 may indeed prove to be a pivotal year. Between 2014 and 2018, the

The U.S. is willing
to go to war with
China over Taiwan,
and China knows it.



Bill Wilson

PLAN deployed about 678,000 tons' worth of ships; by 2019, it possessed a total tonnage of about 1.8 million, compared to the U.S. Navy's 4.6 million tons. Assuming the PLAN's current rate of buildup continues, 2027 could see it reach around 2.5 million tons. This would put it roughly on par with the U.S. Pacific Fleet, which comprises anywhere from one-half to two-thirds of the Navy's total deployed assets.

But keep in mind that China wants to fight Taiwan, not the United States. Merely being on par with U.S. Navy tonnage is unlikely to be of sufficient assurance, particularly given American superiority in actual naval-warfare experience and most (though not all) areas of naval technology. The year 2027 might be when the PLAN reaches viable, but not optimal, capability for a Taiwan war.

What is more likely is that China will wait a while longer, probably until the early 2030s. By this time, a few key pieces will have fallen into place. The PLAN could be displacing up to four million tons, easily larger than any fleet that the U.S. Navy would be able to sustain on the other side of the Pacific. It is also during this time that the size of the U.S. Navy will reach a low ebb as it decommissions old ships at a faster rate than it can deploy new ones. (The PLAN, having much newer ships on average, will not face this issue for a couple more decades.)

If the CCP's plans come to fruition, China could dominate key technological sectors like semiconductors by 2030, making economic warfare a less sustainable option for the United States. The early 2030s could also see China's household consumption as a percentage of GDP rise to 50 percent, up from around 35 percent now. This reduced reliance on trade would make it all the more difficult for the international community to impose consequences over a Taiwan war.

Any delay past the early 2030s would begin to cause problems for Beijing. China's population is expected to enter into decline around that time; the government will have trouble sustaining the size of the military with a shrinking pool of young people to recruit from, and it will be politically distracted by tens of millions of elderly Chinese entering retirement and facing a weak pension system. The PLAN will also begin to experience the same problems with aging ships that the U.S. Navy currently has, while the latter by that point may have cleared out its obsolete assets and begun expanding again.

There is also, as aforementioned, the fact that Taiwan's movement toward cultural, political, and economic independence will continue apace. The 2040s and 2050s will see the centennials of the Second World War and the Chinese Civil War; by that point, the

CCP's continued clinging to historical territorial claims will seem increasingly unjustified even to its allies.

Therefore, if an invasion of Taiwan is to happen sometime this century, the early 2030s would appear to be the most opportune time for Beijing to strike.

Cruisers Speak Louder Than Words

Provided that this is true, how should the U.S. prepare itself and its allies? A lot hinges on what Washington actually wants. For decades, the American policy of "strategic ambiguity" — that is, of being intentionally vague about whether the U.S. would militarily intervene to defend Taiwan in the event of an invasion — has been ironclad in Washington. But since America's "pivot to Asia," begun by Barack Obama and continued by his successors, the American position on Taiwan has started to become less ambiguous. Last year, President Joe Biden seemingly blundered when he declared that the U.S. would defend Taiwan if the latter were attacked; the White House quickly walked back his comments. Last month, in an interview with CBS, he stated again that the U.S. would assist Taiwan, only for the White House to once again retract his comments on his behalf.

Such discordant messaging could perhaps be attributed to Biden's senility. But the American position on Taiwan is by this point barely even an open secret, and it is likely that Biden was simply repeating what his own military staffers had told him. The U.S. is willing to go to war with China over Taiwan, and China knows it. The only real question is the extent and duration to which the U.S. would be willing to commit to such a conflict.

Keeping China guessing as to the degree of U.S. involvement has worked to deter aggression for decades. Yet such a strategy only works if China genuinely fears total commitment from the U.S., in the form of the might of its Navy and all of its sea and air assets. If Beijing feels that the upper limit of U.S. conventional capability no longer represents an existential threat, then strategic ambiguity loses its utility, and Biden's unambiguous threats lose their bite.

If the Biden administration wishes to commit to Taiwan's defense, it must be able to back up words with actions. The "capability gap" between obligations and actual military strength will begin to show itself in the coming years. The Chinese Communist Party knows that the current budget for the U.S. Navy would see it shrink by eighteen ships in the next five years, all while the PLAN is aggressively expanding. Unless Biden commits to keeping the U.S. Navy on pace with the PLAN's growth into the 2030s, his current rhetoric is reckless, and he would be better off saying nothing at all. ❧



Biden Tanks U.S. Energy Economy

He takes all the wrong lessons from the recent OPEC cuts.

by Jordan McGillis

While Americans were doomscrolling through election results on the morning of November 9, something more consequential than the Democrats' potentially holding the Senate was unfolding: an ominous round of tech layoffs. According to internal documents, Meta (formerly Facebook, Inc.) is letting go of more than ten thousand employees, with additional pink slips likely to follow. The Meta news comes on the heels of Salesforce's latest sacking spree, which reportedly put hundreds of workers into the ranks of the unemployed earlier in the week.

Though tech has become a punching bag for the American political Right, these developments are signals of a coming wider recession. While we have been caught up in the midterm melee, bad economic trends have become more pronounced in recent weeks. Take, for instance, the recent OPEC Plus decision to cut oil production. Though the White House framed it as cynical realpolitik — and while it certainly met with the Kremlin's approval and showed the failure

of President Joe Biden's fist-bump diplomacy — the decision was a sober, preemptive retrenchment in the face of a global downturn.

Meanwhile, with inflation raging at levels not seen in forty years, the U.S. Federal Reserve is ratcheting interest rates ever higher, sending shivers down the spines of investors and macro observers. Though the Fed may yet land the monetary equivalent of a figure-skating quadruple axel, stemming inflation without sparking a recessionary pullback, the odds are against it. The OPEC production cuts can be interpreted as a targeted blow against the Biden presidency only by the most conspiratorially minded. OPEC sees a looming demand slide ahead as the inflation bubble bursts, a view that comports with other energy forecasts, such as those from the U.S. Energy Information Administration and the International Energy Agency. As is the case in American tech giants' belt-tightening, OPEC's planning is a reaction to economic expectations. Across many sectors, the repercussions of policy mistakes are now being felt.

With its clunky phrase "Putin price hike" and the accusations it has hurled at OPEC Plus, the White House has deflected responsibility for the economic woes of its own making. According to the *Economist*, Biden's signature 2021 bill, the American

Rescue Plan, and other recent fiscal profligacy have added 2.5 percent to the vicious inflation that is draining Americans' savings and prompting the Fed to hike rates. The president and his handlers claim that the stimulus was a needed jolt for an economy stuck in the mire of a pandemic. But the *Economist* — no one's idea of a Trumpian mouthpiece — disagrees, writing, "whereas Mr. Trump's stimulus arrived when America was suffering the economic equivalent of cardiac arrest, Mr. Biden's came as it was staging a healthy recovery."

With the House set to flip to a Republican Party that garnered five million more votes across all races than the opposition (and the Senate hinging on another Georgia runoff), the electorate has revoked its 2020 mandate from the Democratic Party platform. As a matter of both decorum and political prudence, the president would be wise to eschew partisan legislative ambitions and prioritize salvaging our economy. No issue set provides a better opportunity to do so than energy.

Working with the new Republican House majority, the president should repudiate once and for all his pledge to "end fossil fuels"; he should lend his unqualified support to permitting reform; and he should endorse a predictable long-term investment environment for energy resources.

Jordan McGillis is a policy analyst at the Manhattan Institute, a free-market think tank. He was formerly deputy director of policy at the Institute for Energy Research and resides in Southern California.

As oil expert Ellen Wald argued in the pages of the *New York Times* in late October, while the Biden administration cannot dictate the terms of the world oil market, it can make a positive difference for Americans and global consumers alike by easing the regulatory burden that companies face within our own country. The administration should halt its internal carbon-pricing exercise, direct relevant executive agencies to prioritize pipelines, disavow the Jones Act's misguided protectionism, and look again to federal lands and waters for oil production. Actions like these, Wald writes, "would lower global oil prices and cut into Saudi Arabia's oil profits."

One temptation Biden ought to avoid is lashing out at foreign targets. An oil-product export ban, with which the administration has flirted, would exemplify this ill-advised response. The No Oil Producing and Exporting Cartels bill, soon to be debated in Congress, does, too, granting states the ability to sue OPEC members for antitrust violations. Satisfying as that may sound, it would not generate the new production that is needed. Instructively, a similar idea emerged in June 2008, when Republican presidential adviser Thomas W. Evans suggested using

antitrust law to "allow the states to seek relief in the Supreme Court." Crude oil cost more than \$140 per barrel that month, but the Great Recession was just about to unfold; before the end of the year, the oil price had plummeted to below \$35 a barrel.

An under-discussed aspect of our current energy crunch is that it shows the enduring demand for oil and gas, regardless of its origins. Biden, by way of his advisers Jake Sullivan and Brian Deese, seems to have misinterpreted the OPEC cuts, arguing that it shows the benefits of his preferred alternative energy sources. But prices tend to win out over politics. If the so-called energy transition were well on its way, supplying the affordable energy we all seek, prices for oil and gas would give heartburn only to the companies watching their customers switching to alternatives. In reality, long-term demand for these fuels continues to grow globally, even if a short-term drop in demand is likely. Demand for oil is going up about one million barrels per day each year — providing leverage to the geopolitical actors who recognize this fact and undermining the security of those who wish it were not so. Despite its cuts this fall, OPEC itself predicts growth in the long

run, expecting a demand boom through the middle of this century.

President Biden and a Democratic Congress have inflicted nearly two years of economic damage through wanton spending and hostility to reliable resources. Further damage can be mitigated, and perhaps a crippling recession can be avoided, by righting American energy policy. In the second half of his term, the president must now turn his attention to the brewing storm, work with the Republicans on Capitol Hill, instill investment confidence, and chart an energy course that will give the country a sailor's chance to reach safe economic harbor.

Unfortunately, the midterms not only overshadowed our economic peril but also seem to have clouded the judgment of the man in the Oval Office. When asked on November 9 what he will do differently in the next two years of his presidency given that most Americans think the country is on the wrong course, Biden responded, "Nothing, because they're just finding out what we're doing."

When election mania subsides and the layoffs mount, Americans will find out indeed. And they will be none too pleased. ❧

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How Will Newsom Play in the Rest of the Nation?

The California governor's victory says little about his national chances, but his record should give national observers a clue about his priorities.

by **Steven Greenhut**

California's general election results were anticlimactic. Governor Gavin Newsom was reelected by a nearly 58 percent to 42 percent margin over state senator Brian Dahle, a standard-issue Republican from California's rural northern region. No one expected Dahle to have a chance, and he ran a dogged but ultimately unimpressive campaign.

In recent years, the Republican Party's main goal has been to field candidates who won't embarrass the party and obliterate its down-ticket candidates. And by down ticket, I mean way down the ticket. No California Republican has won a statewide race since 2006, so the focus has been on not losing too many state legislative and congressional races. Dahle essentially took one for the team.

As I pointed out in my election postmortem at *The American Spectator*, even the most qualified and energetic Republican statewide candidates did only marginally better than those candidates who ran no campaign whatsoever — and were little more than a name on the ballot. The state is too Democratic to elect a Republican to a statewide post.

Newsom's winning percentage varied little from the winning percentage of other

statewide Democrats, meaning that any generic Democrat would likely have matched his totals. But Newsom didn't have to run much of a campaign, so it's unclear how well he would have done had he tapped into his enormous campaign chest and run more than a pro forma race.

Republicans took their shot at Newsom in an ill-fated recall election, in which 62 percent of voters wanted him to stay in office. The second gubernatorial recall election in state history came in 2021, following the COVID-19 shutdowns, an unemployment-payment scandal, and rolling electrical blackouts. But the replacement candidates — most notably talk-show host Larry Elder — ran hard to the right in a state that tilts hard to the left.

There's little question that Newsom has his eye on the White House, as evidenced by the television ad he ran imploring Floridians to move to California to pursue freedom. That was a head-scratcher. On almost every measurable issue (regulations, taxes, property rights), the state fares poorly on any freedom index. That campaign suggests that Newsom doesn't understand how non-Californians view our state.

A presidential candidate has to run in the entire nation, and it's easy to see how Newsom's



Steven Greenhut is Western region director for the R Street Institute. Write to him at sgreenhut@rstreet.org.

style of San Francisco progressivism might play elsewhere: not well. During the latest session, Newsom vetoed a bill that would have allowed some municipalities to allow safe-injection sites. Most Sacramento political observers viewed that tilt to the center in the light of his possible national campaign, but he has offered few similar nods.

Looking on the good side, Newsom also has recently floated a reasonable plan for developing more water storage, although critics are right to note that he waited until the state was in the midst of a grueling drought. And, with Newsom, one must take a “trust but verify” approach. He sometimes says the right things, but there’s rarely any follow-up.

The water issue is important because, under his watch, Californians have feared for the provision of their basic infrastructure needs. Local water districts are rationing water. In the midst of wildfires, the state’s main electrical utilities have been shutting off the power. I can already envision the anti-Newsom “lights out” campaign ads.

The state made national news — of the “you’ve got to be kidding” variety — when the Independent System Operator implored Californians not to charge their electric vehicles the same week that the California Air Resources Board (CARB) announced its “groundbreaking” road map to ban internal-combustion vehicles by 2035.

The Newsom governorship is overseeing the state’s continued decline. The progressive wing of the California Democratic Party views our suburban lifestyles as unsustainable. In their view, we use too much water. We rely too heavily on automobiles. They are committed to phasing out fossil fuels — even before affordable and plentiful alternatives are on line. They see a future of rationing and cutbacks.

California has given up building new freeway and road infrastructure — preferring instead a fruitless scheme to push Californians onto our declining transit systems. I have agreed with Newsom on some of his housing policies. For instance, the governor signed laws that eliminate single-family-only zoning, remove parking requirements for many construction projects, and rezone old shopping centers for housing development.

I support these laws because they are deregulatory in nature — they remove onerous zoning requirements, rein in California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) lawsuits, and essentially shift more decisions to the private marketplace. The state’s progressives promote these laws

because they will increase housing density. It’s part of their broader agenda, which attempts to combat urban sprawl.

Yet decades of progressive land-use policy has driven up the cost of housing throughout the state, with a statewide median north of \$800,000. This has actually generated sprawl, as residents of the Bay Area and Los Angeles in particular increasingly endure mega-commutes to the Central Valley and Inland Empire, respectively, as they seek out more-affordable housing.

These are crucial issues as Republicans prepare for a potential Newsom candidacy. The state’s majority party has long touted grandiose goals yet failed to account for unintended consequences. Even as California hopes to prod other states and nations into embracing its climate goals, it has failed to tend to the basics of government — such as ensuring that the lights stay on, the taps are flowing, and the roads can handle normal levels of traffic.

Newsom isn’t to blame for all of this, of course. Numerous California governors and legislatures have created our current mess. But Newsom has championed all of these policies — and more so than his predecessor. Former governor Jerry Brown was a fanatic on the climate change issue, as he routinely prattled about human extinction. But he was more of a pragmatist who at least tended to the basics.

Brown was stuck with a \$30 billion budget deficit and was rather creative — in some good ways and some bad — in filling the gap. He eliminated the state’s obnoxious redevelopment agencies (good) and led the charge for a large tax increase (bad). By contrast, Newsom enjoys an enviable \$97.5 billion budget surplus and therefore inherited the role of Santa Claus.

Instead of using that windfall to significantly pay down unfunded liabilities or to upgrade California’s long-neglected infrastructure or to reform a tax system that is destructively dependent on capital-gains boom-and-bust cycles, he’s been rewarding public-employee unions, building unneeded projects (a bullet train!), and creating new programs. He’s squandering a historic opportunity — but there’s no political price to pay.

Others of Newsom’s decisions probably won’t play well elsewhere. He signed Assembly Bill 5 (AB 5), which largely banned companies from using independent contractors. I’ve written about this regularly in these pages.

This union-backed disaster targeted ride-sharing drivers for companies such as Uber, Lyft, and DoorDash but threatened to destroy the entire freelance economy.

In the face of blowback from ordinary Californians who lost their jobs and musical troupes that had to shut down their performances, the legislature ultimately exempted more than one hundred industries from the legislation’s provisions. But the measure still rears its ugly head. Over the summer, truckers shut down the Port of Oakland to protest AB 5’s attack on their owner-operator model.

By the way, the governor dawdled during recent backups at those ports, refusing to suspend AB 5 even though the shortage of truckers exacerbated the crisis. Newsom suspended hundreds of laws during COVID-19, but he refused to suspend AB 5 even though people couldn’t pay their bills and the state was forbidding them from tackling freelance pursuits.

The bottom line: Newsom doubles down on progressive nostrums even in the face of their real-world results. Newsom did indeed criticize the teachers unions for resisting school reopenings, but he also passed a series of educational laws that make it far more difficult for the state’s successful charter schools to open new campuses — a sop to those same unions.

Brown advocated for charters — and even started the Oakland Military Academy — but Newsom reversed those gains. The teachers unions knew that they had a friend in the new governor, and they quickly took advantage of that alliance. The school-choice movement is growing nationwide, so it’s hard to see how Newsom would make inroads elsewhere as the anti-school choice candidate.

California has long been a Democratic state, but the move from Brown to Newsom signaled the move from a traditional liberal Democrat to a Bay Area progressive. The difference is stark. Past Democrats understood that they needed to tend to the basics of government as they pursued their bigger climate, labor, and other dreams. Now the tail wags the dog.

Whereas Brown was the “last adult in Sacramento,” Newsom might be the first non-adult to take the helm — despite a few token nods in Brown’s direction. As a result, we’re seeing the kind of shortages and economic disruptions that one might expect. As the general election and failed recall showed, there’s no price to pay for this in California. But how will it play east of the Sierras? ❧

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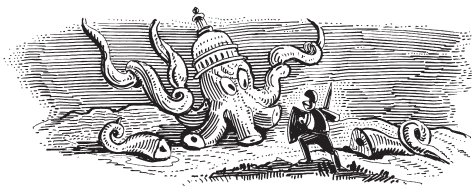
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Cancel the Personal Income Tax

Red states are cutting and flattening it — and Americans are voting for it with their feet.

by Grover Norquist

Joe Biden’s presidency and the narrow Democratic majorities in Congress have done great damage to the American economy. Republicans have been unable to stop the tax-and-spend tsunami because the Democrats can use the reconciliation process to govern alone with their slim majority.

But all is not lost.

Limited-government activists and elected officials locked out of power in Washington have taken advantage of the genius of the American Constitution: federalism. Despite what’s going on in Washington, the fifty states can change the direction of America by passing legislation in one state, thus encouraging other states to follow suit. Concealed carry laws, welfare reform, right-to-try legislation, term limits: all are examples of laws that began in one state and went “viral.”

Success in one state becomes the model for other states to act on. Success in a growing number of states crushes naysaying arguments that something cannot work or will wreak havoc.

The most revolutionary change in American politics since Biden entered the White House on January 20, 2021, has been the decision by a number of governors and legislators in red states to reduce, flatten, and begin phasing out personal income taxes. This movement is not simply a replay of the tax revolt of 1978, which saw tax limitation measures imposed in many states and led to the Reagan tax cuts of 1981.

Yes, in 2021 red-state lawmakers in fourteen states enacted income tax relief, as did eleven red states in 2022. But, more importantly, many of those states have gone further and announced that their tax-rate cuts are just the first steps on a march toward abolition of their state income taxes.

The benefits of forgoing an income tax are demonstrated by the draw of the eight states that have no personal income tax: Texas, Tennessee, Florida, Washington, Nevada, Alaska, Wyoming, and South Dakota attract jobs, investment, and citizens away from states with state income taxes and have been doing so for decades.

Americans have long voted with their feet in favor of states with a lower tax burden, and this trend has ramped up over the past two years as more state lawmakers have cut and



Grover Norquist is president of Americans for Tax Reform.

flattened their state's income tax. The top ten states for inbound migration last year had an average state and local tax burden of 7.7 percent, compared to the 9.9 percent average tax burden of the ten states with the greatest rates of outbound migration.

In addition to having a lower overall tax burden, the states that gained the most people last year also had a lower personal income tax rate on average. The top third of states in terms of population growth from the start of the pandemic (April 2020) through July 2021 had an average combined state and local top marginal income tax rate of 3.5 percent. The bottom third of states for population growth, in contrast, had an average top marginal income tax rate of 7.3 percent.

The states that are attracting the most new residents also levy lower corporate tax rates. The average top corporate tax rate was 4.1 percent in the ten states with the highest inbound migration last year. Meanwhile, the ten states that had the highest rates of outbound migration had an average top corporate tax rate of 8.3 percent.

The Electoral College already has shifted from high-tax states to low-tax states. Every ten years, it becomes more difficult for a liberal Democrat to win the presidency. Thanks to lower taxes, light regulation, school choice, and other policies that have attracted new jobs and residents, Florida, Texas, and other red states will have increased congressional clout and a greater say in shaping the Electoral College for decades to come.

The leaders of more than ten red states have publicly proclaimed their determination to phase out their states' income taxes. So expect emigration from blue states to red states to increase in numbers and speed.

New Hampshire has billed itself as a "no-income-tax state" despite having a 5 percent tax on dividends and interest. Last year, its Republican governor, Chris Sununu, moved to make that boast a reality by signing legislation to phase that tax to zero over five years and turn the Granite State into the ninth real no-income-tax state.

The model most states are following in phasing out their state income tax is North Carolina. It first thought to "pay for" the elimination of the income tax in large part by expanding the sales tax base to previously untaxed services in 2013. This met strong opposition, particularly from service-industry companies that were previously exempt from the sales tax.

Later that year, North Carolina shifted to using "triggers," in which the income tax rate was permanently reduced by a set number when tax revenue hit a certain level. More revenue coming in faster brought more rate reduction. When economic growth is faster, the tax rate falls faster. If the economy slows, the tax reduction is delayed.

The success of triggers has made it easier for other states to vote to phase their income taxes to zero.

In Iowa — thanks to the leadership of state Senate majority leader Jack Whitver, state House speaker Pat Grassley, and Governor Kim Reynolds — legislators voted this year to phase down the state's personal income tax, which currently has a

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progressive structure and a top rate of 8.53 percent, to a flat 3.9 percent over the next four years. They plan to move it to zero.

Using revenue triggers, lawmakers in Iowa also are reducing their corporate tax rate until it reaches 5.5 percent. Arizona's personal income tax rate will drop from 4.5 percent to 2.5 percent, thanks to legislation enacted by Governor Doug Ducey, Representative Ben Toma, and Senators J. D. Mesnard, Karen Fann, and Vince Leach.

In Kentucky, lawmakers led by state Senate president Robert Stivers and House speaker David Osborne passed a bill bringing down the state income tax rate from 5 percent to zero over the next ten to twelve years.

Louisiana legislators passed a bill that could decrease their income tax over the next twelve years. The Democrat governor read the tea leaves and signed the bill.

The Mississippi House, led by Speaker Philip Gunn, voted 97–12 to phase down the state's 5 percent income tax to zero tax in ten years. Republican governor Tate Reeves prioritized the issue, calling for a phaseout of Mississippi's state income tax. As Senate leader, Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hosemann stood in the way of income tax abolition but allowed a compromise in the form of a three-year phasedown to 4 percent. GOP leaders in Mississippi remain

committed to putting the income tax on the road to zero.

In September, another state, Idaho, joined the flat-tax club. Republican governor Brad Little signed a bill that marks his third income tax cut in two years and moves the state to a flat 5.8 percent.

In North Dakota, state lawmakers may soon follow suit. Republican governor Doug Burgum recently proposed moving North Dakota to a flat tax. Today North Dakota has a five-tier income tax with rates ranging from 1.1 percent to 2.9 percent. Burgum's proposal moves to a flat 1.5 percent income tax.

Today there are eight states with no state income tax. Nine states have a single-rate tax. Five states have passed laws that will move their income taxes to a single rate. This is important because it is easier to reduce a flat-rate tax — everyone benefits equally and understands that.

Single-rate taxes are difficult to raise for the same reason. Everyone loses. Politicians can't divide taxpayers and mug them one at a time.

The governors of West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Virginia all have stated their support for eliminating their states' income taxes. The next governor of Arkansas, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, campaigned on the promise to do the same.

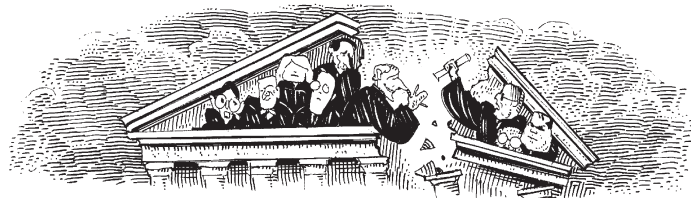
Within the next four years, twenty-four states will have a single-rate tax. For eight states, that single rate is *zero*. One can imagine that this finally will begin a debate on why we do not have a flat rate nationally. (Steve Forbes and Dick Armey have argued for one for decades but did not have as many examples of state successes to point to.)

How many states could get to zero income tax? Twenty-three states have a Republican trifecta: control of the governorship and full control of the legislature. Seven other states have full GOP control of the legislature but not yet the governorship.

This is good news for those Americans left behind in blue states.

Why? Because blue-state governors have begun to fight back against their more liberal legislatures that are pushing for higher income tax rates. They see their people, income, and investment flowing to red states. Lower state taxes in Texas and Florida will, over time, bring down the tax rates in California and New York.

That is bipartisan compromise we can live with. 🐘



The Road to *Dobbs*

In a busy, contentious election year, a look back at how far the pro-life movement has come.

by Tom Raabe

It was an “opinion day” like no other in recent judicial memory. June 24, 2022. Threats of violence had prompted erection of barricades outside of the Supreme Court building — and not the flimsy bicycle-rack railings used along parade routes but the eight-foot-high Washington-under-siege non-scalable-wall variety. Police in riot gear marched on the building, ready if required to bang heads should the customary shouting and placard-waving deteriorate into fisticuffs.

Why this unprecedented display of power and caution? In a nutshell: the fifty-year legacy of legalized abortion in the United States was coming to an end, and the Left had mobilized its shock troops to try to subvert the inevitable.

A draft of the decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, the legal vehicle for overturning *Roe v. Wade*, had been spuriously leaked to the press about seven weeks earlier. This spawned violence against pro-life centers across the nation and threats of planned disruption of Sunday worship services. When certain key justices’ personal information was doxxed, the protests took on dangerously intimate contours. Although in violation of federal and local laws, militants descended with impunity on conservative justices’ homes, trying to browbeat at least one into changing his or her vote. One protester was arrested and charged with attempted murder of a justice — he intended to sneak into Justice Brett Kavanaugh’s home and turn the 5–4 majority vote into a 4–4 *status quo ante* with one heinous act. (And they say conservatives are a threat to democracy!)

The intimidation didn’t work, for *Dobbs* came down exactly as adumbrated in the draft decision. The vote was 5–4, with Justices Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Amy Coney Barrett, and Kavanaugh in the affirmative, and Chief Justice John Roberts

agreeing narrowly that the statute in question should be upheld but disagreeing with the larger overhaul of *Roe*.

Dobbs is a case from Mississippi, in which a state law that banned virtually all abortions after fifteen weeks of pregnancy was challenged on behalf of the Jackson Women’s Health Organization, the only abortion clinic in the state. Enforcement of the law was blocked by lower courts, on the basis of *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, a 1992 ruling that capped the time at which abortion could be outlawed at fetal viability, generally understood to occur at around twenty-four weeks.

The SCOTUS decision reverses the lower courts and upholds the Mississippi law. In doing so, it effectively makes it legal for states to ban abortion before viability. Moreover, acting on the plaintiff’s request to overturn *Roe* outright, the five majority justices went beyond the particulars of the Mississippi case and threw out the 1973 law as well. Whether abortions are permitted is now thrown back to the fifty states to determine. Twenty-six of them, according to some sources, had already indicated, some through “trigger laws” — legislation drafted to go into effect if and when *Roe* and *Casey* were overturned — that they would ban or severely restrict abortions.

Alito, in his majority opinion, put it bluntly: “The Constitution does not confer a right to abortion; *Roe* and *Casey* are overruled; and the authority to regulate abortion is returned to the people and their elected representatives.”

Roe has always been considered constitutionally suspect, even by some scholars sympathetic to abortion. The majority opinion in *Roe*, written by Justice Harry Blackmun, found that, even though the right to an abortion is not enumerated in the Constitution, the “right of privacy” could be found in a number of constitutional amendments, and this right included the right to abortion. The *Casey* court grounded its decision solely on the theory that the right to obtain an abortion is part of the “liberty” protected by the Fourteenth Amendment’s due process clause.

Tom Raabe is a writer and editor living in Tempe, Arizona.

While some rights not mentioned specifically in the Constitution have been deemed protected by the Fourteenth Amendment, the court has required such rights, Alito wrote, to be “deeply rooted in the Nation’s history.” Not only is abortion not so rooted, but, until the latter half of the twentieth century, abortion enjoyed no support in U.S. law and, indeed, was considered a crime. Summarized Alito: “By the time the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted, three-quarters of the States had made abortion a crime at any stage of pregnancy. This consensus endured until the day *Roe* was decided. *Roe* either ignored or misstated this history, and *Casey* declined to reconsider *Roe*’s faulty historical analysis.”

The other objection to overturning *Roe*, that it is settled law and thus immune from related legal challenges, was equally dismissed. “[*S*]tare *decisis*,” Alito wrote, “is not an inexorable command”; he explicitly cited an infamous landmark legal case that was, upon further review, overturned — *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the 1896 law that legalized racial segregation.

Liberals immediately erupted into geysers of fear that an overturned *Roe* paved the way for other, similarly controversial reversals, such as undoing the law ordaining same-sex marriage. On this prospect, Alito intoned: “The Court emphasizes that this decision concerns the constitutional right to abortion and no other right. Nothing in this opinion should be understood to cast doubt on precedents that do not concern abortion.”

As for the future of legalized abortion, it will be available on a state-by-state basis and will likely continue to play a role in electoral politics. Voters in Kansas, shortly after the ruling, defeated a pro-life referendum, and the midterm election dealt pro-lifers setbacks in a number of states, as voters in Michigan, Kentucky, California,

and Vermont enshrined abortion rights in state constitutions. Also, while downplayed as a significant factor by many conservatives in the run-up to the midterms, abortion moved the needle in the Democrat direction in a number of races.

R*oe*’s reversal comes after nearly fifty years of dogged advocacy for life. The ruling has since its inception been deemed a moral outrage by a large percentage of Americans, many of whom, since day one, have been roused into seeking its eradication. They have year after year marched by the millions in the March for Life in Washington, D.C., calling for the law’s overthrow. They have gathered outside abortion clinics both seeking friendly, persuasive interactions with pregnant women and also, for a period in the 1980s, seeking to blockade entrances via Operation Rescue. Many suffered imprisonment for their courage.

They have seen their cause rise and fall.

The 1990s, for example, were dismal years, as abortion advocates were able to cast the argument in terms of a woman’s choice and gain traction in opinion polls, some skewing 2–1 in favor of abortion. Politicians who had mortgaged their political success to the abortion lobby delivered upon election in a big way. At one point in the Nineties, the country hosted more than two thousand free-standing abortion clinics, which performed 1.6 million abortions a year. Planned Parenthood received government handouts in the millions of dollars.

Such huge numbers induced blowback, however, as public sentiment toward abortion began to turn. Younger Americans, of all races, saw what the extinction of fetal life was doing to their generations.

Roe’s reversal comes after nearly fifty years of dogged advocacy for life.



But also, possibly more significantly, advances in ultrasound technology allowed pregnant women to see, beginning at eight weeks, organs developing and a little heart beating inside themselves. Imagine being a young woman whose mother shows you a sonogram of yourself at four months! The Left found it hard to argue with that. Indeed, a Doritos commercial that ran during the 2016 Super Bowl, in which a baby in the womb, shown via ultrasound, is lunging and squirming, trying to get at his father's bag of chips, generated criticism from NARAL Pro-Choice America for "humanizing" a fetus.

But, although consciences were troubled and national sentiment was shifting in the pro-life direction, *Roe* still was intractably enshrined as the law of the land, and the political environment, much less the makeup of the court, caused even optimistic pro-lifers to doubt whether they would see the overthrow of the hated ruling in their lifetimes.

The nearly incredible journey of transforming an often-waffling 5–4 conservative majority into a court with the moral sand to overturn a ruling that had been elevated to sacramental status in secular doctrine started in 2005. In that year, swing justice Sandra Day O'Connor retired from the Supreme Court, and President George W. Bush's nominee to replace her, Harriet Miers, withdrew her candidacy under pressure from pro-life Republicans because she had no track record of publicly opposing abortion. As her replacement, Bush nominated Alito, now one of the staunchest conservatives on the bench, who wrote the *Dobbs* majority opinion.

After two liberal justices retired and were replaced by two even more liberal justices (Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan), the unexpected death of Antonin Scalia in February 2016 looked to give President Barack Obama a third Supreme Court nomination and the opportunity to flip the court to 5–4 liberal. Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell, however, declared that the Senate would not fill

Scalia's seat during a presidential election year but would allow the next commander in chief to do so, even though that would push the event nearly a year into the future. The Left exploded with outrage, but McConnell held his ground. This deprived Obama's pick for the vacant seat, Merrick Garland, from even getting a hearing.

Then, unbelievably, Donald Trump won the presidency. In short order, Trump, who had promised in his campaign to nominate conservative justices, put forth the name of Neil Gorsuch, a solid pro-lifer, whose nomination the Democrats threatened to filibuster. But because the then majority leader Harry Reid had back in 2013 invoked the "nuclear option" — upending the filibuster for lower-court judges — the path was cleared for McConnell to follow suit for Supreme Court nominations, and Gorsuch got in, 54–45.

Then Anthony Kennedy, the swingiest of swing justices, retired in 2018, and Trump got his second SCOTUS nominee. Amid contention that surpassed anything in recent years, including allegations harking back to behavior at high school drinking parties, Brett Kavanaugh was confirmed, 50–48. The 5–4 majority was solidified, with Roberts assuming the swing position.

Then stalwart liberal Ruth Bader Ginsburg, one of abortion's champions, passed away in September 2020, after years of feeble health. Trump was handed his *third* Supreme Court nomination. Ignoring liberal caterwauling over "rushing" through the nomination so close to a presidential election, McConnell — in a glorious volte-face — got University of Notre Dame law professor Amy Coney Barrett confirmed, 52–48, *one week* before the election. The 5–4 majority went to 6–3, and how Roberts voted no longer mattered.

Then, in May 2021, the Supreme Court granted cert to *Dobbs*.

Then, on June 24, 2022, Roberts's defection notwithstanding, the three new justices, plus Alito and Thomas, struck down *Roe v. Wade*. Millions more babies will live as a result.

And it is said God is not involved in politics. 🦋

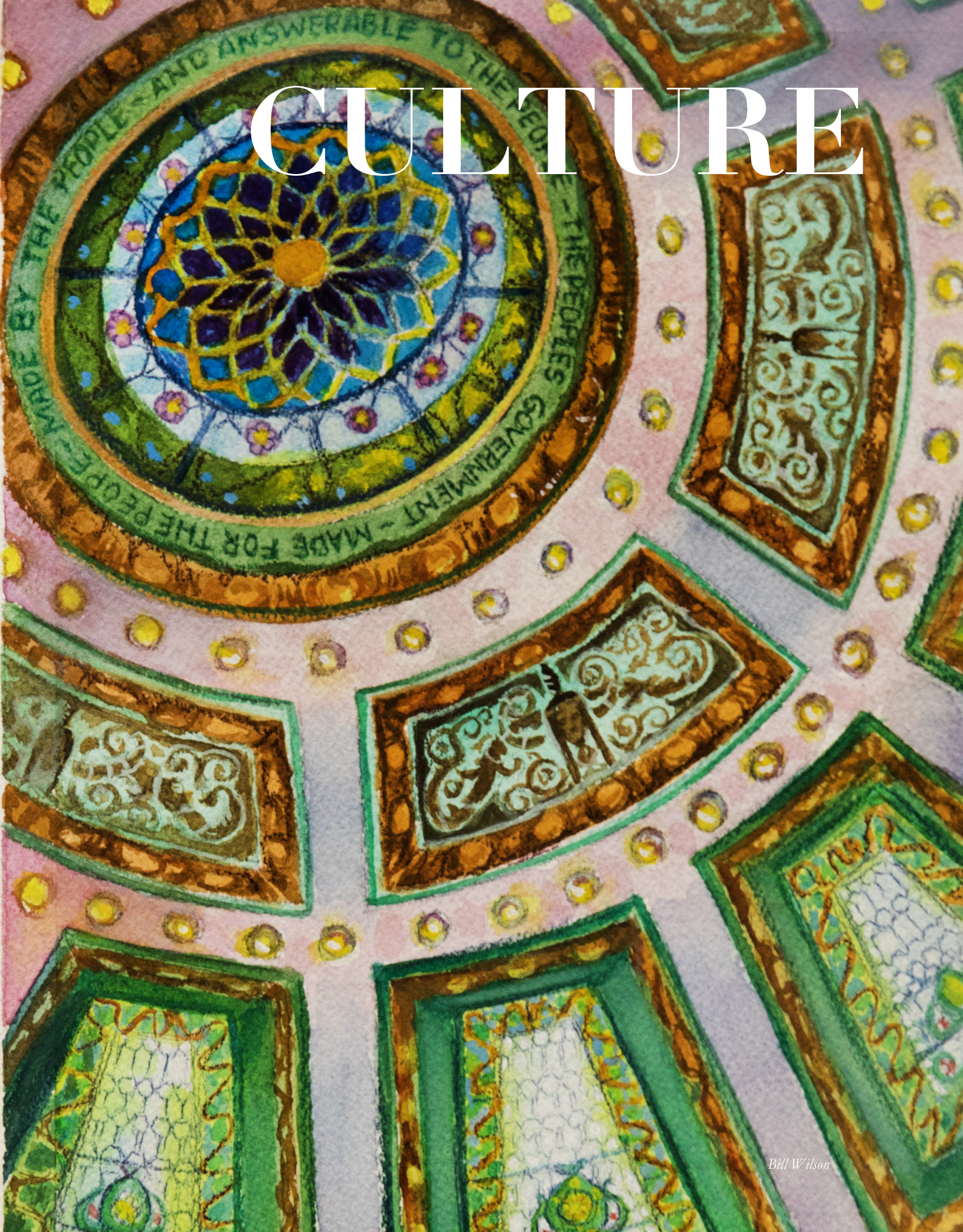
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CULTURE



Bill Wilson



The Transgender Menace

It's not just about other people's children.

by Bruce Bawer

A message to Americans: you may not be interested in transgenderism, but transgenderism is interested in you — especially if you have school-age children or grandchildren.

You may not fully realize it, but, when it comes to this subject, you inhabit an entirely different society than you did twenty years ago. Published in the year 1994, the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) included several pages on gender identity disorder, a malady whose sufferers think they're "a woman trapped in a man's body" — or vice versa — and that is comparable to anorexia (skinny people thinking they're fat) or body integrity identity disorder (people wanting their limbs amputated). The fifth edition (DSM-5), issued nineteen years later, eschews the word "disorder," referring instead to "gender dysphoria," which it defines as "clinically significant distress or impairment related to gender incongruence."

Behind this revision lies an ideological sea change that is well-nigh unprecedented in human history. Today, the major medical and psychiatric organizations, the leading government officials in blue states and large cities, and almost everyone in America's mainstream media and cultural establishment no longer view a man who says he's a woman as someone suffering from a mental disorder. Rather, in accordance with the relatively new and reality-defying creed known as transgender ideology, he's understood to be experiencing a thoroughly valid personal truth: namely, that he has a "gender identity" different from his biological sex — the sex, as one is now supposed to say, that was mistakenly "assigned at birth." As the current slogan has it, "trans women are women" — yes, even if they still have penises. Only if a person's trans identity causes "distress" or "impairment" is it, in the year 2022, a matter for psychiatry to address.¹

DSM-IV stated that there were no reliable statistics on the prevalence of gender identity disorder, but it noted that "roughly

1 per 30,000 adult males and 1 per 100,000 adult females seek sex-reassignment surgery." In other words, as of the year 1994, the number of people claiming to have a gender identity at odds with their biological sex was vanishingly small. Note that the book referred to "adults": at the time, the idea of performing such surgery on minors was unheard of.

In the almost three decades since, this entire picture has been transformed. The number of people identifying as trans has exploded. Today, most are young people. In 2017, the number of medically insured American children aged six to seventeen with new diagnoses of gender dysphoria was 15,172; that number rose to 18,321 in 2018; 21,375 in 2019; 24,847 in 2020; and 42,167 in 2021. Whereas most self-identified transgender individuals used to be biological males, most are now biological females, as documented in books such as Helen Joyce's *Trans* and Abigail Shrier's *Irreversible Damage*. Whereas the tiny number of adults who used to present themselves for "sex reassignment" treatment could recall feeling since childhood that they'd been born in the wrong body, many trans minors today don't — hence the newly identified syndrome called rapid-onset gender dysphoria. Moreover, at least three-quarters of the children who are deciding today that they're trans already have other psychiatric issues, one of the most prevalent being autism.

In any event, the scale of this phenomenon is staggering. "A quarter of the girls in my daughter's class," wrote one anonymous mother recently — I'll call her Parent A — "identify as transgender. Seven out of 28."² Another mother — Parent B — reported that at her daughter's small school, "all the girls were either bi, trans, or lesbian." It couldn't be more obvious that these kids aren't really experiencing gender dysphoria in the usual sense but have, in fact, been caught up in a toxic charade; yet, people in power who should know better continue to pretend otherwise. The number of children who've fallen for this charade should perhaps not be a great surprise. Years ago, anxious teenagers engaged in self-harm or became anorexic. Today they claim to be trans.

Bruce Bawer is the author of many books, including *While Europe Slept* (2006) *and* *The Victims' Revolution* (2012). *He lives in Norway.*

What's different today is that while doctors used to do their best to keep patients from cutting themselves or losing too much weight, nowadays they parrot trans ideology — and act on it. Why? Some are in it for the money. Others, knowing that they might lose their licenses if they challenge this new orthodoxy, are too cowardly to stand up to it. And many of the doctors involved in the gender industry actually buy trans ideology's premise that personal conviction, on this front anyway, trumps objective medical fact. Many, indeed, are themselves trans, and they are activists — crusaders for transitioning — as much as they are doctors. (This isn't the first time, by the way, that many American physicians have gone along with a calamitous trend: between 1949 and 1952, at least fifty thousand lobotomies were performed in the U.S. because they were thought to ameliorate reduce some psychiatric mental disorders; in reality, they were a nightmare, replacing anxiety with almost total mental incapacity.)

One reason why transgenderism caught on is that teachers and school administrators have been a special target of trans activists, who have persuaded a great many of them that transgenderism is common among young children and that it's a major part of a teacher's job to help such children discover and announce the truth about themselves. In many school systems, teachers are expected to refer confused children to a school counselor or psychologist — who, in turn, will almost always affirm those children's declared identity and set them on a path that will involve encounters with psychiatrists, endocrinologists, and probably surgeons. "My daughter's trans identity," recalls Parent A, "started when the school taught a module on 'identity' during which they told a group of 11-year-olds that, if you feel uncomfortable in your body, it means you are transgender. My daughter had just had her first period two months prior to this class. Of course she was feeling uncomfortable in her body. She went home, looked up 'transgender' on Tiktok, and that was it. She was now trans."

That teacher's irresponsible statement is par for the course nowadays. Over a period of decades in the late twentieth century, it increasingly became considered acceptable for boys to play with dolls and for girls to play with toy cars; moreover, if a boy was effeminate or a girl was a tomboy, it was understood that he or she might grow up to be gay. Now, however, children who violate traditional stereotypes often are told that they're trans. Last April, Christopher F. Rufo wrote at *City Journal* about a 277-page guidebook explaining to teachers in Evanston, Illinois, how to teach gender to children from pre-kindergarten through third grade. One passage instructed teachers to tell pupils: "When we show whether we feel like a boy or a girl or some of each, we are expressing our GENDER IDENTITY.... There are also children who feel like a girl AND a boy; or like neither a boy OR a girl. We can call these children TRANSGENDER.... Your identity is for YOU to decide!"

Evanston isn't an outlier. As Parent A puts it, more and more American schools — at every level in every part of the country — are engaged in the "non-stop celebration of LGBTQI+ identities," exposing children to "a relentless stream of identity flags and rainbows" and celebrating "[t]ransgender 'heroes' like Jazz Jennings," who in 2007, at age six, made a famous appearance on

ABC's *20/20* and who, now twenty-two, has been the star of a TLC reality show since 2015. Moreover, while mainstream media outlets, almost without exception, push transgender ideology on adults, the social media platforms on which many youngsters spend several hours every day extol boys and girls who identify as the opposite sex — or as "nonbinary," or as members of some other newly invented gender category, the number of which seems to mount by the week. The trans propaganda aimed at children routinely whitewashes the

finality and gruesomeness of the surgical intervention involved — mastectomies, for example, are called as "top surgery," while hysterectomies and penectomies (penis removals) are "bottom surgery."

While doctors used to do their best to keep patients from cutting themselves or losing too much weight, nowadays they parrot trans ideology — and act on it.

Why all this celebration of transgenderism? Because trans activists — whose stratagem it was, many years ago, to create the acronym "LGBT" and its numerous variations (such as "LGBTQI+"), thereby yoking transgenderism to the entirely unrelated phenomenon of homosexuality — have done a remarkable job of persuading millions of progressive-minded people that if they support gay equality, it follows that they should

also support "trans rights." They've rewritten the history of the gay-rights movement to place transgender people at the center of it — and to push actual homosexuals to the margins, or offstage entirely.

And what does "trans rights" mean, according to their ideology? It means that the moment someone claims to be a member of the opposite sex, *everyone* should be compelled to affirm that identity and to refer to that individual using the pronouns of his or her choice. Of course, this has nothing to do with bestowing rights on an oppressed group; what's going on here is that non-trans individuals are being denied their right to state basic biological truths: namely, that a man cannot become a woman and that a woman cannot become a man.

Trans ideology includes other reality-defying, and even self-contradictory, assertions. The parent of one child — Parent C — described one school's "sex education" presentation, at which it was stated that "[g]ender is fluid, yet immutable" and that "[t]here are 46 genders." Parent C dared to "question their illogical logic" but was told "to shut up." Then there's the question posed by the title of Matt Walsh's recent documentary on this subject: *What Is a Woman?* If anyone who claims to be a woman *is* a woman, then how do we define the word "woman"?

Another major change has taken place on this front. Patients claiming to be transgender used to get hormone injections and undergo operations — then colloquially known as "sex-change surgery" (even though sexual identity, based on chromosomes in each cell of our body, is of course immutable) — only after lengthy

¹ In the DSM's 2022 edition (DSM-5-TR), a number of terms rooted in medical reality were changed to reflect transgender ideology: for instance, "desired gender" became "experienced gender" and "natal male" became "individual assigned male at birth."

² The essays written by parents quoted in this article appear on the invaluable website "Parents with Inconvenient Truths about Trans," pitt.substack.com.



psychiatric observation, and only in adulthood. Today, however, patients are being subjected to irreversible medical regimens at younger and younger ages, with little or no psychiatric screening.

And their parents are routinely subjected to intimidation by professionals who assure them that their child is indeed trans. These doctors, if met with the slightest resistance, insist that the parents, if they hesitate to “affirm” the child and to approve the recommended treatments, risk driving the child to suicide. Innumerable parents in these circumstances report having been asked: “Do you want a dead daughter or a live son?” — or vice versa — as if anything short of immediate affirmation on their part could have fatal results. This scare tactic, like so much else related to transgenderism, is without factual basis. On the contrary, the overwhelming majority of kids who think they’re trans will, if left alone, snap out of it, and oftentimes will turn out to be gay.

Alas, parents are rarely told this. They’re pressured to play ball, and, if they refuse, their children will be urged by teachers and counselors to distrust them and lie to them. One girl’s parent, Parent D, discovered a book given to the child by her school counselor; the book, which had “a false cover,” told her “not to trust [her parents]” and provided addresses to online forums containing “pornography, suicide notes, self harm manuals, advice on how to obtain drugs, and template letters inviting children to tell their bigoted parents to [f***] off and die.”

To be sure, many parents trust authorities, and they are thus quick to believe that their child really is transgender and that their role now is to be “supportive.” Some of these parents — more often mothers than fathers — are actually delighted to have “trans” children, sometimes because they always wanted a child of the other sex, sometimes because they’d rather have a “trans girl” than a gay boy, and sometimes because the role of “affirming parent” makes them feel virtuous and allows them to show how liberal they are. An op-ed titled “How I nurtured my trans nonbinary child’s path — and learned to grow with him,” published on October 2 of this year in the *Los Angeles Times* and written by Rebecca Brenner of Park City, Utah, is a perfect self-portrait of the kind of twenty-first-century American mother who’s absolutely thrilled to be able to tell the world that she is, as she puts it, “an ally and a compassionate human.”

The story begins with Brenner’s daughter, called “E” throughout the article, telling her mother at age seven that she’d like to wear a tuxedo. Brenner allowed it, and the girl was supposedly overjoyed. Further parental encouragement led to more cross-dressing. Meanwhile, Brenner and her husband started “to deepen [their] understanding of the difference between biological sex and gender; learn the differences between trans nonbinary, gender fluid and queer.... [They] learned that using E’s chosen pronouns reduced depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation.”

In other words, they swallowed trans propaganda completely. When neighbors ask, “What if E changes his mind?” Brenner

replies: “He can change his mind as much as he wants. That is what being gender fluid is.” In fact, she hopes that “E continues to change his mind — to be curious, explore, grow, shift and change. I hope E always feels free to be who he is, shine in this new and glorious way, and know that I am in his corner, no matter what.” This is a confused, puerile woman living in a fantasy world. Confronted with what could merely have been the passing whim of a seven-year-old, she embraced it so wholeheartedly that of course the child, enjoying all the attention and praise, kept the whole ridiculous thing going.

Many parents of purportedly “trans” kids are like Brenner. Others aren’t. They’re in torment. But what to do? Parent A spoke to people at her child’s school “about the harm they are doing,” but “they would not hear it,” telling her “that they celebrate all identities, that they pride themselves on being inclusive.” These people, lamented Parent A, “cannot see the transgender issue as anything other than fun flags and inclusivity and respect. They do not see the dark side that we parents do: we are trying to protect our kids from bone-crushing puberty blockers; from taking cross-sex hormones when they’re too young to have had sex; from having radical surgery on their developing bodies. Some days it feels like we are holding back a tsunami.”

Unfortunately, such parents have little or no power to resist that tsunami because school authorities, medical institutions, and the judicial system are increasingly on the other side. In some jurisdictions, to be sure, it’s illegal to subject minors to “gender-affirming care” (at present, alas, this is the case in fewer than half a dozen U.S. states); but, in other places, teachers are free — or even forced — to hide from parents the fact that their children go by different names and pronouns at school than they do at home. In September, Governor Gavin Newsom signed a law making California the first “sanctuary state” for transgender youth — meaning that minors who’ve been denied “gender-affirming surgery” in their own states can secure it in the Golden State.

To be sure, some parents who start out as cheerleaders later snap out of it. A woman I’ll call Parent E wrote recently that when, at age four, her son asked if he was a boy or girl, she “told him he could choose”; soon, he was on the trans assembly line. Fortunately for him, Parent E eventually realized that “I was leading my innocent, sensitive child down a path of lies that were a direct on-ramp to psychological damage and life-long irreversible medical intervention.” Just before his eighth birthday, she took back control, telling him that “males cannot be females, and that we were wrong to tell him he could choose to be a girl.” At first he was mad, then sad — but, a day later, he exuded relief and went back to being a child.

The trans craze, needless to say, can be a tragedy for the children who think they’re transgender as well as for their loved ones. But it’s also a blight on the rest of society. In a time when trans kids supposedly can make up 25 percent or more of a primary- or secondary-school class, the children who’ve managed to dodge the trans bullet are also victims of this twisted ideology. Girls must share their school bathrooms and gym showers with

biological boys — a situation that already has led to many sexual assaults. Girls who excel in school sports, and who a few years ago would have been candidates for medals and athletic scholarships, now lose consistently to bigger and stronger “trans girls.”

One might have expected feminists to criticize these injustices. But the Left has its priorities. So, in schools and other institutions controlled by leftists, the purported “rights” of self-declared transgender individuals routinely trump the rights — and safety — of everyone else. Indeed, at many universities, corporations, and other establishments, you can be expelled or fired simply for saying that only women can have babies or that only two sexes exist.

And Democratic Party politicians, almost without exception, are on the trans side. In June 2021, Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.) said that “Republican attempts to ban trans kids from playing sports in our states” — that is, to prevent biological males like the swimmer Lia Thomas, born William, from winning women’s medals — “are heartless, shameful and rooted in hate.” In December 2020, Senate majority leader

Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) agreed with “Joe Biden’s plan to grant transgender children access to sports, bathrooms, and locker rooms according to their gender identity.” In March 2022, Senator Patty Murray (D-Wash.) said that “[p]arents deserve to be able to make their own parenting decisions — with their medical providers — to do what’s best for their [trans] kids’ health. They shouldn’t have to worry about what a right-wing politician thinks is best for their kids. And they definitely shouldn’t live in fear that a state legislature is going to intervene in their parenting decisions and hurt their child.” In other words, children too young to vote, drive, or drink should be able to opt for chemical and surgical intervention that will change their bodies forever. On Election Day, all of these politicians were up for re-election, and all of them won.

Among the Democrats’ candidates for statewide office this year was DeShanna Neal, who ran for the Delaware House of Representatives. Neal, whose pronouns are “she” and “they,” has advocated for “trans rights” on Capitol Hill for years — and has praised legislators such as Cory Booker and Maxine Waters for their support. Neal’s biological son, Xavier, was four years old when a gender therapist “immediately diagnosed Gender Identity Disorder” (this was before 2013’s DSM-5); at thirteen, the child, now known as Trinity, was, thanks to help from then-governor Jack Markell (D), “the first transgender minor in Delaware to be approved by Medicaid for puberty blockers to halt her sexual development.” Neal won her election, as well.

This madness is still spreading. But so is the pushback. Angry parents all over the country are showing up at school board meetings in impressive numbers to challenge irrational transgender policies. More and more detransitioners — people who underwent “sex reassignment” procedures but now realize that they made a mistake — are speaking up. So are gay men and women who resent being yoked against their will to the trans phenomenon. But too many Americans are still unaware of just how widespread, and insidious, the institutionalization of transgender ideology is. It’s a sheer horror for which none of us voted — but which all of us should strive to undo before it harms even more innocent children. ❧

The trans propaganda aimed at children routinely whitewashes the finality and gruesomeness of the surgical intervention involved.



Institutional Capture: It Can Happen Here

My former employer has gone the way of all leftist-led colleges.

by **Bradley C.S. Watson**

My name has now been added to the long and depressing list of high-profile academic “cancellations.” I recently resigned my tenured position at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, due to an episode — sadly typical of American higher education — that has been widely documented in national media. Like so many recent academic debacles, the actions of the administrators who precipitated the affair were ridiculous and wholly unnecessary. But my ouster was perhaps unique in the speed with which it unfolded and the degree to which it perfectly tells the tale of why so many of our institutions are in free fall. It illustrates what we must confront — whether we find ourselves among the small number of countercultural voices in academia or the much larger number of citizens who seek to preserve an educational system, and a culture, whose directions are not dictated by fanaticism.

The problem colleges face is institutional capture. This capture is of course ideological, but it’s broader than that. It also has important moral dimensions — it is not only, or mainly, an intellectual phenomenon. It usually happens relatively quickly, but early warning signs are easy to spot. It must be nipped in the bud if there’s to be any hope of saving the vital remnants of intellectual seriousness that can still be found on many American campuses. But it can only be stopped if faculty members and administrators, with the support of an awakened public, exercise the moral virtue of courage — the critical virtue without which the other virtues are

impossible. As I have written in these pages, it’s a virtue that is in catastrophically short supply where it’s most needed.

The proximate cause of my resignation was the cowardly administrative takeover and humiliation of the college’s Center for Political and Economic Thought (CPET), which I had directed for many years. CPET is a research and public-affairs institute dedicated to the scholarly exposition of freedom, Western civilization, and the American experience. It is, or was, one of the oldest and most respected collegiate centers of its kind in the nation.

In announcing the takeover, the president of the college, Father Paul Taylor, cited his disapproval of a single speaker (of the hundreds who have spoken under the center’s auspices over several decades). The speaker gave a presentation at a conference held in April 2022. The conference, entitled “Politics, Policy, and Panic: Governing in Times of Crisis,” was among the first that CPET was permitted to hold on campus since the college’s self-imposed COVID isolationism. Ironically, it was designed to bring to campus serious thinkers who could offer reflections on the nature and implications of the previous two years of political crisis and moral panic surrounding everything from public health mandates to violence in the streets. The speaker, David Azerrad, a professor at Hillsdale College’s graduate school in Washington, D.C., dived into controversies related to what he deemed “Black Privilege and Racial Hysteria in Contemporary America.” The title obviously played on the ubiquity, especially in institutions of higher learning, of the phrase “white privilege.” Had he spoken on that — simply asserting its existence and its overwhelming influence on American life — many campus voices would undoubtedly have praised his “bravery” for embracing what is fashionable. But in denouncing affirmative action in strong terms, he

Bradley C.S. Watson teaches in the Van Andel Graduate School of Government at Hillsdale College in Washington, D.C. He has authored or edited many books, including, most recently, Progressivism: The Strange History of a Radical Idea (Notre Dame).

offended the jealous gods of diversity, inclusion, and equity to which most denizens of the academy are now expected to genuflect.

The conference was attended by hundreds. A handful of students showed up for Azerrad's talk apparently to express anger at his title rather than to listen to his presentation. (Many audience members were convinced that they had not in fact listened.) Also in the audience, for the entirety of the conference, was a partisan trustee of the college named Bibiana Boerio, a failed Democratic congressional candidate. In the immediate aftermath of the conference, she described the presentation as "rage-inducing extreme speech." Impartial readers of such a comment may be forgiven for concluding that she was doing her part to license and encourage rage as a response to speech.

Two letters quickly followed the conference. The first was signed by a dean who confirmed to me that he did not write it and was released before full videos of the lectures were even made available. When the dean was pressed into service to sign the letter, he did so as co-director of CPET, even though he exercised no control over the center's political or cultural programming and had no input into the design of the conference — which was entirely my own. My views were not solicited by the administration, nor by the local news media reporting on the story. The letter implausibly claimed that the speaker's remarks "may be interpreted as a form of invidious discrimination," or that they promoted "systemic bigotry," or that they perhaps even impeded "the evolution of the human race" or "evolution in our society" or ... something.

The letter even denounced the speaker's "theory" that Kamala Harris "was selected as VP on the basis of her standing solely as an African American woman." With respect to this point, it should be noted that, as theories go, it's not a bad one. In fact, it appears to be one of the few matters in America upon which there is broad bipartisan consensus. But I digress. The letter also insisted, without any apparent self-awareness, that the college invites "responsible presentation of viewpoints."

That ham-handed missive hardly clarified or calmed the waters. The president soon followed it with another that he himself signed, though he relied on a PR firm to help him write it. It announced that Saint Vincent welcomes "a diversity of responsible opinion on a variety of topics" and that henceforth he and his cabinet would approve all speakers at the college. Presumably, this is to ensure that they are sufficiently "responsible." The letter also insisted that academic freedom is "treasured" at the college — so long as faculty and students "responsibly debate" topics. That's a lot of responsibility the president took on. It's probably more than he should have, since the new policy — obviously drafted by tools that are not the sharpest in the academic shed — has the effect of holding the president and his cabinet accountable for words uttered by officially approved speakers.

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) described the administration's actions as perhaps "the most extreme example of guest speaker censorship" that it had seen in its decades of monitoring such matters (quite a claim for FIRE) and filed a formal accreditation complaint against the college.

Like so many Catholic institutions, Saint Vincent quickly folded under pressure from the mob so as to conform to the secular demands of the age. In its rush to conform, it not only did violence to academic freedom but also made a hash of Church teaching. One might have expected immediate pushback from large numbers of



faculty members — particularly from those who are much better versed in such matters than the college's president, whose graduate training is in "higher education administration" from an institution whose current priorities include "social justice" and "diversity." (Note to parents and bishops everywhere: don't let your priests run off to ed school.) Instead, even faculty members who were privately appalled would say nothing publicly. Few choose academic careers due to a surfeit of courage.

There is a backstory to all this that provides important clues as to how we might stop woke lunacy from co-opting what's left of our institutions. Saint Vincent is the oldest Benedictine college in the country, and the monks who founded it were critical to the establishment of the Benedictine order in North America. It had long been a place largely unaffected by the most pernicious academic fads and fashions roiling higher education. Like most liberal arts colleges, its faculty leaned left, but successive administrations generally understood well enough the college's heritage of Benedictine monasticism and the latter's profoundly important place in the development of Western civilization. They allowed the college to remain a remarkably free institution when it came to the exchange and promulgation of ideas.

In the “acknowledgments” sections of the many books I published during my time at Saint Vincent, I routinely found myself writing words to the effect that the college remained open and receptive to the conversation about fundamental moral and political questions — and I meant those words. At the invitation of CPET, many of the leading intellectual lights of the conservative and libertarian worlds had spoken on campus. Papers and conference proceedings of those speakers and of countless other scholars and public figures had appeared in print, both in the center-sponsored journals and in peer-reviewed books by outside academic publishers. Center-run fellowship programs had supported generations of students in research projects on the conditions of citizenship in a constitutional republic. Peter Wood, president of the National Association of Scholars, described CPET as “not only an ornament to Saint Vincent College but one of the mainstays of conservative scholarship in the United States.” And, indeed, it was both of those things.

But all this changed quickly with the arrival — just before COVID — of Taylor. As soon as the masks came off, he leveled sources of opposition to his peculiar brand of racial justice activism. This of course included dealing a hammer blow to CPET, which had established itself as a bulwark against the perversities of wokeism, both at Saint Vincent and nationally. But when it comes to the business of capturing our institutions, dislodging particular individuals is also important. Anyone who will not go gently into that good night — but will instead publicly defend liberal education and open discourse — is a natural enemy. I was a nationally known senior faculty member who held the college’s oldest endowed chair and also a recipient of the college’s highest teaching award. This made me a hard target — but not an impossible one, at least in the absence of others willing to stand with me. It was clear from the early days of the Taylor administration, well before the aforementioned letters, that I would have battles to fight.

In July 2020, Taylor appointed Jeff Mallory to the position of executive vice president and chief operating officer of the college, making him in effect the second-highest-ranking administrator at the college. Mallory had been a student at Saint Vincent (even in my classes) and held a recently minted doctorate of education in “educational leadership,” much like Dr. Jill Biden. He had also been the assistant vice president of “diversity, inclusion and student advancement” at Duquesne University. High-level appointments such as his are often early warning indicators of trouble on the horizon. Faculty members would do well to question both the budget lines and operational necessities that justify such appointments.

In the months before the fateful conference, major warning signs had appeared. I first found myself alone on a matter of campus-wide concern when I publicly resisted a faculty call for certain “anti-racism” initiatives. The call was largely in response to the nationwide riots and insurrections that began in the spring of 2020 and included “amplifying” voices that happen to emanate from members of the so-called BIPOC community, especially “Black voices,” holding “peers and the institution accountable for continuing this discussion,” and the rejection of “colorblindness” in favor of race consciousness. At the time, it seemed to me that it

In its rush to conform, the college not only did violence to academic freedom but also made a hash of Church teaching.

would have been useful to have a large cohort of faculty members in my corner, publicly, on matters so important to the flourishing of intellectual freedom on campus — not to mention to the fair treatment of all. There were certainly many faculty members who recoiled from such ideas, but, for the most part, they opted for private murmuring. Consciously or not, they thereby telegraphed weakness. Bullies, of course, sense weakness and thrive on it — and such personality types are generally necessary for institutional capture to succeed.

Most importantly, the college’s then chief academic officer, John Smetanka, made a stunning announcement in the fall of 2020. He indicated in an email that faculty members would face negative employment consequences should they use a particular “racial slur” in the classroom. (For the record, in my more than two decades of employment at Saint Vincent College, I had never heard the word uttered on campus anywhere, by anyone, as a racial slur — in other words, with the intention to demean or insult another human

being.) I immediately objected to this new policy and indicated that I could not abide by it. I have always taught almost exclusively through primary sources — particularly the Great Books of Western civilization and the great political writings of the American tradition. I noted, to no avail, the appearance of the word in many important works by authors ranging from Mark Twain, to Flannery O’Connor, to James Baldwin. I stated flatly in faculty meetings that if I viewed works to be important enough to appear on my syllabus, I would teach them the way they were written. I was then informed that I could teach such works, so long as I dared not “vocalize” the forbidden word. But even if it were possible to teach them in this manner, it was not possible to erase the word from their pages, nor to avoid courting complaints from students or faculty who would have a sympathetic ear in the administration. A clear signal had been sent: assign them at your peril.

At no time did the president intervene to clarify the college’s position, even after I solicited the opinion of the college counsel on the compatibility, or lack thereof, of the new policy with the institution’s formal commitments to academic freedom. In raising public objections, I was, again, alone. This was despite the fact that a number of my colleagues also taught primary sources and were very much aware of what was at stake — which is more than one could say of Saint Vincent’s senior administrators. Some faculty members, I suspect, simply shied away from teaching such works entirely. Others kept teaching them as they were written but very much under the radar — likely hoping and praying that no one would raise an objection.

As a result of being forced to stake out public positions at odds with the priorities of the college’s president (but very much in keeping with the Catholic, Benedictine, liberal arts tradition), I had painted a rather large target on my back. It was clear that I would not go quietly. It was also clear that, should a decision be made to remove sources of opposition to the new woke agenda, resistance from faculty would not be forthcoming — the administration could act, at least internally, with impunity. And so it did.

The modus operandi of those on scorched-earth marches through our institutions — whether academic, corporate, political, religious, or cultural — is captured with dark humor in an internet



meme: they find something good, gut it, wear it as a skinsuit, and then demand respect. It is highly unlikely that such people will prove capable of learning, unless they are challenged by large numbers of individuals who reject their forays. In fact, it's unlikely that they will even realize there are large numbers of people who do not share their assumptions. They will instead continue to believe that "history" is on their side and will exhibit the hubris of moral superiority that goes along with this belief.

In the immediate aftermath of the conference, I was personally the target of some rage. I fielded phone calls from a small number of people who identified themselves as angry alums of the college. The mob, though small, was circling like a school of hungry piranhas. One of the callers even posted a screenshot of my contact information, describing it as "dick heads [sic]" and concluding with the exhortation to "blow this man up." I forwarded this to the president and to the two men most responsible for drafting the ill-informed apology letter — college counsel Bruce Antkowiak and executive vice president Mallory. I asked, via email and also a public faculty forum, if they would be as quick to condemn such obvious hatred as they were to condemn an invited speaker. I heard only the sound of chirping crickets. If it weren't for double standards, academia would have no standards at all.

Throughout the ordeal, many faculty members seemed pleased by the administrative takeover of a "conservative" enclave on campus and the concomitant limiting of speech with which the president and cabinet members disagreed. Others, privately concerned or repulsed by the president's actions, remained silent. An ironclad law of academia seems to be that, when the going gets tough, friends head for the hills. I confess I am unsure why this is the case. One would not necessarily expect it, given the job security and formal protections

that academics enjoy — which are unheard of in the non-academic world. A primary purpose of tenure is to allow academics to fight battles for academic and intellectual freedom and to ensure that only minimal levels of courage are required to do so. Yet both the spirit and the flesh are weak and unwilling. Academics are not people with whom you would want to be in a foxhole.

The absence of even traces of the critical moral virtue of courage impedes the development and exercise of other virtues, including intellectual ones. Courage is required not simply for acting but for thinking. Prudence or practical wisdom, in other words, knowing what to do in fraught circumstances, presupposes courage. A certain amount of fearlessness is required for practical wisdom to be, in fact, wisdom, as opposed to the consolation of "prudence" that masks cowardice — the unwillingness to look risk in the eye and think rather than blink. Even if all the ridiculous calumnies launched against a single guest speaker had been true, they could not have justified the effective destruction of a major academic unit of the college — a conclusion that would not tax the intellect of a courageous man.

Without courage, even the human good of friendship is compromised. It remains possible only on utilitarian grounds, and it is therefore as fleeting as the shifting sands of self-interest and pleasure. In the great film adaptation of Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons*, Richard Rich is awarded high office for Wales, advancing himself at the expense of the truth and eventually condemning Thomas More. Sir Thomas remarks, "Richard, it profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world — but for Wales?" Academic perks and privileges don't even stack up to Wales.

The continuing costs of acquiescence are as predictable as the sun setting in the west. Saint Vincent is now advertising "Cluster Hiring for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive Excellence," seeking to

hire a “cohort of faculty” around these objectives. Cluster hiring is relatively new in academia (and also in the private sector). It tends to be driven by the senior administration in order to hire not just individual faculty members who might be needed by a department but to make several hires in tandem, around some transdisciplinary objective, or, nowadays, around the objectives of diversity, inclusion, and equity. It is the ultimate virtue signal, often with special funding lines. Almost everyone knows that DIE cluster hires are designed to exclude as much as to include. They appear to be a way of getting around federal anti-discrimination law, although some are blatant enough to court legal problems. Faculty members in existing departments often acquiesce to such hiring practices because they “get” another hire that they might otherwise not. But what they really get is trouble. Ideological commitment statements are often required of candidates, along with plans to implement them.

None of these things can happen without high-level support, or, at least, high-level negligence. An institution’s board members either know what’s going on or they don’t. Either way, they are fully culpable — institutional capture happens under their noses and on their watch. Yet they too are likely to be unaware of the existence of dissenting voices when those voices are prone to silence and inaction. The chairman of the Saint Vincent board is none other than Art Rooney II, who is also the owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers and, thereby, the keeper of the “Rooney Rule” of affirmative action within the NFL. According to the reporter Jonathan Barnes, when asked about Rooney’s involvement in the Saint Vincent affair, the Steelers director of communications indicated that “[Rooney] and the organization are comfortable with how Father Paul Taylor addressed the situation and the policies and

changes they put in place to ensure it would not happen again.” The ominous “it” in that sentence cannot help but send chills down the spine of anyone who cares about intellectual freedom and the capture of our institutions.

Courage is
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There is a point at which it becomes clear that an institution cannot be saved from itself — although, in fairness, it remains to be seen whether a less craven and more intellectually capable administration might in the future reverse some of the damage done to a place as historically worthy as Saint Vincent. My decision to resign in the summer of 2022

was an exceedingly difficult one. I had been blessed in many ways during my decades at the college. With the support of generous donors (who rightly walked away in the face of the administration’s draconian actions), I had enjoyed opportunities that come only rarely in academia. In addition to making a career for myself in a disfavored field, I had been instrumental in helping to build to national prominence a center that allowed for the presentation of heterodox arguments in a sea of academic orthodoxy. I had also managed to build a small but influential “Great Books” politics department. Each of these things had in turn benefited generations of students who were fortunate that a place such as Saint Vincent existed. It’s not easy to walk away from such things, particularly with the sadness that comes from the realization that decades of work can be undone in an instant. But each of us has only so much energy to expend in the battle to preserve our increasingly captured institutions. Prudence must dictate where it is best expended.

I still think the fall of Saint Vincent need not have happened had a determined and united group of tenured faculty members resisted. I cannot be sure of this; but I am sure that it was worth a try. 🦋



Intern at *The American Spectator!*

Reporting, commentary, editorial, and
development roles available.

Email Leonora Cravotta at
officemanager@spectator.org.





The Cockroach and the Sparrow

A fable about Russian dictators offers hope against hope about the end of the country's dynasty of despotism.

by Matthew Omolesky

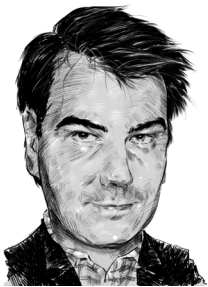
In some kingdom, in some land, beyond seven mountains, beyond seven rivers, beyond the hills, beyond the valleys, as every good Slavic folktale ought to begin, there lay a country where all the animals of field and forest lived in perfect harmony, at least until the day a monstrous, ginger-whiskered cockroach appeared. The hideous insect, emerging from his tunnel, moved quickly to seize power, devouring anyone brave or foolhardy enough to stand in opposition. Some of the surviving creatures fainted away, others fell into frantic fits, and still more took flight, while the wolves and lobsters turned their fangs and pincers upon each other in a maddened frenzy. A committee of concerned hippos, crocodiles, and whales offered a prize of two fat frogs — or a fresh pine cone for the herbivores — to any soul brave enough to slay the cockroach, but the rhinos and bulls demurred, since “horns are dear, like hide and hair / And who will pay for wear and tear?”

Facing no challenge to his sovereignty, the self-styled “King of Field and Forest, Lord of All the Land” grew ever more callous, demanding tribute in the form of plump children, whom he took with his tea or gobbled up at suppertime. The gaunt forms of famine, terror, and despair stalked the once-verdant countryside, but then a stouthearted little sparrow flitted down, “as fast as any arrow,” and

*How he nips! Ob, what cheek!
For the cockroach in his beak
Dies without a single squeak.
His long ginger whiskers are hidden from view.
That giant, the tyrant has now got his due!*

The animals rejoiced in their liberation, “congratulating / Both themselves and that small bird,” and we are left with the impression that they all lived long and happily ever after and that all died on the same day, as every good Slavic folktale ought to end.

So goes the cherished Russian fairy tale “*Tarakanishche*,” or “The Monster Cockroach,” written by Korney Chukovsky in 1921 and published two years later. It is unclear whether Chukovsky had the decidedly monstrous Joseph Stalin in mind when he composed his masterpiece. Although the cockroach’s trademark whiskers and



Matthew Omolesky is a human rights lawyer, a researcher in the field of cultural heritage preservation, and a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute.

homicidal caprice are certainly suggestive, Stalin was still only the people's commissar of nationalities at the time of the poem's composition. Could "*Tarakanishche*" have been an eerily prophetic inculcation of the Georgian revolutionary and future dictator? As Evgenia Ginzburg, a Soviet writer sentenced to eighteen years in the Gulag after a seven-minute show trial, wrote in her memoir: "I don't know if Chukovsky intended it or not. Probably not. But objectively, it's the only way to read it." Chukovsky's granddaughter, Elena Chukovskaya, felt that "the future casts its shadow on the present. And art can discern that shadow before the appearance of the one who casts it ... the Monster Cockroach is as much Stalin as any other dictator in the world."

"The Monster Cockroach" was not the only anti-authoritarian fable produced during the Soviet era — Evgeny Schwartz's play *The Dragon* and Fazil Iskander's allegory *Rabbits and Boa Constrictors* explored similar themes — but it was Chukovsky's poem that most fully entered into the realm of Soviet and post-Soviet public consciousness, continuing to make its presence felt into the present day. On January 12, 2016, the choreographer Vika Narakhsha's hip-hop musical adaptation of "*Tarakanishche*" premiered at Moscow's Vsevolod Meyerhold Center, only to be shut down after one performance on the grounds that the work was "too political" and that the cockroach obviously resembled Vladimir Putin. And when Belarusian protests against Alexander Lukashenko's regime broke out in August 2020, the movement led by democracy activist Sergei Tikhanovsky was at various times dubbed the "Anti-Cockroach Revolution" and the "Slipper Revolution" and featured chants of "Stop the Cockroach!" all in reference to Chukovsky's immortal creation.

But no sparrow swooped down to save the day; instead, thousands of protesters were arrested, hundreds of detainees were tortured, Tikhanovsky still languishes in jail, and Lukashenko remains in power (for now). Life does not always play out like a fairy tale, though the political phenomenon of the *Tarakanishche* is very real indeed.

The English naturalist Edward Pett Thompson, in his perceptive 1848 travelogue *Life in Russia: Or, the Discipline of Despotism*, described the "reserve habitually inculcated by despotism, and the discipline to which the tongue has been brought by the terrors of a most subtle and ubiquitous system of espionage." Truth telling is largely impossible under such repressive circumstances, except in the cases of the bravest dissidents. But seemingly simple allegories like those of Chukovsky, Schwartz, and Iskander managed to lay bare the realities of life lived under tyranny while steering clear of topical, censorship-inducing content. Such fables have thereby retained their relevance, particularly in a post-Soviet world still characterized by atavistic fears and truly monstrous brutality.

In a September 2022 interview with the Ukrainian intelligence officer and blogger Oleksii Arestovych, the preternaturally eloquent Russian nationalist-turned-dissident Alexander Nevzorov attempted to account for the "century-long ability for the Russian people to be humiliated and to endure this humiliation." Rejecting Arestovych's approach, which is based on a sophisticated "culture of psychology," Nevzorov maintained that Russia's ongoing degradation "has a purely zoological explanation." There is something profoundly inhuman about Putin's regime. The director general of the Estonian Internal Security Service, Arnold Sinisalu, recently told the weekly magazine *Eesti Ekspress* that "obviously, you can't abstractly accuse an entire nation, but a society and a nation constitute a whole. The state may brainwash, but the germ of chauvinism still springs from the people itself.... Violence is



a historical pattern in Russia, and that will not change.... Human life has no value there."

Where human life loses its value, animalistic violence invariably becomes the norm. The Russian military is notorious for its practice of *dedovshchina*, or the "reign of the grandfathers," an institution of ritualized abuse that entails not just psychological but also physical torture, and, not infrequently, acts of sexual violence and anal rape. It is little wonder that the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine has found "patterns of summary executions, unlawful confinement, torture, ill-treatment, rape and other sexual violence committed in areas occupied by Russian armed forces."

Human rights experts have likewise noted the penchant of the Belarusian security forces, as part of their crackdown against pro-democracy protesters, to resort to sexual abuse and penetration with rubber batons. The day after the September 25, 2022, poetry reading and anti-mobilization protest at the memorial to Vladimir Mayakovsky, one of the participants, Artem Kamardin, was followed home by riot policemen, beaten to a pulp, sodomized with a set of dumbbells, refused medical treatment, and sent to a detention facility. Two years earlier, a Chechen activist and opposition Telegram channel moderator by the name of Salman Tepsurkayev had run afoul of the regional

strongman Ramzan Kadyrov and was abducted, was forced to sit on a glass bottle while a forced apology video was filmed, and, finally, had a grenade detonated in his mouth at a military training facility in the village of Dzhalka. His relatives were told to “bury him like a dog.”

Russian propagandists positively exult in this squalid violence. The RT television presenter Anton Krasovsky recently made international headlines with his call for Ukrainian children to be “thrown straight into a river with a strong current” or “burned in a hut” and his suggestion that Ukrainian “grannies would spend their burial savings to get raped by Russian soldiers.” (The reader is probably beginning to sense something of a theme here.) Krasovsky has been rightly castigated for his clearly genocidal rhetoric, but he is far from unique in this regard. It has become perfectly normal for figures such as Pavel Gubarev to declare that Ukrainians have become “possessed by demons” and that “if you don’t want to change your minds, we will kill you,” by the millions if necessary.

“Russia’s history,” as Nevzorov sadly observes, “is sinking deeper and deeper into the slop-bucket,” and nothing demonstrates this better than the devolution on display in the Tolstoy family. Count Leo Tolstoy once criticized “savage patriotism and ferocity,” preferring the “brotherly life which has been taught to us by Christ,” while postulating that “the law of violence is not a law, but a simple fact which can only be a law when it does not meet with protest and opposition. It is like the cold, darkness and weight, which people had to put up with until recently when warmth, illumination and leverage were discovered.” Now his descendant, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Pyotr Tolstoy, declares that “our national ideology is war” and makes disturbingly anti-Semitic statements about how the “grandchildren of those who sprang ... across the Pale of Settlement with Nagants [pistols] in 1917 and were destroying our churches” are today “working in revered places like radio stations and legislative assemblies and are continuing that work.”

The spirit of the *Tarakanishche* is evidently alive and well in Putin’s Russia, but the legacy of Chukovsky’s fable must be considered somewhat mixed. A poet of profoundly humane sensibilities, Chukovsky stood up for authors such as Anna Akhmatova, Alexander Galich, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who were being persecuted by the Stalinist regime, and himself withstood withering criticism from the authorities and some of his more conformist fellow writers. He produced a memorable and universally accessible portrayal of the horrors of state tyranny, which also served as a satire of that uniquely Russian art of *pokazukha*, or self-serving delusion, which has allowed the Russian people to survive the extended humiliation ritual of the preceding centuries but has also served, in the words of the Soviet-era dissident journalist Vitali Vitaliev, as “one of the major causes of stagnation and social injustice.”

Yet Chukovsky’s “The Monster Cockroach,” being a fairy tale for children, understandably simplifies the complex realities of despotism. While Lenin or Stalin may have served as models for the ginger-whiskered *Tarakanishche*, it was the Gulag administrators, secret police, and party apparatchiks who enabled the massacres, terror famines, and forced population transfers that made Soviet life a living hell. And while Putin may be a latter-day *Tarakanishche*, he is not the unit commander identified in the aforementioned United Nations report who, in the Chernihiv region, “repeatedly sexually abused a 16-year-old girl during that time and threatened to kill other family members who tried to protect her.” Putin does not personally program the cruise missiles that are being launched at Ukrainian thermal power plants, apartment blocks, and playgrounds. Putin did not shoot Ukrainian conductor Yuriy Kerpatenko dead

when he refused to participate in a propaganda concert about Russia’s “improvement of peaceful life.” Putin did not post online a video of himself killing and eating a puppy and then form the neo-Nazi Rusich battalion to fight in Ukraine’s Donbas — no, that was the infamous war criminal Alexey Milchakov.

Chukovsky’s cockroach stood alone, whereas Putin’s power is buttressed by all those willing executioners, the senior *siloviki* security state officials and their millions of subordinates in the armed forces, the national police, the Federal Security Service, the Federal Protective Service, and various other private and mercenary organizations. Even if Nevzorov is correct in his assessment that “the chair in the Kremlin will soon be vacant” as a result of Putin’s botched invasion of Ukraine, Russia’s perverse addiction to despotism, revanchism, and resentment will no doubt persist, and its ailing body politic will only be purged through the most exhaustive lustration, assuming there are even enough clean hands to carry out such an ambitious program.

Korney Chukovsky conjured up a fairy-tale world in which dictators could “die without a single squeak” in the mandible of a humble sparrow, albeit not without a great deal of hand-wringing and prevarication. Before the songbird arrives *deus ex machina* to save the day in Chukovsky’s telling, an astute kangaroo berates his fellow animals:

*“Cock-the-Roach! Cock-the-Roach!
He’s nothing but a brown cockroach!
That’s the horrid midget’s name —
If you obey him you’re to blame!”*

*Haven’t you got claw and paw,
Fangs to tear and bite?
How could you bow down before
Such a tiny mite?”*

*But the Hippos now felt bad,
So they whispered:
“Are you mad?
Go away! Don’t make a fuss.
You will make things worse for us!”*

Chukovsky, whose timorous creatures of field and forest were bailed out only by an external force, was in the end something of a fatalist, but his fellow Soviet writer Iskander, another ardent critic of the “twin follies of cruelty and stupidity,” was even more of one. Iskander knew that the monster Lenin died in bed, in his opulent neoclassical Gorki mansion, and that the even more monstrous Stalin died amidst the comfortable surroundings of his forested Kuntsevo Dacha; and, in his epic novel *Sandro of Chegem*, he concluded that “the very fact that [Stalin] died of natural causes, if in fact he died of natural causes, inclines me personally to the religious thought that God demanded to see his file with all his deeds, in order to Himself judge him with the supreme judgement and Himself to punish him with the highest punishment.”

A worthy sentiment, but one sincerely hopes that the Russian people can someday, somehow learn something from their Ukrainian neighbors, whose deep history of egalitarianism and sheer love of freedom have enabled them to defy dictators like Viktor Yanukovich and Vladimir Putin, fighting with conspicuous bravery both in the Maidan Square and in the trenches, and sustaining unfathomable losses in the process, instead of merely relying on reassuring fables and the distant prospect of divine retribution. ❧



Churches Still Haven't Recovered From Pandemic Anti-Christian Discrimination

They're picking up the pieces from disproportionate restrictions.

by Ellie Gardey

Americans are increasingly coming to the conclusion that Democrats irreversibly damaged the nation through their pandemic restrictions.

Nowhere is this more true than in the decline of American churches, which were gutted by onerous rules and outright bans that stretched for months on end. In many instances, such restrictions remained in place much longer than those on shopping malls and movie productions, driving questions about why Democrats were incommensurately tough on churches.

Two and a half years after restrictions began, Sunday attendance remains significantly down, churches are struggling financially, and Americans find that their faith communities are hollowed out.

In August, Protestant pastors reported that their Sunday morning service attendance remained at only 85 percent of pre-pandemic attendance, according to a Lifeway Research study. At the time of

the survey, 98 percent of these churches had been holding in-person services for at least a year, demonstrating the enduring negative effect of pandemic restrictions. For comparison, weekly church attendance in the United States also fell 15 percent over a seven-year period from 2012 to 2019, which was already a period of pronounced decline, according to Gallup.

The Southern Baptist Convention announced in May that 18.75 percent of its congregants were still missing from services. This amounts to a decline of over one million members within a three-year period. The convention had already lost one and half million members between 2006, when its numbers peaked, and 2018.

Some Protestant churches have seen worse declines, especially if they accepted Democratic suppression as part of their adherence to liberal politics. For example, Linda Stephan, the associate pastor at Central United Methodist Church in Traverse City, Michigan, said in October that weekly Sunday service attendance had fallen from about 500 worshippers in 2019 to “closer to 350.”

“It’s hard now,” she said, “because families are out of the routine [of going to church].”

Still, attendance at Protestant church services has been improving from its pandemic low. In 2021, church attendance was down roughly 30–50 percent from before the pandemic hit the United States, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

For Catholics, the situation may be even more dire. The *Baltimore Sun* reported that average mass attendance for the Archdiocese of Baltimore had fallen from 4,500 in 2019 to 2,000 in October 2022. The archdiocese announced in late September that it would “reimagine” Catholic life under the new reality in an initiative titled “Seek the City to Come.” Such initiatives usually involve closing down parishes.

In late October, Saint Raymond of Peñafort Catholic Church in Springfield, Virginia, reported that mass attendance remained down 40 percent compared to pre-pandemic times.

“Think of that: 40% of the people who came to Mass in March 2020, are no

Ellie Gardey is reporter and associate editor at The American Spectator.

longer coming. This is amazing, stunning, and frightening,” said Reverend John De Celles. He added that one reason for the “radical decline” is the absence of “folks who got used to watching Mass online or having Sunday off.”

This much is clear: government suppression is not something that churches can easily recover from. They are struggling to pay their bills, pews remain empty, and pastors are leaving. The Barna Group, an evangelical polling firm, estimates that tens of thousands of churches are at risk of closing because of problems accelerated by the pandemic.

One would imagine that tearing apart faith communities and preventing Christians from participating in communal worship would not be a politically savvy move. So, why did Democratic politicians inflict these tough lockdowns on churches?

Many Democratic politicians have a blind spot when it comes to religion. They don't understand how critical worshipping together is for Christians, and for people of other faiths. For Christians, attending services on a Sunday is typically a requirement and the heart of their faith life. For Catholics specifically, attending Mass is an obligation, and attending online is no substitute because Christ is understood to become physically present in what was once bread and wine during Mass.

Only politicians completely out of touch with religion could think closing churches for months on end wouldn't devastate Americans' spiritual lives and Christian communities.

Mayor Greg Fischer of Louisville, Kentucky, announced in April 2020 that he would ban even drive-in church services on Easter. In these services, people listen to a Sunday sermon from their vehicle. “This coronavirus does not care about traditions. It does not care about faith,” Fischer explained.

Conversely, many Republicans understood how essential worship is to Americans' lives and pushed back against Democrats. Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell, who represents Kentucky, penned a letter against Fischer's restrictions and argued that they “[raise] the specter that the government is singling religious people out for disfavored treatment.” Many conservative governors, such as Greg Abbott of Texas and Ron DeSantis of Florida, kept churches open and classified them “essential.”

When the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Kentucky churches could not be stopped from holding drive-in services, it said, “On the same Easter Sunday that police officers informed congregants

they were violating criminal laws by sitting in their cars in a parking lot, hundreds of cars were parked in grocery store parking lots less than a mile from the church.”

While Democrats forbade religious services during the pandemic, they enthusiastically advocated for Americans to join crowded political protests for causes that Democrats support. Democratic politicians, including then vice-presidential candidate Kamala Harris and Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer, among many others, led by example by marching in Black Lives Matter protests.

Certain Democratic politicians have a bias against Christianity that stems from the religion's opposition to certain liberal priorities on social issues.

Another potential factor in Democrats' church closures is that certain Democratic politicians have a bias against Christianity that stems from the religion's opposition to certain liberal priorities on social issues. This bias led Democrats to assume the worst of churches — to see them as dangerous groups that wanted to make political statements by meeting in crowds during the pandemic. Democratic politicians and their liberal allies in the media couldn't see the reality: that Christians just wanted to worship their God in safety and peace.

Thus, Democratic politicians imposed restrictions on religious services that stretched for extremely long periods of time and were totally dissonant with the length and severity of other pandemic restrictions.

California governor Gavin Newsom banned Californians of all religions from gathering to worship from March 19, 2020, to June 12, 2020, and again in many regions from July 13, 2020, to February 5, 2021.

In New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo shuttered all services from March 22, 2020, until June 7, 2020, at which point he allowed churches in some rural

areas to reopen in a limited capacity. Just days after these churches were allowed to reopen, some local governments reversed course, and church doors were slammed closed. On October 5, 2020, Cuomo began enforcing ten-person and twenty-five-person capacity limits on churches — numbers that large congregations of tens of thousands would have found laughable were it not for the fact that Cuomo was preventing them from worshipping God.

In New York, it took the U.S. Supreme Court to stop the suppression of Christians. On November 25, 2020, the Supreme Court issued an injunction blocking the enforcement of the ten-person and twenty-five-person capacity limits. It stated in an unsigned opinion that Cuomo's executive order unconstitutionally violated religious freedom because it “single[d] out houses of worship for especially harsh treatment.”

The court noted that in regions where ten-person capacity limits were in place, so-called essential businesses, which included “acupuncture facilities, camp grounds, [and] garages,” could welcome as many people as they wanted. In places with twenty-five-person capacity limits, non-essential businesses were permitted to admit as many people as they wanted. “Houses of worship” were in a category all of their own.

California, as well as other states, had the same discrepancy. In February 2021, Newsom had opened malls, retail stores, hair salons, nail salons, libraries, tattoo parlors, massage parlors, professional sporting events, and large-scale film operations in “tier one” regions, which were places where the state considered the virus to be widespread. Churches in those regions remained shuttered.

Again, only when the U.S. Supreme Court stepped in, on February 5, 2021, to rule that California must allow churches to reopen was Newsom forced to stand down.

Justice Neil Gorsuch pointed out that the state of California treated religion so differently from other activities that it gave places of worship their own row in a spreadsheet summarizing pandemic rules.

In defending its position, California argued that it was necessary to treat religion so differently from other activities because, it claimed, religious gatherings were an especially dangerous vector for spreading the virus.

Gorsuch fired back, “[I]f Hollywood may host a studio audience or film a singing competition while not a single soul may enter California's churches, synagogues, and mosques, something has gone seriously awry.”



Bill Wilson

Gorsuch was also perceptive of states' tactics in letting up briefly on restrictions on religion only to reimplement them, noting that governments were continually "adopting new benchmarks that always seem to put restoration of liberty just around the corner."

The Supreme Court order that ended capacity limits in New York houses of worship noted that there was zero evidence that the virus had spread at religious services hosted by the plaintiffs, Agudath Israel of America and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn.

Democrats and their media allies, in their blind distaste of Christianity, were, at the very least, unable to see and, at the very worst, ignored the fact that it is extremely rare for COVID-19 to spread at religious services.

In October 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention clarified

that a person should be considered a "close contact" of someone with COVID-19 if they spend fifteen minutes in face-to-face interaction with an infected person. This is not what religious services look like. Congregants typically spend most of the service within their own seating area, and all face toward the pastor or priest. During the pandemic, churches were easily able to add an extra pew between parishioners as an additional precautionary measure.

Infectious disease experts working with Catholic bishops to mitigate COVID spread announced in August 2020 that the American Church had recorded a grand total of zero cases of COVID-19 transmission in more than one million Catholic Masses celebrated with proper pandemic protocols since the onset of government-mandated shutdowns.

Despite this reality, the media pushed the patently false claims that church services were in a category of their own of the utmost danger.

In July 2020, the *New York Times* ran a fear-mongering piece headlined "Churches Emerge As Major Source of Coronavirus Cases." Short on numbers but heavy on innuendo, the piece concluded that all of religion was a special danger based on infections at a Christian summer camp, church choir practice, and a few other anecdotes.

The authors, Kate Conger, Jack Healy, and Lucy Tompkins, quite clearly wanted to smear Christian worship as a stain on the nation's COVID purity. They projected a narrative of right-wing Christians who spat on public safety to achieve their own political aims. "[C]ongregations have

remained defiant in the face of rising infections,” they wrote.

A multitude of other left-wing publications blasted the same narrative that churches were a special evil in the time of COVID. For example, the *Washington Post* referred to houses of worship as “hothouses” for the virus.

Justice Samuel Alito noted the distaste for Christianity that was manifested in strict pandemic restrictions in a speech he delivered in July to the University of Notre Dame Law School’s Religious Liberty Summit in Rome, Italy. Alito noted the “growing hostility to religion or at least the traditional religious beliefs that are contrary to the new moral code that is ascendant in some sectors.”

He went further than that, arguing that pandemic restrictions were actually *intended* to suppress Christianity so that politicians could further their own power. “Religious

liberty is under attack in many places because it is dangerous to those who want to hold complete power,” Alito said.

Alito specifically pointed to the government bans on religious worship and the criminal cases against religious leaders who tried to illegally hold church services.

Think of it this way: the Left shrieks most loudly when Christianity influences politics. Remember the cries of “Christian nationalism!”; “The dogma lives loudly within you!”; “Separation of church and state!”; “This is what theocracy looks like!”; and “Churches are stealing your taxpayer dollars!”

Could Democratic politicians possibly have believed that suppressing Christianity during the pandemic could benefit themselves?

After all, Catholicism and conservative strands of Protestantism demand beliefs antithetical to left-wing ideology: that

men are men and women are women, that abortion is the murder of innocent children, that marriage is lifelong and between one man and one woman, that serving God is the purpose of life, and that the center of life is the worship of the Creator. The Left sees these beliefs as a stain on the country, a contamination that it wants to remove.

Such a plan, if it existed, successfully damaged American Christianity for the long term. And Democrats got away with it: Democratic governors in New York, California, and Michigan were reelected.

Churches have a long road to recovery ahead of them. Filling the empty pews will take a religious revival, one that may not be possible amid the current devastation of American Christianity. Christians’ only hope may lie in the biblical promise that “nothing will be impossible for God.” ✠

Bill Wilson





How to Bowl Alone

The pandemic forced Americans to reconsider their relationship with solitude.

by Nic Rowan

A few years ago, when hard lockdowns were still in place, I took a road trip along the Ohio side of Lake Erie. I skipped the highway and instead rolled through town after town until I hit Port Clinton, where I stopped to take a photograph of a cannon, a relic of the War of 1812, still pointed toward Canada. It occurred to me then that Port Clinton happens to be Robert Putnam's hometown, so I did what most reasonable people would do under such circumstances: I went searching for the local bowling alley.

It was hard to find. Port Clinton's downtown, like many downtowns in the Rust Belt these days, consists of little more than a few restaurants, consignment stores, and a Knights of Columbus hall. The rest is empty storefronts. If there ever were a bowling alley, it was long gone. After some searching, I found an all-purpose entertainment center on the outskirts of town. It advertised lanes inside, but because of statewide health neuroses the complex was closed with no definite reopening date. There was to be no bowling for me, whether in company or alone.

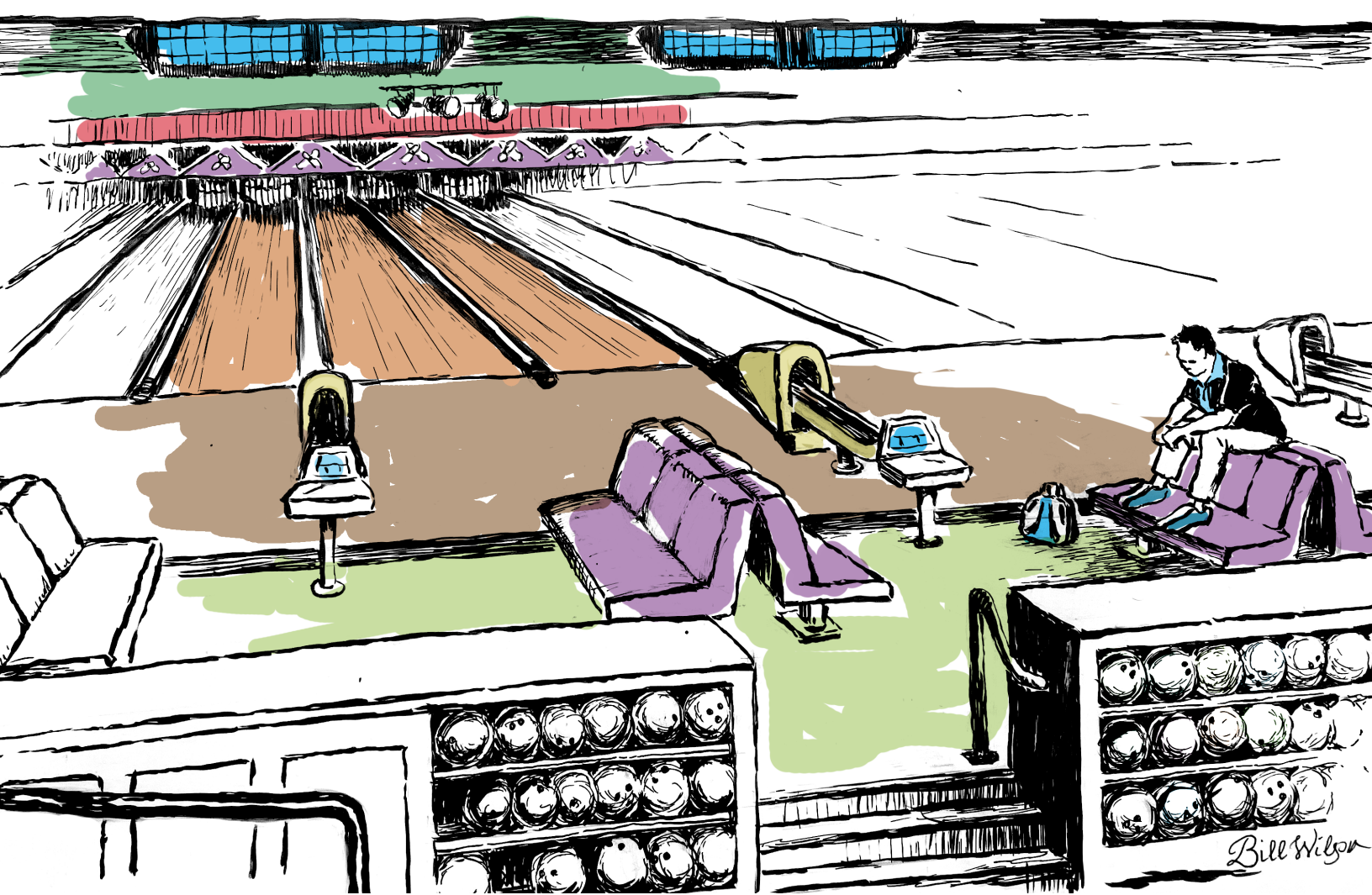
At the time, I thought my strange non-encounter was the perfect incarnation of the argument that Putnam made more than

twenty years ago in *Bowling Alone*. Putnam writes that since his childhood in the 1950s, American society has come undone because fewer people participate in community activities than did their forefathers. The example from which he draws his title is well known: more people in America than ever were bowling at the time the book was published, but the number of bowling leagues in the country had been declining for decades. A confluence of forces, including rising incomes, suburbanization, and personalized technology, made this state of voluntary isolation possible. It wasn't until the pandemic — when, for example, in the interest of my individual safety, I was locked out of a bowling alley in a deserted town — that the nastier effects of this way of life became fully apparent. Many people had already cut themselves off from their neighbors; social distancing regulations only codified the trend.

Even when the regulations relaxed, many people clung to their solitary habits. I've found myself — often to my shame — longing for those few strange months. These days shutdowns are virtually nonexistent, except at a few art house theaters in New York and some of the boutiques near my house in Georgetown. I have a soft spot for eccentric customs, especially defunct ones, and so I feel a pang of longing for



Nic Rowan is managing editor of *The Lamp*, a Catholic literary journal.



the irrecoverable whenever I walk into a bookstore where the owner at the checkout counter is crouched behind a plexiglass sheet, masked and pointing to the social distancing stickers still plastered to the floor. Oftentimes, I am the only person in the store, and, as I browse the aisles, accompanied by nothing more than the hum of the radiators, I experience a strange calm. And I remember that a similar American desire to reclaim the solitude of Eden has marked our popular literature from Emerson down to Joan Didion. Even a glimpse of such complete, unattainable freedom is an intoxicating feeling, and the longing to be truly alone is

as essential to the American character as the “spirit of association” Tocqueville observed in the pioneers.

Put another way, the desire to bowl alone is complementary to the impulse to form a league. One of my dearest friends, who usually bowls with friends in South Bend, Indiana, in times of crisis, when he really needs to turn a problem over in his mind, occasionally will drive down to the alley by himself. There he puts on his headphones and listens to the Brandenburg Concertos as he bowls six games straight. When he leaves, he feels refreshed, and many times the solution to the problem

presents itself on the way home. For my own part, if I have a need to be alone, I drive out to the ocean or a large lake and just stare at the water for a few hours.

That’s what I did, anyway, after I left that closed bowling alley in Port Clinton. Lake Erie is the smallest of the Great Lakes, but, from a sandy embankment on the edge of Catawba Island, it appears endless. When I had my fill, I turned around to find my wife. If the pandemic — and any time of forced solitude — has taught me anything, it is that any stretch of aloneness can only be fruitful if it eventually ends. ✨



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Serious and Funny

The recipient of the Barbara Olson Award at our fifty-fourth annual Robert L. Bartley Gala reflects on the history of The American Spectator.

by **Byron York**

I recently received *The American Spectator's* Barbara Olson Award. It was a great honor, particularly because I knew Barbara, the lawyer, congressional investigator, and conservative force of nature who was killed in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the Pentagon. She was something else — lively, funny, and, in her work, sharp, focused, and relentless. It's a great thing that *The American Spectator* created an award in her name.

The moment was even more meaningful because it was Bob Tyrrell and Wlady Pleszczynski who gave me the opportunity to write for publication, to change my career. That was a very, very big deal in my life.

Prior to joining *The American Spectator* in 1996, I had been a television producer in Washington, producing the 11 p.m. news on a local station. It was a grinding job, and I was getting tired of it. Truth be told, I was really tired of the anonymity of producing newscasts with other people's faces on camera. I wanted a change.

So I started writing freelance pieces in my free time. But the question was: who would publish them? Given my conservative perspective, a lot of places were off the

table. And the conservative media world was pretty small. There was *The American Spectator*, *National Review*, the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, the *Washington Times*, and — well, that was about it. (The *Weekly Standard* would start a little later.)

I wrote a story and sent it to Wlady. He accepted it. And then he accepted the next one. And the next one. And then he and Bob hired me.

It was, from today's perspective, a strange, prehistoric time in journalism. I wrote one story a month for a magazine that was printed on paper and mailed to subscribers. Imagine that! During that time, although I wrote on a variety of topics, at the root of everything, my only real story — by choice — was the cluster of scandals surrounding President Bill Clinton and the woman Bob sometimes referred to as “his lovely wife Bruno.”

As it turned out, I joined at a tumultuous time for *The American Spectator*. There's no need to go into the weeds on it, but the Clinton investigations, which had made the magazine famous with David Brock's stories on Travelgate and then Troopergate, were causing conflict in *The American Spectator's* world, as well as the rest of the conservative universe. The Clinton administration even struck back — for a while, *The American Spectator* was the only magazine in history

that had its own independent counsel. People were unhappy. The magazine was sold. It took a long time to get back on track.

In 2001, after I had left, I wrote an article about it for the *Atlantic*. I had not seen the story for many years, but I read it again for the awards dinner. The first part of the article was about the history of the *Spectator*, and the second part was about all the Clinton-era successes and then troubles. Here's the thing: I got a little bored by the second part — I actually skipped over a lot of it — but I loved the first part, the story of *The American Spectator*, how it began, and how it became what it became.

Researching the story, I talked to all the people who had been there when Bob created *The American Spectator* in 1967, when he was a student at Indiana University. He originally named it *The Alternative* but later decided that the word “alternative” had such hippie connotations — an “esoteric fragrance,” as he called it — that it was better to move on. Thus, *The American Spectator* was born.

Bob had serious ambitions. He wrote letters to intellectual eminences such as Bill Buckley and the *National Review* crowd, to Milton Friedman, Nathan Glazer, Edward Banfield, Norman Podhoretz, Irving Kristol, and many others. He sought contributions and advice. He held events. It was all well and good, but in the early years the magazine

Byron York is chief political correspondent for the Washington Examiner and a Fox News contributor.

wasn't getting noticed, not in the way that an ambitious young editor wanted.

Cut to 1969 and what in retrospect was a pivotal moment in the magazine's history. Bob organized what he called a "conservative teach-in" on campus. He invited Bill Rusher and Frank Meyer, of *National Review*, to debate two liberal Indiana University professors. Then Bob arranged for himself to debate one Dr. Rudolph Montag, a distinguished professor from Columbia University. The subject of the debate would be one of those vague, gaseous topics in vogue at the time — "The Social Problem."

No one in the audience knew it, but Dr. Rudolph Montag, the distinguished Columbia professor with the impressive résumé, was entirely the creation of ... Bob Tyrrell, who had recruited a fellow student to play the professor. On stage, the two went back and forth. Montag mouthed one liberal platitude after another until a member of the audience stood up, called Montag "a goddamned Communist," and threw a pie in his face. The guy in the audience was, of course, another setup — he was a member of the IU wrestling team put up to it by Bob. With pie on his face, Montag stayed in character and gave a speech earnestly lamenting the tensions on campus that led to such acts of violence.

It was a beautiful send-up, a perfect prank. But here is the remarkable thing about it: the school newspaper took it quite seriously. It got lots of coverage. Many years later, Bob told me, "We had had events for a couple of years and never got any attention at all, so we decided to have this bogus pie throwing, and overnight we got a huge amount of attention."

The lesson was clear: You needed to be serious to win respect. But you needed to be funny to attract attention. Serious and funny. You can argue with your adversaries, but mock them, too. Do a lot of mocking of all the nonsense on the left. Call them and their ideas funny names — lots of funny names — to suggest that they're just not worth taking seriously.

Bob's style got under their skin. In 1984, Hendrik Hertzberg, a former Jimmy Carter speechwriter who went on to become a major voice in the world of liberal journalism, wrote a review of one of Bob's books. Bob's far-ranging and heavily anglicized vocabulary seemed to really irritate Hertzberg, who tried to come up with a formula to write like Bob. "First, select a person to attack," he wrote. "If possible, refer to him or her as the Hon. insert surname, the Rev. insert surname, or Dr. insert surname. Second, call the person a nasty name, either a heavily sarcastic one (esteemed eminento,

sonorous pontificator, distinguished scholar) or simply a jeering one — bellyacher, buffoon, dolt, dunderhead, galoot, gasbag, greenhorn, half-wit, idiot, imbecile, jackass, loony, moron, nincompoop, pinhead, poltroon, popinjay, quack, rube, sap, simpleton, snot, windbag,

You can argue with
your adversaries,
but mock them, too.
Do a lot of mocking
of all the nonsense
on the left.

wretch, yahoo, yoke, or zealot. Third, add an adjective ... brazen, fuliginous, gaseous, gimcrack, maudlin, meretricious, piffing, portentous, sophomoric, peurile [*sic*] — any of these will do. Fourth, accuse the person of engaging in bibble-babble, claptrap, flapdoodle, flumdiddle, hokum, moonshine, pishposh, rumble-bumble, pronunciamentos, or tosh ..."

Do you think that was just a bit oversensitive? Bob knew, of course, that it would not please liberal writers if one referred to their writings as unpersuasive or poorly reasoned. But it would really drive them nuts to call their work "flapdoodle," or "pishposh," or "bibble-babble." That would suggest, without explicitly saying so, that the work in question was not only unpersuasive or poorly reasoned, but ridiculous, too. Bob because a master of the style, as evidenced in his book *Public Nuisances*.

That was the heart of *The American Spectator*. It is *The American Spectator's* DNA. It began with Bob's style and worked through Wlady Pleszczynski's beautiful editing, which turned each issue into a pleasure. (My favorite Wlady-ism? It's hard to pick just one, but he once gave an article on the very loud and not terribly insightful ABC News White House correspondent Sam Donaldson the brief and lovely headline "Dim Sam.")

The wonderful thing is that now, all these years later, *The American Spectator* is still doing it. It's a great pleasure to receive an award, but the real honor — and thanks for their work — goes to Bob and Wlady. ✨



The Catholic Case Against Communism

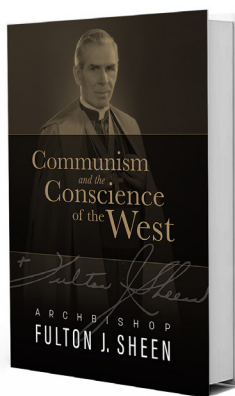
An inspired and providential reissue of one of Fulton Sheen's most important works.

by Paul Kengor

Communism and the Conscience of the West

By Fulton J. Sheen

TAN Books, 280 pages, \$28



Born on the Midwestern plains of El Paso, Illinois, in May 1895, Fulton J. Sheen was ordained a priest in 1919 in the Catholic Diocese of Peoria and was soon on his way to becoming one of the most remarkable Americans of the twentieth century, and, undoubtedly, the most widely known and respected American Catholic ever.

Throughout the 1930s, Sheen was heard nationwide on his *Catholic Hour* radio broadcast, which began in 1930. By then, most Americans had a radio, and millions were tuning in to hear this priest. Protestants as well as Catholics admired Sheen. Television executives duly noted his mass appeal and great communication skills. And as the new medium of TV boomed in the 1950s, Sheen soon boomed with it.

During the 1950s, Sheen appeared on television through his immensely popular show, *Life Is Worth Living*, where he entertained and informed with his wit and knowledge. By April 1952, Sheen was on the cover of *TIME* magazine. He won the 1952 Emmy Award for “Most Outstanding Television Personality,” defeating superstars Jimmy Durante, Lucille Ball, Frank Sinatra, Arthur Godfrey, and newsman Edward R. Murrow. At the award ceremony, the winsome priest quipped, “I would like to thank my writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.”

Paul Kengor is editor of The American Spectator and author of many books, including A Pope and a President and, most recently, The Devil and Karl Marx.

It was classic Sheen. It was what made him so likable.

Two decades after his death in December 1979, a poll by the website *Daily Catholic*, with 23,455 participants, asked respondents to name the twentieth century’s most influential Catholics. Sheen was the only American atop the list. He joined Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa, and Padre Pio among the top four choices. (Notably, the other three individuals today are officially recognized saints in the Catholic Church. Sheen’s process for canonization is underway.) The *Catholic Almanac* in the year 2000 rightly described Sheen as “perhaps the most popular and socially influential American Catholic of the 20th century.” He was not only the most famous Catholic of the century but also, as the leading Jesuit publication *America* editorialized after his death, “the greatest evangelizer in the history of the Catholic Church in the United States.” (I highly recommend Thomas C. Reeves’s *America’s Bishop: The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen*, published by Encounter Books, as the best biography of Sheen.)

Sheen was extraordinarily popular not just because of his radio program, television

show, and sermons but also for his blistering attacks on communism, particularly the prime enemy of the world in his day: atheistic Soviet communism.

Sheen dramatically forecast that Soviet communists had “put before the world a dilemma,” an “apocalyptic” one: “They have thrown down the gauntlet to the world. The voice is either brotherhood in Christ or comradeship in anti-Christ.” Communism, he said, was inspired not by the spirit of Christ “but by the spirit of the serpent... The Mystical Body of the anti-Christ.” He called communism “a groan of despair” and the Soviet Union “the most anti-Christ nation on the face of the earth.” He said it was fitting that Soviet communism’s emblem was “a rotted corpse, the body of Lenin — a perfect symbol of that to which all communism must lead us all, unto dust, unto dissolution, unto death.”

Fulton Sheen said that the communists had failed to convince the world that there is no God. Rather, he quipped, they had succeeded only in convincing the world that there *is* a Devil.

All of which brings us to the book under review.

Among his messages against communism, and his many books and writings, in 1948 Sheen delivered perhaps his best treatment: *Communism and the Conscience of the West*, published by Bobbs-Merrill. It was a profound work that displayed the remarkable breadth of his knowledge and integration of theology, philosophy, politics, science, history, literature, and even language, all exhaustively documented. It ought to be required reading for anyone studying communism, the Cold War, the Soviet Union, and, especially, the Marxist assault on religious faith.

I was first introduced to the book by Bill Clark, who became President Ronald

Reagan's most important adviser in the strategy to defeat Soviet communism and win the Cold War. I was Clark's biographer. I asked Clark if any particular books had most influenced him in the late 1940s, as he considered seminary and his ultimate career calling of fighting communism. He pointed to two of Sheen's works, *Peace of Soul* and *Communism and the Conscience of the West* (he also pointed to Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain*, likewise published in 1948, and endorsed by Sheen).

Communism and the Conscience of the West has long been out of print. But now, wonderfully, it is back in print, courtesy of Catholic publisher TAN Books. And with sympathy toward communism strangely on the rise, including in Sheen's beloved home country, and with Catholic publications like the Jesuit-run *America* magazine bizarrely publishing articles with titles like "The Catholic Case for Communism" (July 2019) — adorned with an accompanying photo of a grinning Pope Francis being handed a "communist crucifix" by the president of Bolivia — a reissue of Bishop Sheen's book seems inspired and truly providential.

The book opens with a crucial theme of Sheen's, namely, that the problem with communism and Russia "is not primarily economic or political but philosophical: it revolves around the nature of man."

That's a crucial point that was made by popes in Sheen's time and after, especially popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, both of whom said that communism fails not just economically or politically but anthropologically. In his classic encyclical *Centesimus annus*, from May 1991, John Paul II stated: "[T]he fundamental error of socialism is anthropological in nature. Socialism considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism, so that the good of the individual is completely subordinated to the functioning of the socio-economic mechanism." Socialism assumes that man's problems can be solved by bread alone — and yet, as Jesus Christ told Satan, man does not live by bread alone. As Augustine said, we all have a *God-shaped vacuum* that God alone can fill. Not a dollar-signed vacuum. We crave the divine manna of heaven.

Sheen drove home that message in his book. He noted that communism was a "distortion of the true nature of man," a "dehumanization of man that [makes] him a social animal for whom an economic machine is the total meaning of existence." This false "philosophy of life" offered by

Marxism-Leninism was made far worse by its complete rejection of God. And, of course, communism was just that: a rejection of God.

As Sheen put it, "The truth on the subject is that communism and atheism are intrinsically related and that one cannot be

Fulton Sheen said that the communists had failed to convince the world that there is no God. Rather, he quipped, they had succeeded only in convincing the world that there is a Devil.

a good Communist without being an atheist and every atheist is a potential Communist." He quoted Marx: "Communism begins where atheism begins."

In *Communism and the Conscience of the West*, Sheen cleverly turned Marxist phrases on their head. He showed how *communism*, rather than religion, is an opiate of the masses. (The prominent intellectual Raymond Aron would cleverly title his 1955 book *The Opium of the Intellectuals*.) Sheen exposed the religion-like nature of Soviet communism: the "preaching" of Lenin, the "apostles" of Marx, Stalin's cult of personality.

Sheen commended the Roman Catholic Church for its long, unwavering role in confronting communism. "The Catholic Church is sometimes praised for its opposition to communism," he wrote. "This compliment is deserved, for the Church is the only solid moral force in the world that has been consistently opposed to the new barbarism."

That began as early as 1846 — two years before the *Communist Manifesto* was even published — with the issuing of Pope Pius IX's encyclical *Qui pluribus*, which stated that communism is "absolutely contrary to the natural law itself" and, if adopted, would "utterly destroy the rights, property, and possessions of all men, and even society itself." *Qui pluribus* stated that communism was a "dark design" of "men in the clothing of sheep, while inwardly ravening wolves." The encyclical warned of communists: "[A]fter taking their captives gently, they mildly bind them, and then kill them in secret." The writings of

communists were "filled with deceit and cunning" and "spread pestilential doctrines everywhere and deprave[d] the minds especially of the imprudent, occasioning great losses for religion."

In Sheen's day, and through popes such as John Paul II and Benedict XVI, the Catholic Church fearlessly and eloquently fought this good fight against communism. (Francis has been silent on the issue — a total failure.)

Sheen dedicated *Communism and the Conscience of the West* to Russia's conversion and advised that Christians pray daily for Russia: "It is not Christian to wish for the extinction of Communists, though it is most Christian to pray for the evaporation of communism." Sheen urged that the Russian people — for whom, he said, "atheism is not natural" — take heart that Christ's tomb is empty, while Lenin's tomb is not.

Fulton Sheen's book remains to this day a sophisticated and timeless dissection of communism, long after his death over forty years ago. Sheen's wit, mastery of metaphor, and fascinating historical parallels shine through.

Communism and the Conscience of the West has been a lost gem. Thanks to this reissue by TAN, it has been unearthed for a new generation.

Americans today need to know Bishop Fulton Sheen and his message, and they need to know this book and its message. ✨



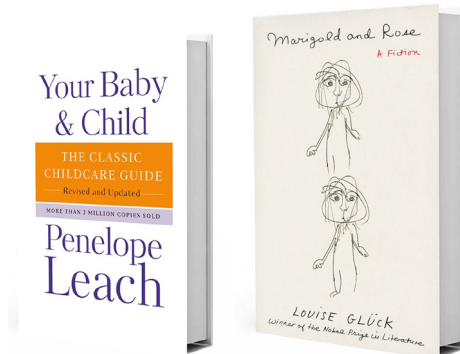
Learning to Read

by Hannah Rowan

Parenting: there's an app for that, but also there isn't.

Your Baby & Child: The Classic Childcare Guide, Revised and Updated
By Penelope Leach
Knopf
640 pages, \$20

Marigold and Rose: A Fiction
By Louise Glück
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
64 pages, \$22



When I first suspected I was pregnant, I panic-Google. A whole list of terms, soon the same ones in rotation: pregnancy symptoms. Pregnancy test accuracy. *Early* pregnancy symptoms. How do I know if I'm pregnant? *When* can I know if I'm pregnant? Pregnancy symptoms.

I'm not alone in responding this way, and this only increased my terror.

So I got the app. I downloaded Ovia Pregnancy Tracker and scrolled through all the fruits and small animals that matched the size of my baby. The first was a blueberry, about seven weeks. Early — I hadn't missed much.

I checked every day. Until months after my daughter was born and I had graduated to the Ovia Parenting app, I read every article and listicle — some helpful (potential allergens to introduce to your baby), some not (how to talk with the folks about your gender-neutral parenting style).

I wish I could say that her birth was a catalyst that parted me from parenting by phone. But it didn't, and it doesn't for many nervous young moms. And that's been the case for decades: parenting by proxy was made a famous (and lucrative) part of maternal culture by "pregnancy bibles," like *What to Expect When You're Expecting* and its many spin-offs. These books are solid long-term sellers; even in the post-pandemic era of paper shortages and slashed publishing lists, the increasingly stingy Knopf put out Penelope Leach's hefty *Your Baby & Child: The Classic Childcare Guide, Revised and Updated* this fall.

Hannah Rowan is managing editor of *The American Spectator*.

There will be those who read it religiously. And the advice there will be perfectly reasonable, as useless as it is useful for parents who want to fend off all dangers and soothe all anxieties. Leach, a research psychologist who published the first edition of the guide in 1977, is revered as a "comforting voice" with a perspective that is "wise, empathic, and sensible."

Unlike the apps, these book blurbs assure me, Leach will studiously avoid anything that sniffs of a parenting fad. To take one example trending among millennial moms: "baby-led weaning" — the idea that infants don't need puréed "baby food" but should just eat what their family eats when they're ready — receives no mention in *Your Baby & Child*. Its section on introducing solid foods arbitrates the great purée-versus-whole foods debate by advocating "balance." After all, the sensible Leach presumes, a nonzero number of people reading the book must be presumed to have only yesterday's Domino's in the refrigerator. Being sensible can come at the expense of being helpful.

Reading baby bibles didn't satisfy my need for reassurance as a young mom. They're too solitary for those who crave the mass validation of internet parenting. For that, there's Instagram. It hosts pages and pages of baby-led weaning accounts, managed by doctors, moms, chefs, and social media influencers. Contra Leach, to me it seemed everybody was in on the trend. The pediatrician-run @solidstarts has two million followers; @RebeccaWilsonFood has over five hundred thousand. There are more.

Your Baby & Child claims on its cover: "More than 2 million copies sold." It remains to be seen who, in 2022, comes out ahead in the end: the glossy, ephemeral infographic

posters or the experts whose names exude authority from the bookshelf. But what's interesting in the age of Google search, apps, and algorithms is that niches enforce and advocate for themselves: how many *anti*-baby-led weaning accounts will you find by searching the term on Instagram? Depending on parenting personality, trends can easily become dogma, no matter how studiously the establishment ignores them.

Online, you can find an expert who will tell you anything. So, baby-led weaning: why not give it a try?

This feedback loop taunted me as, a few months later, I watched my daughter refuse sliced apples but devour applesauce. Steamed carrots, no. Blended, yes. We were going to have to purée.

My baby seemed like a natural to lead her own weaning. She had a healthy appetite. She was bright and endlessly curious. Guilty and frustrated, I scrolled: meal plans and eating schedules promised to introduce a variety of textures, then told me that on the other hand I needed neither schedules nor plans — you do you, and, also, here are three more articles with three more baby menus that just might do the trick.

In the end, we made friends with the food processor — a move the internet and parenting bibles also validated. But the impression that I was always reading the wrong sources and asking the wrong questions persisted. Online, I was suspicious of specific advice — dogma! — and yet unconvinced by encouragement to relax and follow my instincts.

This nagging sense that there was something I wasn't factoring in, someone whose opinion I hadn't considered, only grew stronger as I continued researching. It wasn't the facts I was missing; this wasn't the anxiety of ignorance. It had more to do with the time and work it takes to build trust in ourselves as these new creatures, mother and child, learn to communicate with each other.

A story to illustrate. One afternoon, as the purées were slowly being phased out by solids, I was debating over choosing more applesauce or more yogurt for her snack, weighing protein and carbs, and she slipped into the fridge and grabbed a tomato from the bottom shelf. Seeing

the mischievous glint in her eyes, I laughed and said, “Go for it”; she’d just picked out the tomato chunks in her pasta the week before.

She bit down, bit again, brought me the fruit to slice into the tough skin, and ate the whole thing, sitting on the kitchen floor.

Okay, I thought. *Message received: There is no program. We are not following any schedule or philosophy.* That’s the sort of freedom that no one, expert or influencer, could give me. Only my girl.

But my feeling of inadequacy didn’t disappear overnight, and it still hasn’t. Instead, my daughter and I are slowly learning to read.

What we read is each other. She doesn’t yet talk, but we do talk — without words, she tells me what she needs with admirable clarity and concision.

The ineffable language of those who can’t yet speak is what animates Louise Glück in her new “fiction,” *Marigold and Rose*, where a pair of twins tell the story of their first year. Glück, a Nobel-winning poet, by reputation is more likely to leave one’s hair singed when she turns to domestic matters than to daydream about baby’s first words. “I hate them as I hate sex” is a classic Glück line from “Mock Orange,” whose title is a metaphor for the poem’s view of romantic love. It goes on, “We were made fools of.” Another of her famous poems is “The Drowned Children.”

So, I approached *Marigold and Rose* with trepidation. But the line drawing on the cover was sweet, and I was exhausted from chasing my one-year-old, and the book was fifty pages long.

“Marigold was writing a book,” Glück opens. “That she couldn’t read was an

impediment. Nevertheless, the book was forming in her head. The words would come later.”

Marigold is the introspective twin. Rose is the social one. Taking turns, in fits and starts and with endearing misunderstandings — Marigold’s struggle to understand the meaning of “once upon a time,” attempts to hear Rose’s thoughts from outside her head, and great confusion over what it means that they “are one,” meaning one year old — Marigold and Rose compose (in their way) the epic of their lives. They share their first memories of climbing stairs and meeting rabbits (or “bunnies,” a diminutive from their children’s books that they note with the sweet seriousness of those just getting wise to “baby talk”) to their first birthday party.

What’s obvious here is also profound: the story is narrated from the perspective of two prelinguistic infants. This is attractive to a poet first as a challenge of language, primarily of voice and tone: how to channel the momentous precocity and pride inherent in discovering words or the mysterious occupations of one’s parents? So, when Father comes home from work, “There was always a festival.” The last, unexpected word in the mouth of an infant is just right, as is this gloss on a baby’s facial expression when a party becomes overstimulating: “Chaos and imprecision.” And here is the adorable dignity of simple categorical understandings and misunderstandings: “people they didn’t know were touching them and calling them lambs and chickens though it was perfectly obvious they were human babies.”

Marigold and Rose give Glück more than language lessons. Attention to the minds of infants reveals not just the ABCs of communication but also its heart: the ways familial sympathy — instinctual or “animal” connection — becomes conscious understanding.

And love. Rose intuits that something about this storytelling is essential to Marigold’s understanding of her place in their family, and she makes mute or telepathic suggestions for the book’s ending. After the party, Marigold lies awake in her crib “trying to make it real.” She goes on: “[N]othing could stop her, even words couldn’t stop her. All night she wrote. She wrote and wrote and wrote and wrote. The end was the morning.”

And the family’s story begins again, or continues. Marigold and Rose, speaking or not speaking, writing or not writing, share their story by the attention they give to one another. Not the successful writing of the story, but the sharing of it, is transformative. This is how poets and parents learn to read.

Here, getting the facts right is not the end or perhaps even a requirement for the powerful revelations that define childhood: “Rose was staring at her new feet which had purple bows in the middle of them. Rose was very pleased. They were not feet anymore. They were shoes.”

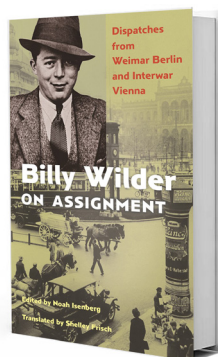
Soon after reading *Marigold and Rose*, I bought my daughter her first pair of sandals, and I did not think to ask Google if it was appropriate to do so. It was simple: she kept waving from her stroller at the children in the park. It was time. We knew. 🐾

Becoming Billy Wilder

by Leonora Cravotta

A new translation of the Hollywood icon’s early works depicts a legend in the making.

***Billy Wilder on Assignment:
Dispatches from Weimar Berlin and
Interwar Vienna***
Edited by Noah Isenberg
Translated by Shelley Frisch
Princeton University Press
224 pages, \$19 paperback



How did Billy Wilder (1906–2002) become the Hollywood legend who created such film classics as *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *Some Like It Hot* (1959), and *The Apartment* (1960)? That is the question animating editor Noah Isenberg and translator Shelley Frisch’s English-language anthology of Wilder’s early journalistic writing from his time in Vienna and Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s. Recently released in paperback, *Billy Wilder on Assignment: Dispatches from Weimar Berlin and Interwar Vienna* explores the early work of the award-winning writer and director, whose keen observations about

Leonora Cravotta is director of operations at The American Spectator.



the human experience, mastery of dialogue, and romance with the camera have inspired filmmakers and movie watchers for more than eight decades.

Although Wilder was born in Sucha, a small town thirty miles outside of Krakow that was part of the Austrian empire at the time, the Wilder family relocated to Vienna a few years later. Wilder's birth name was Samuel, but his mother started calling him "Billie" (which would later become "Billy") after seeing an American show, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*. As a young man, Wilder decided to become a newspaperman, disappointing his father, who had hoped that he would pursue a career in the law. After graduating from high school, Billie sent a letter to the editorial staff at the Vienna-based newspaper *Die Bühne*, requesting advice about launching a career in journalism. Although Wilder was informed that his limited command of the English language would be an impediment to his success, he remained undeterred. He visited *Die Bühne's* office one Saturday and inadvertently walked in on the newspaper's theater critic, Herr Doktor Liebstöckl, having sex with his secretary. Liebstöckl reportedly quipped, "You're lucky I was working overtime today."

And that's how Wilder's journalism career was launched. He soon became immersed in Vienna's literary scene, which centered around Café Herrenhof, befriending influential people such as the theater and film director Max Reinhardt, the writers Alfred Polgar and Joseph Roth, the

critic Anton Kuh, and the Hungarian stage actor László Löwenstein, who later found fame on the silver screen under the stage name Peter Lorre. Wilder later made his way from Vienna to Berlin through a pivotal encounter with the American jazz orchestra leader Paul Whiteman, who invited the young journalist to accompany him on his Berlin tour, a professional association that raised Wilder's public profile.

Billy Wilder on Assignment compiles Wilder's early, German-language writings from publications including Vienna's *Die Bühne* and *Die Stunde* and Berlin's *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, *Der Querschnitt*, and *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag*. The book, which is divided into three sections — "Reportage, Opinion Pieces, and Features from Real Life," "Portraits of Extraordinary and Ordinary People," and "Film and Theater Reviews" — features many of the themes that would later define Wilder's films. His early ruminations about the "survival of the fittest" nature of both the journalism and film industries would resurface repeatedly in his later work.

In 1928, Wilder had the opportunity to pursue his dual passion when he earned solo writing credit and played a small walk-on part in the film *Der Teufelsreporter* (*Hell of a Reporter*), which depicts the escapades of an ambitious reporter at a Berlin-based tabloid. The reporter character, laser focused on getting the story at any cost, would continue to figure prominently in Wilder's movies, such as Chuck Tatum (Kirk Douglas) in his *Ace in the Hole* (1951) and Walter Burns (Walter Matthau) in his 1974 remake of *The Front Page*.

Billy Wilder on Assignment is also a deeply personal repository of Wilder's reflections on his own experiences. The most intimate chapter, which is entitled "Waiter, A Dancer, Please!: From the Life of a Dancer for Hire," depicts his two-month stint as a paid "social dancer" at a Berlin hotel:

I dance with young and old; with the very short and those who are two heads taller than I; with the pretty and the less attractive; with the very slender and those who drink teas designed to slim them down; with ladies who send the waiter to get me and savor the tango with eyes closed in rapture; with wives, with fashion plates sporting black-rimmed monocles, and whose escorts, themselves utterly unable to dance, hire me.... This is no easy way to earn your daily bread, nor is it the kind that sentimental softhearted types can stomach.

Not surprisingly, some of the characters in Wilder's films sacrifice their dignity for money. *Sunset Boulevard's* struggling screenplay writer Joe Gillis (William Holden) dancing with aging silent-screen star Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) is perhaps the most famous example. *The Apartment's* C.C. Baxter (Jack Lemmon), who is coerced into loaning out his apartment to "company bigwigs" for extramarital trysts in the hope that they might "put in a good word" for him with management, is also memorable.

Wilder was a master at the personal portrait, as shown in his essay interviews with noteworthy famous and "ordinary" people, including a 1926 interview for *Die Bühne* with the then prince of

Wales, who would later become King Edward VIII and then abdicate the throne to marry the American divorcée Wallis Simpson. Wilder's humorous summary of this interview largely highlighted the difference between European and American fashion and buying habits. "An Englishman orders ten suits and five pairs of shoes at a time" but does not buy another article of clothing for the next five years. The American, by contrast, "buys himself a new suit, every summer, every winter, wears it day after day, then tosses it into the trash can after six months." The collection includes an equally entertaining 1926 interview for *Die Stunde* with Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr., the fifth-generation heir to the famous shipping- and railroad-industry dynasty, who described himself as having "so much work to do that I don't get around to thinking about whether being rich makes me happy or bored."

The anthology provides context and commentary on the transition from silent to sound films in Wilder's reviews of some early German sound films, including Max Mack's 1928 *Ein Tag Film (A Day in Film)*, the first German film to use the Tri-Ergon sound-on-film system, a new photoelectric method for recording sound. A profile of the German actor-director Erich von Stroheim in a 1929 article for *Der Querschnitt* discusses Gloria Swanson's performance in von Stroheim's silent film *Queen Kelly*. Isenberg describes this review as Wilder's first inspiration to cast Swanson and von Stroheim in *Sunset Boulevard* as former silent-screen legends whom the world of talking pictures left behind. The book is peppered with anecdotes from his days "on assignment" that would be recreated in his films.

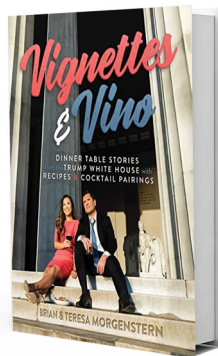
Billy Wilder on Assignment is a beautifully assembled collection of the early writings of a master storyteller whose body of work has entertained moviemakers and movie watchers for generations. We love Wilder because he had a unique ability to see the cynicism in the world without succumbing to it. Even in the darkest of circumstances, his characters still can alter their destiny. Recall *The Apartment's* Baxter choosing his romance with Fran Kubelik (Shirley MacLaine) over a key to the executive washroom and *The Lost Weekend's* alcoholic protagonist Don Birnam (Ray Milland) giving up the bottle at the end of the film. Billy Wilder reminds us that a happy ending is always within our reach. This hopeful quality is present from the beginning of his career to the end, from his journalism to his films. And that is why we continue to watch his movies. ✎

Good Living in Gomorrah on the Potomac

by Kevin R. Kosar

Trump White House insiders give tips on wining and dining, D.C. style.

Vignettes and Vino: Dinner Table Stories from the Trump White House with Recipes and Cocktail Pairings
By Brian and Teresa Morgenstern
Post Hill Press, 160 pages, \$30



Washington, D.C.: the mere mention of it can make a conservative shudder. I myself have been asked more than a few times by friends from the hinterland whose voices ooze suspicion: "What's it like there? Do you like it?"

The latter question cannot help but feel like a character probe, seeking to know if I am "one of *those* people" — you know, the sort that schmoozes, politicks, and lines his pockets with the hard-earned dollars of his countrymen. For the record, no I am not, and no I don't, although, if any of you red-blooded

Americans wish to send me a check to help me restock my liquor cabinet and buy more fishing tackle, I won't stop you.

These feelings about D.C. are understandable, and not unwarranted. American skepticism about big cities is older than the Founding. The metropolis is a place of vice, a den of godless elites, money grabbers, and outright swindlers who chortle derisively at the rest of the country while fleeing and corrupting it.

And when that city happens to be the seat of government, well, the suspicions run higher still.

Indeed, I often wonder why I live in the Federal City. Taxes are high, and yet I get lousy public schools, high crime rates, corrupt local government, and open-air drug dealing. Driving in the city is increasingly tedious, thanks to the government's replacement of traffic lanes with outdoor seating areas and bike and scooter paths. When slogging through traffic, the sole entertainment is watching the minority property maintenance crews trimming the lawns and edges of the million-dollar homes displaying yard signs declaring, "In this house, we believe: Black lives matter . . ." et cetera.

Yet, it is possible to make a good life in a big city — and even in Washington, D.C. I moved here as a single man, and today I find myself the dad of four beautiful children and the chief walker of two Labrador retrievers. Within a short stroll from home are two

Kevin R. Kosar is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and the author of *Whiskey: A Global History*.



churches, a trail through a leafy national park, and a university buzzing with moon- and goggle-eyed adolescents fumbling their way toward respectability.

And I am not the only one who has found a good life in Gomorrah on the Potomac. Consider Brian and Teresa Morgenstern, the authors of the charming new book *Vignettes and Vino*, who are living *la dolce vita*.

“We were never supposed to meet each other,” they write. “According to the news media, Donald Trump wasn’t supposed to get elected president. Neither of us was supposed to get a job in his administration. Neither of us was supposed to go out to a party on a random Tuesday night in Washington, DC. But we did. And we met. And we fell in love.”

Take that all in: Trump supporters find love and happiness in D.C.

To be sure, their work in the capital city was anything but an ideal launchpad for a life together. Brian was toiling at the Treasury Department, helping with the various government relief programs keeping Americans and the economy afloat. Teresa was running hither and yon managing Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross’s breakneck travels.

Then COVID-19 hit in March 2020, and the couple had a choice to make: weather it together or apart. Teresa understood that her decision was a life and death one — for Brian:

Now, most men are crippled without women or a significant other when it comes to taking care of themselves. I know this stereotype applies to Brian.... [I]f he were to stay by himself, he would microwave a Lean Cuisine meal every night and skip breakfast and lunch.

What was supposed to be a two-week quarantine lasted many months. Things could have gone badly; the “cracks” in their relationship might have developed into “fault lines.” Instead, they grew more closely together, in part by learning to cook and drink new things.

Vignettes and Vino includes some great recipes for chow that are not terribly demanding. First on my list to try is Teresa’s “Best Breakfast Sandwich,” a savory combination of sweetened and grilled onions, eggs, and American cheese, served on a brioche bun with mayonnaise. Brian advises washing it down with a tequila

sunrise, which he makes with the addition of club soda to add digestion-aiding fizz.

Next up on my to-cook list is their “Mojo Steak,” a flank steak marinated in garlic, mojo sauce, and orange and lime juices, then grilled and served. Teresa advises following it with her coconut mojito (“Coco-Jito”), a tropical amalgamation of coconut rum, coconut water, lime, and mint. I usually go for red wine or beer with a steak, but it’s good to get out of one’s comfort zone.

As the book’s title promises, the Morgensterns pair their food and drink recommendations with tales from their White House days. With tact, they share some fun anecdotes about Trump, whose impishness proved both amusing and, sometimes, crazy making. Their White House days also gave them the chance to rub elbows with stars, such as the retired Yankee reliever Mariano Rivera, the pro golf wild man John Daly, and the music stars Kid Rock and Zac Brown.

By the way, the Zac Brown Band concert in Washington, D.C., was a key moment in Brian and Teresa’s budding relationship. All of which goes to show that beautiful things do spring up in the Swamp. 🐸



“You elected the highest-ranking black Indian, with Indian background, woman, in American history to be vice president.”

President Joe Biden
October 24, 2022

“I am Kamala Harris. My pronouns are ‘she’ and ‘her,’ and I am a woman sitting at the table wearing a blue suit.”

Vice President Kamala Harris
July 26, 2022

“Jackie, are you here? Where’s Jackie? She must not be here.”

President Joe Biden on the late representative Jackie Walorski
September 28, 2022

“[Walorski] was on top of mind. I mean, I don’t — that is — I mean, that is — that is not an unusual — unusual scenario there.”

White House press secretary
Karine Jean-Pierre
September 28, 2022

“On my watch, for the first time in ten years, seniors are getting an increase in their Social Security checks.”

President Joe Biden
November 1, 2022

“If you went to school, if you qualified for a Pell Grant ... you qualify for \$20,000 in debt forgiveness. Secondly, if you don’t have one of those loans, you just get \$10,000 written off. It’s passed. I got it passed by a vote or two.”

President Joe Biden
October 23, 2022

“He’s a great man. He’s a great president... Thank God Joe Biden is the president of the United States today. Thank God for that.”

Former Florida Democratic gubernatorial candidate
Charlie Crist
August 24, 2022

“I believe if my doctor believes that I’m fit to serve and that’s what I believe is appropriate, and now with two weeks before the election, I have run a campaign and I’ve been very transparent about being very open about the fact we’re going to use captioning. And I believe that, again, my doctors, the real doctors that I believe, they all believe that I’m ready to be served.”

Pennsylvania senator-elect
John Fetterman
October 25, 2022

“None of the usual criteria that real experts use says that we’re in a recession right now. And what does it matter?”

New York Times economist
Paul Krugman
July 31, 2022

“LET’S DECLARE A PANDEMIC AMNESTY. Let’s focus on the future, and fix the problems we still need to solve.”

Brown University economist
Emily Oster
October 31, 2022

“Nothing like CNN+ exists in the marketplace, and no one other than CNN could create the kind of product we’re going to deliver.”

Former head of CNN+
Andrew Morse
February 23, 2022

“I want you all to know that among progressives, it has become clear that you cannot claim to hold progressive values, yet back Israel’s apartheid government.”

Michigan representative
Rashida Tlaib
September 21, 2022

“I am a twenty-seven-year-old transgender woman. I am a wolf therian and a member of the furry fandom.”

Naia Okami, in the Daily Wire’s *What Is a Woman?*, with Matt Walsh
released June 1, 2022

“Seriously, let’s castrate Florida.”

Former MSNBC host
Tiffany Cross
November 4, 2022

“We need to shut them down here in Massachusetts, and we need to shut them down all around the country.”

Massachusetts senator
Elizabeth Warren
on crisis pregnancy centers
July 12, 2022

“Fashion is a vehicle for expression. Every day I wake up and ask myself, ‘What gender do I want to express myself as?’”

TikTok fashion stylist
Kate Sabatine
September 29, 2021



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Leave the Crickets Alone!

Bill Gates wants us to eat bugs. Don't they have rights, too?

by Itxu Díaz

I have vegan friends. Actually, I don't, but I remember years ago, when, to get someone to listen to your anti-gay marriage opinion, you had to open with "I have a lot of gay friends, but ..."

Postmodern courtesy. The truth is, I'm all for everyone being vegan; it seems like a good way to make sure more steak lands on my plate. I love meat. Ever since I was a kid, whenever life has given me the option of marrying a lettuce or marrying Maria Sharapova, I've always felt a strong yearning for meat. First thing in the morning I am a patriot, willing to do anything to save civilization from a climate apocalypse; but after a couple of hours, my patriotism becomes like that of Orson Welles: "Ask not what you can do for your country. Ask what's for lunch."

For some time now, the Left has been insisting that we become canaries and eat birdseed and the like. I am beginning to suspect that its plan ends with us locked in a cage. Leftists change their obsessions and madneses every twenty years, but their objective is always the same as that of the Soviet Union: they want us behind bars, singing.

My progressive friends say they want us to stop killing cows, but I just shrug and

tell them the same thing each time: "I don't kill them. I just eat them." It's madness. But let me tell you what I am worried about: those chia seeds that influencers are eating like they're goats, or those peas they use to make vegan burgers. Don't peas have rights? Don't they consume water? Could not the increase in demand for chia seeds upset the ecosystem and send us to hell, all because of the influencers?

When I was a baby, my parents would go out of their way to snatch rocks, flowers, and ants out of my hands, shouting, "You can't eat that!" before I could put them in my mouth. That's how we were brought up in olden times. Now you could be sent to jail for curtailing children's right to veganism, insectism, or stoneism if you were to say anything of the kind to them. In addition to Bill Gates's synthetic meat, which works about as well as his operating system, the Left is betting big on us eating insects to save the planet.

Take a look at the newspapers. Until a few years ago, whenever the word "insects" or "worms" appeared in a news article about a school canteen, it was because of the uproar caused by someone finding these creatures in the food and the parents or authorities demanding the school be closed down. Now, every time insects or worms appear in school meals, instead of closing the school progressive governments reward their efforts to introduce schoolchildren to the world of sustainable food.

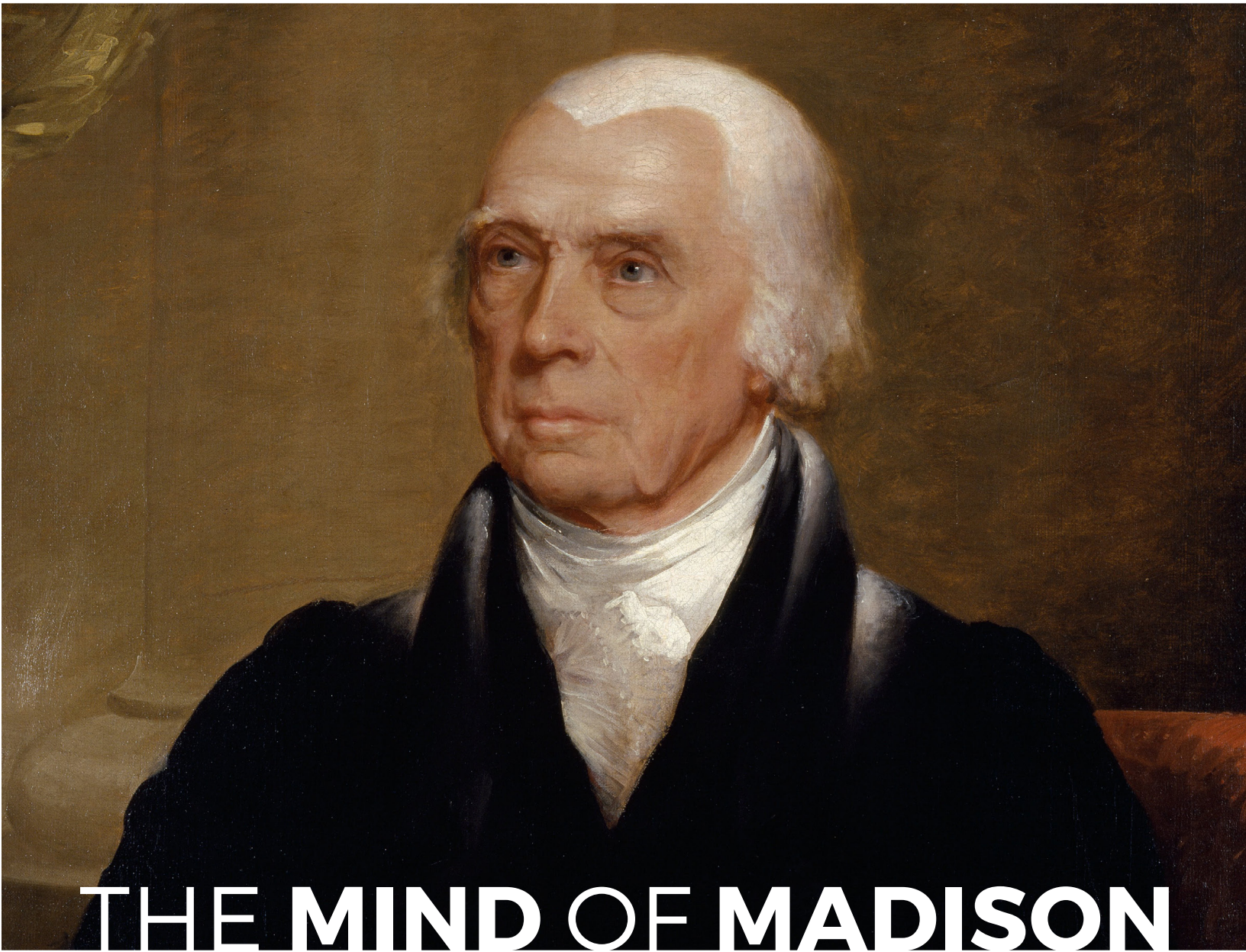
Several European countries host theoretical and practical training schemes in schools, in which activists inform children about the benefits of eating crickets or mealworms. The theoretical part is when they tell you about it and you feel sick. The practical part is when the activist forces you to eat a damn cricket and then you are sick. If anything like that had happened in my day, the kids in my class not only wouldn't have eaten the cricket but would have eaten the activist.

Do not go thinking that veganism is healthy, either. Some people, after prolonged contact with veggie burgers, end up becoming cannibals. Look at what happened to that Beyond Meat executive. He worked for decades at Tyson Foods and headed its McDonald's business. Suddenly he switched to a company that makes fake meat, and next thing you know he gets arrested for trying to bite off a man's nose after a football game. Imagine how hungry that poor sap must have been to try to eat a nose, when the reasonable thing to do would have been to sink his teeth into the thigh.

As for me, every time someone appears on the news saying that we should eat more vegetables, more artificial proteins, and less meat, I go to the butcher and buy the biggest steak he has. Their nonsense makes me hungry. In fact — and this is one of the few promises I feel confident making in my life — if the survival of the planet depends on me giving up meat to nibble on dried worms and cockroaches, you can be absolutely sure that the Earth is going to go to rot. 🦋

*Itxu Díaz is a Spanish journalist, political satirist, and author. He has written ten books on topics as diverse as politics, music, and smart appliances. His most recent book is *Todo iba bien* (Everything Was Going Well).*

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