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Public assistance cannot keep you healthy

Wealthy people tend to be healthier, so kindhearted souls tend to argue that we can improve the health of the poor by handing them cash.

But it doesn't work. Public assistance may be capable of many things, but making poor people healthier is not one of them, which is a lesson we should apply to Obamacare, Medicare, and Medicaid.

This lesson was reaffirmed this July. A U.S. nonprofit organization provided a \$1,000 monthly allowance to 3,000 low-income recipients for three years. A control group of 2,000 low-income people received a paltry \$50 each month.

After three years, researchers studied outcomes, comparing the two groups. Specifically, they looked into health and healthcare. Those receiving the larger amount spent more money on healthcare, which is to be expected. But this extra healthcare spending did not translate into measurably better health outcomes.

The researchers asked all sorts of questions. They even did blood tests. "We can rule out even very small improvements in physical health," they concluded.

"We also find that the transfer did not improve mental health after the first year, and by year 2 we can again reject very small improvements. We also find precise null effects on self-reported access to health care, physical activity, sleep, and several other measures related to preventive care and health behaviors."

This surprised some — at least one major news outlet conflated higher healthcare spending with "better health" — but it shouldn't have. A study last decade in Oregon found similar results.

When Oregon expanded Medicaid beyond the poor to the wider working

class, it did so by lottery. This created a randomized controlled trial and allowed researchers to see the results of government-provided health insurance.

The result was that government aid provided no measurable improvement in physical health.

“Public assistance may be capable of many things, but making poor people healthier is not one of them, which is a lesson we should apply to Obamacare, Medicare, and Medicaid.”

Health outcomes, it turns out, can't be cured with cash. While poor people have worse health outcomes, money isn't the beginning or end of their problems. There are many explanations. Poorer people are less likely to be raised in stable households, their poverty is sometimes a result of the same bad habits that harm health, and their communities do not promote health habits.

Much of the welfare state is premised on the idea that redistributing wealth will lift the poor. The latest study and the Oregon study suggest otherwise. The one bright spot in Oregon was that it seemed to keep beneficiaries from devastating financial shocks.

Throughout debate over Obamacare, this page repeatedly noted the reasonable moral intuition behind creating a health-care safety net: (1) nobody should die simply because he or she cannot afford an otherwise available treatment; (2) nobody should become poor because he or she gets cancer.

Again and again, though, government assistance has proved inept at improving health. The most government can do is prevent people from losing their house because of catastrophic hospital bills.

A federal safety net may do some good, but an allowance from Uncle Sam doesn't seem to make us live longer or healthier. ★



Netanyahu and Israel outclass the Biden-Harris-Iran axis

The wildly diverging partisan reactions to Wednesday's Capitol Hill appearance by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu show that the Left has neither a moral compass nor a sense of U.S. national interests in the Middle East.

Netanyahu is a divisive figure in his own land and worldwide, but even his personal detractors here should welcome him as the duly elected leader of one of America's most important allies.

Just as it would be unacceptable for U.S. elected leaders to boycott or protest any prime minister of Great Britain, regardless of ideological differences, as long as that great nation remains an ally and a representative democracy, so too is it wrongheaded to maltreat an Israeli leader. Israel remains a beacon of democracy and human rights in a part of the world otherwise hostile to those practices, and it collaborates with the United States, to the great benefit of our nation's interests, in ways too numerous to count.

Yet President Joe Biden long has treated Netanyahu with disrespect, and Kamala Harris shamefully refused the vice president's traditional role of presiding when a foreign ally addresses Congress. Some left-wing House and Senate members were even worse. For example, Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-NY), one of the most senior Democrats in the House, had the effrontery to call Netanyahu "the worst leader in Jewish history since the Macabean king who invited the Romans into Jerusalem over 2100 years ago."

Both Netanyahu and Israel have been subjected to widespread left-wing exco-riation in the aftermath of Hamas terrorism and for their international posture in general. As definitively documented by the U.S. Military Academy's John Spencer, Israel's efforts in Gaza, compared to other instances of urban warfare, have

been remarkably restrained and humane, with a historically low percentage of civilian casualties. Israel has done so while responding to an unprovoked and barbaric attack from an enemy that openly boasts about using women and children as human shields.

It was an attack, the world should remember, not by a people Israel has abused but by people whom Israel has long provided water and power and billions of dollars of humanitarian aid, assistance that Hamas terrorists redirect from their own people to use instead for terrorism.

Of all Israeli leaders since that brave nation's founding, Netanyahu has been the one most friendly to the U.S. He spent many of his formative years as a child and a young man here, and he long has expressed love for this nation and usually has backed that up with concrete action. He also is a peacemaker, having worked for years, to great effect, to put in place the alliances with Arab nations that were formalized in the Abraham Accords, arguably the most far-reaching peace agreements in the history of the Middle East.

It is likely that those accords would have been publicly proclaimed sooner if the Obama-Biden administration's hostility to Israel had not gotten in the way.

Once Biden himself became president, he picked up where Barack Obama left off, treating Netanyahu with open disrespect. And except for a single week of strong support for Israel immediately after Hamas's terrorist attack last fall, Biden repeatedly has worked to hamstring Israel's justified response rather than doing more to enable it to eradicate Hamas, all while Biden also gives short shrift to American hostages held in Gaza.

More inexcusably, both the Obama-Biden and Biden-Harris administrations have consistently bent down to the aya-tollahs of Iran, the world's biggest state

sponsor of terrorism and a self-avowed enemy of both the U.S. and Israel. It is Iran that finances and largely directs the terrorists of both Hamas and Hezbollah, each of them dedicated to wiping Israel from the globe and eventually to taking down the U.S., which they persist in calling the "Great Satan."

The Obama-Biden administration entered a foolhardy deal with Iran related to Iran's nuclear power, and the Biden administration repeatedly and inexplicably has released back to Iran billions of dollars of cash and other assets, even as Iran's provocations continue. And even though Iran sponsored close to 200 attacks on U.S. troops in Iraq, Syria, and Jordan, Biden has responded only with near-pusillanimous, supposedly (but barely) "proportionate" retaliation against Iranian-backed militants.

Now Secretary of State Antony Blinken says Iran is less than two weeks away from producing enough fissile material for a nuclear bomb despite Biden's adherence to the pathetic "agreement" that was supposed to keep Iran's nuclear work restricted only to energy production, not weapons.

There's still no word on what Biden's plans are in response to this bombshell (literally) revelation. But don't fear: Team Biden remains dedicated to treating Netanyahu, not Iran's leaders, as the real malefactor in the Middle East, with Harris's snub of Netanyahu's speech being an outrageously childish gesture and an unforgivable breach of protocol. In a classy move, Netanyahu himself said what is surely a greater number of complimentary words about Biden, personally, in this one speech than Biden has said about Netanyahu in 40 years.

In pushing the demonization of Netanyahu, Harris clearly is courting this nation's radical-chic university types and the left-wing Arab American community in swing-state Michigan, thus hoping to energize her natural base in the anti-American Left. She is courting those who Netanyahu rightly described as "Iran's useful idiots."

All other people, though, should resent Harris's anti-Israel posturing and her administration's weak-kneed kowtowing to Iran. And be willing to vote accordingly. ★



Washington Examiner

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Harris opens her campaign — sides with the mob

In the ever-expanding category of political behavior that is shocking but hardly surprising is Vice President Kamala Harris's ostentatious snub of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as he addressed a joint session of Congress on July 24.

She decided to set out on the campaign trail, where she garnered only a tiny fraction of the attention she got for dissing America's most important Middle Eastern ally and friend. She secured none of the praise that would have come to her had she taken command of the august setting in which Netanyahu delivered a stirring invocation from the moral high ground of the House podium of the absolute good of liberal democracy and the utter evil of Islamist terrorism.

Harris could have gone much further and done much to stoke her presidential campaign if she had used this first day of her bid for the White House to execute a "Sister Souljah moment," as Bill Clinton did in 1992 when he distanced himself from an advocate of violence against white people and secured the admiration and votes of decent people sickened by Leftist racial militancy.

If Harris had hosted the Israeli prime minister and shaken his hand while explicitly supporting the rightness of Israel's existential fight against Iran and its Islamofascist proxies, she'd have made voters and the rest of the world sit up and note that a new and better America might be at hand. She'd have undercut accusations that she was on the side of antisemites and Jew killers and their contemptible supporters in America. She'd have separated herself from the lamentable administration of which she is, at least officially, still a part and suggested to voters that Democrats wanted a new start and therefore should be given another chance.

But no, instead of taking a principled stand on the side of civilization, she pandered to a mob of terrorism cosplayers who were on Capitol Hill while Netanyahu was speaking. These troglodytes hauled down and burned the American flag, hoisted Palestinian flags outside Union Station, and vandalized federal monuments with spray-painted slogans such as " Hamas is coming" and "Abolish the USA."

It says much about the modern Democratic Party that it feels, perhaps rightly in terms of electoral math, that it needs the votes of people whose views should be beyond the pale of civilized discussion in our republic. It also, lamentably, says much about the state of America and the erosion of the principles on which it was founded that such a loathsome group has become too big to be safely ignored by the party of the Left.

Cynical calculation and genuine conviction jointly press Democratic Party leaders, President Joe Biden and now Harris, to take a knee to what was once just a fringe faction. The party relies on the votes of people whose ultimate goal is the abolition of America.

Thus, the Democratic Party has become the unpatriotic party, the one whose leader 15 years ago went on an apology tour. It is the party of people either weakly ashamed of America or militantly opposed to America.

Either way, it is hardly the party voters should elect to power. ★



The 'King' Bears the Flag

The honor of carrying the flag for the Olympic opening ceremony often falls to those who represent the country the best. In other cases, it falls to someone like LeBron James.

Team USA will be led into the 2024 Olympics by LeBron, the NBA star who represents several facets of being an American, such as nepotism and pretending to read books. But LeBron's selection is also peculiar, given that he does not care for the national anthem, hates police officers, and doesn't really like America. You may recall that LeBron questioned why an American imprisoned by the Russian government would even want to go back to the United States.

Surely there is a better fit among the hundreds of American athletes in attendance, isn't there?

On the bright side, LeBron's selection represents a victory over China, as LeBron chose to represent the USA over the CCP. Surely, he must have been in consideration for China's team after he declared that any critics of China's authoritarianism were "not really educated."



ILLUSTRATION BY THOMAS FLUHARTY

So, sure, LeBron may not like America and may pander to a genocidal government that hates everything America stands for, but he still chose the U.S. over China. Beating China in the Olympics is about as American as it gets these days. Maybe it's a wash.

LeBron may be the most prominent American athlete on the planet, but his carefully managed public (political) persona does not allow him to be the most American one. LeBron has chosen politics over patriotism, which may unfortunately make him the perfect choice to represent modern-day America. LeBron has also made a career of dominating Canadian teams. Once again, I guess we can call it a wash.

—By Zachary Faria

Don't Get It Twisted: Movies Aren't 'Meant to be Message-Oriented'

A summer blockbuster is being panned by scientists for not having enough of an agenda? Say no more.

Twisters, a standalone sequel to the 1996 film Twister (without the s), arrived in theaters earlier this month to much audience acclaim and big box office

numbers. The film, starring Top Gun: Maverick's Glen Powell, is "a well-crafted action-romance that arrives like a much-needed cool breeze," per a movie critic at the Washington Post.

But this breezy summer blockbuster has a glaring problem, according to some critics: It never mentions climate change. This omission was intentional, says director Lee Isaac Chung.

"I just wanted to make sure that with the movie, we don't ever feel like [it] is putting forward any message," Lee said in an interview. "I just don't feel like films are meant to be message-oriented."

This is not only exactly the kind of comment a director ought to make — it suggests you're in for an entertaining film — but it's also backed by science. Even CNN admitted, "Generally, scientists are the least certain about the connection between tornadoes and climate change as it's unclear how warming temperatures are changing storms themselves or the outbreaks."

That hasn't stopped climate change activists from getting upset, of course.

"I do think it's an unfortunate lost opportunity that speaks to the pusillanimous nature of Hollywood these days," climatologist Michael E. Mann told Salon. "The science suggests that we are seeing larger outbreaks and more destructive tornadoes due to human-caused climate change."



Daisy Edgar-Jones and Glen Powell in Twisters.



Hollywood is famously pusillanimous when it comes to serving up progressive propaganda to audiences, of course. (Or not)

In a more subdued criticism, a writer for the Union of Concerned Scientists lamented the "missed opportunity to

★★★

"I just wanted to make sure that with the movie, we don't ever feel like [it] is putting forward any message. I just don't feel like films are meant to be message-oriented."

—Twisters director Lee Isaac Chung

EDDIE GASPARI/THE TEXAS TRIBUNE VIA AP



Today's swimmers, for instance, shave every 100th of a second off their times with scientifically designed suits, head caps, hairless torsos, and the like. In 1972, though, Mark Spitz won a then-almost-unimaginable seven gold medals while sporting a mod mustache that surely added dreaded nanoseconds to swims. In track, in what still may be the most stunning come-from-behind performance in Olympic history, American Dave Wottle wore a wide-brimmed golf hat — surely an aerodynamic hindrance! — while winning the 800-meter race.

Then there was the Cold War backdrop, despite which Americans showed then what seems rare now, which is that we could separate the athletes from the politics. This was a time when most Americans really feared the Soviet Union would nuke us to oblivion. Still, when the pixieish Belarusian Olga Korbut performed with stunning grace in gymnastics, she became a widely admired sensation here in the United States.

Nineteen years later, it should be noted, Korbut emigrated to the U.S. and is now a citizen. The earlier innocence was rewarded with redemptive freedom. Can this year's Olympics begin a storyline just as good?

—By Quin Hillyer

get people thinking and talking about climate change,” a comment that brings us back to Lee’s point.

Politicians and Swedish activists do their best to make sure we don’t forget about climate change for a second. If a boisterous Hollywood blockbuster about storm chasers can actually quiet that noise for two hours of entertainment, then it’s worth more than the price of admission.

—By Madeline Fry Schultz

Olympic Lament

As we watch the Olympic Games this year, some of us oldsters lament a sort of innocence and sense of wonder that has been lost in the past half-century.

The first cross-oceanic Summer Olympic TV coverage with abundant portions aired live via satellite was in 1972 in Munich, and they proved almost unbelievably tragic (a massacre of Israeli athletes) and controversial (the Soviet basketball team being given three chances to score the winning points for the gold medal over the U.S. squad). There was a sense of sporting innocence shattered, on live TV from across the globe. But to be shattered, the innocence had to be there to start with.

In 1972, all the free-world Olympic athletes were, in actual fact, amateurs. Some were already somewhat famous, but there was a real sense of young people competing for pure love of sport while struggling to make ends meet. There was far less glam and glitter than there is today, and concomitantly far more room for endearing quirkiness.

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Brat to the Basics

KHive. Brat. Coconut-pilled. Unburdened by what has been. If you're a healthy, sane person who doesn't spend your every waking moment on the internet, the Kamala Harris discourse is bound to be baffling. The public talked relatively little about the vice president after her failed presidential bid segued into a position in the White House. That is, until President Joe Biden quit his reelection campaign and Democrats quickly coalesced around his 59-year-old heir.

The memes were swift. If you have the good fortune of not knowing what any of the terms above mean, consider yourself blessed. But if you'd like to learn, here's an explainer to help you get through the election.

Beyonce's fans call themselves the BeyHive, and Harris's supporters call themselves the KHive. Pop stars and politicians always, unfortunately, have had rabid fan bases in common. And Harris's is getting bigger.

"Kamala IS brat," pop star Charli XCX posted mere hours after Biden's campaign resignation, baffling boomers, Gen Xers, and most millennials all at once. Discussion of this inscrutable declaration made it all the way to CNN.



Charli XCX released her sixth studio album, *Brat*, in June. The cover, a simple lime green backdrop to the word "brat" in a pixelated, old-internet-style font, was made to be memed. And that's exactly what the Harris campaign did, with its cover image on X reading "Kamala HQ" in the same iconic styling. Weeks before the Harris campaign began, media outlets had been proclaiming that we are living in "brat summer." Harris just embraced it.

But what does "brat" mean, exactly? Calling a sitting vice president a "brat"

would have been an insult in ye olden days, methinks.

"You're just like that girl who is a little messy and likes to party and maybe says some dumb things sometimes, who feels herself but maybe also has a breakdown," the singer explained on TikTok. "But [she] kind of like parties through it, is very honest, very blunt. A little bit volatile. Like, does dumb things. But it's brat. You're brat. That's brat."

Yes, you're right, it still doesn't make sense. Don't worry about it too much.

People who are Very Online like to talk about being red-pilled or blue-pilled, a reference to *The Matrix*. To be "coconut-pilled" means to be part of the KHive. It's a reference to one of Harris's famously strange proverbs. "You think you just fell out of a coconut tree?" she said at an event last year. "You exist in the context of all in which you live and what came before you."

The infamous coconut comment, while odd, actually makes some sense. Not so Harris's favorite phrase, "what can be, unburdened by what has been," repeated ad nauseam at various events and now throughout all corners of the internet.

The Harris team has embraced the memes, and Politico has ludicrously dubbed her "Gen Z Meme Queen." Though the jokes aren't her doing, she's not missing an opportunity to capitalize on the free publicity. Luckily for Harris, yesterday's gibberish is today's pandering to Generation Z.

—By Madeline Fry Schultz



The Week That Was

STAT OF THE WEEK

10,500



The Olympic Games Paris 2024 take place exactly 100 years since Paris hosted the Olympics back in 1924. The 1924 games included only 126 events across 17 sports and 23 disciplines, with over 3,000 athletes from 44 countries competing. This year, **10,500 athletes representing teams from 206 countries** will compete in 329 events across 32 sports.



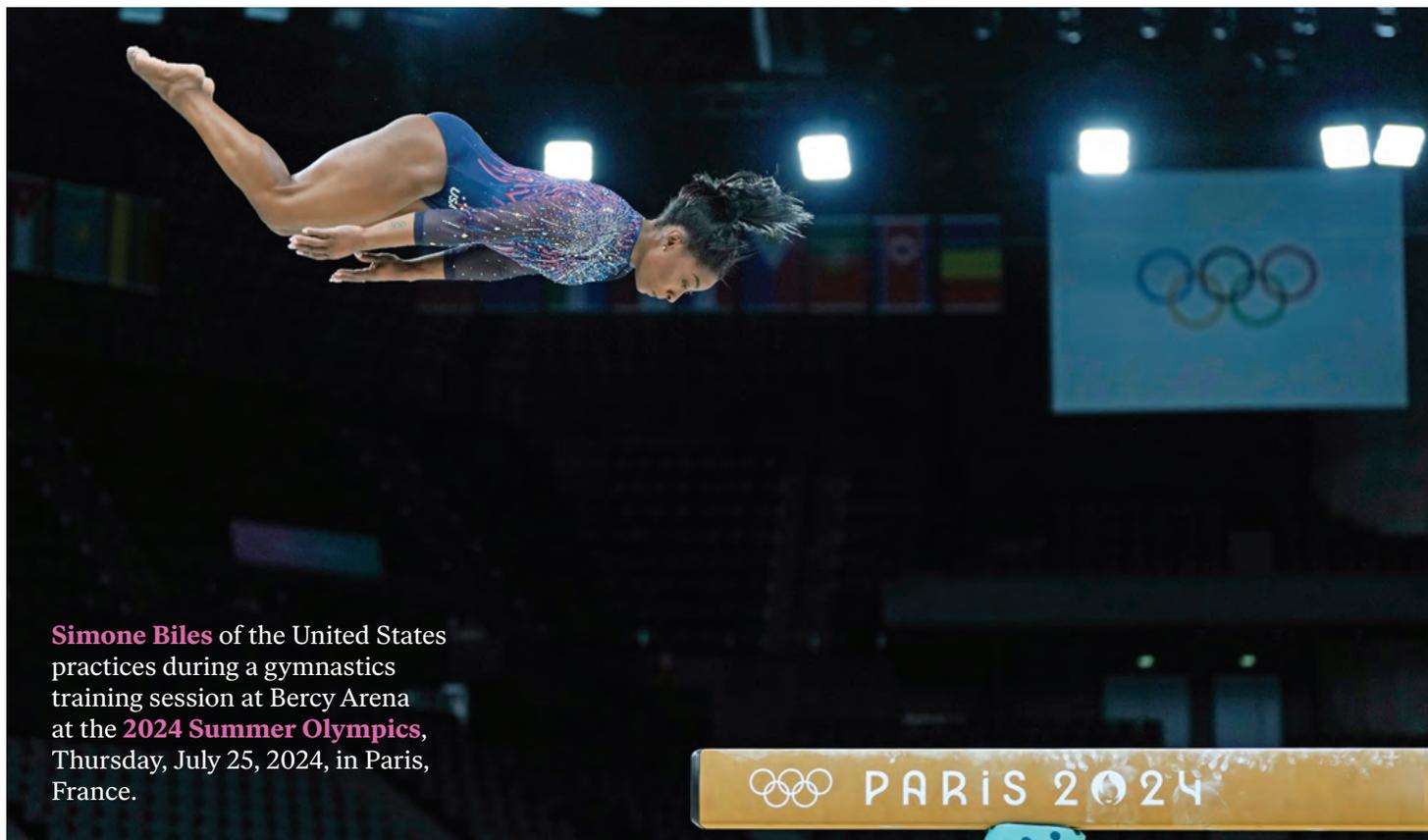
QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Knowing that Paris is going to have the cardboard beds again — the ‘anti-sex’ beds, which is not what they are for — they are very uncomfortable. ... So I think I’m going to Amazon order a mattress topper and have it shipped there.



— **Nick Mayhugh**, an **American track and field athlete** who won three gold medals and one silver in the Tokyo Paralympics, told CBS Sports on July 25. The twin cardboard beds were introduced during the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics and have been reintroduced in France. The beds are part of the Paris Olympics’ effort to create the “greenest-ever Games” and reduce the carbon footprint of the event.

PHOTO OF THE WEEK // FRANCISCO SECO / AP PHOTO



Simone Biles of the United States practices during a gymnastics training session at Bercy Arena at the **2024 Summer Olympics**, Thursday, July 25, 2024, in Paris, France.

PARIS 2024

Computing Chaos

When CrowdStrike sneezes, the entire business world catches a cold

By Jack Baruth

On July 18, the average person had no idea what “CrowdStrike” was. That changed in a hurry when a minor programming error in a mandatory, and automatically distributed, update to the company’s “Falcon” program disabled much of the Western world’s computing infrastructure. It grounded flights, disabled 911 response centers in at least three states, and caused major business interruptions for businesses as diverse as fast-food restaurants and Formula One teams. This sort of nations-spanning simultaneous failure would have been utterly impossible as recently as a decade ago — but it’s highly likely to happen with increasing frequency from now on, thanks to a combination of individually benign, but collectively deadly, changes in our global technology infrastructure.

The first of these problems, and the proximate cause behind the CrowdStrike outage, has to do with the way software is written in 2024. Historically, computer programs were the work of small, dedicated teams that understood their



Waiting to check in at Rome Fiumicino International Airport, July 19, 2024.

products from nose to tail. Often, a single person did the bulk of the work, as was the case for both the popular 1982 home video game *River Raid*, written by Activision employee Carol Shaw, and the powerful UNIX operating system, initially created by AT&T’s Ken Thompson. Software written in this fashion tended to be effective, efficient, and largely bug-free, which was important in an era without the possibility of remote software updates. It was also remarkably difficult to predict when it might be finished.

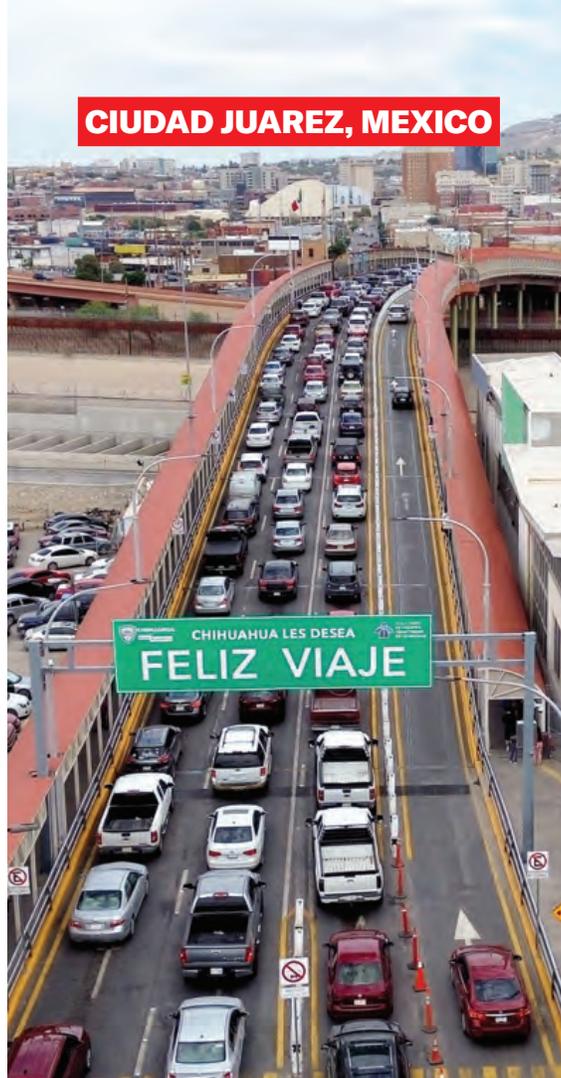
The average pre-internet computer programming project was kind of like the later Steely Dan records: just a few enigmatic people running the show, with no accountability to management and little incentive to follow anything other than their own whims along the way.

It’s not like that anymore. Most of today’s software is developed and released in two-week “sprint” intervals by teams of anonymous and interchangeable hired-gun, low-skill programmers, most of whom are sourced from overseas on a lowest-bidder basis. Each of them is given a tiny piece of the overall task on which to work. Rarely do they possess or even want a greater understanding of how their contributions fit in with the program as a whole. When there is a conflict between the work of two adjacent coders, it is resolved in automatic fashion by the tools with which they work, and not always correctly.

This creates a culture in which offshore and H-1B programmers are considered to be expendable commodities but their onshore managers are irreplaceable assets who portray themselves as masters of “agile” or “scrum” methods to anonymize and dehumanize the people doing the actual work. Conse-



WASHINGTON, D.C.



CIUDAD JUAREZ, MEXICO



MANILA

From left, a blue Windows error message on a screen in a bus shelter, July 22, 2024; vehicles wait at the U.S.-Mexico border, July 19, 2024; passengers stand in long queues at airline counters in the Philippines, July 19, 2024.

quently, it is all but irresistible to American tech leaders, even if the promised cost savings from offshore code farms never materialize and even if the resulting product is subpar. Which it almost always is nowadays, in ways ranging from “this new phone is slower than my old one, even though it’s more powerful,” to “this airplane seems to fall out of the sky more often than we’d like.”

Of course, even the most incompetent software can’t hurt you if it isn’t installed on your computer, or if you have a chance to evaluate it on test systems before installing it. In the past, most major systems were operated by skilled personnel who had the last word on what went on “their” computers. It was common to test software patches or updates on a few systems before releasing them to the company as a whole. This didn’t happen with the CrowdStrike update because the Falcon program, which is supposed to protect computers against criminal hacking and external attacks, has authority that supersedes that of the system administrators. It could in-

“**This sort of nations-spanning simultaneous failure would have been utterly impossible as recently as a decade ago — but it’s highly likely to happen with increasing frequency from now on.**”

stall its own updates from CrowdStrike at any time, without the consent of the computer owner. Which it did, pretty much everywhere all at once. Then the dominoes started to fall.

This “absolute power” is a nonnegotiable part of using the CrowdStrike software. Clients are not allowed to

place their own controls or cautions in the process, which places them at the absolute mercy of a company that was clearly willing to install an unproven and outrageously harmful update remotely on their servers with absolutely zero notice. Yet most of them would still have been safe from this combination of carelessness (on CrowdStrike’s part) and helplessness (on theirs) had CrowdStrike followed even the most basic of safety policies during its update process.

It only took the firm a few hours to understand the problem and to provide a fix. Had CrowdStrike deployed this noncritical update on a staggered basis, as has traditionally been done across the industry, it would have likely fixed the problem before some major percentage of its customers were affected by it. Instead, it sent it to everyone at the same time. There’s little explanation for doing so other than the culture of “we know what’s best for you” tech company arrogance that manifests itself everywhere from the lack of a “back” button on iPhones to the general belief that a pro-

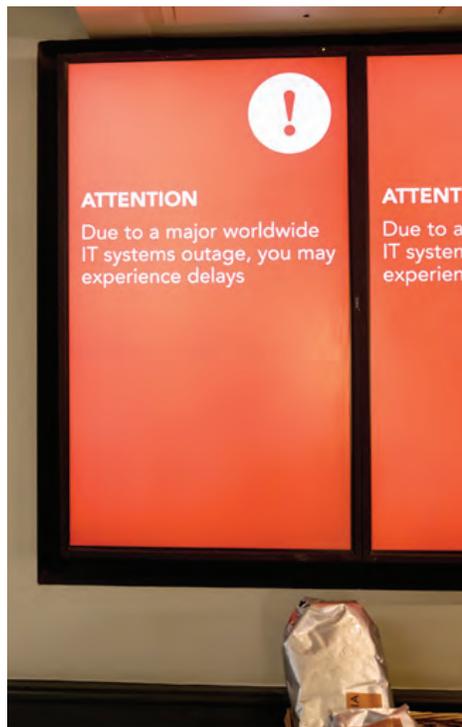
gram for which you've discontinued an annual license program, such as McAfee Antivirus, has the inherent right to "pop up" on your screen perpetually and demand additional payment like the electronic equivalent of a Barbary pirate.

Yet even the above-described combination of carelessness, absolute power over consumers, and staggering corporate narcissism is nothing new to American consumers. It's why the General Motors "X cars" had to rack up more than a dozen fatalities before they were recalled for a rear-brake fix. That famous problem, however, affected just a fraction of the cars sold in showrooms at the time. Ford Fairmont buyers didn't have to worry. (The same was true for buyers of the Chevrolet Vega when the Ford Pinto was recalled for fuel system-related fires.) The automotive business is inherently competitive. There are plenty of different manufacturers who would like to provide your next car.

This was true of computing for a long time, as well. At the turn of the century, there were a dozen different vendors for server operating systems and multiple providers for almost every imaginable type of software. This diversity of environment has declined at a Brazilian rainforest pace over the last two decades. The vast majority of servers are now either Microsoft Windows, which was affected by the outage, or a few different flavors of Linux, which were not.

We are now dangerously close to a "monoculture" in many aspects of tech. The vast majority of cloud servers are run by Amazon, so when an outage strikes, as it did in the "US-East" region of Amazon Web Services on Dec. 7, 2021, the effects are immediate and far-reaching. The combination of Windows Server and CrowdStrike Falcon is common at more than half of the Fortune 500 companies, so when CrowdStrike sneezes, the whole business world catches a cold.

The greatest irony is that these single points of failure are often the direct result of policies that are meant to increase the stability and availability of services. Our modern computing dogma of "site reliability engineering" demands the highest possible number of absolutely identical servers and software builds. This supposedly makes maintenance and upkeep easier. In practice, it tends to mean the entire infrastructure depends on one piece of software, and that one piece of software often has absolutely disproportionate power to knock everything down.



An IT outage message at London's Gatwick Airport, July 19, 2024.

“**In 2000, there were a dozen different vendors for server operating systems and multiple providers for almost every imaginable type of software. This diversity has declined at a Brazilian rainforest pace.**”

How did we get to the monoculture? Some of you may remember the old phrase "Nobody ever got fired for buying IBM." The famously anticompetitive tech sector has used a series of technical partnerships and deliberate incompatibilities to extend this mindset to nearly every level of software and computing. CrowdStrike is an Amazon Web Services partner, a Dell partner, a Netskope partner, and so on. When you buy one product in the stack, you're encouraged to buy the other products as well — so most tech leaders simply do the easiest thing.

Often, this means abandoning common sense altogether. The Okta plat-

form, for example, puts *all* of your company's authentication in the hands of a third party, while CyberArk will gladly store all of your passwords. It's perfectly ordinary nowadays for a Fortune 500 company to hand all of its passwords, privileges, and authentications to a third party while at the same time employing a Byzantine labyrinth of policies and procedures to restrict the privileges of its own tech support and system administration staff. When these third-party authentication and password providers are compromised, they are often unwilling or reluctant to disclose their problems to the very customers they are supposed to protect, as was the case with both Okta and password "vault" LastPass in 2022. What did most LastPass customers do when they were betrayed? Most of them just moved *en masse* to Keeper or 1Password. This is like giving your wallet to a random person on the subway, watching them run away with it, and concluding that your mistake was giving your wallet to the wrong person.

In light of the above, the only surprising thing about the CrowdStrike problem was that it took so long to happen at this scale. It will almost certainly happen again, with another monoculture "choke point," and it will keep happening until corporations learn the correct lessons as a result. Doing software development in the United States, with your own employees, solves a lot of the problems. Refusing to work with software providers that insist on taking control of your systems will handle most of what's left. A little bit of diversity focus wouldn't go amiss. In this case, we're talking "diversity of computing infrastructure."

Yes, this outage was CrowdStrike's fault. That's like saying that the Challenger disaster was an O-ring problem. It doesn't convey the broken nature of the system that let it happen. In this case, the lessons should be clear to every tech leader in America. Most of them won't bother to learn those lessons or even take the smallest steps to prevent the next problem. After all, this outage is now handled. It's history. There's just one little problem: It's the kind of history that is all but certain to repeat, again and again. ★

Jack Baruth was born in Brooklyn, New York, and lives in Ohio. He is a pro-am race car driver and a former columnist for Road and Track and Hagerty magazines who writes the Avoidable Contact Forever newsletter.

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HOW THE BOSSES BEAT BIDEN

Obama and other leaders are
the real center of power in the party

By David Freddoso

Blame those conservatives who insisted so loudly and for so long that it was going to happen. Blame the conspiracy theorists, who ended up being right once again when the conspiracy turned out to be real.

Thanks to them, we were all too ready to accept it when it happened — to accept that Joe Biden would not be the Democrats' nominee in 2024.

But Biden's decision to abandon an already-won renomination contest and snuff out his own political career is a far more shocking development than anyone is giving it credit for.

To be sure, Biden's career was probably over either way. Even before his disastrous June 27 debate, polls showed him headed for defeat. Biden trailed in nearly every state-level poll taken this calendar year in North Carolina, Georgia, Arizona, and Nevada.

Thus, former President Donald Trump appeared to have 268 electoral votes locked down. Trump needed just one more win (any swing state or Nebraska's 2nd Congressional District) for an Electoral College tie or win that would restore him to the White House. In other words, Biden's back was against the wall. He needed to win every single swing state and district or he was toast. And not only was Biden already trailing in nearly all polls of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, but Trump seemed on the edge of putting new states into play: Virginia, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Maine at-large, Colorado, and even New Jersey.

That explains why Democrats and liberals were so eager to pressure Biden into such an undignified withdrawal from public life, which their pious flattery cannot change.



President Joe Biden pauses before addressing the nation from the Oval Office of the White House in Washington on July 24 about his decision to drop his Democratic presidential reelection bid.

Yet Biden did not in fact drop out of the race because he was already losing before the debate. He dropped out because his debate performance laid bare his mental decline beyond anyone's ability to deny, deflect, or deceive.

Biden's team had done all it could to hide his condition, not always successfully, to be sure, but the debate was the very first incident that exposed him before an audience of more than 50 million people. With his mouth agape, his face blank, his mind unable to complete thoughts, his mouth unable to string sentences together, Biden was the very picture of non compos mentis. One could have forgiven Trump, on a different timeline, for refusing a second debate with Biden on the grounds that he opposes elder abuse.

But if not for that unprecedented early debate, Biden would have been the nominee. The real story here is that Democrats quite nearly renominated someone who obviously lacks the mental faculties to govern the nation. And indeed, by failing to remove him via the 25th Amendment, Democrats are forcing all of us to live under an incapable person for the next six months. One can only hope that Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping are too busy with their own problems to notice.

This could never have happened but for the profound rot within the Democratic Party. Democrats, you see, have an authority problem, albeit not the one you think.

Long before I was born, the rank-and-file Catholic co-religionists of both Biden and myself were told, as the saying goes, to "pay, pray, and obey." They mostly complied, understanding the divine nature of the enterprise. But the old Catholic ways have nothing on Democrats' unquestioning submission to party authority. Democrats continue to pay and obey, even though they don't believe in prayer — ironic, given most Democrats' ideological commitment to subverting authority.

In any case, with that paradox comes another: For all of their professed respect for "our democracy" — you might remember how Trump was supposedly a great threat to "our democracy" and there would never be another election if he won — Democrats at the highest levels are returning with gusto to their party's oligarchic roots. Party bosses in backrooms (presumably smoke-free) are about to choose a nominee for whom not a single Democratic primary vote has ever



President Joe Biden, right, speaks during a presidential debate with Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump on June 27 in Atlanta.

been cast, not in 2020 and not this year.

The tipping point for Biden's presidency came with the reluctant assent of one man — a man who had supported Biden right up to the point where he couldn't sustain it any longer. And he was reluctant not because of any love of Biden but because Biden had been providing him his third term.

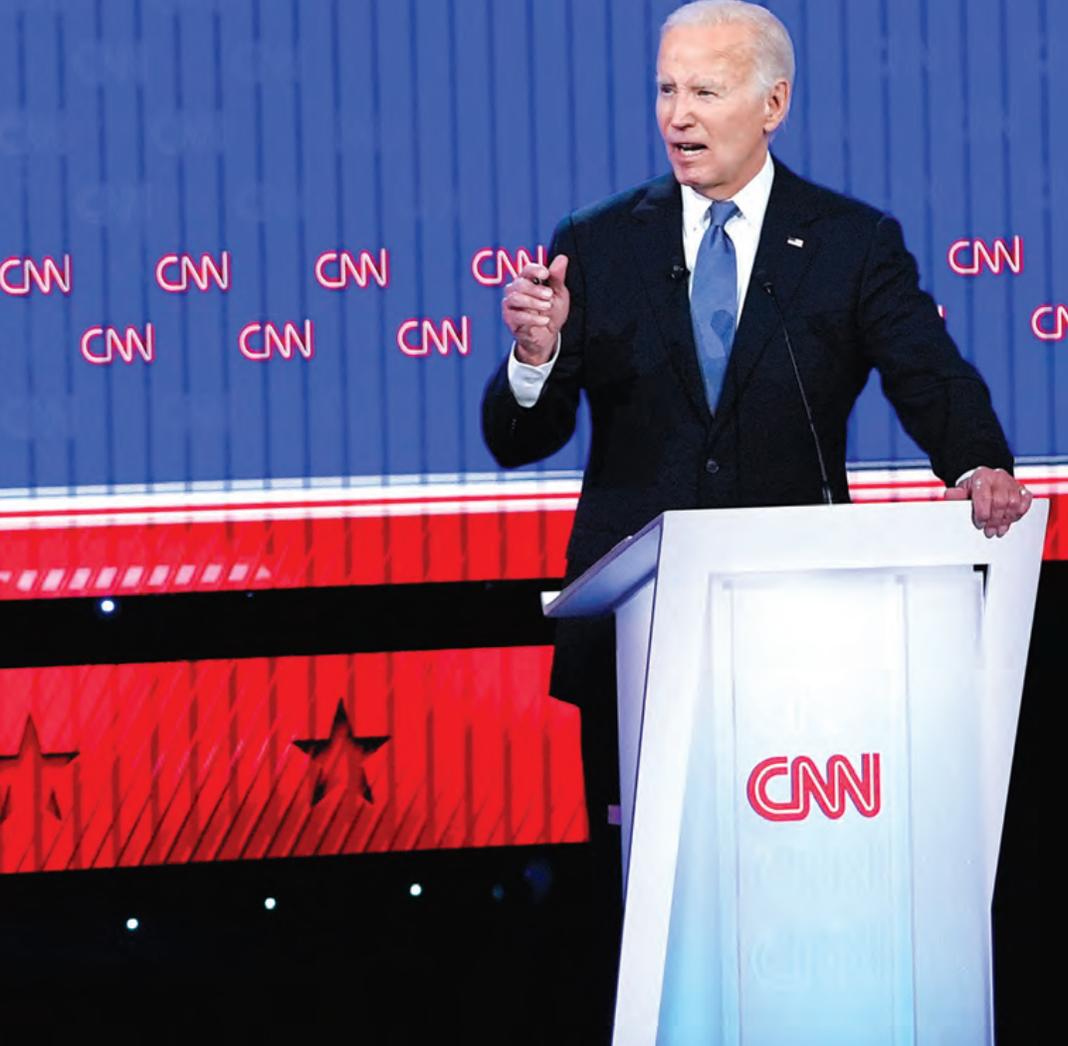
In February, I wrote about how Biden

“**Biden's team had done all it could to hide his condition — not always successfully, to be sure — but the debate was the very first incident that exposed him before an audience of more than 50 million people.**”

was “an empty vessel for all-inclusive Obama-era leftism, which keeps evolving into something ever more extreme.” I wrote that to the Obama-ites, “Biden does not matter. He might have the title of president, but it is the young, radical aides from the Obama era who are really running the country in his name.” I added that “Biden's administration is so derivative of Obama's that one could be forgiven for thinking the former president is still in charge.”

This was not, and is not, to say that former President Barack Obama was literally exercising the nation's executive power. Rather, his ideological heirs — his old staffers, from their appointed positions of power within Biden's administration — have been running everything all along in an administration that has been Biden's in name only. This may explain in part why the direction Biden has taken in office looks so different from the promises he made in 2020 to restore normalcy and reunite the nation after Trump's tumultuous term.

Over a 16-year period, Obama has quietly and successfully radicalized Democratic politics, re-creating one of the two



major parties in his own community organizer image and likeness. Biden, meanwhile, whom Obama considered a disloyal chatterbox, an embarrassment whom he nearly booted off the 2012 ticket, has had a fun ride in the people's house. He eats his ice cream, takes his naps, and observes his early bedtime. Meanwhile, within the massive maze of bureaucracy, Obama's revolution continues.

Prior to the debate, Obama, as much as Vice President Kamala Harris, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), and all other powerful Democrats, had an incentive to keep up the false appearance that Biden was fit to serve. And most people were easily fooled. Yes, abundant evidence of Biden's unfitness had reached millions of political YouTube addicts, but it was simply explained away or suppressed as "disinformation." People were told they were seeing and sharing "manipulated" videos and "cheap fakes."

By the time the debate had ended on June 27, neither Biden's party colleagues nor the news media could continue the cover-up. They had managed to hide him throughout 2020, thanks to the pandemic, and after Biden became president, they

managed to keep him away from as many open microphones as possible. But after that debate, there was just no more hiding the problem.

For Obama, a good thing had come to an end. Biden had lost all utility and was

“Prior to the debate, former President Barack Obama, as much as Vice President Kamala Harris, former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and all other powerful Democrats, had an incentive to keep up the false appearance that Biden was fit to serve. And most people were easily fooled.”

fit only to be returned from the historical ash heap from which Obama had plucked him in 2008.

Obama seems to have reached this conclusion reluctantly and later than almost every other important Democrat. And his leaking of “concerns” on July 19, along with Pelosi's decision to turn against Biden, was the last straw. Once he and Pelosi had abandoned Biden, all other Democrats had permission to do the same.

It must be added here that these political manipulations by Democratic bosses, including most prominently the concealment of Biden's incapacity but now also the defenestration of their own presumptive presidential nominee, have damaged voter confidence in the federal government — and at a time when there is already deep and justified skepticism about Washington. Their shambolic abuse of the democratic process only lengthens the list of systemic shortcomings that have enraged voters: a Congress that cannot pass spending bills without a crisis, a Secret Service that cannot protect presidential candidates, a border crisis created by the Biden-Harris administration as if on purpose, and of course the many prosecutions and civil actions cooked up by various Democrats with the obvious goal of overburdening Trump and knocking him out of the election.

Obama has thus continued playing his own role in loosening the fabric of the republic and undermining the integrity of one of its two main political parties. If you wonder why conspiracy theories keep cropping up, including the one about whether Biden was still alive or aware of his own withdrawal, look no further than the machinations of untrustworthy leaders who did indeed conspire for so long to keep Biden's condition from the voters. Some conspiracies are real, after all.

Despite falling on a Sunday afternoon, Biden's decision to withdraw was apparently so rushed that he could not even be bothered to release a video announcing his earth-shaking news or address the nation or show his face in public until midweek. If Biden's aides are to be believed, the failure to endorse Harris immediately was a mere oversight in the heat of the moment. They told *Politico* that the Harris endorsement came “moments later” on X after “a flurry of panicked texts and calls.” But this account, especially coming from people who had lied about so much for so long, seems doubtful. The Harris endorsement came a full 27 minutes af-

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ter the withdrawal letter was posted. Was this an unscripted, passive-aggressive act of revenge against those doing all the leaking and pushing him out?

Obama's response appeared on *Medium* an hour or so later. And to be fair, he was not entirely unkind. He called Biden "a dear friend and partner to me."

But the former president, who is a brilliant writer and surely signed off on the contents or even composed them himself, had a chance to say anything he liked about Biden's presidency. He could have praised his advocacy for the American worker or his commitment to justice, fairness, and equality. In short, he could have said something nice. He did not.

The most he could bring himself to say about Biden's leadership was that he was "one of the most consequential presidents in American history." This damningly faint praise about a man three years into the job evokes Obama's lethal remark to Hillary Clinton in a presidential debate 16 years ago: "You're likable enough." Those brilliantly poisonous words were still damaging Clinton during her 2016 presidential race and might as well serve as her epitaph when she goes to her eternal reward. Yet "most consequential," despite receiving far less attention, might be the sharpest insult Obama has ever penned.

Obama avoided endorsing Harris that day and has in fact held out longer than Pelosi and most of the mob. He instead called for a "process" that would give his party a strong nominee. Perhaps he just wanted to keep options open. Perhaps he simply did not anticipate there would be a need to discard Biden. Or perhaps he wants to salvage a veneer of democracy for a party that increasingly eschews it.

Did he intend to put forward someone else? His wife, perhaps? I say no, and by all accounts, she would not have gone along with the plan even if he had tried. But given Obama's massive influence over Democratic politics since his breakthrough convention speech of July 27, 2004, can you really fault those engaged in such speculation? I used to think Vivek Ramaswamy was taking the joke too far when he demanded in a debate that Democrats stop pretending Biden would be their nominee. I still think he is wrong about Michelle, but forgive me if I am less dismissive than I used to be.

Either way, events quickly overtook Obama. With Biden's assistance, the backing of progressives, unions, black Democrats, and the influential Rep.



Biden stands with former President Barack Obama onstage during a campaign fundraiser on June 15 in Los Angeles.

James Clyburn (D-SC), Harris now has the upper hand and seems a lock to inherit the nomination. A good party man, Obama will fall in line soon enough, if he hasn't already backed her by the time this is published.

After all, even the Clintons reached out from their political grave to announce

support for her within minutes. Obama cannot afford to be the only holdout.

There are no serious ideological disagreements. A Harris presidency would in most ways be a continuation of Biden's, only with a lot more internal rancor and perhaps a 90% staff turnover. But her administration, were she to win, would not necessarily belong to Obama the way Biden's has from its inception. She has an entirely different California pool from which to draw progressive personnel and a distinct, if partially overlapping, base of financial support.

If Obama's third term has evinced the vastness of his influence over Democratic politics, Biden's unprecedented withdrawal and apparent spite endorsement of Harris have finally demonstrated its limits. It's still Obama's party, yes, but for how long?

Well, Obama does have at least some right to stake a claim already. Should she win the nomination, Harris will owe it to his having finally given in and accepted Biden's demise. And assuming he does what everyone expects and throws in behind her, dare he hope that she is the new and cackling empty vessel of his fourth term?

An old-fashioned party boss at least has to try. ★

David Freddoso is deputy opinion editor of the Hill and author of The Case Against Barack Obama (August 2008).

“**These political manipulations by Democratic bosses, including most prominently the concealment of Biden's incapacity but now also the defenestration of their own presumptive presidential nominee, have further damaged voter confidence in the federal government, and at a time when there is already deep and justified skepticism about Washington.**”

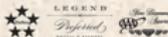
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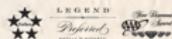
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Democrats Rush to Kamala Harris

**The party seeks unity above all else
after weeks of uncertainty**

By Jay Cost

Well, that sure was fast. After three weeks of insisting that he was going to drop out of the race, President Joe Biden suddenly dropped out of the race. Many people throughout the media ecosphere, myself included, had speculated

that if he were to leave the race, there might be some kind of open process for the party to choose an alternative candidate. The chances of this were always low, but at this point, they seem to be nil. Within 24 hours of Biden's withdrawal, elite Democrats began lining up behind Vice President Kamala Harris, who as of this writing can claim to be the presumptive nominee. Granted, Biden could make the very same claim right up until the moment he withdrew, but this does seem set in stone.

Why did the Democrats move so hastily toward Harris? And was this a wise decision? While we cannot know for sure why the party elite acted as it did, the speed with which its leadership all moved in the same direction suggests several good reasons. Yet downsides linger.

Democratic leaders seem above all to desire a united front. They want to avoid internal conflicts being exposed to the public and focus the party's energies on defeating former President Donald Trump and the Republican Party in the November election. Parties always have an incentive for unity. If leadership had its way, there would never be a primary contest anywhere or anytime. The preferred candidate of the party leadership

would be anointed, and the party would immediately pivot to the general. Of course, presidential nominations rarely go so smoothly, as many would-be candidates risk challenging the front-runner for the nomination. But after three weeks of the party clawing itself apart, and with just 100 or so days to go until Election Day, the overwhelming majority of Democratic stakeholders are so desperate to end the internal fighting that no major would-be challenger to Harris dared enter the race.

Harris also is generally liked by the party itself. While her favorable ratings with the country at large are quite anemic, regularly clocking in under 40% of the people while she has been vice president, Democrats like her. She is not controversial within the party. There is no anti-Harris faction with an axe to grind. Granted, many Democrats have privately expressed doubts that she can win, but no major group has indicated that a Harris administration would be unacceptable to its interests. That's a huge advantage.

Moreover, the problems with challenging Harris this late in the game would be steep. Such a candidate would have to build essentially from scratch a campaign organization — first to woo the convention delegates, then to carry the party banner into the general election. Given the massive operation a presidential campaign is nowadays, there is precious little time to put any such organization together, let alone build a good one. And finally, many would-be candidates for president waiting in the Democratic wings might be anticipating a Republican victory this year. Better to let Harris fall on her sword and run in 2028, when Trump will be excluded from running.

All in all, the speed with which the party fell in line makes sense. Nevertheless, the decision to swap Biden for Harris without the input of the voters is unprecedented in the modern era. And even though the party elites have made a sensible choice, there are still important risks the Democrats are taking in doing so.

There are two problems with doing this switcheroo. The first is a sense of legitimacy. Harris will be the first nominee of the Democratic Party chosen with no meaningful public input since 1968, when Hubert Humphrey won the nomination despite not having competed in any of the primaries that year. If one goes back to the 19th century, there is nothing unusual about the way in which Harris will be chosen. Party officials, national and state, gathered at the quadrennial convention to select a new candidate, without primaries or open caucuses. But when Democrats chose Humphrey in that manner in 1968, at the height of the controversy over the Vietnam War, there was outrage among average Democrats. Afterward, the party resolved to bring voters into the selection process, essentially creating the modern process.

As of now, this problem is unlikely to be significant. Early polls do not show a sense of frustration among Democratic voters. If anything, the average Democrat seems to be relieved. Most polls show Democratic voters agreed Biden needed to step aside and that Harris is an acceptable replacement. That could change between now and the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, but for now, the Democratic rank and file seem to have approved the move. At most, the penalty the Democrats will pay for the “anti-democratic” removal of Harris is to give the Trump campaign a pointed rejoinder to accusations that he is a threat to democracy. As a rhetorical matter, that is good for the GOP, but it will probably not be significant in deciding the outcome of the election.

The second problem with swapping Harris for Biden is that it avoids the utility of a proper primary campaign. That could be a big deal. In a way, the Democrats have repeated the mistake they made over a year ago when they paved the way for Biden to acquire the nomination. Granted, primary campaigns are grossly inefficient: They take too long, cost too much money, and involve the party mostly training its fire on itself. No wonder the Democrats have been at pains to avoid them. But they do provide value in demonstrating which candidates have

“what it takes,” to borrow a phrase from Richard Ben Cramer. Primaries illustrate which candidate has the guts, drive, and skill to wage a general election campaign, during which the opposition will relentlessly attack the nominee while undecided voters watch with an ever-critical eye.

One can see the problem in avoiding such a contest with the quick collapse of Biden. It was evident at his June debate with Trump that he was not up to a campaign. But if the Democrats had an actual primary this year, his feebleness would have been manifest to them much earlier. But they avoided it purposefully. The Democratic National Committee changed the calendar to help Biden — moving South Carolina, Biden’s strongest state, to the first primary and disqualifying the New Hampshire one, where Biden performed poorly in 2020. No major Democratic challengers stood against him. No major financiers came forward to vouch funds to any challenger. And all this was despite the fact that the Democratic rank-and-file *did* want an alternative to Biden. The party, so intent it was on unity, inadvertently doomed itself to the last three weeks of internal dissension.

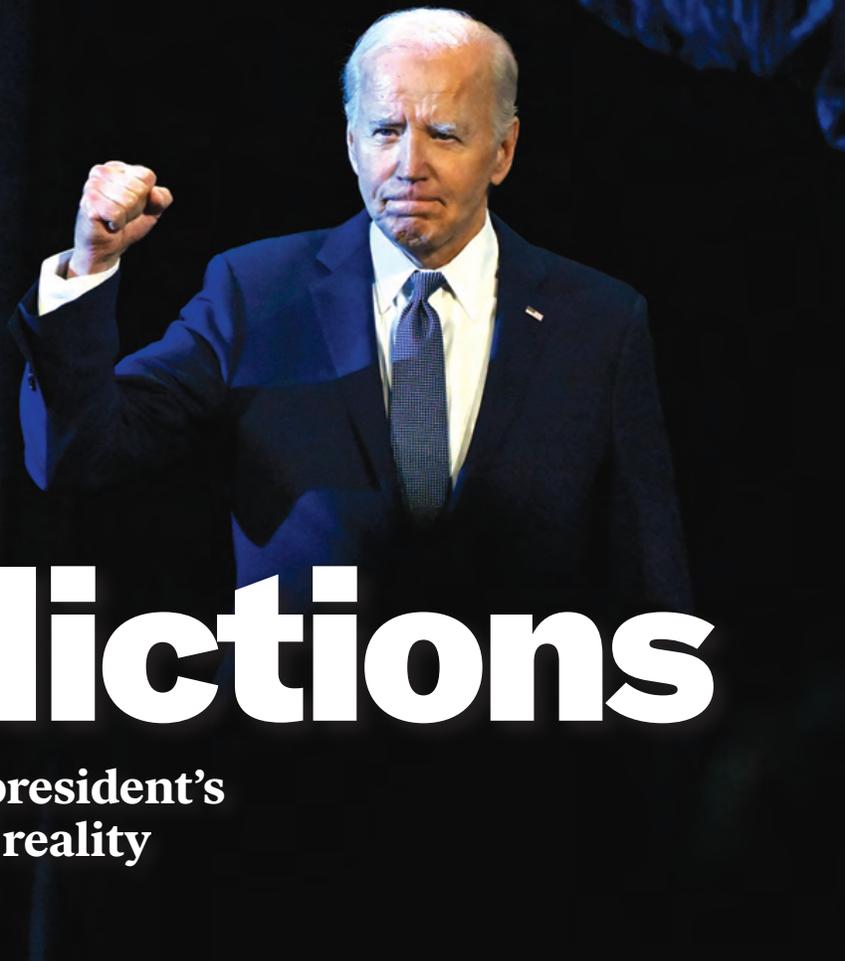
So it may also be once again. In February 2007, when Barack Obama declared his candidacy for president, most people wrote him off as a long shot who was not possibly up to a campaign. But in August 2008, when he accepted the Democratic nomination, everybody knew he was ready for the rigors of the general election. After all, he had proven himself ready in the primary campaign against Hillary Clinton. Can the same be said for Harris? Hardly. When last she was a candidate for president, back in 2020, she quickly wilted under the spotlight. Has she learned from her mistakes? Perhaps. Is she going to be a more effective candidate this time around? Possibly. But without having won the nomination through the primary process, nobody knows for sure — not even Harris. Democrats are taking a risk.

Granted, a risk for Democrats at this point is an upgrade. Harris gives them a chance to win, which is more than can be said with Biden as the nominee. Yet it was the party’s desperate desire to avoid a challenge for Biden in the first place that put them in this situation. And the speed with which the elites have rallied around Harris leaves open the possibility that once again they have endorsed a candidate not up to the challenge. ★

Jay Cost is the Gerald R. Ford senior nonresident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.



While Harris’s favorable ratings with the country at large are quite anemic, regularly clocking in under 40% of the people while she has been vice president, Democrats like her.



Biden's contradictions

There are tensions between the president's soaring democratic rhetoric and reality

By W. James Antle III

President Joe Biden walks onstage to speak during the NAACP national convention in Las Vegas on July 16.

Former President Ronald Reagan had been out of office for five years when he returned to Washington, D.C., to address a Republican National Committee fundraiser. It was three days before his 83rd birthday. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, RNC Chairman Haley Barbour, and Senate Republican Leader Bob Dole were among those on hand for the tribute and \$1,000-a-plate dinner.

When the tuxedo-clad Reagan stepped up to the podium, he faltered a bit. He seemed out of sorts and unsure of himself. It was only temporary, however. Reagan launched into his speech in earnest, taking shots at then-President Bill Clinton, telling stories, and cracking jokes as normal. He went on for over 20 minutes, and the event was a success.

Nancy Reagan never let him give a live speech in public again. (There were some subsequent videotaped remarks.) Later that year, the former president wrote a letter to the public informing them of his Alzheimer's disease diagnosis.

It's probably too soon for first lady Jill

Biden to wish she had similarly encouraged her husband's gracious exit from the public square. No grim medical diagnosis is necessary, though many self-appointed internet physicians have stepped in to offer them, to realize that President Joe Biden has, at 81, become a diminished communicator at the precise moment his party most needed him to excel in that role.

The president is nowhere near as good extemporaneously as he was for most of his 50-plus years in politics. Since rallying to deliver what is now sure to be his last State of the Union address earlier this year, Biden has slipped noticeably in his ability to read reliably from a teleprompter. His voice sounds weak. He loses his train of thought. He confuses names he ought to remember.

Biden reached his nadir on June 27 in the most lopsided debate in the history of presidential debates. It was an encounter his campaign had requested, subject to ground rules his aides had devised to be helpful to him. The exchange was nevertheless a disaster from which his reelection campaign never recovered. After three weeks of attempted intransigence, Biden succumbed to his own party's demands that he exit the race.

It was a stunning fall from grace for a two-term vice president who finally won the presidency on his third attempt after 33 years of trying, not counting the 2016 race he was dissuaded, again by his own party and then boss, from entering in the first place. In an Oval Office address explaining his decision to reverse course several days after dropping out via social media and then not being seen in public for a while, Biden didn't put it quite like this.

Instead, Biden appealed to high-minded principles. "I revere this office, but I love my country more," he said. "It has been the honor of my life to serve as your president, but in the defense of democracy, which is at stake, I think is more important than any title."

"America is going to have to choose between moving forward or backward," Biden continued. "Between hope and hate. Between unity and division. We have to decide, do we still believe in honesty, decency, respect? Freedom, justice, and democracy?"

These are the contradictions Biden has never been able to resolve, not in his single term as president or in his lengthy career in Washington. He speaks on the one hand

DAVID BECKER/AP

of unity, decency, respect, and democracy, of treating political rivals as friends and neighbors. Yet on the other hand, he frames his political opponents as the forces of darkness and existential threats to the constitutional system of government.

Perhaps this was understandable in the context of when Biden took office, 14 days after the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol by supporters of former President Donald Trump who did not wish to accept and hoped to overturn the 2020 election results. But Biden has always vacillated between invoking bipartisanship and throwing sharp partisan elbows, emphasizing civility while attacking his opponents in the crassest political terms.

Some of this is the culture of the Senate, where Biden served for 36 years. You excoriate fellow members and their policies in speeches on the chamber's floor while addressing them as "my friend." Senators can be friendly in private while sharply critical of each other in public, a practice that was even more common when Biden was in his prime. But as vice president, Biden hinted to a black audience that Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan were going to enslave them if they won the 2012 election. He has denounced as fascistic and "ultra-MAGA" policy positions on abortion that he once held himself.

Fighting for his own political life, Biden could not figure out how to strike the civil and unifying tone he called for the rest of the country to adopt in the wake of the assassination attempt on Trump. Days after dropping out, Biden released a statement about the now-former Secret Service head who presided over that grave security failure that politely thanked her for her service after lawmakers of both parties angrily demanded her resignation.

Biden stood by as Democratic prosecutors and officials tested legal and constitutional theories as novel as anything John Eastman concocted to disqualify, bankrupt, and possibly incarcerate Trump, giving a speech at the White House to complain that the Supreme Court made it difficult to put the Republican presidential nominee on another trial before the election. The president has frequently attacked the high court saying his version of "Supreme Court reform" is also "critical to our democracy."

It is Biden's defense of democracy, which he planned against the advice of unaffiliated Democratic operatives to make the centerpiece of his abortive reelection campaign, that looks most contradictory with the sad conclusion of his public life.

Biden entered the Democratic primaries as allies dissuaded other candidates from doing so, fearing a competitive process would weaken him in the general election. He won them against token but at least sentient opposition, receiving 14 million votes. When he initially resisted calls to withdraw after his disastrous debate, he cited these voters, "not the press, not the pundits, not the big donors, not any selected group of individuals, no matter how well intentioned," as the rightful decision-makers.

After being presented with polling data that suggested Biden might lose a democratic general election to his opponent, Biden acceded to the wishes of the press, pundits, donors, and a "selected group" of influential Democrats — the most important of whom, Barack Obama and Nancy Pelosi, had ostensibly surrendered their leadership positions to other people, though at least Pelosi remains an elected member of Congress — and bowed out before he could even be seen in public.

Biden then threw his support behind Vice President Kamala Harris, who has never won a single Democratic (or democratic) primary dating back to 2020, in a process that looks as closed as the abandoned primaries in which he alone among major candidates participated. Within 36 hours, she was crowned the new presumptive nominee. She is at least an elected vice president, albeit in another election cycle with Biden at the top of the ticket.

There is an argument that political parties are private organizations that are not obligated to pick their nomi-

“ He speaks on the one hand of unity, decency, respect, and democracy, of treating political rivals as friends and neighbors. Yet on the other hand, he frames his political opponents as the forces of darkness and existential threats to the constitutional system of government.

nees democratically. Great presidents have been chosen by their parties less democratically. Parties are supposed to identify candidates who can win. That is not the process most Democrats have believed they were following since 1972, the year Biden was first elected to the Senate. More importantly, this argument is difficult to square with the contention that the Electoral College, the filibuster, and the composition of the Senate itself are undemocratic and therefore illegitimate. The principle is either one person, one vote, or it is not.

It is abundantly clear that Democrats often use democracy as a cudgel with which to beat their opponents. When Democrats could win majorities of the size that enacted legislation ranging from the New Deal to Obamacare, they accepted the legitimacy of the system. Once they could no longer win majorities that large, they wanted everything to be done with 50% plus one — one time.

Biden, the victim of what a former spokesman to the first lady described to Fox News as a "political intervention of epic proportions," has played an outsize role in all this. Indeed, stories that came out in the attempt to end his reelection bid raise important questions about how engaged he, as the elected president, ever was in the day-to-day process of governing.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported as Biden lost his grip on the Democratic nomination in July that during his first year in office, he had "spoken disjointedly and failed to make a concrete ask of lawmakers" in a meeting with House Democrats, prompting "a visibly frustrated" Pelosi to intervene and explain what was needed. "That was October 2021," the report noted. "That month was the last time Biden met with the House Democratic caucus on the Hill regarding legislation." (The White House denied covering for Biden's infirmities on the same day he publicly explained his rationale for leaving the presidential race.)

When it looked like Biden was going to lose an election rather than just the attention of Democratic lawmakers, Pelosi took more than the microphone away from him.

Democrats are grateful Biden finally passed the torch. If democracy does not go their way in November, we can expect to hear more stories about what his term was really like. ★

W. James Antle III is executive editor of the Washington Examiner magazine.

Gangland Killings

Violent nonstate actors and naive policies are destabilizing the globe

By Andrés Martínez-Fernández

A constant stream of news headlines illustrates the wave of rising global instability, from the descent of Haiti into gang rule and rising cartel violence in Mexico and South America to the war in Gaza and unrelenting attacks by Houthi rebels on global shipping.

Global instability is clearly on the rise. Among the principal culprits are criminal organizations and other violent nonstate actors. Gangs and violent groups are seeing a resurgence across much of the world, bringing terrorism and even collapse both to historically stable nations and to countries with long-standing security challenges.

Transnational criminal organizations number in the thousands and span the globe, controlling illicit industries that combined exceed most European economies. The global illegal drug trade alone represents upward of \$650 billion a year in illicit value, while human trafficking is estimated at over \$150 billion. This revenue has enabled many criminal groups

“**In the recent past, tough-on-crime policies against everything from street crime to cartel drug trafficking was the norm. Now, governments are increasingly abandoning these policies thanks to a mix of ideological, misguided, and even corrupt motivations.**”

and other violent nonstate actors to expand dramatically, equipping themselves with weapons and technology sufficient to outgun most police forces and rival a well-resourced military.

The threat of gangs and transnational

organized crime is not new. Even factors like their sponsorship by corrupt officials and rogue authoritarian states are not novel developments. What, then, is driving the apparent wave of global instability? Of course, countries across the world all have their own unique context, and many face materially different challenges when it comes to violent nonstate actors.

However, there are also some key, shared factors underlying the recent wave of violent nonstate actors. A mix of policy decisions, a changing and more interconnected global environment, and the onset of uncontrolled migration crises are empowering violent nonstate actors and driving a new period of crisis. To regain control, policymakers in the U.S. and around the world will have to recommit to defending the rule of law and confronting criminal threats.

POLICY CHOICES: FROM ENFORCEMENT TO ENABLING

A primary driver of the outgrowth of organized crime is a fundamental shift in the way many governments approach criminality. In the recent past, tough-on-crime policies that favored proactive enforcement against everything from street



Port-au-Prince, Haiti: Above, gang leader Jimmy 'Barbecue' Cherizier, center, patrols streets with G-9 federation gang members, Feb. 22, 2024; at left, youths huddle during a gunfight near a school and refugee center, March 22, 2024; at right, a police officer takes aim during a street fight with gang members, March 1, 2024.



crime to cartel drug trafficking were the norm. However, governments around the world are increasingly abandoning these policies as a mix of ideological, misguided, and even corrupt motivations.

Progressive activists, academics, and politicians in the West and beyond have long pushed an effort to change policing and security policy radically, often attacking the legitimacy of police, counternarcotic initiatives, and the so-called war on drugs. Instead, they call for treating even organized crime as an economic

development issue at its core, to which the only appropriate response is to deliver economic and humanitarian aid. In large part, many nations are now seeing the consequences of the success of these advocates as governments enact policies that de-emphasize law enforcement and imprisonment and dismantle the international counternarcotic consensus.

Most people are aware of this effort's latest manifestation in the United States, where progressive prosecutors and legislators have cut funding for police forces,

implemented bail reform, and reduced sentences even for violent crimes. However, similar approaches and policies have also become increasingly prominent abroad, including in countries that face far more dire criminal threats.

In Colombia, the world's top producer of cocaine, far-left President Gustavo Petro has called for ending the so-called drug war and implemented an aid-centric approach to combating cocaine production and trafficking. At the same time, Petro has severely restricted the

TOP: GILES CLARKE / GETTY; INSET IMAGES, ODELYN JOSEPH / AP

offensive operations of the Colombian military against the country's powerful narco-terrorist guerrillas.

In Mexico, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, another critic of the "war on drugs," has pursued a "hugs, not bullets" approach to the country's drug cartels over the last six years. This largely empty strategy relies on increasing social spending in the country while limiting military operations against the cartels and actively dismantling U.S.-Mexico security cooperation.

Certainly, there are also nonideological motivations behind many governments' shift away from enforcement and confronting criminal threats. While Lopez Obrador has deepened Mexico's departure from conventional counternarcotics efforts, this shift began under his predecessor, Enrique Peña Nieto, who explicitly changed Mexico's security policy to de-emphasize confronting the drug cartels. Notably, Peña Nieto's minister of defense was arrested by U.S. law enforcement in October 2020 for taking money from drug cartels in exchange for aiding their narcotics trafficking operations.

This dynamic has also accelerated the outgrowth of violence and instability outside of Latin America. In recent years, South Africa has seen some of the most rapid rises in criminality in the world, according to the Global Organized Crime Index. There, rampant corruption by officials has enabled a collaborative relationship between the state and criminal gangs. It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that the government of South Africa does not even seek to fund its security forces properly.

At their core, these dynamics and policies rest upon the quiet conclusion that organized crime cannot be eliminated through enforcement and the rule of law — and is therefore a problem to be managed and, where possible, contained.

Of course, governments that adopt this view are constantly forced to expand the acceptable bounds of containment as criminal groups and violent nonstate actors gain strength thanks to their permissive policies. And eventually, this leads to chaos, as exhibited in the case of Haiti, where a deeply corrupt government has collapsed under the onslaught of drug trafficking gangs. While not motivated by corruption or progressive ideology, in many ways, Israel is now reckoning with the consequences of its leaders' flawed assumption that the threat of



From top: Across one of Mexico City's main thoroughfares, a protester hangs a portrait of a missing person on a makeshift line commemorating victims of cartel violence, Aug. 30, 2023; Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, July 1, 2019; in Madrid, police officers and journalists stand by part of a haul of 1.8 tons of methamphetamine smuggled into Spain by the Mexican Sinaloa cartel, May 16, 2024.

Hamas could be contained and managed.

Regardless of the motivation, the crises these and other countries are now facing are owed to policy decisions that shift away from confronting these threats. The results have been predictably disastrous. In the U.S., political projects such as bail reform enabled the wave of violent street crime in major cities and even facilitated the establishment of organized retail theft networks throughout the country.

Drug cartels in Mexico are more powerful than ever and continue to push homicides and violence in Mexico to record high levels while driving over 100,000 drug overdose deaths in the U.S. each year. In Colombia, coca production is skyrocketing and narco-guerrillas have expanded their territorial control, bringing an uptick in violence to the country.

One of the most pernicious aspects of these policies is that their consequences

do not remain within the borders of the countries that enact them. Instead, criminal groups and violent nonstate actors that once had to contend with security forces now are free to grow and expand to new territory.

Colombian guerrilla groups and Mexican cartels have rapidly expanded their presence in Ecuador, bringing a dramatic wave of narco-violence to what was recently one of the safest countries in the Americas. Elsewhere in the world, the outgrowth of organized crime in Myanmar has also spread into neighboring Asian countries, where police forces in previously low-crime nations are now struggling to reassert control.

BUCKING THE TREND

As gangs and criminal organizations gain strength in much of the world thanks to permissive government policies, the prospect of reversing course and confronting these illicit groups becomes even more daunting for leaders. However, there are nations that have done just that and made notable progress against the threat of or-



A few nations have made notable progress against organized crime, in large part because they have bucked the international trend of undermining security forces. Perhaps the clearest example is that of El Salvador.

ganized crime, in large part because they have bucked the international trend of undermining security forces.

Perhaps the clearest example is that of El Salvador, where the government of Nayib Bukele has made dramatic, once-unthinkable gains against the violent gangs that once terrorized the country. In 2015, El Salvador had the unfortunate distinction of being the most violent nation in the world as gangs such as MS-13 operated with impunity.

In 2022, the Bukele government launched a major offensive against El Salvador's gangs, embracing the so-called La Mano Dura or tough-on-crime policies that many progressives have sought to delegitimize globally. Bukele's strategy has included the empowering and aggressive deployment of police and military forces, a major initiative to double the size of the military, and the imprisonment of tens of thousands of gang members in a new maximum-security prison.

The impact has been dramatic. Now, two years after El Salvador launched its crackdown on gangs, the country has gone from the global murder capital to the safest country in the Western Hemisphere after only Canada. In the whole of 2023, El Salvador saw fewer than 150 murders, a number that a decade earlier was surpassed in the space of less than a week.

Of course, now the activists and analysts who were saying five years ago that such policies couldn't bring security and stability to El Salvador are now frantically formulating arguments for why such tough-on-crime policies can only work in El Salvador and should not be attempted elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, these latest



Above, prisoners in Tecoluca, El Salvador, many bearing tattoos associated with gangs, await transfer to a high-security prison on the orders of El Salvador's president, Nayib Bukele, June 11, 2024; at right, Bukele waves after voting on election day in San Salvador, El Salvador, Feb. 4, 2024.



warnings have little credibility, and leaders from around the world are seeking to learn from El Salvador's success.

The success of rule of law-centered security strategies and so-called tough-on-crime policies is not limited to El Salvador. In Brazil, former President Jair Bolsonaro adopted an aggressive strategy against the country's violent drug trafficking gangs while also encouraging gun ownership by private citizens. Critics lambasted Bolsonaro's strategy. However, by 2022, its implementation brought Brazil's homicide rate down to a 15-year low, even as other countries saw a post-pandemic spike in violence.

During the early 2000s in Colombia, then-President Alvaro Uribe succeeded against another very different threat with his "democratic security" strategy. Uribe broke with his predecessors and launched an aggressive military campaign against the country's narco-guerrillas, which had taken control of a third of Colombia's municipalities. Uribe's aggressive policies delivered dramatic gains against these violent groups and brought Colombia back from the brink of failed-state status.

US PULLS BACK

It wasn't long ago that foreign nations would look to the U.S. for support and

guidance on how to confront security challenges like transnational organized crime. Indeed, a key factor behind the success of Uribe's security policy in Colombia was robust U.S. support, including the provision of military training, equipment, and intelligence.

The U.S. has long played a critical role in supporting partner countries through security cooperation as well as pressing less proactive governments to confront shared security threats, such as violent drug trafficking gangs. This role is necessitated by the reality that transnational efforts are essential to combating much of the transnational organized crime that threatens to destabilize the U.S.

However, one reason that many foreign governments have pulled back on confronting criminal threats is that the U.S. has increasingly shied away from advocating and supporting such efforts.

Instead, the Biden administration's foreign policy seems to have internalized an unfavorable view of U.S. security cooperation, particularly on counternarcotics. As a result, the Biden administration has significantly de-emphasized the once-central priority of security in its

**AM I OKAY
TO DRIVE?**

**BUZZED DRIVING
IS DRUNK DRIVING**


NHTSA

ad
COUNCIL



Mass migration provides easy cover for criminal organizations and illicit smuggling networks to spread to and infiltrate not only the U.S. but also countries in Europe and Latin America.

diplomatic relations. International security cooperation, training, and engagement by the State Department and U.S. military countries have been increasingly blunted and watered down by everything from climate change advocacy to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The Biden administration has also abandoned the vital role of the U.S. as a source of pressure and accountability for foreign leaders. Rather than pressing complacent and corrupt governments abroad to combat transnational drug traffickers and violent gangs, the Biden administration has actively avoided confrontation with such foreign leaders and refused to utilize the substantial economic and political leverage that the U.S. possesses abroad.

Rather than push back on the Petro government's efforts to blunt Colombia's security forces and abandon the country's historic commitments to combating drug trafficking, the Biden administration has given silent consent to Petro's actions, prioritizing instead engagement on areas such as climate change. Indeed, the Biden administration even halted U.S. satellite monitoring of coca crops in South America as cultivation of the illicit crop soared along with the production and trafficking of cocaine.

Similarly, the Biden administration has acted as little more than a passive observer as Mexico has dismantled security cooperation with the U.S. even as cartels accelerate the flow of deadly fentanyl to the country.

When a security crisis grows to the point that it cannot be ignored, the Biden administration struggles to play catch-up. In the recent responses to surging instability in Haiti and Ecuador, the response of the U.S. has been marred by a



Above, a Mexican smuggler poses in Nogales, Sonora, Oct. 31, 2019. He said he pays a license fee to the Sinaloa cartel in order to operate in Nogales and he is only allowed to smuggle Mexican nationals across the U.S. border. If he wanted to move other nationalities, his license fee would go up, he said.

lack of serious planning, causing embarrassing and costly missteps.

TECHNOLOGY AND GLOBALIZED CRIMINAL NETWORKS

Beyond the poor policy choices guiding how governments face the threat of gangs and other violent nonstate actors, there are also changing global realities that are driving this age of growth and expansion for criminal groups.

Even as effective security cooperation between governments has been on the decline, criminal organizations and their illicit networks are growing more globalized and interconnected than ever. With encrypted messenger apps, cryptocurrencies, new financial technologies, and even drones and artificial intelligence, criminal groups around the world are rapid adopters of new technologies and leverage them to facilitate and expand their reach and illicit networks.

The acceleration of global connectivity through trade, technology, and communication has also brought about an increasingly globalized organized crime threat. Illicit partnerships between the world's criminal groups and violent nonstate actors now span the globe.

Chinese triads use encrypted messaging technology and cryptocurrencies to sell fentanyl precursor chemicals to Mexican drug cartels. Organized retail theft rings across the U.S. partner with Mexican cartels and other South Amer-

ican gangs to move and profit off stolen goods. Brazilian drug trafficking gangs have gone beyond establishing trafficking partnerships with criminal groups in Europe and Africa to actually expanding and recruiting members at a large scale in countries such as Portugal. Even Lebanese Hezbollah has deeply entrenched itself in illicit drug trafficking and money laundering operations in South America's tri-border region to secure vital revenue.

With technological advances and international expansion, the world is rapidly becoming smaller and easier to traverse for transnational criminal organizations, at the same time making them more powerful and resilient.

MIGRATION CRISES

Mass, uncontrolled migration is also having an undeniable accelerating effect on the global spread of criminal groups and increasingly dwarfs the impact of technology and globalization.

Fiscal 2023 saw a stunning 2.5 million migrant encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border. In Europe, migrants and refugees continue to arrive at dramatic levels. In 2021, the European Union had under 10% of the global population of refugees across its 27 states. By 2022, the EU's share surged above 20% with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and continued arrivals from Africa and the Middle East. Similarly, the Venezuelan crisis continues to see the outflow of mi-



Criminal networks are growing more globalized and interconnected than ever: Lebanese Hezbollah runs illicit drug trafficking and money laundering operations in South America's tri-border region to secure vital revenue.

grants to the U.S. and across the Western Hemisphere with nearly 8 million Venezuelans having fled their country as of the end of 2023.

These migration crises and policy choices around migration have left many countries without the capacity to vet migrants or otherwise exercise control over their borders. This dynamic provides easy cover for criminal organizations and illicit smuggling networks to spread to and infiltrate not only the U.S. but also countries in Europe and Latin America. At the same time, these uncontrolled migration crises offer an opportunity for gangs to grow by tapping into new revenue through migrant smuggling.

The rapid growth of the Tren de Aragua gang exemplifies the close linkages between migratory crises and the spread of gangs and other violent groups to new nations. Tren de Aragua originated in Venezuela, gaining strength in the country's corrupt and lawless prison system.

With the acceleration of the Venezuelan migrant crisis, this criminal gang has now spread into the U.S. and across much of Latin America, where their members commit violent crimes and establish new networks of human smuggling, drug trafficking, retail theft, and extortion. This group's arrival in other nations has also brought a new wave of instability and criminality to low-crime nations such as Chile and Uruguay, whose governments are struggling to contend with the new gang threat. Europe has seen a similar dynamic over the past several years as uncontrolled migration has seen the establishment and growth of criminal gangs from Africa and the Middle East.



Lebanese national Moussa Hamdan, center, in police custody in Asuncion, Paraguay, for allegedly financing Shiite militant group Hezbollah, June 16, 2010.

These new criminal footholds secured abroad empower these violent groups, making them more resilient to crackdowns in a single country and allowing them to expand into lucrative new international illicit activities.

In the U.S. and elsewhere, the effectively open borders driving mass migration also create a set of lucrative opportunities for criminal networks in human trafficking. Gangs such as Tren de Aragua owe a great deal of their surging numbers to their ability to tap financially into the migration crisis. The U.S. migration crisis has even brought terrorist-affiliated human smuggling networks to the Western Hemisphere from as far as Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

PATH FORWARD

An increasingly unstable yet interconnected world will continue to accelerate the growth of organized crime and violent groups. Therefore, it is more crucial than ever for governments to adopt proactive policies designed to confront organized crime and reassert the rule of law.

When it comes to transnational organized crime, confronting these well-funded and heavily armed networks requires an aggressive, internationally coordinated effort spearheaded by security forces to secure borders and maritime routes and control ungoverned spaces.

For the U.S., confronting the surging transnational criminal threat begins at home. The porous border is a major and increasingly principal driver of the growth of instability and criminality, not

only in the U.S. but across the Western Hemisphere and beyond. Therefore, the first step in countering the global criminal threat is for the U.S. to implement appropriate border security policies and resourcing, many of which were present under the Trump administration. The increased severity of the migratory and cartel threat also calls for more aggressive action, including ramping up of resources for border security as contemplated in H.R. 2 and the deployment of U.S. military resources and personnel to secure the border and combat these growing threats to national security.

With growing global instability and the increasing weaponization of migration by foreign regimes, the U.S. should also play a leading role in promoting border security abroad, particularly close to home in the Americas, where some leaders recognize the need for such policies.

More broadly, the U.S. should reassume its role of both pressing for and supporting such an international offensive against armed criminal groups, particularly those who threaten national and domestic security with deadly narcotics, weaponized migration, and violent crime.

Without a major reversal of course and concerted action along these lines, the recent images of global instability hitting the headlines will only multiply, along with their impact on the public. ★

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Washington Briefing



WHITE HOUSE

RFK legacy hovers over presidential race in more ways than one

The 1968 killing changed how White House candidates are protected, as did assassination attempts on Presidents Truman and Reagan

By David Mark

The most memorable piece of information from my Bush-Quayle-era AP Biology class has nothing to do with cellular mitosis, genotypes, or, really, any scientific concept. Rather, it's our long-tenured John Muir High School teacher, Al Razum, recalling how, more than 20 years earlier, FBI agents came calling on his classroom on a sad June 1968 morning, with students at their desks, right after the assassination of Democratic presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy.

Federal agents wanted any information they could gather on Sirhan Sirhan, who some years earlier was a student at the Pasadena, California, public high school. Sirhan stood accused of assassinating Kennedy, the former attorney general, senator from New York, and, most famously, younger brother of slain President John F. Kennedy. The crime had taken place at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, about 15 miles away, in what today is the city's Koreatown neighborhood. Sirhan was convicted on April 17, 1969, and remains in prison today at age 80.

A similar investigation recently played out in and around Butler, Pennsylvania, north of Pittsburgh. FBI agents interviewed former teachers and former classmates of Thomas Matthew Crooks — and anybody else who had been in contact with him recently. The 20-year-old had notched an unenviable place in presidential history when, around 6 p.m. on July 13, he shot at former President Donald Trump, now the 2024 Republican presidential nominee, from the roof of a building about 400 feet away from a campaign rally stage where the candidate was speaking.

A bullet that struck Trump's right ear came inches away from killing him. But a crowd member, Pennsylvania firefighter Corey Comperatore, 50, was killed. Two other rally attendees, David Dutch, 57, and James Copenhaver, 74, were injured. A Secret Service sniper killed Crooks seconds after he fired at the former president.

It's the first comparable incident involving a president or presidential candidate since Ronald Reagan was shot in 1981. In U.S. history, four presidents have been assassinated — a terrible record considering only 45 people have held that office.



U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy holds two fingers up in a victory sign as he talks to campaign workers at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, California on June 5, 1968. He is flanked by his wife Ethel (left) and his California campaign manager, Jesse Unruh, speaker of the California Assembly. After making the speech, Kennedy left the platform and was assassinated in an adjacent room.

Kennedy, at the time of his murder by the Palestinian Jordanian Sirhan over support for Israel, was a leading contender for the 1968 Democratic presidential nomination. Had Kennedy lived, he could have plausibly beaten Republican Richard Nixon, the ultimate victor of that chaotic and tragic year. And unsuccessful attempts on the lives of presidents have reverberated for years after, in unexpected ways.

THE SAD STRING OF PRESIDENTIAL ASSASSINATIONS

The first presidential killing shockingly spurred little change in protecting the commander in chief. To say Abraham Lincoln's assassination on April 14, 1865, at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., changed the course of history is a wild understatement. Except in one area, presidential security, where needed obvious, dramatic improvement, was in short supply. Instead, Lincoln's killing by actor and Confederate sympathizer John Wilkes Booth was viewed as a final, tragic chapter to the Civil War, which took more than 600,000 lives cumulatively.

Little had changed in terms of chief executive protection when President James A. Garfield was fatally shot on July 2, 1881, at the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Station in Washington — Garfield died on Sept. 19 amid poor medical care even for the time. In the wake of Garfield's death, after only six months in office, there still was little clamor for presidential protec-

tion. Public officials' need for a connection to regular people was the highest priority, public opinion went at the time. And waves of immigrants were arriving from Europe, with newcomers escaping monarchical regimes where Praetorian Guard-like units were the norm. Such measures drew deep public skepticism.

It was only after the assassination of President William McKinley that the Secret Service added protecting presidents to its duties, which until then focused largely on fighting currency counterfeiting. Even after McKinley was fatally shot on Sept. 6, 1901, at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, protection was limited and, at times, haphazard. It would take several decades to become a full-time part of the president's entourage.

Intense security measures were in place by the time of President John F. Kennedy's murder on Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas, though, obviously, not nearly enough to prevent the Texas tragedy.

The Warren Commission, appointed by President Lyndon Johnson to investigate his White House predecessor's assassination, noted that no one thought to check the buildings along the Dealey Plaza motorcade route in Dallas. The Secret Service also had no formal procedures for working with local law enforcement agencies.

The agency set about fixing these and other shortcomings in the subsequent years. For instance, presidents no longer sit in open vehicles but wave to onlookers



U.S. President Ronald Reagan being shoved into the President's limousine by secret service agents after being shot outside a hotel in Washington, D.C. on March 30, 1981.

through the thick glass of a heavily armored limousine nicknamed “the beast.”

PRESIDENT-ADJACENT ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS

It's been failed efforts to kill presidents and a successful assassination of a would-be president that arguably have brought the biggest changes to Secret Service procedures.

Such as the Nov. 1, 1950, attempt by two Puerto Rican nationalists to assassinate President Harry S. Truman. The assault took place outside of Truman's temporary home at Blair House, across the street from the White House, while the executive mansion underwent renovations. One of the gunmen was killed, along with a White House policeman. Truman, who remained inside, was unhurt.

Only after the Truman attack, a full half-century after McKinley was the third sitting president killed, did Congress finally enact legislation that permanently authorized Secret Service protection of the president. Until then, Secret Service protection had to be re-upped annually in federal spending bills — which it always was. The 1951 law also authorized Secret Service protections for the president's immediate family, the president-elect, and the vice president, if he wished. Eleven years later, not long before the Kennedy assassination, Congress expanded coverage to require the vice president, among others, to be protected.

Still, major public figures were vulnerable, as the nation and world tragically learned on April 4, 1968, when civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in

Memphis by escaped convict James Earl Ray. Today, a figure such as King would have at least private security, the way Trump, a television star and business mogul, did before declaring for president in June 2015. (That's not in any way to compare the legacies, accomplishments, moral standing, etc., of the two men.)

Robert Kennedy's death two months later happened as he soared into a seeming lead for the 1968 Democratic presidential nomination after Johnson bowed out amid unpopularity over the war in Vietnam. Due to that assassination, Congress authorized the protection of major presidential and vice presidential candidates and nominees. A separate law expanded other Secret Service protections, such as for the widow of a former president until her death or remarriage. Minor children of a former president were granted protection until they reached 16 years of age unless protection was declined.

Thirteen years later, the Reagan assassination attempt led to other tangible, if less visible, changes to presidential protection. Particularly because it happened just three months after the New York City murder of former Beatle John Lennon, and two months before the unsuccessful assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II in Vatican City.

In Reagan's case, the president was coming out of the Washington Hilton hotel when John Hinckley Jr. opened fire from a crowd of onlookers and journalists just 15 feet away. Hinckley got off six shots before Secret Service officers tackled him. The last shot ricocheted off a limo and into Reagan.

After that, presidential events became increasingly White House-centered rather than out-and-about in Washington or anywhere the commander in chief traveled. Presidents also were driven into buildings through underground parking garages. When that wasn't possible, a cover was erected around the entrance to obstruct the line of sight as the president got into or out of a vehicle.

The White House's Rose Garden became a frequent site of presidential events. While once reserved for major events of state, such as the 1979 signing of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty during President



The site where President William McKinley was fatally shot, in Buffalo, New York, on Sept. 6, 1901. McKinley was shot by anarchist Leon Czolgosz, on the grounds of the Pan-American Exposition, and died eight days later. The site is now part of a residential neighborhood, in the middle of Fordham Drive.

Jimmy Carter's administration, the Rose Garden was used for routine events. In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed welfare reform legislation. President George W. Bush presided over a Teacher of the Year awards ceremony in 2002. In a 2020 Rose Garden event, Trump celebrated his third Supreme Court justice, Amy Coney Barrett, being confirmed.

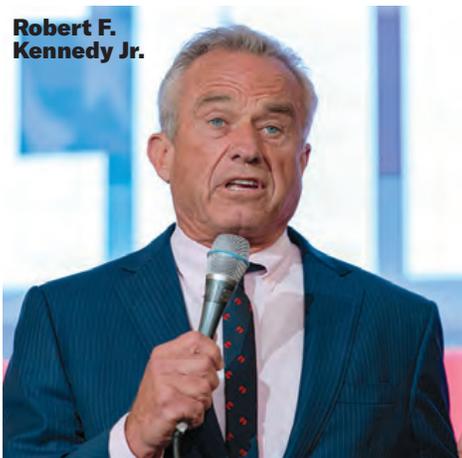
The change to a more bunker-like presidential security approach came in part at the behest of then-first lady Nancy Reagan.

"She became a bigger worrier, especially when it came to her husband's safety," the *Los Angeles Times* reported in March 2016 a few days after her death at age 94. "But it also marked a turning point, in which she took a more assertive role in expressing her views on matters of security, scheduling, and policy, often to the frustration of White House aides."

However, Nancy Reagan wasn't the only one pushing for enhanced presidential security arrangements. The Secret Service was already moving in that direction after a pair of unsuccessful assassination attempts against President Gerald Ford in September 1975 during separate visits to Northern California.

Each represented just the sort of public-facing risk the Secret Service wanted to mitigate. The first occurred on the state Capitol grounds in Sacramento, California, where Ford was walking to the building to pay a courtesy call to Gov. Jerry Brown, a Democrat elected the previous November. The second happened in downtown San Francisco after Ford exited a building where he had given a speech and before entering his limousine.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.



Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump is surrounded by U.S. Secret Service at a campaign event in Butler, Pennsylvania on July 13.

There was always a certain irony about Ford's brushes with assassination attempts and good fortune eluding them — for him and the nation. Ford had been on the Warren Commission, appointed by Johnson. As a Michigan congressman, Ford was a member of the House Appropriations Committee, which funds federal agencies. The 38th president knew more about the logistics and mechanics of presidential protection than White House predecessors or successors in either party.

BUREAUCRATIC SHUFFLE FOR THE SECRET SERVICE

The July 13 Trump assassination attempt was only the latest in a string of negative headlines for the Secret Service. And some unflattering agency problems have lingered for years.

An uninvited couple was able to crash a November 2009 state dinner hosted by President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama, and numerous people were able to slip past security and get close to the president and first family. Then in 2012, Secret Service agents hired prostitutes on a trip to Colombia, where they were supposed to be setting up security for a visit by Obama. In 2015, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee concluded the Secret Service is an "agency in crisis" after a series of high-profile embarrassments. The congressional report faulted both leadership failings within the agency and budget cuts imposed by Congress that have led to what the committee concluded was a "staffing crisis."

Many argue the problems go back to the 2003 move of the Secret Service from its longtime Treasury Department home to

the newly created Department of Homeland Security. Now, under DHS, more than 20 years into the behemoth department's existence, the Secret Service is just one of several agencies competing for annual appropriations.

Moreover, Secret Service protection remains a touchy political subject. A son and namesake of the late Robert F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is running for president as an independent against Trump and the likely Democratic presidential nominee, Vice President Kamala Harris. Kennedy Jr., 70, for months, said he requested and was denied Secret Service protection. As Robert Kennedy's son and John Kennedy's nephew, the pleas had a certain public resonance. President Joe Biden's White House long declined to provide him with security coverage, but it relented after the Trump assassination attempt and before Biden dropped his reelection bid and yielded to Harris.

The Trump assassination attempt, coming less than four months before the Nov. 5 general election, is likely to spur changes to Secret Service operations and the presidency in ways that aren't yet clear. Interviews with people who knew the Trump shooter will yield some information, as did post-Robert Kennedy assassination queries to high school teacher Mr. Razum, who died at age 96 in 2016. Though it's a tragedy, such interviews have been, and likely will be, necessary in a democracy where political violence has occurred much more than we would like to think. ★

David Mark is managing editor of the Washington Examiner magazine.

TECHNOLOGY

GOP platform distinguishes party from Democrats on tech issues

Cryptocurrency policy is one of the biggest areas of disagreement

By Jessica Melugin

Delegates recently adopted the 2024 Republican policy platform during the party's national convention. The July 15 document's statements on cryptocurrency, artificial intelligence, and domestic energy production will surely have implications for tech policy if presidential nominee Donald Trump is successful in the November election.

The platform's chapter titled "Build the Greatest Economy in History" lists "Champion Innovation" among its specifics. It's a bit of a departure from the tech themes of Trump's 2017-21 presidency. His administration was adversarial to some aspects of the tech industry, such as "Big Tech" over antitrust and speech concerns, so the enthusiasm for the broader sector was a welcome surprise to many.

"The Republican Party inclusion is a huge first for the crypto industry," Ron Hammond, director of government relations for the industry group Blockchain Association, told the *Washington Examiner*.

The platform puts "Crypto" at the top of its listing in the economy section, and it reads: "Republicans will end Democrats' unlawful and un-American Crypto crack-down and oppose the creation of a Central Bank Digital Currency." It continues, "We will defend the right to mine Bitcoin and ensure every American has the right to self-custody of their Digital Assets and

transact free from Government Surveillance and Control."

Hammond explained why that might be a politically savvy approach for Republicans: "While crypto is an important issue for many Americans, as poll after poll has shown, the Biden administration hasn't shown much engagement, and that's likely why we've seen Trump jump in on this issue." He continued, "For a campaign looking to appeal to a young demographic of voters, crypto has proven to be an issue people care about."

Another tech area in which the platform distinguished itself from the Democratic tech policy agenda was AI technologies. In October 2023, President Joe Biden signed a sweeping executive order on AI. Critics panned the order as being too regulatorily stringent and warned it risked future U.S. dominance over rivals like China. Vice President Kamala Harris, the likely 2024 Democratic nominee after Biden dropped out of the race on July 22, is now likely to come in for similar criticism over tech policy as her boss.

The adopted Republican platform says, "We will repeal Joe Biden's dangerous Executive Order that hinders AI Innovation and imposes Radical Leftwing ideas on the development of this technology. In its place, Republicans support AI Development rooted in Free Speech and Human Flourishing."

"The GOP platform statement is an unsurprising backlash to President Biden's overzealous move to try to go at it alone on AI policy through a massive executive order," Adam Thierer, senior fellow for technology and innovation at the R Street Institute, told the *Washington Examiner*. "The White House should not have tried to make AI laws by executive decree."

The platform also addresses something

AI desperately needs to succeed: energy. AI's data centers could represent a third of new electricity demand in America and consume as much as a quarter of all the country's electricity by the end of this decade, up from about 4% today. The Biden administration's emphasis on renewable energy may not be enough to meet these expected needs.

The Republican platform seizes on that weakness and pledges to lift "restrictions on American Energy Production and terminating the Socialist Green New Deal." The document also supports increased nuclear energy specifically, a technology that may be necessary to meet the country's tech needs, alongside calling for "streamlined permitting" for "Oil, Natural Gas, and Coal."

The GOP platform is silent on other major tech policy matters.

It says nothing about the politically controversial Section 230, the liability shield for hosts of third-party content online, such as social media companies Meta, Alphabet, and X. Both Trump and Biden have supported repeal or curtail of the law in the past. The document also does not address the banning of TikTok in the United States, a law Biden signed, which is now being challenged in the courts, but Trump opposed while out of office.

The biggest question left unanswered in tech policy may come from the naming of Sen. J.D. Vance (R-OH) as the party's vice presidential candidate. One of the biggest headaches for Big Tech is the Federal Trade Commission's and Department of Justice's investigations and lawsuits against them. Some of those suits began under the Trump administration, but Biden-appointed leaders at both agencies have been increasingly aggressive in targeting the tech firms on antitrust grounds.

Whether that trend will change under a second Trump administration seems less likely with the nomination of Vance, an outspoken critic of the companies. Earlier this year, Vance told a tech forum, "I look at [FTC Chairwoman] Lina Khan as one of the few people in the Biden administration that I think is doing a pretty good job." ★

Jessica Melugin is a contributor for the *Washington Examiner*.



Vance



CONGRESS

Democrats' top-of-the-ticket switch to Harris leaves congressional race chances murky

While Democrats sang Biden's praises after he took himself out of contention, they were preparing to sever public ties with him days earlier

By Max Thornberry

Democrats know they aren't tying themselves to President Joe Biden at the top of the ticket in November. They will almost certainly be attached to Vice President Kamala Harris as their party's presidential standard-bearer. Yet it's unclear whether chopping half of the Biden-Harris ticket will improve downballot candidates' odds of winning pivotal contests that could determine control of the House and Senate.

The unraveling of Biden's reelection campaign was quick. It began with a disastrous debate performance on June 27 against former President Donald Trump, now the 2024 Republican nominee. It was followed up by two weeks of fending off an angry press corps and ended with a letter posted on X saying he was quitting the race, without any notice for Cabinet members or campaign staff.

Biden was under immense pressure from the most powerful forces in his party to bow out of the contest, and his presence at the top of the ticket acted as a lead weight around the necks of downballot Democrats. Constant questions about whether the president was fit to complete his term, much less run for reelection, threatened to dampen Democratic spirits, all at a politically sensitive time, with House Democrats needing to net four seats in November to claim a majority and Senate Democrats trying to hold on to their perilous control of the chamber, with 51 seats to 49 for Republicans.

Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) was reportedly prepared to present Biden with polling that contradicted what his inner circle was telling him and showed precisely how untenable the situation had become. If he didn't step aside, Democrats



President Joe Biden hugs Vice President Kamala Harris during a campaign event on May 29.

were heading for defeat not only in swing states but in safe blue regions such as Virginia and New Mexico as well.

Bowing out of the 2024 contest wasn't how Biden imagined his career would end. But he was lauded for his efforts as Democrats quickly turned from despair to delight.

"President Biden's love of country and loyalty to the American people has been unwavering. He will undoubtedly go down in the history books as a true American patriot," Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA) said in a statement. "I believe Vice President Harris has the experience, energy, and resolve to lead our nation and defeat Donald Trump and his backward agenda."

But while Democrats sang Biden's praises after he took himself out of contention, they were preparing to sever public ties with him days earlier.

Election analyst David Wasserman told the *Washington Examiner* Democrats had been trying to separate themselves from Biden and Harris in some of the

most competitive regions in the country. And that strategy isn't likely to change unless Harris shows that the energy and excitement she has generated in the early days of her campaign is more than a political sugar high.

"The big question mark is what she does to Democrats in more blue-collar rural districts where she might be a harder sell," Wasserman said. "The strategy for Democrats in those places is going to be

“**The big question mark is what she does to Democrats in more blue-collar rural districts where she might be a harder sell.**

—David Wasserman, Election analyst

to continue to cut and run from the top of the ticket. ... I suspect that will still be the case if Kamala Harris is the nominee.”

Republicans have scrambled to change their messaging that was centered on attacking Biden to focusing their rhetorical fire on Harris. Shifting their focus to Biden’s No. 2 required some tweaking but allowed them to carry on criticizing the projects and policies of the current administration with a slightly different emphasis.

A memo circulated by the National Republican Senatorial Committee laid out a clear path for Republicans who don’t appear daunted by the Democratic change in plans.

“San Francisco radical Kamala Harris is seizing the Democrat nomination from Scranton Joe Biden,” NRSC Executive Director Jason Thielman wrote. “Democrats subverted the democratic process to anoint Kamala Harris with no input from their voters, and Republicans must be ready to shift gears.”

“Furthermore, Kamala Harris creates a strong downballot opportunity for Republicans. The case against Joe Biden relied in part on the fact that he was mentally unfit to hold office, which was difficult to translate downballot. Kamala Harris owns the Biden Administration’s baggage and is an avowed radical. An endorsement of Kamala Harris is an endorsement of her extreme agenda, and Harris is arguably a bigger threat to Democrats’ Senate majority than Joe Biden.”

A dueling memo from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee only hinted at the drama at the top of the ticket, focused on huge cash and polling advantages front-line Democrats have compared to vulnerable Republicans.

“Despite a volatile month of ever-evolving political news, House Democrats remain well-positioned to win back the majority this fall,” according to the memo. “Thanks to our continued fundraising advantage, the individual strengths of our

Frontliners and Red to Blue challengers, and a stark contrast between the forward-looking agenda of House Democrats and MAGA extremism, the DCCC is confident that we will retake the Majority and get the House back to work For the People.”

Swapping candidates has resulted in a surge for Democrats. Harris reported bringing in \$100 million in her first 24 hours and signing up 30,000 volunteers for her campaign. The same can’t be said for Republicans, who have been mobilized and energized for months in response to Trump’s legal woes.

It’s not clear if either peaked too soon or whether Harris will have enough runway to define herself before voters go to the polls in roughly 100 days.

Democrats feel like they’re back in the game after taking a third-quarter pounding, but it might be too little, too late. ★

Max Thornberry is a breaking news editor for the Washington Examiner.

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NATIONAL SECURITY

Ukraine war may be headed to dreaded 'frozen conflict' zone

'You either win fast, up front, or you're in for a long slog,' says Army Gen. Chris Cavoli, U.S. European commander and NATO top general

By Jamie McIntyre

If the war in Ukraine has demonstrated anything, it's that it's easier to play defense than offense.

Ukraine scored dramatic gains in the first year of the war when Russia's three-day plan to take Kyiv and install a puppet government was upended stunningly by Ukraine's fierce defense, which forced battered and demoralized Russian troops into an ignominious retreat.

Ukraine stunned Russian President Vladimir Putin's army and surprised the world by retaking 50% of the territory Russia occupied in its initial invasion, thanks to sheer grit and Western weapons, including U.S.-supplied Javelin tank-killing missiles and deadly accurate HIMARS artillery rockets.

But then came Ukraine's failed counteroffensive last summer, followed by Russia's failed counter-counteroffensive.

In 2 1/2 years of fighting, both sides have suffered heavy losses but have also adapted, with the war settling into a horrifically destructive and deadly battle of attrition with no military resolution in sight.

"Wars are hard to predict in general, but as they go on, they become harder and harder to predict," Army Gen. Chris Cavoli, U.S. European commander and NATO's top general, said at a recent Aspen Security Forum. "In modern wars, you either win fast, up front, or you're in for a long slog full of unpredictable twists and turns. And that's where we are right now."

Ukraine's drone warfare has ef-

fectively defeated Russia's Black Sea Fleet, and after a six-month delay, fresh supplies of American ammunition and artillery shells have slowed Russia's modest advances in the east.

Ukraine, however, remains handicapped by the Biden administration's limits on the use of long-range weapons to strike targets deep in Russia and the agonizing slow pace of providing Ukraine with F-16s its needs to take control of its skies.

Running low on munitions itself, Russia figured out how to convert its stockpile of old Soviet-era dumb bombs into glide bombs by adding wings and GPS guidance systems.

They have used the powerful glide bombs with impunity to kill civilians and cripple Ukraine's energy infrastructure, knocking out half of its generation capacity ahead of winter.

Putin's superpower, though, is his absolute indifference to the appalling high battlefield casualties his troops sustain as they are forced to conduct "meatgrinder" assaults against dug-in Ukrainian defense in pursuit of meager, strategically insignificant gains.

"Poorly trained Russian soldiers are being used as cannon fodder in an attempt to overwhelm strong Ukrainian defenses," according to a British intelligence assessment, which estimates Russian casualties at over half a million, with an average of more than 1,000 a day in May and June, the highest toll in the war to date.

But both sides are dug in, not just physically but psychologically.

As a precondition for peace talks, Putin wants to keep Crimea, which he illegally annexed in 2014, as well as all four of the eastern Ukrainian provinces he now only partially occupies, and he is also demanding Ukraine give up its aspirations of NATO membership.

It's a deal Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky says he can never accept, as it would lead to a "frozen conflict," a war that never ends, is never won, and in which Ukraine is never safe.

"Who says a frozen conflict would work? Who says Putin does not simply want us destroyed? He does. He wants a return of the USSR under his control until the end of his days," Zelensky told the BBC during a visit to London in mid-July.

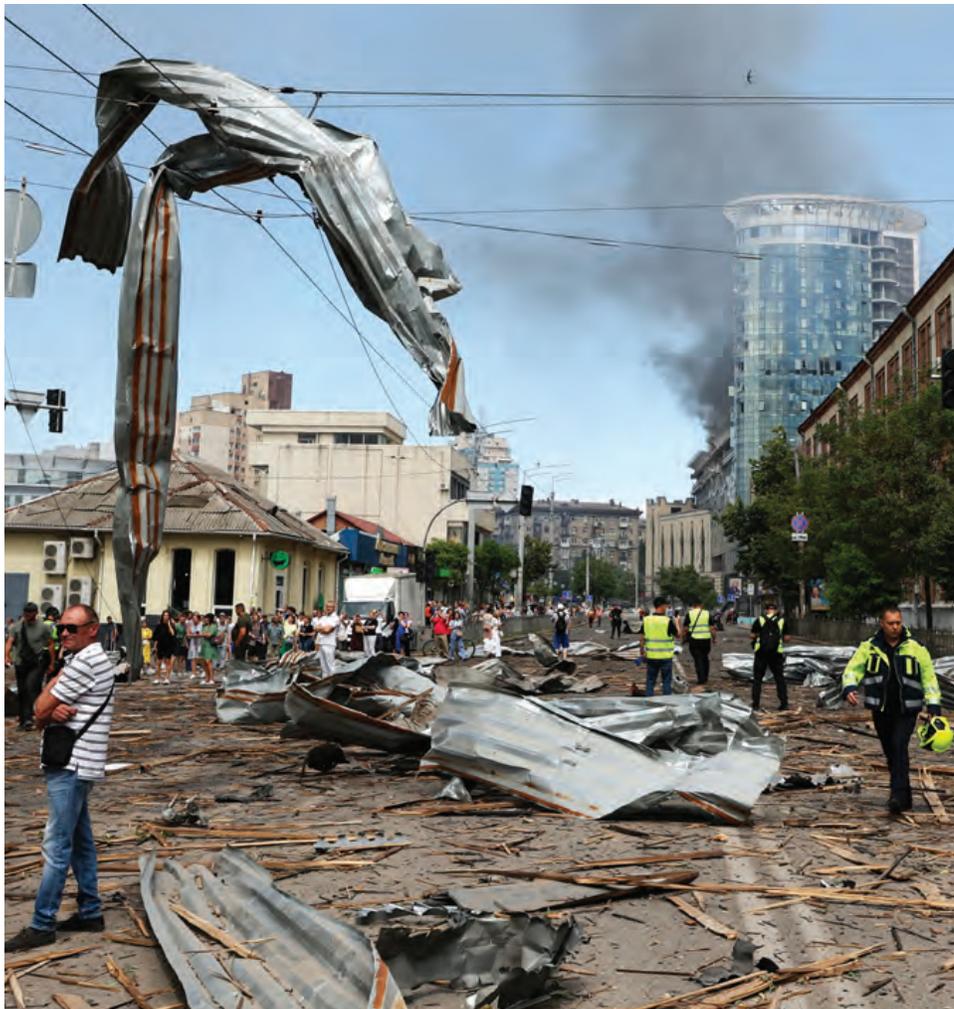
"If he sacrificed 500,000 people of his country, who says he wouldn't want to kill another million of us? If he didn't spare half a million of his people, how can this person be trusted?" he said.

Zelensky desperately wants Ukraine to be given an invitation to join the NATO alliance, the one thing that might convince Putin he can't win, but at the July Washington Summit, he had to settle for a nonbinding declaration that Ukraine is on an "irreversible path" to NATO membership.

"We are not NATO members. We don't have such an umbrella," Zelensky said in an interview with Fox News while in Washington. "And that's why we need Putin to lose. We don't want him to be on our territory because, anyway, it's a frozen conflict."

In his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention the following week, former President Donald Trump repeated his assertion that he can broker a quick end to the fighting. Trump, the 2024 Republican presidential nominee, claimed he has the persuasive power to "stop wars with just a telephone call."

The next day, after what he called a "very good phone call" with Zelensky, Trump boasted, "I, as your next president of the United States, will bring peace to the world and end the war that has cost so many lives and devastated



Debris is seen in the aftermath of a Russian missile strike on July 8, 2024, near the Lukianivska metro station in Kyiv, Ukraine.

countless innocent families.”

“Both sides will be able to come together and negotiate a deal that ends the violence and paves a path forward to prosperity,” Trump posted on his Truth Social platform.

Zelensky, well aware that he may have to deal with Trump as the next U.S. president and equally aware that Trump is likely to pressure him to make peace with Putin, is ruling out any forced surrender of Ukrainian territory.

Trump may be the one person in the world who can stop the war in 24 hours, Zelensky told the BBC, but he said, “The question is, what is the price? And who will pay?”

“If he wants to do it during 24 hours, the simple way is to push us to pay because it’s understandable how. It means

just stop, and give, and forget. Sanctions out, everything out. Putin will take the land, Putin will be [given] a victory for his society,” Zelensky said.

“We will never go [for] this. Never. And there is no guy in the world who can push us to do it,” he said.

Meanwhile, Putin’s putative peace plan is being undercut in Russian media by comments from former President Dmitry Medvedev, who, as deputy head of Russia’s Security Council, performs the role of Putin’s attack dog.

Medvedev was quoted as promising that Russia will complete its objective to destroy Ukrainian statehood within a decade and that Ukraine as a sovereign nation will cease to exist by 2034.

“This Russian narrative also directly and strongly undermines select Krem-

lin officials’ separate attempts to suggest that Russia is willing to ‘negotiate’ for ‘peace’ with Ukraine and further emphasizes that the Kremlin’s only desired end-state for the war is the complete destruction of the Ukrainian state and people,” the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said in a recent assessment.

“The outcome on the ground in Ukraine is terribly, terribly important to future European and global security,” says Cavoli, who, as NATO’s top commander, is intimately involved in the alliance effort to keep Ukraine in the fight.

“The Ukrainians right now, for this past few months, have been focused on defending what they have in the east, denying Russia the free use of Crimea and southern Ukraine to attack Ukraine, preserving their access to the Black Sea, and generating force,” Cavoli said at the Aspen forum. “I think they’ve got a great strategy. It’s just a matter of prosecuting it.”

“We can’t be under any illusions,” he warned. “At the end of the conflict in Ukraine, however it concludes, we are going to have a very big Russia problem. We are going to have a situation where Russia’s reconstituting its force, is located on the borders of NATO, is led by largely the same people as it is right now, is convinced that we’re the adversary, and is very, very angry.”

There was more than one four-star general at the Aspen forum, including Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

“If, collectively, we stopped supporting Ukraine, Putin wins. OK. And what that allows is it also emboldens others,” Brown said. “We have credibility that’s at stake, not just the United States, but NATO, the West. If we just back away, that opens the door for Xi Jinping and others who want to do unprovoked aggression.”

“So, I think it’s important that we continue to provide support to Ukraine,” he said. “Our leadership matters. It gets watched.” ★

Jamie McIntyre is the Washington Examiner’s senior writer on national security.

Vice President and Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris on July 25, 2024, in Houston, TX.



CAMPAIGN

Who will win the Democratic Party veepstakes?

Candidates fall into four broad categories: Safe choices, swing-state anchors, balancers, and wild cards

By Jeremy Lott

President Joe Biden's shock July 21 announcement on X that he would not stand for reelection, months after securing enough delegates to be his party's standard-bearer, left some questions about what this would mean for Vice President Kamala Harris.

The note thanked Harris near the end for "being an extraordinary partner" in pushing White House priorities but was otherwise silent on what this would mean for the Democratic Party's presidential nod. The people in charge of Biden's social media account quickly moved to end all speculation, posting

about half an hour later, "My very first decision as the party nominee in 2020 was to pick Kamala Harris as my Vice President. And it's been the best decision I've made. Today I want to offer my full support and endorsement for Kamala to be the nominee of our party this year."

TONY GUTTIERRI/AP

The last time an even remotely similar thing happened was in 1968 when President Lyndon B. Johnson dropped out of the running on the evening of March 31 in a televised address. Johnson administration Vice President Hubert Humphrey then secured the nomination and lost to another former vice president, Richard Nixon, in November.

This year, Biden was the only candidate who had something approaching a legal right to the party's nomination. He held a commanding supermajority of the delegates who were pledged to vote for him in the first round. However, that right was not transferrable. He cannot do anything but urge them to vote for his preferred candidate. The convention that will be held in late August will technically be an open convention, though whip counts from state delegations have Harris as the clear favorite.

If those counts prove accurate, that will leave the bottom of the presidential ticket wide open. Democratic delegates and Harris's team are looking at several different would-be candidates for vice president. These candidates fall into four broad categories: safe choices, swing-state anchors, balancers, and wild cards.

SAFE CHOICES



Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg

These candidates might be likened to Goldilocks's choice of porridge, furniture, and bedding. They are known quantities that Harris, and Democratic delegates, might regard as "just right." Names on this list include Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, who has a national following, and Gov. Tim Walz (D-MN), who has put together a string of progressive victories and done a great deal to keep Minnesota from going Republican.

SWING-STATE ANCHORS

There are certain states that Democrats simply need to win to have a chance at



Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D-MI)

beating former President Donald Trump in November because of how the Electoral College math breaks down. These include Michigan, Pennsylvania, and probably Arizona. Thus Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D-MI), Gov. Josh Shapiro (D-PA), and Sen. Mark Kelly (D-AZ) are getting serious consideration.



Gov. Andy Beshear (D-KY)

Thus Gov. Josh Shapiro (D-PA), and Sen. Mark Kelly (D-AZ) are getting serious consideration.

BALANCERS

Democratic politicians who can climb to the top in majority Republican states are rare. Putting one of them on the ticket would send a message to wavering voters of inclusion and ideological balance. That's why Gov. Andy Beshear (D-KY) or Gov. Roy Cooper (D-NC) could end up getting the nod.

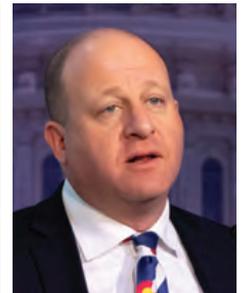
WILD CARDS

These are high-risk, high-reward nominations that have both drawbacks and possibly huge payoffs. For instance, Gov. J.B. Pritzker (D-IL) is something of a loose cannon, but he's also a billionaire who could easily cut a \$100 million check to boost the campaign.

The Constitution's 12th Amendment does not allow both the president and the vice president to come from the same state. That would seem to rule out Gov. Gavin Newsom (D-CA), yet he remains one of the most successful Democratic politicians in the country.

Gov. Wes Moore (D-MD) is quite green, having first been elected in 2023 as Maryland's first black governor. He is also relatively young, 45, with an interesting and varied background in the military, business, and philanthropy, and has a significant media profile. He has tentatively ruled out running,

though he said he'd do whatever he can to get Harris elected.



Clockwise: Gov. J.B. Pritzker (D-IL), Gov. Gavin Newsom (D-CA), Gov. Jared Polis (D-CO) Gov. Wes Moore (D-MD).

Gov. Jared Polis (D-CO) is somewhat out of step with his party, in a year when that might be a good thing. While much of his party was pushing COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 and onward, Polis's more libertarian instincts prevailed. He did what he could to keep his state as free as possible. Polis himself noted how improbable his nomination would be, saying on CNN, "Look, if they do the polling and it turns out that they need a 49-year-old, bald and gay Jew from Boulder, Colorado, they've got my number."

Harris has reportedly requested vetting materials from several of those possible running mates, but this is an open convention. The delegates may feel like they've been accommodating enough already by voting for Harris when they were only pledged to vote for Biden. In any event, they remain free to do what they please rather than what is demanded of them. ★

Jeremy Lott is the author of The Warm Bucket Brigade: The Story of the American Vice Presidency.

Business



Wind turbines and an oil pumpjack work in Sweetwater, Texas; a city that aims to be the windpower capitol of the world.

POWER SUPPLY

Renewable energy and politics: Can the two continue to mix?

The Inflation Reduction Act put in place billions of dollars in funding and tax incentives for clean energy innovation, research, and development

By Nick Thomas

Texas is the largest oil producer in the United States. Nothing surprising there, but the state is also, perhaps less well known, the largest producer of wind energy. It also comes in second as the country's largest producer of solar power, behind only California.

Perhaps that makes it a very good example of how energy supply, and the sources of such supply, is predominantly

a bipartisan matter. A solidly Republican state is such a large producer of renewable energy after all, something not necessarily associated with so-called red states.

But as a highly polarized presidential election fast approaches, is there a danger that such examples of bipartisanship, or energy source neutrality, may fall by the wayside? After all, Republican nominee Donald Trump has said he would “drill,

baby drill” from day one if the former president were to win the election and return to the White House.

In a June 2024 report on infrastructure trends, investors at KKR acknowledged that partisan politics could play some role in shaping specific policies. However, the extent of such a possible role is unknown and should also be largely balanced by the positive trend of green energy progress across the board.

ORJAN F. ELLINGVAG/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES

“Our upbeat outlook on the renewables sector is generally independent of questions about the future of green energy related to the potential impact of the upcoming U.S. elections,” KKR said in the report titled Market Review Infrastructure June 2024.

WHAT ABOUT THAT INFLATION REDUCTION ACT?

Nevertheless, questions remain, partly due to some of the political rhetoric but also over concerns over the uncertain future of the Inflation Reduction Act, signed into law in August 2022 under President Joe Biden and rejected by Republicans.

That law put in place billions of dollars in funding and tax incentives for clean energy innovation, research and development, and deployment, the KKR report noted.

While the Inflation Reduction Act is “unlikely” to be fully repealed in any future under a possible unified Republican control of government, there are certain programs within it that could be vulnerable, KKR said.

“We think that companies that have locked in funding are less risky investments than companies that are counting on funds being approved or allocated in the future,” the report said.

But even an unlikely repeal of the law would also not necessarily mean the end of clean energy, most would agree.

“**Our upbeat outlook on the renewables sector is generally independent of questions about the future of green energy related to the potential impact of the upcoming U.S. elections.**

—Investors at KKR

“Even after a potential repeal, the subsidies provided by the IRA will have set into motion a momentum for U.S. renewable energy which will not be easily halted,” said Mathilde Mounier, co-founder and COO at Powerweave, a digital software platform that helps improve energy efficiency.

Economic and political realities will also help prevent a move away from green energy, even in states where it may not be perceived as all that popular an issue.

“Subsidies for energy, clean or not clean, will likely continue as long as they show a benefit to some segment of American voters and to the American businesses that are bankrolling the campaigns of our elected officials,” said Mothusi Pahl, vice president of business development and government affairs at Modern Hydrogen, a Seattle-based clean energy solutions company.

INSATIABLE ELECTRICITY DEMAND

Meanwhile, the rise of artificial intelligence and its staggering data capabilities, as well as the move toward cleaner vehicles, will keep on pushing up requirements for electricity, whatever its source.

Electric vehicles alone are likely to add an estimated 700 terawatt-hours to the U.S. grid by 2050, said Hunter Bjork, founder and CEO at ISA Industries, an Arizona-based clean energy solutions company.

“With that in mind, developing clean and sustainable energy resources is imperative, and we believe efforts toward this objective will continue to be subsidized,” he said. “Green energy can initially augment traditional forms, minimizing grid strain.”

Such traditional forms will remain a big issue, some argue.

“This rapid increase in demand cannot be met by solar and wind alone,” according to Adam Ferrari, CEO of Phoenix Capital Group, a Denver-based oil and gas investment group. “It will necessitate substantial increases in either natural gas-fired power plants or nuclear generation.”

And while there have been some moves

to promote increasing amounts of nuclear power generation, such as from Bill Gates, as well as subsidies in the Inflation Reduction Act, the regulatory process can be very burdensome, with projects taking years to approve. Other energy sources are, therefore, more likely to prevail.

Power generation is also a global matter and, therefore, one perhaps way outside of any perceived political control U.S. elected representatives may think they have. Such global forces will drive investments in the sector.

“It is clear that rising geopolitical uncertainty and increasingly severe weather events are driving investment into next-generation energy around the world, regardless of which way political winds blow here at home,” said Michael Jung, director of government affairs and public policy at Modern Hydrogen.

So, while some politicians may like to diss green energy, using it as fodder to rile up easy base support, global economic forces are likely to be a way stronger factor in the long run.

“Green energy is undoubtedly here to stay,” said Rue Phillips, president and co-founder of SkillFusion, a digital customer service platform for the training of electric vehicle professionals. “While political shifts can influence the level of support and funding for renewable energy, the momentum behind green energy is driven by market forces, technological innovation, and a global commitment to reducing carbon emissions.”

All that said, more traditional forms of energy still significantly outpace renewables, with any change to a completely clean economy some way off, Pahl at Modern Hydrogen said.

But the changes are there, and it will be forces far greater than one U.S. election cycle that will prevail.

“The future of clean energy is bright and increasingly bipartisan,” Bjork at ISA said. “While the economics of subsidies may shift with the results of the next election, the core need for sustainable energy transcends political lines.” ★

Nick Thomas is a writer based in Denver, Colorado.

TIANA'S TAKE

JD Vance may hold heterodox economic opinions, but he's perfectly happy being subservient to Trump



Republican vice presidential nominee Sen. J.D. Vance (R-OH) has been heralded as a sort of intellectual progenitor of “Trumpism” as a political philosophy. The Ohio senator’s career has evolved from his best-selling memoir and excursions in venture capital to becoming former President Donald Trump’s running mate on the 2024 GOP ticket.

But for all of their similarities in worldview, Vance has expressed some stark disagreements with the economic positions of his billionaire boss. The former president’s closest allies know that Vance’s blue-collar upbringing and intensely personal populist persuasion at times come in conflict with Trump’s unparalleled economic priority of American prosperity. But Trumpworld, the GOP, and Trump himself have made clear that where he and the millennial wunderkind disagree, the top of the ticket wins.

The economic agendas of Trump and Vance still broadly overlap, with fiscal policies fueled by protectionist instincts: a justified distrust of open trade with China and disdain for institutional elites like universities and oligopolistic big business that have used government favors to enhance their market power at the expense of consumers. Like nearly all Republicans, Trump and Vance abhor President Joe Biden’s green energy handouts and regulation of domestic fossil fuel and mineral extraction and production. The two have championed universal tariffs as a means of bringing manufacturing jobs back home and specific tariff negotiations as tools of diplomacy. Trump and Vance have flirted with befriending nominally private sector unions as well as cryptocurrencies, and both broadly support the standard Republican preference for deregulation and limited taxation of the middle class while rejecting the historic GOP orthodoxy on reforming



Vice presidential candidate J.D. Vance and former President Donald Trump

entitlements within a decade of reaching insolvency.

Yet at certain junctures, Vance’s populism and Trump’s pro-growth priorities crucially diverge.

For example, whereas Trump lowered the top marginal corporate tax rate from 35% to the European average of 21% with the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, Vance has signaled past opposition to further lowering the corporate tax rate. And in some cases, Vance has vastly extended beyond Trump’s past policies. Whereas the TCJA imposed a 1.4% on gains incurred by select and expansive university endowments, Vance has proposed imposing 35% tax rates on private secular university endowments.

But no divergence is more foundational to the philosophies of Trump and his running mate than the role and the value of the U.S. dollar.

For years now, Vance has been skeptical of the greenback’s status as the world’s reserve currency. While questioning Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, Vance gave us a glimpse at this heterodoxy.

“There’s a lot of coal in central Appalachia that enables a certain amount of consumption. Obviously consumption is good; people need food and medicine and other things,” Vance said. “There’s also a pretty good argument that for a host of reasons, it causes malinvestment in the region and consequently, you have

lower productivity growth, lower innovation, and an economy that is much less diversified and much less dynamic. I am wondering when I hear about the history, what I think about and read about the history of Appalachia and the resource curse, I am struck by the idea that you can make a similar argument about the reserve currency status of the United States dollar.”

Vance has grown more vocal over the past year, recently admitting his willingness to devalue the dollar.

“Devaluing’ of course is a scary word, but what it really means is American exports become cheaper, and that’s important,” Vance told *Politico*. “If you want to employ a lot of people in manufacturing, you need to make it easier for us to export and not just import what we need.”

In this schism, just as with Trump’s decision to double down on plans to further slash the corporate tax rate to 15%, all signs point toward Trump’s preference winning out over Vance’s. The brevity of the new RNC platform, as well as Trump’s reported veto power over the document, means that every point made is intentional and a salient priority of Trump’s. The platform enumerates just 20 promises, one of which explains that Trump will “KEEP THE U.S. DOLLAR AS THE WORLD’S RESERVE CURRENCY.”

While Trump has blasted other countries for committing currency manipulation and echoed Vance’s opposition to our vast trade deficit, a trade deficit, itself a value-neutral proposition, is a small price to pay for the global privilege of the greenback’s reserve status. The high value of the dollar has been crucial in slowing inflation from its worst crisis in 40 years, and the power of the dollar is the only remaining resource allowing our government to borrow some \$2 trillion in deficit spending for (relatively) cheap. ★

Tiana Lowe Doescher is an economics columnist for the *Washington Examiner*.

Life & Arts

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“The world of automobiles is shifting away from the everyman.”

John Scott Lewinski, P. 56



BOOKS

Auden Your Auden

By Gustav Jönsson

In 1933, the English poet W.H. Auden told his friend Stephen Spender, “I entirely agree with you about my tendency to National Socialism, and its dangers.” It’s a surprising confession. He’d later travel to Spain to serve in the Republican medical corps, praising the soon-to-be vanquished loyalists in the Marxist poem “Spain 1937.” He befriended the socialist playwright Ernst Toller, whose elegy he penned when Toller, in penurious exile from Nazi Germany, killed himself. He married Erika Mann to help save her from the Nazis. And his poetry registered the rise of Europe’s fascist regimes. “September 1, 1939” exhorted future historians to “Find what occurred at Linz / What huge imago made / A psychopathic god.” In “Danse Macabre” (1937) he saw “the Devil has broken parole and arisen, / He has dynamited his way out of prison.”

Perhaps only someone susceptible to fascism could see its full menace. Still, Auden’s confession should prompt serious thought. So says Nicholas Jenkins in *The Island: War and Belonging in Auden’s England*. He shifts how we read early Auden: the period that stretches up to the publication of *On this Island* in 1936. He believes that Auden sought to become the poetic voice of the English nation. While some of Auden’s early poems are engagé leftist, more often there’s a subterranean patriotic current. The early poems, Jenkins writes, “were underwritten by an anti-metropolitan cele-

bration of an ideal of organic, egalitarian, communal rootedness [...] nationalist by implication and feeling,” perhaps even with “some vaguely cult-like elements.”

That’s why Auden recognized a fascist streak within himself and why he told Spender that “emotional symbols are of necessity national emblems.” A year before the Spender letter, he wrote *The Orators*, with the following verse:

*On English earth
Restores, restores will, has restored
To England’s story
The direct calm, the actual glory.*

That collection is suffused by vaguely fascist hero-worship. It celebrates the regenerative potential of force. Following its publication, Auden said that it had “meant to be a critique of the fascist outlook” but that it could instead “be interpreted as a favourable exposition.” He said that his “name on the title-page seems a pseudonym for someone else, someone talented but near the border of sanity, who might well, in a year or two, become a Nazi.” That he had that realization, of course, meant that he knew how to check his political impulses. But it’s impoverishing, Jenkins says, to read him without noticing that his English nationalism, like fascism itself, had been shaped by the violence of World War I.

With hundreds of thousands killed serving their country, the English set out to find what England really meant. The word “Englishness,” Jenkins notes, had in fact hardly been used before the war, but it became ubiquitous in the years that followed. Rural travelogues became bestsellers: H.V. Morton’s *In Search of England*, published in 1927, had gone through 21 impressions by 1934. It’s in this period, Jenkins observes, that the “Heritage Britain” iconography of the English countryside emerged, with its “gently swelling southern fields, neatly sectioned by hedgerows and meandering lanes gleaming in afternoon sunlight.” Dr. Samuel Johnson once remarked that someone tired of London is tired of life.

But Auden much preferred the idyllic Malvern Hills or the Lake District to bustling London. In “A Happy New Year,” he praised what Jenkins terms his “provincial, unglamorous setting.”

*Permit our town here to continue small,
What city’s vast emotional cartel
Could our few acres satisfy
Or rival in intensity
The field of five or six, the English cell?*

But for Auden, this rural England wasn’t reassuringly nostalgic. Even in his schoolboy poems, the English landscape is freighted with images of war. Jenkins suggests, I think plausibly, that those “who must walk the lanes of darkness blind to stars” in Auden’s teenage poem “Frost” refers to the “aimless legion of disabled or shell-shocked unemployed war-veterans [...] hobbling around the country in the 1920s as tramps.” And in one of the early rural poems, Auden hears the “surge of wind through writhing trees / The huddled clouds of lead, / The waste of cold dark-featured seas / And the men that are dead.” The reference isn’t to preceding generations but to the men killed in Flanders or France.

It’s roughly at this point the critic should bring up some shortcoming of the book under review, if only to prove that he’s not a complete hack. But I’ve enjoyed it so much that I’d rather not. Still, I guess it isn’t for the casual reader. It’s more than 500 pages of recondite literary criticism. And sometimes it’s written as if it weren’t meant to be read widely. Take, for example, the following sentence: “In place of a hypotactic subordination and hierarchization of language, enforced by a complex syntax, Auden’s poem works by accretion.” Perfectly intelligible, but not what blurb-writers tend to call “captivating.”

And perhaps there’s a shade too much Freudianism. But only a shade. It’s via Freud that Jenkins excavates the buried meaning of Auden’s poetic imagery. He shows how mines, so ubiquitous in the early poetry, recall the trenches on the Western Front. He traces the parallel of mining with warfare through Wilfred Owen and Ernst Junger to Christopher Isherwood, who compared Cornwall’s tin mines with “shell-craters, surrounded with barbed-wire.” Auden himself, Jenkins suggests, subconsciously used mines to symbolize trenches, as in “The



The Island: War and Belonging in Auden's England
By Nicholas Jenkins
Harvard University Press
656 pp., \$53.00

BOOKS

No Lights, No Camera, but Plenty of Action in Hollywood Native Peter Theroux's Spycraft Tell-All

By Sean Durns

In his new book, *In Obscura: Adventures in the World of Intelligence*, Peter Theroux offers a look into his unconventional life, from Los Angeles to Langley. Theroux comes from a famous literary family. His older brothers, Alexander and Paul, are noted novelists. His nephews and cousins include journalists, filmmakers, and the actor Justin Theroux. Peter himself garnered acclaim as a journalist and linguist. His translations of Arabic literature are widely considered among the best.

Theroux spent years working as a journalist, filing dispatches for *National Geographic* and the *Wall Street Journal*, among others. His job took him across the world, but largely focused on the Middle East, writing stories on Syria, Egypt, and elsewhere in the region. He authored two books: *Sandstorms*, on his travels in the Middle East, and, much closer to home, 1995's *Translating Los Angeles*.

But in his mid-30s, feeling unfulfilled, Theroux began to look elsewhere for work. A visit to Syria, where even domestic opponents of the Assad regime celebrated anti-Jewish violence, proved to be one of the final straws. Syria, he noted, "felt like strike one against the idiot boss: self-employed me." In between hanging out with Gore Vidal and the stuntmen of James Cameron's 1997 hit film, *Titanic*, Theroux began the process of launching a career in the intelligence community. "I sensed a kinship with the stunt actors, who worked in the shadows, whose names would never show in bright lights, but who made the mission work," he writes. Indeed, "as a translator, I already had a taste of that."

Theroux had previously done contract work translating for the Joint Publication Research Service, a division of the now-



W.H. Auden pulls a wooden wagon.

Miner's Wife," where a woman is informed of her husband's fate by a man, much like "one of those messengers who at front doors handed over the fatal telegram from the War Office."

Auden later claimed that *The Orators* had been a stage in his "conversion to Communism." But Jenkins will have none of it: Auden's poetry "is never militant about class conflict [...] it is much more concerned with emotional healing." He was no real communist. With more truth, he once called himself a pinkish Little Englander — intensely patriotic but opposed to empire. But as the 1930s progressed, he found the role of national poet increasingly limiting, increasingly false. The rest of the world intruded into his insular, hobbit-like island. Provincial England, in other words, was part of the imperial metropole — which he had hardly noted before. The empire, Jenkins observes, is "curiously occluded" in early Auden, though there's hints of it in poems like "Out on the lawn" (1933), where "we" prefer not to inquire "what doubtful act allows / Our freedom in this English house, / Our picnics in the sun." As Jenkins puts it, "The word 'picnics' art-

fully suggests the consumption of sugar, fruits, and spices that probably did not originate in the fields around Colwall."

By the latter half of the 1930s, the British Empire emerged in full view. Isherwood and Auden travelled to China in 1938. In the sonnet "Hongkong," Auden sees "The bugle on the Late Victorian hill / Puts out the soldier's light" while "off-stage, a war / Thuds like the slamming of a distant door." A little later, in Shanghai, they had what Jenkins calls "an awkward moment" when a group of Japanese men extemporize on their empire's benevolent intentions toward China. As they insisted that the emperor invaded China in order to "save her from herself, to protect her from the Soviets," Auden looked out the window and saw the warship HMS Birmingham steaming upriver. He had observed, living in Berlin, the germinal moments of Nazism. And now he saw the prelude to World War II. No man, Donne said, is an island — Auden had come to see that the "English Island" was no island onto itself either.

Gustav Jönsson is a Swedish freelance writer based in the United Kingdom.

defunct Foreign Broadcast Information Service, which served as an open-source intelligence collector for the CIA. But Theroux wanted something more, initially choosing to apply to the National Security Agency and then the CIA itself. “In *Obscura*,” he explains, is an old CIA operational term referring to the status of clandestine work. An intelligence officer engaging in espionage who has successfully evaded enemy surveillance so that they can commit an operational act is said to be “IO.”

A few years after Theroux joined the Agency, al-Qaida perpetrated the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The United States was at war, and Theroux’s linguistic gifts and years spent traveling the Middle East made him uniquely qualified to help. Theroux would display a knack for always being “at the most interesting place at the most important time,” as his friend Lee Smith, the writer, observed. *In Obscura* is replete with anecdotes and impressions as the onetime Hollywood-based writer navigates the various national security bureaucracies. Theroux is careful to note the very different cultures that make up these agencies, from the more informal CIA to the rigid and process-obsessed State Department. The book pulls back the curtain on how the policy sausage, so to speak, is made and implemented.

Yet Theroux is gracious. Many spy memoirs, he notes, are authored by “heavily disgruntled, partisan, axe-grinding” types. Thankfully, this memoir is different. Theroux is proud of his service to his country and proud of the men and women that he served with. Some of them were the “most erudite, congenial, and witty people that I had ever met.” As he notes in the book’s introduction, he is not seeking to settle scores. Rather, his model for his memoir is Lynda Obst, whose 1996 book *Hello, He Lied*, offered an insider look at what producers, directors, agents, writers, actors, and editors do on a day-to-day basis to make movies. Theroux hopes to do something similar for the intelligence world.

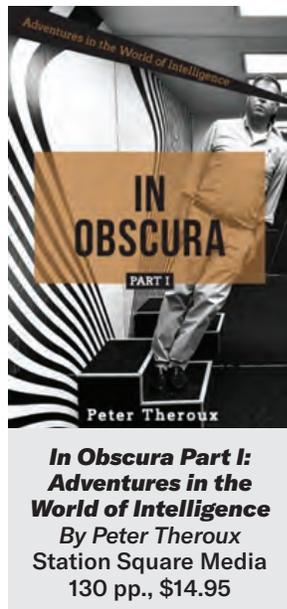
This does not mean, however, that Theroux is naïve. Indeed, his book is filled with biting commentaries on how

the D.C. foreign policy establishment functions — or, just as often, doesn’t. One comes away with a good understanding of how institutional cultures can shape national security. The State Department, for example, is depicted as often too keen to please host countries instead of prioritizing the wishes of America’s elected leaders. Theroux also notes the “disconnect from the policy world of the executive branch” and those tasked with implementing their wishes.

Unsurprisingly, there are aspects of Theroux’s work that he can’t write about. He is still bound by secrecy agreements, some of which will have expired by the time he writes his projected second volume. “‘Tell as little as possible’ isn’t the sexiest way to start a book,” he admits. Nonetheless, *In Obscura* doesn’t suffer for it. Theroux still offers insights into what it was like to debrief and target Islamist terrorists in Iraq. One also garners interesting tidbits. For example, the Palestinian terrorist Yasser Arafat was known to hog the air conditioning. Arafat, he notes, was a “physical coward” who had “won most of his battles at a microphone.” And a former U.S. national security adviser, later busted for trying to steal confidential documents from an archive, is described as a “creep.”

Yet, the revelations in his book extend beyond Theroux’s work as a spy. The author’s time as a journalist, including his stories on how Middle Eastern governments from Cairo to Damascus try to manipulate news coverage, is both informative and relevant. Ditto for his frank admissions on how Western journalists often self-censor to preserve access to repressive regimes. “Beware of obsequious human beings,” Obst wrote in her Hollywood memoir. “The most dangerous wolves are in sheep’s clothing.” As Theroux observes, this piece of advice applies to the sometimes-murky world of national security, too.

Sean Durns is a Senior Research Analyst for CAMERA, the 65,000-member, Boston-based Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis



BOOKS

Too Cheap to Fail

By Joe Joyce

One of our wisest philosophers (Homer Simpson) described television as “teacher, mother, secret lover.” Reality television belongs to that final classification, a mistress we can’t quite quit yet also will never introduce to our parents. It is ubiquitous as dirt and as dirty as, well, dirt. Critics have mostly treated it like dirt, too.

If *New Yorker* staff writer Emily Nussbaum doesn’t come to praise reality TV, she doesn’t come to bury it either. Her new tome *Cue the Sun!: The Invention of Reality TV* is a comprehensive yet fair recounting of the genre, starting back before television itself and finishing with the apocalypse — which, like most *New Yorkers*, she believes was marked by *The Apprentice* host Donald Trump’s election.

Cue the Sun takes a mostly chronological look at the history of reality TV, which means the reader sometimes gets a sandwich of the genre’s highs and lows. Thus you find the story of a true television innovation like PBS’s *An American Family* between the likes of *The Newlywed Game* and *Cops*. Much like reality TV itself, this alternating draws in our inquisitive side while appeasing the voyeuristic little gremlin in all of us. I brought the book to read on a beach in San Diego, but forgot both sunglasses and a pen. I improvised by dog-eared the page every time I read something interesting, so as to return later and properly underline. In what amounts to the highest praise, I squinted down a few hours later to find I had made an accordion.

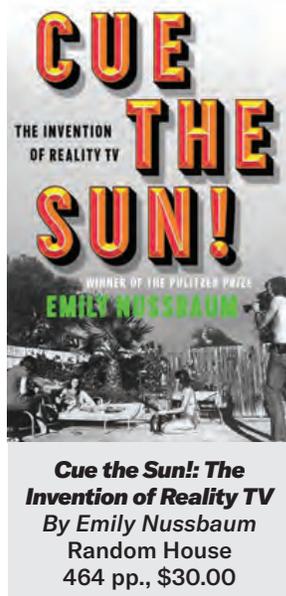
One of Nussbaum’s funniest running gags is how reality television is but one entirely original idea stolen ad nauseam. Every reality television producer interviewed alludes if not outright claims to have invented the genre as we know it, and the fans of their shows tend to agree. Much like sex, reality TV is continually invented around the time you start paying attention. Nearly every reality television concept, even something as contemporary as *The Bachelor*, had already been tested on early radio. It follows that every criticism was tested as well, and there’s real delight in read-

ing snippets of critics decrying such voyeurism and predicting its imminent collapse, ironically dispatched from long-shuttered papers like the *Poughkeepsie World Tribune*.

Those critics and their successors kept mistaking quality for survivability. Reality television may very well have coarsened the soul of a nation, but it has also always been too cheap to fail. There's a reason the airwaves get saturated with reality TV every writer's strike; what is more affordable than dialogue written by America's only renewable resource, mouthy blondes? In one illuminating chestnut, Nussbaum describes the process by which the now-multibillion-dollar franchise *Survivor* was first greenlit: CBS CEO Les Moonves was initially skeptical, but upon hearing just how little money was needed to give it a go, he let it start despite not believing in it. Thus the juggernaut began with a shrug.

In a history of a notoriously sleazy genre, there will of course be tales of wrongdoing. For all the stories of serial killer contestants and grub dinners in *Cue the Sun*, what's most shocking is how your sympathies reverse the deeper into Nussbaum's history (that is, the closer to the present) you get. After all, it's hard to build pretense when you're hawking the likes of *The Gong Show* or *When Good Pets Go Bad!* In one passage, we learn that Fox's Mike Darnell ushered the infamous *Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction?* through production, then repudiated it three years later with *World's Greatest Hoaxes*, both produced by the same team. Each did gangbusters in the ratings, which for Darnell is where the ethical debate ended.

On the other hand, if I can forgive self-denial, most repugnant is repentance. Former *Bachelor* producer Sarah Gertrude Shapiro confesses a litany of sins with exhibitionist abandon, then describes how she atoned for her role by creating the scripted drama *Unreal* about the behind-the-scenes horrors. This is like collecting interest on an indulgence you sold to yourself. *The Real World* cre-



ator Jonathan Murray waxes on about is how innovative his show was, then admits in the next sentence that “the bedroom cameras were not the best idea.” A pig with a bib is still in the sty.

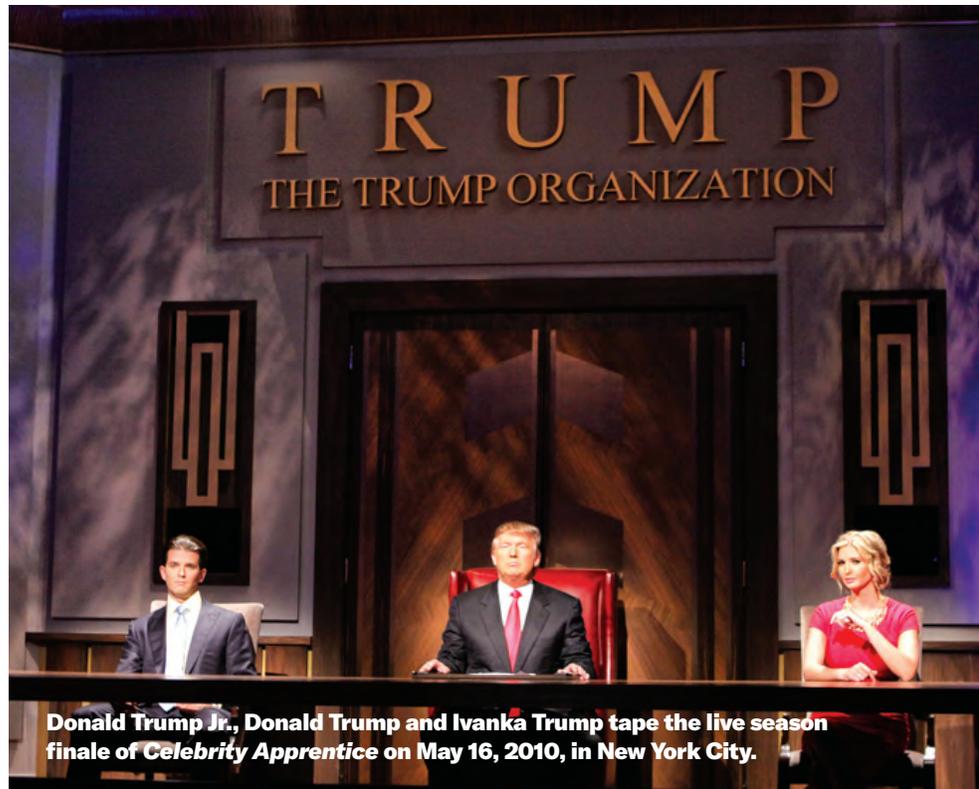
It's old news to rage against the unreality of reality TV. *Cue the Sun* is skilled at bringing specificity to that sin, showing artificiality even in “elevated” reality shows that would astound even the Realest of Housewives. Nussbaum digs into a nasty little trick called “frankenbites,” where editors take fragments of dialogue and create new sentences whole cloth. On *The Bachelorette*, contestants were edited into love triangles with other contestants they barely interacted with.

Nussbaum is expansive but not comprehensive. She glides over the Kardashians, perhaps recognizing their empire doesn't help her argument that reality TV can be marginally conducive to human flourishing. Former host of *Fear Factor* Joe Rogan also escapes her at-

tention, but perhaps the journey he took from feeding coeds Madagascar hissing cockroaches to kingmaker deserves 400 pages on its own. Her greatest omission is reality TV's influence on Generation Z. All TikToks are shot in aesthetic imitation of the reality TV confessional, third-person perspective with the user crying to the camera.

The book ends on that mouthiest of blondes, Donald Trump, and the treatment is not as harsh as one might think. For all her disgust, Nussbaum can't help but admit Trump as the perfect reality TV star, even the form's avatar. He straddles that taut line between id and self-awareness, where we feel like we're seeing too much yet not nearly enough. His spontaneity, cattiness, even his, yes, messiness were all forged in the hellfires of reality TV. He is definitely not here to make friends. Even after an assassination attempt, find him shrugging off Secret Service agents to pump his fist to the crowd and the still rolling cameras. Here is a man who understands the core ethos of reality TV producing: that life is not nearly as important as what this moment will look like on screen.

Joe Joyce is a writer. Follow him on X at @bf_crane.



Donald Trump Jr., Donald Trump and Ivanka Trump tape the live season finale of *Celebrity Apprentice* on May 16, 2010, in New York City.



LIFE IN UNIFORM

Restoring Communications in Vietnam

By Trent Reedy

I talk to many old warriors, from different branches of service and different wars. But after the many conversations I've had, I'm still in awe of selfless American bravery. One example of this is Maj. William Keller, with whom I recently chatted.

Keller graduated high school in 1968. "Back then," he told me, "if you had two legs and you could stand, you were going in the Army." Keller was the sole surviving son of a widow. He qualified for full deferment. "That didn't feel right," he said. At dinner every night, his family watched Walter Cronkite give the latest body counts. "It was pretty intense to watch."

He had a scholarship to a small college to study electronics, but soon after his 18th birthday, he broke his mother's heart by going alone to the Air Force recruiter, saying he wanted to enlist and go to Vietnam.

The recruiter laughed. Keller had the impression that not a lot of people came in to volunteer for Vietnam. He chose the Air Force because it was the best in electronics, but a lot of training would be required before he could serve in the war. His specialty would be ground control radio. He would work on everything in an airport that talked to aircraft.

After Air Force tech school, he was stationed for six months at a radar site on an island off Taiwan. There, he increased his skill level so he could go to the war. On Christmas of 1970, he wrote a long letter explaining he was supposed to go home but that he'd volunteered for Vietnam. His girlfriend had been so sure he was coming back that she'd sent no cookies or other gifts.

They had only letters, which traveled two weeks. This delay between messages created a lot of confusion and hostility. One argument by mail grew very bad.

This much I remembered from my service in Afghanistan. A high-stress situation, complicated by limited communication without vocal inflection or body language, was an invitation to chaos.

A sergeant, qualified to work alone, Keller ran the radio at Camp Radcliff at An Khe in Vietnam. The base was the home of the 7th Cavalry and a lot of Army helicopter activity. "The last flight of each day, we took bodies out on their way home." The Viet Cong attacked a lot. It was such a large base that enemy sappers sometimes infiltrated.

American troops were being pulled out as part of the "Vietnamization" of the war. This made security difficult. Everyone had to cover perimeter guard duty. "I was a radio guy, not a gunner," Keller said. He'd been given one belt of ammunition in a brief training session on the M60 machine gun.

One night, when Keller had one month to go in country and one week before the Vietnamese took over the base, the enemy attacked. "The whole runway lit up," Keller said. Two Viet Cong guys infiltrated the perimeter with rockets and shot the tower. It was a nightmare repairing the radios. It took three hours to restore communications with planes.

The Army sent a temporary tower. Keller and his friend worked four days straight to restore all communications. Then it was wonderfully quiet. He and his friend were awarded the Bronze Star for their great work restoring the radios. He left Vietnam about a month later.

"We were not received well when we came home," he told me with difficulty.

But there was one excellent part of his homecoming. Keller had bought an engagement ring in the base exchange, and upon returning home, when his girlfriend got off work, he drove her to their church parking lot, where they became engaged. He eventually commissioned and retired a major.

He and I talked for a long time, trading old war stories and comparing our respective wars, both of which were forfeited by our government. But one thing nobody can take away is William Keller's courage and devotion to America.

*Trent Reedy, author of several books including Enduring Freedom, served as a combat engineer in the Iowa National Guard from 1999 to 2005, including a tour of duty in Afghanistan. *Some names and call signs in this story may have been changed due to operational security or privacy concerns.*



FILM

The Moon Slandering

By Peter Tonguette

If ever there were an event about which Americans can be justifiably, sincerely, and perpetually proud, it was surely the Apollo 11 moon landing on July 20, 1969. You remember: Neil Armstrong, Tranquility Base, "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" — the whole bit.

Yet, in a sign of the perversity of our times, a new movie seeks to diminish, distort, and, finally, demean this monument to American resourcefulness, guts, and engineering know-how. *Fly Me to the Moon*, playing in theaters now, advances a completely made-up account of the moon landing in the guise of a peppy romantic comedy: The movie tells us that public excitement for lunar exploration was negligible, that mysterious figures from the Nixon administration contrived to create a "fake" moon landing in case some catastrophe prevented the real one, and that a girlboss saved the day.

Of course, none of this is true. And the movie, a rough approximation of the 1960s-era Rock Hudson-Doris Day comedies, never pretends that it is. Even so, the fact that the moon landing, of all things, is fodder for such a cheap, cynical fictitious treatment is a sorrowful sign of the times. Is nothing sacred?

Before it descends into "alternate history" territory, *Fly Me to the Moon* begins rather promisingly: Scarlett Johansson stars as Kelly Jones, a bright, bubbly New York ad agency mover and shaker whose success at her trade is a reminder that, once upon a time, working women made tactful use of their femininity, not just their feminism: In a nicely done little scene, Kelly, outfitted with a pillow to appear pregnant, is seen expertly sweet-talking Mustang executives into agreeing



Channing Tatum and
Scarlett Johansson in
Fly Me to the Moon.

to her ad campaign highlighting the automotive maker's seat belts — women, she tells them, will adore their husbands for being so safety conscious.

Yet trouble is brewing a world away in sunny Florida, which, in director Greg Berlanti's vision, is not a bastion of freedom but a cauldron of space-age ineptitude and apathy. We are told that NASA has reached a low ebb. The space agency's budget has been hacked away at. And the failures of other missions, including the deadly launchpad fire on Apollo 1, loom over the pending Apollo 11 mission. Among the few NASA officials holding it together is launch director Cole Davis, who, as played by Channing Tatum, has something of the manly professionalism of Leonardo DiCaprio and Brad Pitt in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. So far, so good.

Enter Moe Berkus (Woody Harrelson), a vaguely CIA/FBI/White House Plumbers-type figure who corrals Kelly into signing up with NASA as a kind of all-around marketing fixer. Her mission is to gin up public excitement for

Apollo 11, but even in these appealing early scenes, there are warning signs on the horizon of the movie's actual agenda: For example, Kelly's assistant Ruby (Anna Garcia) is loudly anti-Nixon and ardently anti-Vietnam War in a way that does not seem entirely believable for a Madison Avenue worker bee in the late 1960s; political stridency was not yet the coin of the realm — at least outside of Berkeley, California.

Even so, Johansson is agreeably take-charge when she descends on Cape Canaveral: One of the better scenes features Kelly gaining access to a restricted area simply by snatching a tour guide's badge and marching through the door. The gung-ho Johansson, sporting a fashionable bob and a wardrobe consisting of capri pants and pencil skirts, bounces nicely off of the strong, stoic Tatum, and the two are teased as a potential couple early and often. Berlanti has a sure eye for period detail, and the diners, cars, clothes, media, and technology of the era all look authentic. As a facsimile of a Rock and Doris comedy,

Fly Me to the Moon is at least as good as Peyton Reed's *Down with Love*, an apparently long-forgotten charmer from 2003 with Ewan McGregor and Renee Zellweger.

The picture of competency, Kelly succeeds in packaging sponsorships between NASA and the brands of the age, like Tang and Fruit of the Loom. Here, the movie could have settled into a perfectly bewitching conventional romantic comedy: Will Kelly and Cole find romance on Earth while Neil Armstrong walks on the moon?

Sadly, the screenplay by Rose Gilroy, from a story by Bill Kirstein and Keenan Flynn, has more profound things on its mind: questions of fakeness and authenticity and the great American art of the swindle.

Like a bad penny, Moe turns up with another proposal for Kelly: In case a disaster derails the real moon landing, could she round up a cast and crew to film a fake moon landing that could be broadcast in its stead? Jim Rash stars as Lance Vespertine, the flamboyantly

exacting commercial director tapped to play auteur on this secret production. “Kelly, these aren’t real actors,” Lance says upon surveying the federal agents who will “play” the astronauts on the fake moon set that has been constructed in Florida. Later, he complains the moon dust-sprinkled soundstage resembles nothing more than a dirty beach, and at one point, he asks where his trailer is.

This is all amusing in an *American Hustle* or *Argo* sort of way until it sinks in that the filmmakers are tinkering with actual history in order to make this speculative confection. What, exactly, is the point of saying that fake moon landing footage was filmed? That the federal government will go to any lengths to perpetuate a fraud on the American public? That’s fair enough, but in the case of the moon landing, they didn’t. It does not prove that Nixon administration-adjacent officials were evil when a movie accuses them of doing evil things they never did.

The film is equally slippery in its presentation of Kelly: The filmmakers wish to view her as both complicit in a fraud when she agrees to whip up the fake moon landing and heroic when she fesses up and teams up with Cole against Moe.

Maybe I am taking all of this too seriously. *Fly Me to the Moon* is charming enough for most of its length: The movie recreates its world skillfully, and Johansson and Tatum make for a nice pair. Harrelson is agreeably rascally, and Ray Romano, as a NASA colleague of Cole, has acquired some weary gravitas in his late middle age. Yet, in appropriating a great achievement for a would-be expose of American fakery, the movie is more depressing than funny.

Forty-one years ago, Philip Kaufman’s great adaptation of Tom Wolfe’s *The Right Stuff* presented an ambitious, audacious vision of the intrepidity of America’s test pilots and astronauts. The movie had a healthy perspective on the triumphs and failures of the space age; it humanized these men, but it certainly never tried to diminish what they had achieved. *Fly Me to the Moon* offers not the right stuff but the fake stuff. And who, really, wants to see that?

Peter Tonguette is a contributing writer to the Washington Examiner magazine.

ON CULTURE

The Bad and the Ugly of the Goodwood Festival of Speed

By John Scott Lewinski

Every summer, the quiet rolling hills of the South Downs and the Duke of Richmond’s expansive royal backyard echo with the roars of engines from the Goodwood Festival of Speed, one of the highlights of the international automotive calendar and an opportunity for different ends of the auto industry to smash into one another. Vintage cars putter past models that won’t be out until next year. Cheap cars park next to cars worth the price of a luxury house. And slow cars leaking trails of oil take to the same track as some of the fastest cars in the world.

Whether it’s the banging, unsteady rumble of V-12s from ages past or the high-pitched harpy whines of finely tuned F1 machines, peaceful gaps between the songs of internal combustion are few, far between, and unwelcome. Cacophony is the lifeblood of the annual festival, the U.K.’s biggest car show and a chance for automakers to show off achievements of the past alongside offerings of the near future. A mix of locals and car worshippers from across England’s mountains green gather to gawk at every conveyance from legendary winners of Le Mans to old bangers private craftsmen resurrected.

The one feature of the Goodwood Festival that sets itself apart from other major international car events like California’s Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance is the Hillclimb. Never was there a more accurate and succinct description of a modest spectacle. A menagerie of vehicles ranging from century-old classics from automakers long since extinct to the latest electric models looking for buyers take a single run from Goodwood’s lush green pit row up a hill past an adoring public.

That’s it — but it’s more than you get at Pebble Beach and its ilk. Those stuffer, more elitist car shows park museum pieces and vanity builds out on a beautiful golf course that should be hosting

foursomes that day instead, and unless you’re on the Pebble Beach Golf Links at sunrise when all of those cars arrive to take their places, you never see them move at all. You end up standing around in the hot sun and drinking an overpriced cocktail until some 1937 Duesenberg originally owned by the Red Skull takes home a trophy.

Goodwood is more vibrant and playful. There are certainly cars worthy of supervillains on display, but the crowds get to hear some decades-old cylinders bark and smell rubber shredded by burning out tires on an open-wheel rocket originally driven by Ayrton Senna or Niki Lauda. All of this noise and haste plays out against a Victorian portrait of English societal classes mingling. Well-heeled buyers for the most elite international makes do their pre-shopping, deciding how they’ll drop their next six figures. They pass by the sceptered isle’s everyman and his children as they eye those poster stars of little boys’ aspirational walls such as Ferrari and Koenigsegg.

Amid the mix this year, it feels like the world of automobiles is shifting away from the everyman and more into the lap of the folks who have everything. Ask Rolls-Royce. Goodwood plays out a ball bearing’s throw from that company’s immaculate factory and corporate headquarters. When asked about the festival’s ability to bring Joe Six Pack together with Country Club Reginald, Gerry Spahn (head of corporate communications for Rolls-Royce North America) kept the focus on the heavy hitters.

“Goodwood is the true home of Rolls-Royce, and we’re thrilled that it hosts this gathering of luxury lovers every summer,” Spahn said. “While we travel to places like Monaco, Pebble Beach, and Dubai regularly to celebrate with our clients, there’s nothing more intimate than sharing a few days with them on the spectacular Goodwood grounds.”

Those most British of car builders, Jaguar and Land Rover, arrived at Goodwood looking to the future. Once an all-purpose banger of an SUV that saw duty from the African bush to a Midlands farm, the Land Rover Defender is now a luxury performance creation. Its builders chose Goodwood to debut its new variant, the OCTA class — Defender’s 626 horsepower, ultimate off-road design that comes equipped with enough power



NASCAR legend Richard Petty drives a Fiat S76 at the Goodwood Festival of Speed on July 13 in the parkland surrounding Goodwood House in West Sussex.

and toughness to drive through the living rooms of those who can't afford its \$160,000 price tag.

Across the same pristine white tent, Jaguar is in the midst of a major transition, moving away from a full line of mid-range luxury consumer cars to a handful of very high-end and all-electric rides. Fans and would-be buyers will have a better opportunity to see the end result of that evolution at next year's festival. For now, Jaguar and its managing director, Rawdon Glover, made sure the automaker kissed the Goodwood ring.

"Anyone who experiences the festival will find everyone with the Goodwood staff has a passion for automotive," Glover says. "They do everything brilliantly along the way to creating an event that is quintessentially British. As an exhibitor, it gives us access to 300,000 people, and those people are right for us."

Still, is the car world Goodwood reveals right for all of "those people"? Beyond all of the star-studded hill climbs, the festival also serves as advertising. The majority of driving fans in attendance come to the Festival of Speed in the market for reliable, petrol-driven cars with approachable price tags. What they find is electrification creep with MSRPs heading north to match. The ham-and-egger, working folks end up with fewer

options they can grasp.

To understand the shifting nature of Goodwood and the overall automotive industry, consider MG. The iconic British sports car builder created the two-seat MGB (or Midget, in less sensitive times), sold in its original form from 1963 to 1968. Until the Mazda MX-5 Miata came along to claim the title of bestselling roadster, the MGB rubbed European shoulders with the 1966 Alfa Romeo Spider as the most immediately recognizable and desirable two-seaters in gearhead history. Best of all for the ancestors of today's Festival of Speed crowds, the MGB was priced to fit in reasonably-sized garages.

Celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2024, MG wanted to make a lot of fuss at this year's festival to introduce a new line of vehicles ready to reintroduce the company to the marketplace. The star of the rollout is the sexy Cyberster — the good-looking, all-electric roadster descendant of the original MGB (with an unfortunate, overly corporate name that falls from the lips with an audible thud whenever spoken). Introduced with a fireworks display highlighted in the red, white, and blue of the Union Flag, the Cyberster sat high over the assembled masses, balanced on a massive sculpture across from its sister of the 1960s. A U.K.

drum corps pounded out a patriotic beat as the nation's car lovers came together in a proud throng remembering one of their historic native brands and looking forward to its very British resurrection.

The only problem is MG is now entirely owned by the Chinese. All of its 21st-century cars will be built in China. Like the old British Mini now built by BMW in Germany, the Cyberster looks back to the era of Twiggy and Cliff Richard, while sending more than \$54,000 per car to Xi Jinping and company. It seems British cars once celebrated at Goodwood for their appeal to lovers of everything motorized (while remaining within reach of a healthy portion of buyers) went electric and headed east.

As Defender achieves ultra-performance, Jaguar goes all-electric, and Rolls-Royce does Rolls-Royce, the legions who also stand and drool rightly admire the beautiful, advanced machines these companies build for their customers. Across the way, watching from the stands, there are plenty of onlookers at the Goodwood Festival of Speed who wish there was something new for them to play with, too.

John Scott Lewinski is a freelance reporter whose work has appeared in Forbes, Barron's, and the BBC.

TV

Leave This Lady in the Lake

By Graham Hillard

The road is as familiar as it is well traveled. An ingénue enchants us all with her puckish charm. Half a decade later, she strikes it rich with a *Marvel/Star Wars* project or three. Perhaps the occasional award bait falls into her lap, but, time being what it is, every offer soon begins to look enticing. One minute she's accepting an Oscar for headlining a Darren Aronofsky masterpiece. The next she's married to Murray from *Stranger Things* in a tedious racism-of-the-week miniseries.

Such is the career arc of Natalie Portman, the early-aughts "it" girl turned edutainment antihero. In her most recent serious project, 2023's *May December*, the Israeli American played an actress sucking the metaphorical blood of a Mary Kay Letourneau type she hoped to portray on film. Portman's latest role is as a housewife-cum-journalist investigating the murder of a black woman in midcentury Baltimore. In both instances, the former starlet's character exists to critique "white female privilege," a leftist bugbear that transforms anthropological interest into "harm." Is it surprising to find a performer of Portman's fame in such parts? It shouldn't be. Had the *Black Swan* star passed, Alicia Vikander or Elizabeth Olsen would surely have come aboard.

Of course, even a vaguely sad career choice can lead to passable entertainment. Apple TV+'s *Lady in the Lake* certainly tries hard. Based on Laura Lippman's novel of the same name, the limited series belongs to a flourishing genre of gal-meets-noun productions

(*The Girl on the Train*, *The Woman in the Window*) that, while never quite good, are at least evocatively staged. One might expect, given its well-received source material, that Apple's *Lady* would rise to that middling standard. Alas, no. A baffling and chaotic affair, the show is as poorly made as any television drama we're likely to see this year. Moreover, it exposes afresh its lead actress's long-standing stiltedness on-screen. If Portman wants a future beyond Dior ads, she had better pray that casting directors forget this outing soon.

The actress plays Maddie Schwartz, a Jewish homemaker and former high school reporter wed to the dull but upstanding Milton (Brett Gelman). When, on the morning of Charm City's 1966 Christmas parade, an 11-year-old goes missing, Maddie experiences an emotional crisis that sends her fleeing her marriage. Because the young girl in question is not the titular slain "lady," a secondary plot must run alongside the first. In this storyline, an African American activist named Cleo Johnson (Moses Ingram) works for the betterment of the black community, even as she hurtles toward the events that will lead, a month later, to her death.

The practical tethering of these narratives is simple enough: Shattered by the missing child's death, Maddie begins digging into Cleo's. Their thematic connection, however, is what really counts. Both of our heroines are reckless strivers, increasingly desperate to break the shackles of sex and circumstance. In Maddie's case, this means putting aside traditional values in the name of self-actualization. (In addition to leaving her husband, Portman's character abandons a son and commences an affair.) Cleo, meanwhile, runs up against a different set of rules. To make ends meet, she must work for unrepentant gangster

Shell Gordon (*The Wire*'s Wood Harris). Yet doing so disqualifies her for a place in an activist community that must, given the era, maintain appearances.

Had *Lady in the Lake* been filmed 15 years ago, it might have been a straightforward liberation parable in the style of *The Hours* (2002), Stephen Daldry's feminist fantasia in multiple keys. Since this is 2024, a darker ideology gets its say. Peppering the show's action is an ill-designed voiceover track in which a dead Cleo scolds Maddie for caring about her murder. ("You came at the end of my story and turned it into your beginning.") Six weeks ago in these pages, I reviewed Netflix's *Eric*, which condemns white people for failing to notice a black man's death. *Lady in the Lake* takes the opposite tack without batting an eye. If one didn't know better, one might suppose that the point is to bring viewers under political discipline, not to impose a coherent "antiracist" standard.

Unlikable characters, ideological complaint: Is there anything Apple's latest doesn't offer? One possible answer is a clear sense of what is literally happening on-screen. Another is pacing decisions that make a lick of sense. Among the tricks in creator Alma Har'el's (*Bombay Beach*) tool bag are dream sequences and symbols that bleed messily into her characters' real lives. Frequently presented as montages, these moments are insufficiently distinguishable from what is actually taking place. Perhaps such self-conscious "artfulness" would work if the series weren't already overstuffed and overlong. It is though. So caught up is Har'el in minor subplots and digressions that the main thrust feels at times like an afterthought.

Given recent resurgences of the oldest hatred, we should be relieved that an Israeli showrunner can still cast an Israeli actress in a role that emphasizes her Jewishness. It would be a great shame if such productions were tacitly outlawed in Hollywood. As things stand, however, the ignominy belongs to Har'el, Portman, Apple, and everyone else involved in *Lady in the Lake*'s creation. They got to make the show they wanted, thank God. But it is terrible.

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Mikey Madison and Natalie Portman in *Lady in the Lake*.



LONG LIFE

What I Learned From Bob Newhart

By Rob Long

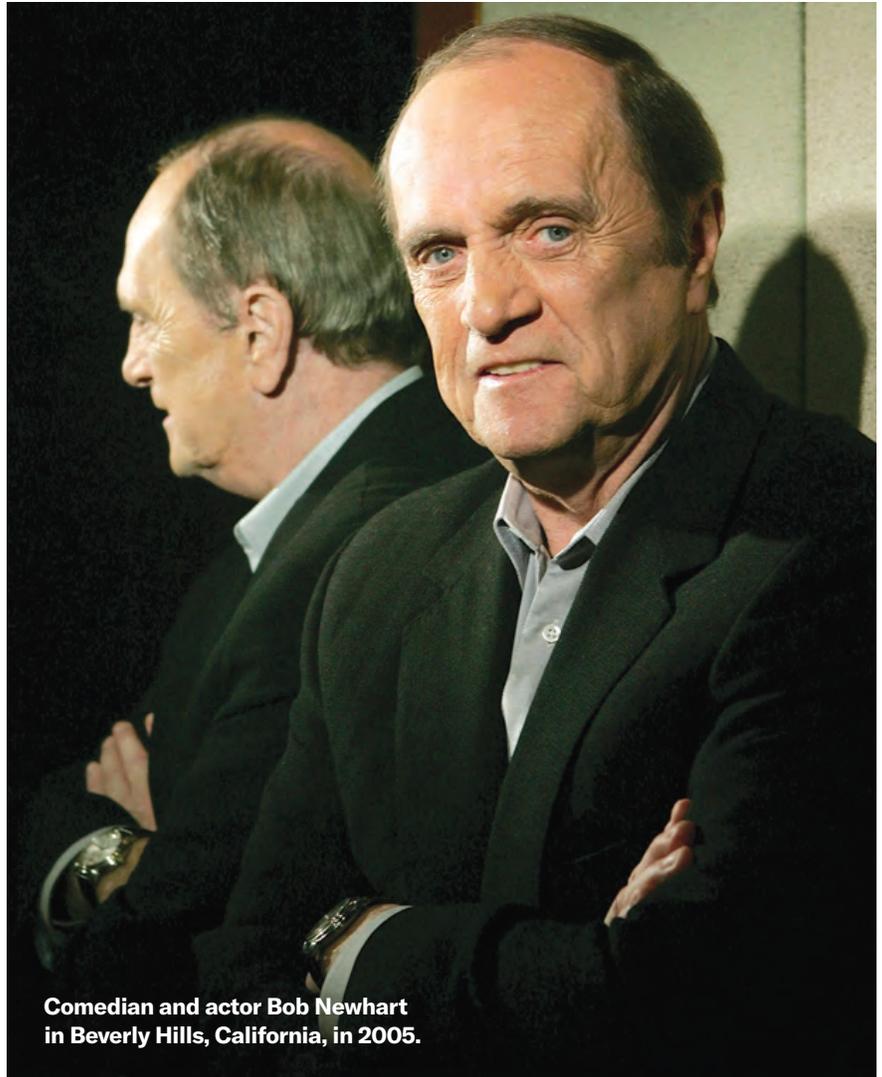
I have a shoebox filled with old photographs, relics of the time before we all had cameras on our phones and terabits of images cluttering up our storage devices. And that's what we call them now, too, "storage devices," which sounds neat and organized and no fun at all.

I went to the shoebox this month when I heard the news that Bob Newhart, the brilliant comic mind who practically invented the stand-up comedy album before becoming a television legend, had died at 94. Bob and I worked together years ago, and I knew there was a photograph or two of us on the set.

Bob Newhart was the star of four broadcast network comedy series, and they were all terrific. Two of them, *The Bob Newhart Show* and *Newhart*, were long-running smash hits. The other two didn't fare so well. I worked with Bob on one of those, unfortunately, but aside from the disappointing financial implications of writing and producing a show that's canceled after one season, it was an honor and a joy to show up to work every day and watch a genius work up close.

It didn't look much like work at all, though. Bob's trademark style, a deliberate, stammer-filled deadpan, was so effortlessly confident that you had a hard time understanding why he was so funny, even while you, and the audience, were laughing yourselves silly. Bob's on-screen persona was "decent guy, surrounded by lunatics, trying not to be embarrassed," which is a complicated set of character intentions that he could convey with a slight pause, a barely furrowed brow, and a perfectly timed Um ...

"I don't think I need all of this," Bob once told me after a rehearsal while



Comedian and actor Bob Newhart in Beverly Hills, California, in 2005.

pointing to a two-sentence speech in the script. "I think I only need to say this," he added, pointing to one word, "good," at the top of the line of dialogue. Bob was scrupulously respectful of the writers and rarely asked for an adjustment, partly because he was a gentleman and a professional, partly because his voice was so indelible that we could hear him say the lines in our heads, so tailoring the dialogue was a cinch. But when a performer who had been at the top of his game since 1960, when his first comedy album, *The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart*, hit No. 1 in the Billboard charts, asks for a small change in a line, you give it to him.

So we ran the scene again, this time with Bob's fix. He shook his head again. "Good" alone wasn't working. "Let me try it one more time," he said.

So we ran the scene again, only this time, Bob added a little back to the line.

"Well, good," he said, and for reasons having to do with the mystery of what makes us laugh, the technical requirements of humor, and especially the intuitive brilliance of Bob Newhart, "Well, good" was hilarious, while plain old "good" was merely funny and the longer speech that was in the script originally was barely amusing.

This happened nearly 25 years ago when I was barely 30 years old. I didn't know it then, but working with Bob Newhart was a master class in the music of comedy. Some people hear it, and some people don't. But Bob could hear it, compose it, and fix it all at once in the five minutes between rehearsing one scene and moving on to the next.

Rob Long is a television writer and producer, including as screenwriter and executive producer on Cheers, and he is the co-founder of Ricochet.com.

YORK

Trump-wasn't-shot theories proliferate



From the moment former President Donald Trump was shot at a rally in Pennsylvania, there have been people, usually his political opponents, who have suggested that Trump was not actually shot. Of course, there were the usual conspiracy nuts who claimed it was all made up. But there were also more mainstream figures who suggested that Trump was not hit by a bullet from the would-be assassin's gun but rather a bit of shrapnel that came from ... somewhere.

The first theory held that a bullet had actually shattered a glass teleprompter panel, and a shard of glass then hit Trump's ear. That theory suffered from the fact that the teleprompter panels were not hit by bullets and appeared to be intact after the shooting. But that did not stop the theorists from starting with the glass and going on from there.

"We still don't know for sure whether Donald Trump was hit by a bullet, whether he was hit by glass fragments, whether he was hit by shrapnel — we don't have those details," MSNBC host Joy Reid said a few days after the assassination attempt. "We actually have no details from his physician, even though this man is still a Secret Service-protected, you know, presidential candidate. We know almost nothing." Reid was also upset that, in her view of things, Trump's Secret Service agents "allowed" the former president to stand up after being hit so that he could pose for photos.

"We don't know why, for nine full seconds, Donald Trump was allowed to stand back up during an active shooting, an active shooter situation, even though they at that point had said the shooter was down. How would they have known if there were more shooters or not?" Reid said. "Yet they allowed him to stand up in the middle of that crisis and pose for a photo and fist-pump the air so he could

get the iconic photo."

Clearly, Reid has an active imagination. Finally, she questioned the wound that Trump suffered in the shooting. "What is the actual injury to Donald Trump's ear that is under that bandage?" she said. "Shouldn't we know that by now? It's weird."

If you think this sounds a little weird itself, you should know that such speculation is fairly common on the Left and becoming more so every day. No need to list a lot of examples. It's out there.

Now the speculation has received the imprimatur of the director of the FBI. Christopher Wray appeared before the House Judiciary Committee on July 24 and, on two occasions, suggested that Trump might have been hit by "shrapnel."

On one occasion, Rep. Kevin Kiley (R-CA) asked Wray, "How close did the assassin's bullet come to killing President Trump?" Wray responded, "My understanding is that either it or some shrapnel is what, you know, grazed his ear. So I don't know that I have the actual distance."

On another occasion, Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH), chairman of the committee, asked Wray if the FBI had accounted for all eight bullets thought to have been fired by the shooter and whether some victims might have been hit multiple times. "I think with respect to former President Trump, there's some question about whether or not it's a bullet or shrapnel that, you know, hit his ear, so it's conceivable," Wray answered. "Although, as I sit here right now, I don't know whether that bullet, in addition to, you know, causing the grazing, could have also landed somewhere else. But I believe we've accounted for all of the shots and the cartridges."

What to make of it? Wray did not offer any information on what, if Trump was not hit by a bullet, the shrapnel might have been or how it might have happened. Had he talked to FBI experts who have

examined the evidence? He did not say. So what could it mean?

I called Dr. Ronny Jackson, now a Republican congressman from Texas, to find out more. He is a former Obama and Trump White House physician who served more than 20 years in the U.S. Navy, including a stint with a shock trauma unit in Iraq during the worst days of the war there. Gunshots, shrapnel, explosives, whatever — in Iraq, Jackson treated the terrible wounds they can cause.

As a congressman, Jackson does not practice medicine. He has let his various licenses lapse, although he is still certified in emergency medicine. His critics have pointed out that he was accused of inappropriate actions while White House physician, which he denies.

In our conversation, Jackson stressed he is not Trump's doctor. He was not present at the July 13 shooting but joined Trump the day after. He dressed Trump's wound and applied the bandage, which he said anyone could do. But the fact is, he is an experienced doctor, and he saw Trump's wound the day after the shooting. He is certainly qualified to describe it.

Jackson told me that the bullet took off a little of the top of Trump's ear and left a wound entirely consistent with a high-velocity gunshot. Jackson also said he read the medical report from the Pennsylvania hospital where Trump was taken after the shooting. Doctors there treated Trump's wound and gave him a full examination. The hospital medical report, Jackson said, referred to Trump's wound as a gunshot wound. He said the appearance of the wound, presence of swelling and other symptoms were entirely consistent with a gunshot wound.

"The reality is, it was a bullet," Jackson said. "It looks like the path of a bullet coming right over the top of his ear." Jackson cited his time in Iraq and said, "I know what a gunshot wound looks like."

Jackson was unhappy with Wray's speculation. "He shouldn't be making statements like that," Jackson said. "From him, it's an irresponsible statement unless he has some obvious forensic evidence."

But Wray said what he said, and now the speculation from the Joy Reids of the world will only grow. What can be done? The best thing would be for Trump to authorize the doctors who treated him in Pennsylvania to discuss the wound and treatment involved. And there will certainly be more evidence in

GREEN

This wasn't a coup



In the space of a week, people tried to take out both candidates for the presidency of the United States. On Saturday, July 13, Thomas Matthew Crooks tried and failed to assassinate former President Donald Trump with a bullet at a rally in Pennsylvania. On Sunday, July 21, a statement on President Joe Biden's X account announced that he would not seek renomination but would complete his term as president. Shortly afterward, a second statement endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris as the Democratic nominee.

The president was not seen in public from Wednesday, July 17, to Tuesday, July 23. His team said he had a mild case of COVID. On Wednesday, July 24, he delivered a 10-minute address from the Oval Office. Biden confirmed that he would not run again but did not tell the public why he was quitting, or how he had reached his decision, or what had changed since July 12, when he had told a rally in Detroit, "I am running and we're going to win."

Sen. J.D. Vance (R-OH), the Republican nominee for vice president, calls this a "coup." You can see what he means, but it isn't. The primary meaning of "coup," the OED says, is a "sudden, violent, and unlawful seizure of power from a government." This is not what is happening. The leaders of a political party's major factions, Nancy Pelosi's Californians, Barack Obama's Chicago-on-the-Potomac, decided to run a different candidate in November. The government remains in place. No laws

have been broken. If this is a coup, then every pope is elected in a coup.

Habemus candidatum. The media equivalent of a puff of white smoke from the Vatican chimney indicates that the factions of the Democrats' secret conclave have reached consensus. We are so accustomed to the corporatist fusion of political parties with government that we mistake one for the other. Government is bound by law. Political parties are free to make the rules up as they go. In 2016, making the Republican nomination process more democratic allowed party members to pick Trump over the heads of the party's leaders. In 2024, making the Democratic nomination process less democratic allows the party's leaders to pick a new nominee over the heads of the party members. Who knew that the "smoke-filled room" is still open for business?

This is an insult to the Democrats who endorsed Biden in an uncontested primary, but they should be used to being taken for fools by now. It meets the secondary definition of "coup": "an instance of successfully achieving something difficult" — providing, that is, the new consensus around Harris was what the plotters wanted. It's rumored that Biden, or whoever operates the presidential X account, endorsed Harris to spite his assassins. Or perhaps the assassins had no choice. The 2020 voters elected Biden in the knowledge that, should the presidential brain turn to porridge, Harris would take over. Anyway, the donors seem fine with her as the nominee. All perfectly legal, all perfectly

revolting.

We complain that nothing works in America, that the government is ossified and the infrastructure collapsing, but the media-industrial complex is running in perfect order. For four years, most of the media lied to us about Biden's physical and mental health — right up to the moment when they broke the news that he was a vegetable. The pivot from telling us "Harris is a hopeless candidate" to "Harris will save America" was breathtaking. It's all lies. Anyone who believes it, let alone votes for it, gets what they deserve.

Perhaps the government is working better than we think. A president, barely there on a good day, goes AWOL for the best part of a week. The system runs on regardless. Like the media's surreal pivot, this is a kind of transparency. All you have to do is look, if you can stomach it. The presidency was created with the powers of an elected monarch. It has become a symbol. Charles III takes a long weekend all the time.

Swap one symbol, and it gets easier to keep swapping them. Rome had four emperors in A.D. 69. Britain had three prime ministers in 2022. I suspect that we have seen only the first step of Biden's managed withdrawal. If Harris is the nominee now, it's logical that she should go to the DNC in Chicago as the president. If she isn't by then, she might not be the nominee by November. Again, all perfectly legal and all perfectly revolting.

In "Federalist No. 10," James Madison defined a faction as a small group "united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community." That was in 1787. Today, both parties claim to believe their passions and interests are identical to those of all people. It is transparently obvious that they are lying. This is the only transparency we will ever get. Soon, there will be nothing to see. ★

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the future about the events of those few seconds, including the paths of the eight shots investigators believe the would-be assassin fired.

That information is needed if only for the public's right to know. In the big picture, though, it's not clear what difference confirming the shrapnel theory would make. An assassin intending to kill Trump fired a high-powered rifle at

Trump, and Trump was hit by shrapnel from the high-velocity bullet. Does that change anything significant about the story?

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HANNAN

A country that picks its leader on DEI grounds is doomed



Civilizations, Arnold Toynbee said, die from suicide, not murder. The United States has chosen to commit seppuku through the unusual method of identity politics and has picked Vice President Kamala Harris as its sharpened blade.

Harris's disqualifications are so obvious that they should not need adumbrating. She is slow, vacuous, and superficial. She talks in cliché because she thinks in cliché. She cackles, not because she has some sardonic take on life that eludes the rest of us but because she cannot think what to say. Almost every political office she has occupied has been handed to her on grounds of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Up against any Republican except one, she would be pulverized. But the GOP has nominated the only candidate she has any chance of beating, a convicted felon damned by his vanity, disloyalty, petulance, boastfulness, neediness, fickleness, and greed.

President Joe Biden's resignation came as no surprise to me. I always assumed that the Democrats would carry out a bait and switch, waiting until the Republicans had lumbered themselves with the candidate who had been a drag on their ticket in 2016 and 2020, and who

had single-handedly lost them control of the Senate by his intervention in Georgia, before replacing Rip Van Biden with someone more alert.

What did surprise me was their choice of candidate, for Harris is not simply dimwitted and plodding. She is also, in an unthinking and virtue-signaling way, extremely left-wing, even by the standards of today's radical Democrats.

Cast an eye over her short career in politics. During the pandemic, she wanted everyone to get \$2,000 a month until three months after the emergency ended, a policy that would have whacked the national debt up by an almost unbelievable \$21 trillion. She suggested that employees get family and medical leave without having to work a minimum number of hours first and also wanted them to get a \$15 minimum wage (presumably more now).

She backed Medicare for All and the abolition of private medical insurance. She opposed fracking and called for rent controls. She was one of only a handful of senators to vote against the U.S.-Mexico-Canada trade deal, arguing that it was insufficiently environmentally demanding. She backed the Green New Deal that would add yet more trillions more to the national debt.

Unsurprisingly, Harris loves DEI and has called for a Climate and

Environmental Equity Office within the Congressional Budget Office and an Office of Climate and Environmental Justice Accountability within the Office of Management and Budget. She even moved a bill to force the Federal Reserve to interview at least one woman and one person from an ethnic minority for its top positions.

Lefties go mad when you call Harris a diversity hire, but it's far from clear what they are getting cross about. Biden himself was clear about what he was doing when he picked her and has repeated it several times since. "To me, the values of diversity, equality, inclusion are literally — this is not kidding — the core strengths of America. That's why I'm pleased to have the most diverse administration in history, and it starts at the top with the vice president."

Note how different this is from the appointment of, say, Condoleezza Rice or, indeed, the election of Barack Obama, who no one suggested was there on DEI grounds. Like them or loathe them, both plainly succeeded on their own merits.

Perhaps you feel that my point about civilizational suicide was over the top, but it is difficult to see how else to describe the end of meritocracy even when allocating the top positions in the land. Conservatives used to respond to silly DEI policies by saying things like "Imagine if we picked our brain surgeons that way." Yet here is one of the two big parties literally proposing to appoint the leader of the free world on grounds of melatonin levels and X chromosomes.

Democrats tell us that Donald Trump is a threat to the Constitution, that if he loses, he will refuse to concede and that if he wins, he will create an authoritarian state. They might very well be right. But if they really think that way, do they not have a duty to find the best and most electable candidate in order to save democracy?

Something has gone horribly wrong when one party picks a wannabe dictator and the other a hectoring halfwit. The mechanisms that are supposed to mediate between politicians and public — primaries, conventions, and, yes, an occasional smoke-filled room — have failed. In consequence, American democracy itself is failing. There are no good outcomes from here. ★

Daniel Hannan is a member of the House of Lords, and a former Conservative MEP.

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For Reid and her allies, the answer is yes. They are looking for a way to devalorize Trump's actions after the assassination attempt. People were amazed that Trump could be shot and then stand up and gesture defiantly as Secret Service agents hustled him offstage. Remember that Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg called Trump's actions "one of the most badass things

I've ever seen in my life." That impression is precisely what the Trump theorists are hoping to diminish — and in the process diminish any political benefit Trump might have reaped from the assassination attempt. For them, it's all politics. Still, more information is better, and the public needs to know more about the events of July 13. ★

Byron York is chief political correspondent for the *Washington Examiner*.

Bob Newhart, 1929-2024

Ordinary man, extraordinary talent

By Peter Tonguetta

Bob Newhart preferred his comedy to be neither shaken nor stirred but served dry — very, very dry. The influential stand-up comedian, renowned sitcom star, and periodic motion picture player put forth a persona that was sharp, smart, and, above all, straight-laced.

Newhart, who died on July 18 at age 94, seemed earnestly perplexed by the universe in which he lived. He had the countenance of an accountant, which he had been at one point, and the demeanor of a psychologist, which he once played on TV. Even his faint stammer, which was authentic even as he marshaled it for comedic purposes, could be considered a condition of his bewilderment. Newhart proved that the flat could be funny.

Some comics work for years to develop their stage identities, but Newhart seemed to have been born with the rudiments of his persona. Those who listened to his comedy albums or watched his TV shows could scarcely have conceived a more appropriate biography than the real one: A son of the Midwest — he was one of four children born to George and Julia Newhart in Oak Park, Illinois — Newhart was not a rebel or subversive but an ordinary, if amused, participant in the midcentury American dream.

“From the outside in, it appeared a very normal upbringing,” Newhart said in a 2005 interview for the PBS series *American Masters*, adding that his family’s aspirations for attaining status in the upper-middle class were not quite attained. “Something happened between the time my father got his paycheck and the time he got home,” he said.

Humor was in the home. He said that he grew up reading H. Allen

Smith and Robert Benchley. But upon receiving a degree in business management from Loyola University Chicago, and upon failing to receive a degree from Loyola University School of Law, Newhart toiled in accounting before attempting to make his funny bone pay.

Persuaded of his own comic instincts, Newhart and a business colleague named Ed Gallagher whipped up some amateur recordings. “I would get so bored at the end of the day with accounting that I could call Ed up, and we would improvise routines,” said Newhart, who called them “poor man Bob and Ray routines.”

Even so, in time, Newhart’s material reached radio airwaves and, eventually, nightclub audiences. Among his favorite gambits was to present himself on the receiving end of a telephone conversation: For example, in the routine “Abe Lincoln vs. Madison Avenue,” Newhart incarnates a press agent conversing with Abraham Lincoln.

“Listen, Abe, I got the note — what’s the problem? ... You’re thinking of shaving it off? ... Abe, don’t you see that’s part of the image?” the press agent says to the unheard 16th president. Later, the topic of a certain Union Army commander comes up: “Now, what’s this about Grant? ... You’re getting a lot of complaints on Grant’s drinking, huh? ... Abe, to be perfectly honest with you, I don’t see the problem. I mean, you knew he was a lush when you appointed him.”

Such routines became the raw material for a series of widely beloved comic albums, including his debut, *The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart*, which, in 1960, was not only a hit with record-buyers but won Grammys for album of the year and best new artist.

This was succeeded by *Behind the Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart* (1961), *Bob Newhart Faces Bob Newhart* (1964), and *The Windmills Are Weakening* (1965), among others.

Yet to take full measure of Newhart’s humor required more than just listening to him. The audience really needed to see his face: glum, bedraggled, maybe even slightly ornery were it not for his perpetual self-deprecation. Fleeting, in 1961, Newhart was installed as the host of his own variety show, *The Bob Newhart Show*, and there were guest appearances in all the usual places: *The Ed Sullivan Show*, *The Judy Garland Show*, and so on. Finally, in 1972, CBS had the wisdom to give the comic his own sitcom, *The Bob Newhart Show*.

Playing a psychologist on the classic show, Newhart had found the perfect fictitious vantage point to observe the human parade, which, after all, had been the secret to his comedy all along. “There is this man, me, who keeps looking at the world and saying, ‘This is crazy,’” Newhart told *American Masters*.

Although *The Bob Newhart Show* concluded its run in 1978, the public still found its star a meekly humane source of identification, and, from 1982 to 1990, CBS aired a second sitcom, *Newhart*. This time, the star was a Vermont innkeeper inundated with misfits, though nothing could have been more idiosyncratic than the ending to the show itself: The last episode’s last scene makes it clear that the entire series had occurred in the dream state of the psychologist from *The Bob Newhart Show*.

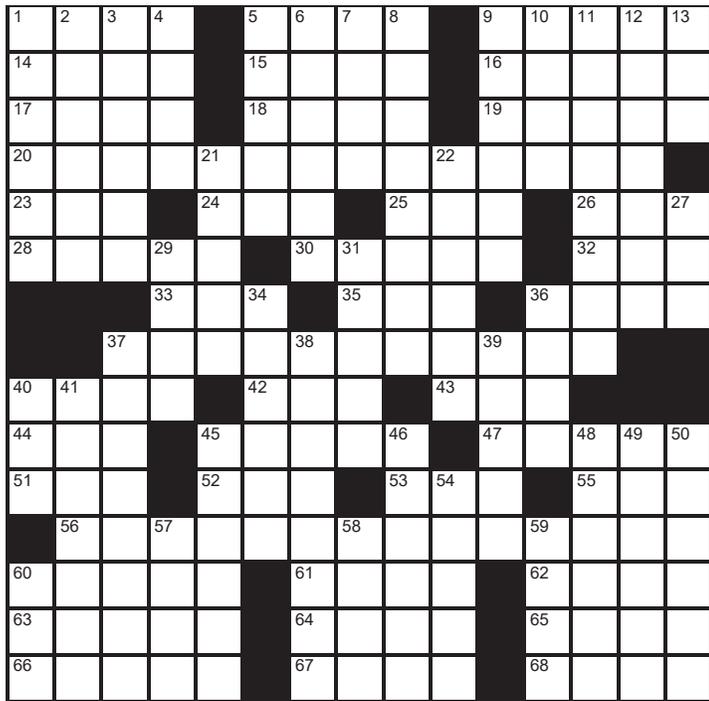
Newhart had his share of movie work, but his quiet, retiring demeanor was never a natural fit for the big screen. He had supporting roles in *Hell is for Heroes* (1962) and *Hot Millions* (1968), though his best movie part was surely as Major Major in Mike Nichols’s 1970 adaptation of Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*. In the 21st century, he logged memorable appearances in *Elf* (2003) and on *The Big Bang Theory* or *Young Sheldon*.

It is unlikely that so ordinary a man will ever again have such an extraordinary show-business career. ★

Peter Tonguetta is a contributing writer to the Washington Examiner magazine.

Coup-Coup-Ca-Choo

By Brendan Emmett Quigley



ACROSS

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- 5 Resistance units
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- 18 Folk singer Guthrie
- 19 Sealy rival
- 20 Commit a coup on the baseball diamond?
- 23 Stab
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- 25 Crash site?
- 26 Lobbying grp.
- 28 Induction motor inventor
- 30 Liking
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- 36 Own (up to)
- 37 Commit a coup during a corporate acquisition?
- 40 "Not on ___!"
- 42 Not just "a"
- 43 Number in Keir Starmer's Downing Street address

- 44 Stew vegetable
- 45 Big medal winner in the Paris Olympics
- 47 Chews like a beaver
- 51 Wiggler
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- 55 Bon ___ (witticism)
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- 62 Bet
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- 22 Drawings from devotees, say
- 27 IRA components
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SOLUTION TO LAST

WEEK'S CROSSWORD:

STOP RUNNING



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