

The Onward| Upward Archive 2021-2022



ONWARD | UPWARD
SKIP JOHNSON

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**By Skip Johnson
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Free Edition**

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in September 2021, I wrote a weekly online newsletter titled Onward| Upward that focused on current events, gee-whiz science and religion. I stopped writing it in November 2022 because it was distributed by a platform named Revue, which was owned by Twitter, which Elon Musk bought, and of which I wanted no part. So, as many other writers did, I closed it down. And we were right to do so. Twitter canceled Revue a few weeks later.

Some of the essays were timeless, and they have been published as an ebook, which is available on my website at GrowPurpose.com

The rest of the collection was topical and primarily focused on the 2022 midterm elections and in that sense they are all dated now. But, strangely, with the 2024 presidential elections right around the corner, they also speak very loudly about what is happening today.

With that in mind, I offer this free archive for anyone interested in digging deeper into some of the issues, then and now.

- Skip Johnson

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Sep 13, 2021

Just Get the Shots, People

I've had it up to here with anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers.

Anti-vaxxers cry that forcing them to be vaccinated violates their civil liberties. Horsefeathers! No one in the world cares more about protecting our civil liberties than the A.C.L.U., so hear what David Cole, its national legal director, and Daniel Mach, its program director, had to say about your civil liberties in a recent New York Times article:

“While the permissibility of requiring vaccines for particular diseases depends on several factors, when it comes to Covid-19, all considerations point in the same direction. The disease is highly transmissible, serious and often lethal; the vaccines are safe and effective; and crucially there is no equally effective alternative available to protect public health. In fact, far from compromising civil liberties, vaccine mandates actually further civil liberties. They protect the most vulnerable among us...”

The A.C.L.U. writers also said the real threat to civil liberties “comes from states banning vaccine and mask mandates” because “these bans directly endanger the public health and make more deaths from the disease inevitable. They trample the rights of the most vulnerable, who want to participate in society without putting their health at grave risk.”

Furthermore, the U.S. Supreme Court once upheld the right, even the necessity, of governments to force vaccinations.

In deciding the Jacobson vs. Massachusetts case during the 1905 smallpox epidemic, the court held that “in every well ordered society charged with the duty of conserving the safety of its members, the rights of the individual in respect of his liberty may at times, under the pressure of great dangers, be subjected to such restraint, to be enforced by reasonable regulations, as the safety of the general public may demand.”

The decision went on to say that “real liberty for all could not exist under the operation of a principle that recognizes the right of each individual person to use his own [liberty], whether in respect of his person or his property, regardless of the injury that may be done to others.”

Many of the excuses people give for refusing to get vaccinated range from plain ignorance to extraordinary ignorance, such as the woman who sent out a video link about how “they” are injecting us with magnets, and when “they” test us for Covid they are actually spraying something into our bodies. You can tell because if you shine an infrared light on your body, you can see light through the skin.

Or how about those conspiracy theorists who believe the government is using the shots to implant transmitters into our bloodstreams so they can track us? Sheesh!

But the ones who really infuriate me are the ones who refuse the shots for political reasons. Most of these people are Trumppublicans, evidenced by the fact that red states consistently have more people refusing the shots and therefore have more Covid cases, more Covid hospitalizations and more Covid deaths – by far – than anywhere else. Recent studies show that unvaccinated people are eleven times more likely to die of Covid-19 than vaccinated people.

Yet, many anti-vaxxers say the shots don't work when they know full well they do. They say the shots are too dangerous when they know full well they're not.

Some of these folks are undeniable hypocrites, such as those Missourians – but certainly those in other states as well – who preach against the shots, then disguise themselves so no one will know who they are and go get a shot.

And isn't it just as hypocritical for parents to scream against forced Covid vaccinations for their children when virtually none of them complain about their children being "forced" to be vaccinated against such diseases as measles, mumps and various other illnesses before being allowed in schools?

But the most dangerous anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers are those who feel that even if they do come down with Covid they will only suffer mild symptoms. That's an incredibly selfish attitude, because even before they feel the first symptom they are spewing the coronavirus at everyone they meet. They don't seem to care that some of their victims may not recover as easily as they do, or even not recover at all.

As for their complaints that getting the vaccine or wearing a mask is a personal choice, well, it is. But so is yelling fire in a crowded theater, or driving 95 miles an hour in a 35 mph speed zone, or, or, or... You don't do those things because it would damage other people – which is why it's also against the law – and it's the same with vaccines and masks.

Hospitals across the nation, especially those in red states, are approaching full capacity with Covid patients, almost all of whom are anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers. Doctors, nurses, first responders and others are forced to work themselves to exhaustion and risk their lives to take care of people who will not take care of themselves. How selfish can you be!

Now, I do not wish death on anyone, but if you refuse to take the vaccine, get Covid-19 and die, I do not care.

My heart breaks for your family and friends, and I wonder why you did that to them. But as for you, I do not care. You knew what you were doing. You knew the chance you were taking. And you stupidly took it anyway.

Refusing to take the vaccine is the same as playing Russian Roulette. You put a round in the gun's chamber. You spin the cylinder. You point the gun's barrel at your temple. You pull the trigger. If the hammer clicks against an empty chamber, you're lucky. But if it fires a lead slug into your brain and

you die, why should I feel sorry for you? You knew the chance you were taking. And you stupidly took it anyway.

Just get the shots, people. Just wear a mask and get the shots.

Sep 20, 2021

Why so many Americans like dictators

I have often wondered how it could be possible that millions of highly intelligent, well-informed, democracy-loving Americans could still be under Donald Trump's totalitarian spell.

How can so many people believe Trump won the election when there is absolutely no proof, not even any evidence, that he won.

More than 60 state and federal judges and justices, nonpartisan election watchers from all over the world, and top election officials in all 50 states have attested that the election was fair and Joe Biden won. And yet, Trump's minions still say the election was stolen from him. How is this even thinkable?

I know that throughout history many well-meaning people in other countries have supported dictators – Hitler and Mussolini, for example. But that does not explain why any democracy-loving American would support any totalitarian synonyms.

But now I understand. I found the answer – an answer, anyway – in a book first copyrighted in 1948: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, by Hannah Arendt. It is a photograph of Trump and explains why people support him.

The book is long, heavy and dense. But I also found another book that reduces some of Ms. Arendt's key points to their essence: *Ex Libris*, by Pulitzer Prize winning Michiko Kakutani, which was published in 2020.

What follows is based largely on Ms. Kakutani's compression of Ms. Arendt's fundamental points about what totalitarians are, how they dissolve traditional political and moral understandings to control their followers' behavior, and why good people fall for it.

One early warning sign that totalitarians insert here are on the loose is their abolition of the right of asylum, because once that's done the principle of equality before the law breaks down, and "the more difficult it is for states to resist the temptation to deprive all citizens of legal status."

Trump is famous for trying to deny the right of asylum, especially to Central Americans.

Another sign is that totalitarians lie often, lie big, and never apologize or retract their lies. Even when it is proven beyond any possible doubt they lied, they just keep on lying. And they never admit an error.

Trump's fingerprints are all over this one. Witness his so-called Big Lie that he won last year's presidential election – "by a landslide" no less – plus the 30,573 other lies and misstatements he made during his presidency, which comes out to more than 20 a day for four years (source: The Washington Post's fact-checking team). He never admitted one lie or one error during his term in office.

So why does anybody support Trump? Ms. Arendt explains: Hungry for simplistic narratives that explain a confusing world, totalitarians' followers welcome an escape from reality rather than trusting their eyes and ears. Suffering from a combination of gullibility and cynicism, they routinely shrug off the lies.

Totalitarians' need for complete control is so severe that they demand absolute loyalty – to them personally, not to a constitution, not to law, not to democracy, not to anything but themselves

Performance does not matter Efficacy does not matter. Totalitarians will replace first-rate talent with "crackpots and fools whose lack of intelligence and creativity is still the best guarantee of their loyalty." Only loyalty to them matters

Witness Trump's choices for ambassadors, postmaster general, several health-related positions, so many more. He even expected attorneys general he appointed and an FBI director he did not appoint to be loyal to him, not to the Constitution to which they had sworn allegiance.

Totalitarians also repeatedly invoke new opponents or enemies to ratify followers' sense of belonging to a movement that is making progress toward a distant goal. "As soon as one category is liquidated," Ms. Arendt writes, "war may be declared on another."

Finally, totalitarians, eager to believe that failures can be denied or erased, will push a purely fictitious reality that endows them with infallibility and absolute power. And their minions sop it up.

Just for the record, political scientist Lawrence Britt wrote an article for The Humanist magazine in 1970 that identified traits that were common to the fascist regimes of Germany's Hitler, Italy's Mussolini, Spain's Franco, Indonesia's Suharto and Chile's Pinochet. (Fascists differ from authoritarians, if at all, because fascists have rubber-stamp parliaments where authoritarians are one-person dictators.)

Britt's detractors accused him of not having enough credentials to write such an article and they criticized his choice of magazines, but they did not challenge the facts he presented. It's the old lawyers' trick: If you cannot attack the argument, attack the person making it.

You decide whether they fit Trump. Britt said fascists:

Lean heavily on patriotic symbols, especially flags;

Rally the people into a unifying patriotic frenzy over the need to eliminate a perceived common threat or foe, such as racial minorities, liberals or socialists;

Give the military a disproportionate amount of government funding;

Denigrate the news media and do all they can to control it;

Use the nation's most common religion to manipulate public opinion, even when their policies are diametrically opposed to the religion's tenets;

Have a mutually beneficial relationship with the industrial and business aristocracy;

Severely oppress labor unions, because the organizing power of labor is the only real threat to a fascist government;

Give police almost limitless power to enforce the law and are often willing to overlook police abuses;

And manipulate elections by various methods, such as using legislation to control voting numbers, gerrymandering voting districts, and even using judiciaries to control elections.

Sound familiar?

Oct 11, 2021

Similar Stories, Opposite Results

It's long been said that Democrats fall in love and Republicans fall in line, and it's true. But it's also true that while Democrats sometimes fall out of love, Republicans almost never fall out of line.

Compare the cases of former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, and former U.S. President Donald Trump, a Republican. There's nothing new about the stories, but juxtaposing the essence of the two stories says a lot about what the two parties are.

Start with Cuomo. A few weeks ago, New York's attorney general, a Democrat, released a report that said 11 women accused Cuomo – repeat for emphasis, accused Cuomo – of inappropriate sexual conduct, and before nightfall virtually every Democrat leader in the state was demanding his resignation. Within 24 hours the Democratic-led state legislature was demanding his impeachment, and within a week Cuomo was forced to resign.

Now consider the Republicans' reaction to Trump. He was recorded bragging about grabbing women by their crotches. Multiple women have accused him of sexual misconduct. And he's being investigated for paying two women hush money to keep them from tattling about having sex with him while he was married.

And yet, Republicans overwhelmingly voted to make him president.

But it goes much further than just Trump's sexual dalliances. Federal and state officials are investigating him for committing so many felonies it's hard to keep track of them; it's even been suggested he may have committed so many felonies that we may need two special investigators to sort it all out.

The felonies include tax fraud, bank fraud, insurance fraud, real estate fraud, marketing fraud, election fraud, obstruction of justice (at least 10 counts), countless instances of violating the Emoluments Clause, and countless instances of violating the Hatch Act.

Beyond that, Scotland is using laws designed to investigate Mafia operations to uncover how Trump financed his (badly failing) golf courses there.

Now the House is investigating Trump for sedition, defined as "conduct or language inciting a rebellion against the authority of the state," because of his leading that Capitol insurrection.

And we just recently learned from Bob Woodward's book PERIL that in the days leading up to the Jan. 6 insurrection, Trump and a lawyer friend devised a plan to keep Trump in office. The plan showed how Vice President Pence could block certification of Biden's victory. And only Pence's refusal to carry it out prevented it from happening.

Regardless, the plan was a blatant attempt at a coup, and if that isn't a crime it certainly should be.

And still Republicans want him to be their leader.

Further, Congress impeached him twice, once for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, and once for inciting that Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. The Senate acquitted him both times even though several Republicans admitted after the first impeachment trial that they voted to acquit him despite knowing House Democrats had proven their case. After his second trial even Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell admitted he voted for acquittal despite knowing Trump was guilty as charged.

And then there's The Big Lie that says, without any evidence whatsoever, that Trump won the election "by a landslide" but Democrats stole it from him. Trump and his lawyers filed more than 60 lawsuits to show he won, but state and federal judges and justices, some of them appointed by Trump, tossed out every one of the suits because none of them offered any evidence.

Secretaries of state in all 50 states have certified the election was fair and the vote count was accurate, and poll watchers from the U.S. and abroad have said the election was perhaps the cleanest presidential election in American history.

And still Trump's minions believe him, and still they want him to run for president again.

Oh, well, I suppose their belief in him is understandable. After all, anyone who'll believe a man who has lied to them more than 30,000 times will believe anything.

Oct 18, 2021

Steve Bannon is About to Walk Free

Stephen Bannon openly committed two more felonies during the last two weeks, and it looks like he's going to get away with it again.

You remember Stephen Bannon. He was former President Trump's chief strategist during Trump's first seven months in office. He also co-founded and is a former executive chairman of the far-right Breitbart News, and served on the board of Cambridge Analytica until the company was forced to close in 2018 after it was found to be acquiring and using personal data about Facebook users. In August 2020, Bannon and three others were arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit mail fraud and money laundering both felonies, in connection to the We Build the Wall Campaign. Bannon pleaded not guilty, but Trump pardoned him before his trial began. Last November, Twitter permanently suspended Bannon's account after he suggested that America's top government infectious disease authority, Anthony Fauci and FBI Director Christopher Wray should be beheaded.

And now he's at it again. Two weeks ago he ignored a Jan. 6 Select Committee's subpoena to turn over documents the committee demanded, and last week he ignored a subpoena to testify before the panel. Both are felonies.

So, this week, the committee will formally accuse him of criminal contempt of Congress.

And therein lies the story of how Bannon will walk.

Here's how it will play out from now: The committee will make its case to the full House of Representatives this week, perhaps today. Three days later, at the earliest, the House will begin deciding whether the accusations have merit. If House members decide the charges do have merit, they will "refer" the case to Attorney General Merrick Garland. If Garland decides the House has a case, he will formally charge Bannon with criminal contempt of Congress.

If Garland agrees, that's when the fun begins. Just like anyone else charged with a felony, Bannon will have the right to a trial by jury. His lawyers will find ways to postpone that as long as possible – many months at the least – but eventually a trial will happen.

And if Bannon is convicted? No problem. There is no doubt we can count on many more months of appeals, probably years of appeals, before anything is made final. The man may very well die before justice reaches him. Either way, the Jan. 6 Select Committee will not get the information and testimony it needs from him and deserves from him.

Bannon is claiming executive privilege for his actions because former President Trump told him to. But lawyers involved in such proceedings say that's just plain silly, for several reasons.

One, Trump is not president so he cannot claim executive privilege. Only a sitting president can claim executive privilege, and Joe Biden has not done that and is not likely to do that for Bannon, so it does not exist.

The lawyers also point out that Bannon was not a member of the White House staff in the days leading up to Jan. 6, so Trump has no power over him anyway.

Furthermore, they say, the information sought by the Select Committee refers to an attempt to overthrow the United States government, and that cannot be privileged information.

It is clear that Bannon has important, even crucial, information, such as his pre-riot comments that “The game is going to start on Capitol Hill” and “All hell will break loose.”

Nevertheless, it appears the Select Committee will never get Bannon’s testimony, so Bannon will essentially walk. If he does walk, he and Trump have defeated the United States Congress, at least the Democrats therein.

Could the committee members have handled it differently?

Oh, yes, say the lawyers.

They could have charged Bannon with “inherent contempt,” which would have sent him directly to jail without passing Go, and he would linger there as long as the committee is in session. That action also would have sent a red-flag warning to any other witnesses that they, too, would face certain, immediate and significant jail time in jail if they followed in Bannon’s footsteps.

Why didn’t the committee do that?

Who knows. But coupled with the Democrats’ failure so far to protect the voting rights of every American, and their failure to drive home the \$1 trillion and \$3.5 trillion infrastructure bills that Biden needs so badly— and the nation needs so badly — it begins to appear the Democrats are beginning to fear Trump as much as Republicans already do.

And that is a sickening thought.

Nov 1, 2021

Nobody Wins in the War on Drugs

In the late 1980s, when U.S. Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., was chairman of the Charleston County Council, I was president of a group called South Carolinians for Drug Law Reform. Our goal was to legalize all drugs and make drug addiction a medical problem, not a legal problem. We wanted to tax drug sales and use the money to provide treatment centers for addicts. That way, addicts would pay for their own treatment, prisons would empty, and law enforcement officers could focus on solving real crimes.

The county council had a program during those days that allowed council members to unilaterally earmark money to any nonprofit organization they felt was worthy. One of the council members understood what we were trying to do and awarded us \$500.

Once it got around that the council was giving tax money to an organization that supported drug use (we didn't, but that was the popular understanding) the council demanded we return the money. Since we were in this for education, not to be a point of controversy, we agreed to return the money.

As SCDLR's president, I attended a council meeting and presented the county a check for \$500. I also gave each member a packet of information that included a short history of the War on Drugs, and the book *Drug War Facts*, which Common Sense for Drug Policy compiles from reliable sources. (The book, now called *Drug Policy Facts*, is constantly updated and is available free at www.drugpolicyfacts.org.)

I don't know what the other council members did with the packet, but Chairman Tim Scott made a point of mailing his packet back to me unopened. In other words, his mind was made up and no facts were going to change that.

And that's a shame, because if he had read it he would have learned, among other things, that Black people – such as himself -- were, and are, a primary target of the War on Drugs.

That's right. The War on Drugs has never been about protecting people from dangerous drugs. If that were the point, alcohol, tobacco and caffeine would be outlawed and cannabis (marijuana) would be legal. After all, cannabis is just a weed that grows wild on every continent in the world except for Antarctica.

To understand why cannabis was made illegal, first understand that humankind has never been able to define what a drug is. No matter what definition is used, it either covers too many substances or too few. So, until someone comes up with a better definition, the working model is that a drug is what the FDA says it is, and an illicit drug is what the government says it is.

Which takes us to 1971, when President Nixon declared his "War on Drugs."

Nixon said he declared the war to promote moral behavior and increase public safety. But the truth is that Nixon needed a way to fight people who opposed his politics, primarily Black people and hippies. By arresting more people for possessing their favorite drugs, mostly marijuana, and making those violations felonies, Nixon could eliminate a lot of his opposition. After all, felons cannot vote.

We all know how that worked out – extremely well, for Nixon. Drug arrests have packed our prisons with mostly nonviolent people, most of them Black. As of Sept. 30, 2019, the latest date for which numbers are available, about 46 percent of inmates in federal prisons were serving time for drug offenses, and more than 99 percent of those were for nonviolent drug trafficking. About 59 percent of all females serving time in federal prison at that time were there for drug offenses. Add all that to the

numbers of “felons” who are on parole but still cannot vote, and the total number of American citizens denied the right to vote, and it becomes staggering.

Yet, drugs flood the streets today as much if not more than any time in history. Any high school or middle school student will tell you it’s easier for them to buy marijuana than it is to buy a beer.

There’s also the financial aspect to be considered. Our federal government has spent more than a trillion dollars – that’s trillion with a T – on the War on Drugs, mostly to hire more police officers and build and staff more prisons to house them. The war also created one of the most profitable, illegal and violent industries in the world: drug cartels.

The idea of making drug addiction a medical problem is not just my idea, or the idea of the (now-defunct) South Carolinians for Drug Law Reform. It’s the very basis of an international organization called LEAP – Law Enforcement Against Prohibition.

LEAP was founded in 2002 by five law enforcement officers who recognized the futility of trying to arrest our way out of drug addiction. Since then the organization has grown to include thousands of police officers, FBI agents, DEA agents, sheriffs, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, prison wardens and sympathetic civilians from 87 countries, all of whom understand that the War on Drugs is not the solution to our problems, but the cause of them.

Can you imagine where we might be today if Tim Scott had understood in the 1980s that the War on Drugs was actually a war on him? And if he had acted on that knowledge?

Nov 8, 2021

Church Membership is Plummeting – But Some Congregations Are Growing. Why?

In the year 1937, 73 percent of American adults belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque, a number that held steadily between 70 and 73 percent until the end of the century. Then the bottom dropped out.

According to Gallup polls, the number plummeted from 70 percent in 1999 to 50 percent in 2018, and on down to 47 percent in 2020, the first time in Gallup’s polling history that fewer than half of Americans belonged to a house of worship.

Not all religious organizations are losing members, but a deep look at those that are gaining members shows the increases in some of them are deceptive.

For example, a Pew Research Center study discovered that the number of White Americans who started identifying themselves as evangelical Christians grew significantly between 2016 and 2020, but

it wasn't because evangelicals were bringing people to Jesus. It was because they were bringing them to Donald Trump's Republican Party. Religion perhaps, but politics and power? For certain.

But what is causing the membership decline in the other houses of worship? Studies vary widely in their answers. Some say people are becoming less religious. Others say more than 85 percent of Americans believe in God but have lost faith in all institutions – banks, education, corporations, government – including organized religion. Other reasons include everything from clergy failing to lead to congregations drifting into complacency with no direction.

There are, however, individual non-evangelistic congregations throughout the United States that are booming, and today I want to take a personal moment and talk about just one of them, the one I belong to: Circular Congregational Church in Charleston, S.C.

Everything about us indicates we should be losing members. For one thing, we are affiliated with the United Church of Christ, which has been hemorrhaging members ever since it was created in 1957. Since its creation the number of congregations has plunged more than 40 percent and the number of members has plummeted more than 60 percent.

Even local conditions indicate we should be losing members. We're located in downtown Charleston, have no space to expand, and don't even have a parking lot. A bank next door lets us use its parking lot on Sunday mornings, but Charleston is one of the nation's top tourist attractions so tourists flood our streets and often get to the lot before we do. So then we either must compete with tourists to find metered parking spaces on the crowded streets or use a nearby parking garage. And weekdays at the church? Good luck with that!

We've built out on the church grounds so we must make do with what space we have. We don't even have enough space to offer our senior minister, the Rev. Dr. Jeremy Rutledge, a decent office. He has to use a small Sunday School room that is across the campus from his administrative staff, and even they have to share a cramped, hallway-type space behind the sanctuary.

But despite all that and more we are growing, even during the pandemic when in-person attendance to Sunday worship services is limited to a handful of masked attendews. Last Sunday, for example, when we were limited to 60 masked, nonsinging members, we welcomed eight new members.

Why is this happening?

This is just one person's opinion (and it's the main reason my wife and I joined Circular in the first place), but I believe it's because we (1) don't insist on a religious dogma and (2) don't spend much time praising Jesus but a lot of time trying to following him.

As for dogma, Dr. Rutledge opens every worship service with these words: "Whoever you are, and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here." And on communion Sundays he invites everyone to the table, regardless of religion, with these words: "Jesus didn't discriminate and neither do we."

Isn't that what Jesus wanted? He never asked to be praised, and he never made any beliefs about him a condition of discipleship. He never asked us to believe he was the Messiah or that he would be bodily resurrected from the dead. On the personal level he only asked us to help one another through their day in any way we could, and on the corporate level he wanted us to work for social justice in society.

And that's what Circular Congregational Church does best. On the personal level, Circular's members always appear ready to help one another, and their own friends and neighbors, in any way they can. And on the corporate level, it shows in several ways. There is an organization in Charleston, the Charleston Area Justice Ministry (CAJM), that works for social justice in several fields, such as affordable housing, racial profiling by police, public transportation, education and the environment. CAJM is composed of more than 20 houses of worship – Black and White, conservative and liberal, Christian and Jewish – that differ widely in their theological beliefs but agree totally on working toward social justice. And Circular has more members in CAJM, by far, than any other congregation. The church is also involved in seeking gay rights, racial equality and other forms of social justice.

Isn't that what Jesus wanted us to do?

And couldn't that be why Circular – and, according to Dr. Rutledge, other progressive churches across America – are bucking the downward trend and continue to grow?

Nov 15, 2021

Trump-Led Republicans Are Becoming Seriously Dangerous

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, Democrats and Republicans got along with each other. They would argue with each other and complain about each other, sure, but then they would compromise on a solution and go have lunch. But no longer.

Here are just a few recent examples of how despicable Trumpian Republicans have become:

U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., tweeted a video showing a character with his face killing a figure with the face of Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y.

U.S. Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., was told by a member of his own party he should slit his wrists and "rot in hell" because he backed a bipartisan infrastructure bill. Twelve other Republicans also voted for the bill, and every one of them received similar threats from Trumpian Republicans.

In Idaho, a young Republican asked a conservative rally when he could start killing Democrats, and the local state representative later called it "a fair question."

In South Carolina, a gun dealer offered to change the names of the three settings on the firing mechanism of AR-15 rifles from safety, single shot and full-automatic to F@CK! JOE! BIDEN!

And, of course, there's the new cry of "Let's Go Brandon," which is just a euphemism for "F*** Joe Biden."

And on, and on, and on it goes.

I have two daughters whose careers put them in contact with the public, and both have been cursed and threatened simply because they did their jobs.

One, Kathy Nash, a public-school nurse in Mt. Pleasant, S.C., sent a child home because he was still in Covid quarantine, and the child's mother called her and screamed at her for it, and even threatened to sue the school.

The other, Laura Meier, a Democratic county commissioner in Mecklenburg County (Charlotte), N.C., has had to deal with sharply abusive language from several constituents because she voted for mandatory mask wearing. On another issue, a constituent suggested she should "drop dead."

And on, and on, and on it goes.

One would think, or at least hope, that actions like these are coming from the Republican party's nutty far-out fringe, but unfortunately that's not the case. It starts with the rank-and-file and goes right to the top. Have you noticed what the party leaders have said about all the threats and other forms of ugliness spewing from their members?

Nothing! Absolutely nothing!

They're even part of it. Mark Meadows, ex-President Trump's former chief of staff, will probably be indicted for contempt of Congress because he ignored a subpoena to testify before the House commission investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, and what did he say about it? He said he does not take orders from Congress or the law, but only from Donald Trump.

The awful truth is that Trumpian Republicans, and they unquestionably constitute the party's vast majority now, feel the nation our Founders envisioned is being taken away from them. They rail against what they see as its liberal agenda – abortions on demand, God being removed from public schools, gay marriage, unchecked immigration, equality for Black people, equality for women, equality for non-genders.

There are tens of millions of these people and, according to The New York Times, polling indicates that 30 percent of them feel that "true patriots" may have to resort to violence to "save" the country. Forty percent of those who "most trust" far-right news sources feel that way.

Sound far-fetched? Maybe not.

I just finished reading the novel “State of Terror” by Hillary Rodham Clinton and Louise Penny, which essentially is a red-flag warning to Americans to wake up before it’s too late. The writers point to the growing trend of Republicans moving from the right, to the far right, to the alt-right, and the writers have one of their key characters, an international terrorist, speak these chilling words about coup d’etats:

“They’re all so sudden, at least to the person being coupéd.”

Nov 22, 2021

Democrats Can Win in 2022

It seems all I’ve heard lately is how energized the Republicans are and how they’re going to run away with the 2022 elections. Maybe not.

It’s true that Republicans may have gerrymandered themselves into taking back the House. Also, the president’s party almost always loses seats in midterm elections. And rest assured that Republicans will do everything they can to blame Democrats for problems even if they had nothing to do with them, such as Covid-caused inflation.

But Republicans are running into headwinds of their own that just might work to help Democrats gain seats in the Senate and win governorships throughout the nation.

For one thing, polls constantly show that rank-and-file voters from both parties have liked President Biden’s \$1 trillion infrastructure plan from the very beginning, and they’re certain to like it a whole lot more once they see pockmarked roads and decaying bridges in their own neighborhoods being repaired. They should remember all the Republicans who opposed that bill.

Most voters also like Biden’s \$1.8 trillion social services and climate change package, especially since a huge chunk of it – \$555 billion – is earmarked to protect the air they breathe, the water they drink, the rising temperatures they face, and so much more. Climate change tops most people’s list of the most-important issues facing America and the world, and voters are likely to remember the GOP’s solid opposition to solving it.

Come to think of it, about all Republicans do is oppose whatever Democrats try to do, just because they’re Democrats. They have offered no solutions to any of our problems; instead, they just complain about whatever Democrats do.

The last big bill Republicans sponsored gave huge tax breaks to the very richest people in America and to big corporations while tossing peanuts to lower income classes. You would think these rich folks would be so thankful for the country that made it possible for them to make so much money they’d be eager to pay heavy taxes, but those folks are rare.

Rank-and-file voters might think of that when they visit the polls in 2022.

And then there's Donald Trump. Trump seems to be the hero of most Republican candidates now, but that might not last long. By the time the 2022 elections get here, Trump very well might turn out to be an albatross around their necks, more of a detriment than a help.

After all, Trump is being investigated by federal and state authorities for a whole slew of felonies – tax fraud, bank fraud, insurance fraud, real estate fraud, election fraud, obstruction of justice (10 counts), and more – and a credible charge resulting from any one of those could make him less than a desirable backer. A few such charges might make him completely toxic. Several GOP candidates already are showing signs of trying to put some space between themselves and Trump.

Then, too, Democrats have a list of 50 or so Republican candidates who are on record as believing (or at least saying they believe) Trump's Big Lie that he won the election, and the Democrats are planning to hold their feet to the fire over it. Several of the Republicans are trying to backpedal on their recorded statements, but they made them, they're stuck with them, and Democrats are bound to hammer them with it.

And remember: All Republicans are not Trumppublicans. A few weeks ago, both The New York Times and The Washington Post ran op-ed pieces on the same day that were written by Republicans who said they would vote for a Democrat if Trump ran for president again. And there are a lot of "real" Republicans out there who must feel the same. They've been pretty quiet lately, but that might change soon.

Another possibility: There are far more Democrats than there are Republicans in America, and once people of color and poor people, both normally reliable Democratic voters, realize the extremes Republicans have gone to keep them from voting, they might become so infuriated they'll walk to the polls barefoot in the snow to make sure their voices are heard.

And then there are the intangibles that might work in Democrats' favor, such as Biden's talks with China's President Xi that are calming the dangerously rising temperatures that Trump had caused, or Biden's re-establishing trust with European countries that Trump had destroyed, or Biden's work to stop the coronavirus that Trump had ignored, or Biden's reclaiming public lands that Trump had given to Big Oil, or, or, or...

In other words, there is hope.

Nov 29, 2021

People With Guns Kill People

The M1 Garand rifle was the American military's standard rifle for infantrymen from World War II until three years into the Vietnam War. It weighed 9.5 pounds and when fully loaded it contained eight rounds. When the eighth round was fired the clip ejected and the shooter had to reload. An expert

rifleman might be able to squeeze off perhaps 20 shots a minute. Perhaps. And if he held the rifle too loosely its mule-kick recoil could seriously damage his shoulder.

Compare that with the military-style MR-15 that 17-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse used to kill two men in Kenosha, Wis., earlier this year. It weighs seven pounds when fully loaded with a standard 30-round clip, but it can easily be modified to hold 100 rounds. And it can be fired 45 times a minute, much more accurately than an M1 because of a much-reduced recoil.

The M1 was the rifle of choice when I underwent basic training at Parris Island. Before we were even allowed on the rifle range, we had to know the weapon so thoroughly we could disassemble it, clean it, and re-assemble it blindfolded. We had to know how fast a slug was traveling when it left the rifle's muzzle, how far the slug would fly, so much more.

Then, once on the rifle range, we spent a full week learning how to hold it, how to put our finger on the trigger, how to aim it, and a whole raft of safety regulations before we even saw the first piece of live ammunition.

Safety was paramount. Break a safety regulation, even once, even accidentally – such as allowing your rifle to point at anyone or, having a closed breech any time the rifle wasn't pointed toward the targets – and you were in serious trouble. You could be expelled from your platoon and assigned to another one that had not yet been to the rifle range, extending your time at Parris Island for a week or more.

In other words, before we put a live round in our rifles, we knew them thoroughly and had a deep and abiding respect for them. The M1 was considered that dangerous.

Compare that with Kyle Rittenhouse's experience with the far more deadly MR-15. He borrowed it from a friend, loaded it, slung it over his shoulder, and off he went to stroll around a crowded protest rally. No training needed. No practice needed. No knowledge needed. No evidence that he knew what he was doing needed.

Nothing is needed to purchase, carry in public and use an MR-15 other than having the money to buy one, which an enormous number of people have done. But no one has any idea of just how enormous that number is, or where the weapons are, or who owns them.

That's because, by law, the government is not allowed to gather that information. The gun industry's lobbyists persuaded Congress long ago that if the government had that information it would have a de facto registry of gun owners, which would put the government just one step away from being able to take people's guns away from them.

You must have a license to drive a car because you could cause great damage if you didn't know what you were doing behind the wheel. But you don't have to prove you have the slightest idea of what you're doing if you want to walk around in public with one of the most dangerous hand-held weapons ever built. That's nuts. That's just plain down crazy.

Consider that in the light that 30 percent of all Republicans – and there are tens of millions of them – think an armed insurrection may be necessary to “save” America.

Also relate it to the fact that most states now allow virtually anyone to openly carry almost any lethal firearm, even MR-15s, almost anywhere they want to, even if they don't even know where the safety switch is.

Add to all that the fact that murders are rapidly increasing all around America. In South Carolina, for instance, murders were up more than 20 percent in 2020, and they're up more than 50 percent over the last five years. Most murders involve guns, of course.

Normally, I'm an optimist. But when it comes to guns and the mood America is in right now, I am not so sure.

Dec 6, 2021

Why Would Anyone Want Trump To B Our President?

CNN released the results of a poll yesterday that shows a majority of Republicans want Donald Trump to run for president in 2024. I am not surprised at the results, but it still boggles my mind that anyone – anyone! – would want that man to represent our country in any capacity.

Even if Trump were exonerated of every one of the myriad felonies for which he is being investigated (fat chance, there), I still would not like him.

I do not like Donald Trump because he publicly mocks people who have physical limitations; because he's a draft dodger; because he's a draft dodger who overruled generals who knew what they're doing; because he is a pathological, unapologetic liar, with well more than 30,000 lies or misleading statements documented during his time in office, especially his Big Lie than he won the 2020 presidential election; because he used his casino in New Jersey to launder money for the Russian Mafia before he got caught; because he is a white supremacist; because he refers to women as dogs; because he decimated our State Department — at one point, more than 30 embassies didn't even have ambassadors, and some of them were in major countries; because he gave important positions to horribly unqualified people just because they gave him money; because he demanded people in his administration be loyal to him, not to the Constitution for which they all took oaths of loyalty; because he took his daily news briefings from Fox News rather than government experts who knew what they were doing; because he is so low that he took thousands of dollars from his own charitable foundation and spent it on himself, including taking \$10,000 to purchase a life-sized photograph of himself to hang in one of his clubs; because he ran a fraudulent "university" until he got caught, then paid \$25 million to the students to muffle the story so it would not become a campaign issue; because he had affairs with at least two women while he was married, then bribed them with more than a quarter-million dollars to keep quiet; because he cozied up to the world's dictators — Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, North Korea and others — while insulting our allies around the world and diminishing our standing in the world; because he insulted our military heroes, dead and living; because he filled important posts with titles that were preceded by "acting," thus giving him virtually dictatorial power over those offices; because he's a schoolyard bully ("Flatter me and I'll reward you, criticize me and I'll

destroy you.”); because he gave billions of dollars to rich people through his mammoth tax cut and trickled on the rest of us; because he bragged about grabbing women by their crotches, and later denied it even though he was recoded saying it; because he withdrew us from the Kyoto Protocol, even though more than 99 percent of environmental scientists around the world say humans are at the very least adding to conditions that are leading us into an environmental disaster; because he opened up so much sensitive federal land to oil drillers; because he is so ignorant and/or cruel he ended the Endangered Species Act, the very act that saved bald eagles, alligators and other wildlife species from extinction; because he insisted on drilling in pristine Alaskan areas, and even off the South Atlantic coast although whatever oil is there was not needed, not wanted by anyone except oil drillers, would seriously harm whales and other wildlife, and present a real danger to the region’s crucial tourist industry; because he denied the existence of Covid-19, calling it a hoax generated by Democrats and the news media, while tens of thousands of Americans were dying of the disease; because he promised to fix our crumbling infrastructure but never did a single thing about it; because if you look up the words “authoritarian,” “totalitarian” and “fascist” in the dictionary, you’ll see his fingerprints and photograph; because he’s also a demagogue, and having a demagogue as president is the one thing our Founding Fathers feared the most; because he either refused to realize or didn’t care that a tariff on any nation is really a tax on American citizens; because he accepted Vladimir Putin’s denials of Russian interference in the 2016 election despite the unanimous assessment of the American intelligence community; because he met in private with Putin and refused to ever say what they discussed; because he deserted our allies the Kurds and allowed Turkey to attack them; because he is such a hypocrite he tossed out “chain migration” after allowing his wife’s family members to come here that very same way; because he separated thousands of innocent children from their parents along our southern border, and some of them will never be reunited; because he promised during his campaign that he would release his tax returns, but after he was elected he demanded that the U.S. Supreme Court allow him keep them private; because he was legitimately impeached twice, and would have been convicted except his cowardly Senate minions voted nay even though they later admitted the House had proved its points each time; because he backed out of the nonproliferation deal with Iran, which made matters so much worse for the world; because he backed out of so many deals that world leaders were left to doubt whether the United States can be trusted; because with virtually no discrimination he tossed out his predecessors’ diplomatic work, destroyed nonproliferation and climate accords, and disrupted alliances that underpin the international order; because he fired anyone he thought was not loyal to him even though they took an oath to be loyal to the Constitution, not him; because he completely disregarded human health by his wildly irresponsible and false claims about the pandemic; because he actually suggested people drink disinfectant to fight Covid-19; because he attempted to take away our access to affordable health care; because he is so ignorant he thought Iceland was part of Russia; because he openly hawked a medicine made by a company that he owns stock in that has not been proven to help Covid-19 patients, but has been proven to cause many of them serious health problems, including death; because he pressured the Senate to approved his last-minute nominee to the Supreme Court even though the Senate refused to even consider an Obama choice with a full year to go; because he locked immigrant children in cages, some of whom will never see their parents again; because he denies climate change, which scientists say is rapidly approaching the point of no return; because he refused to take action on gun violence although gun violence was rapidly increasing everywhere in the nation; because he tweeted a satellite photo from an intelligence brief that revealed the capabilities of some of the government’s top secrets; because he worked so hard to keep people from voting when he should have done the opposite; because he tried to get the Georgia secretary of state to fraudulently

“find” nearly 12,000 votes so he could carry the state in 2020; because he admitted to attacking the news media so people wouldn’t believe them when they attacked him; because he came into direct contact with 500 people, including Joe Biden, while keeping secret the fact he had tested positive for Covid-19; because he tried to get Vice President Mike Pence to stop Congress’ vote count so he could remain president, even knowing it would be illegal for Pence to do that; because he persuaded his sycophants to attack the U.S. Capitol to prevent Congress from counting the “fraudulent” presidential vote; because he still claims, without offering even a shred of evidence, that he would have won the election “by a landslide” if the election hadn’t been “fixed”; because he, well, so much more, but I don’t want to belabor the issue.

Dec 13, 2021

We Are Letting Our Democracy be Murdered

There can no longer be any doubt that Donald Trump and his minions will stop at nothing to assure victory in the 2024 presidential election, and that includes violence up to and including a civil war.

They appear to be trying to use dubious political avenues first, but if those don’t work violence appears likely.

Let’s begin with the dubious political avenues. As Barton Gellman writes in the January/February 2022 issue of Atlantic:

“Some of them (state Republican operatives) have rewritten statutes to seize partisan control of decisions about which ballots to count and which to discard, which results to certify and which to reject.

They are driving out or stripping power from election officials who refused to go along with the plot last November aiming to replace them with exponents of the Big Lie.

They are fine-tuning a legal argument that purports to allow state legislators to override the choice of the voters.”

The hope that state legislators will override voters is based on Article II of the U.S. Constitution, which says that each state shall appoint electors “in such a manner as the Legislature thereof may direct.”

No state legislature has overruled voters’ choice since the 19th Century. They have always routinely certified the voters’ choice of electors. But, in 2000, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Bush vs. Gore that a state “can take back the power to appoint electors.”

So, if a legislature controlled by Trump acolytes can find any action taken during an election that it had not specifically authorized – and there are always multiple such actions – the legislature could throw out the people’s vote and substitute its own cast of electors. And a strongly conservative Supreme Court, such as the one we have now, would not be likely to intervene.

Another method Trumpsters are using is to find patches of resistance and remove them. A prime example is Brad Raffensperger, Georgia's secretary of state who denied Trump's demand that he "find" nearly 12,000 votes that would give him a victory there. As a result of his refusal, Raffensperger was formally censured by his state party and stripped of his power as chief election officer. There have been, and certainly will be, others.

Which means the upcoming elections will have officers in those positions who will do whatever Trump wants to give him a victory.

A third method, which Trump has been actively and successfully pursuing for years, is to cast doubt on the validity of elections. Faith in the validity of elections is the very heart and soul of democracy and until now it has never been doubted. Now, though, if people doubt that validity, they won't vote, which will play into the hands of Republicans.

But if all else fails, there is always violence, and that appears very likely. Consider:

A new Harvard Institute of Politics poll shows that nearly half of Republicans aged 18 to 29 believe the chance of a second civil war is 50 percent or higher.

A New York Times survey shows that 30 percent of all Republicans, which equates to tens of millions of people, think an armed insurrection may be necessary to "save" America.

And who might these likely insurrectionists be?

Gellman reports on an in-depth study of the Jan. 6 Capitol invaders led by Robert A. Pape, a leading scholar on the intersection of warfare and politics. Pape was helped by a group of seven research professionals supported by 24 University of Chicago undergraduates.

And they found that the culprits are not the obvious suspects, such as the far-right Proud Boys, Oath Keepers or any groups like them. Among their findings:

Six of seven persons who were arrested because of their involvement in the riots had no connection with any of those groups.

The median age of the rioters was 41.8, which is wildly atypical of violent political extremists in the United States, Europe and the Middle East, whose median age for decades has been in the 20s and early 30s.

Seven percent of the Jan. 6 insurgents were unemployed, compared with 25 percent of violent extremists arrested by the FBI over the previous decade.

More than half of those arrested at the Capitol had white-collar jobs or owned their own business. They were doctors, architects, a Google field-operations specialist, the CEO of a marketing firm, a State Department official. "The last time America saw middle-class whites involved in violence was the expansion of the second KKK in the 1920s," Pape was quoted as saying.

Most telling, though, was where the insurrectionists lived. All other things being equal, the researchers discovered that insurgents were much more likely to live in counties where the white share of the population was in decline. For every one-point drop in a county's percentage of non-Hispanic whites from 2015 to 2019, the likelihood of an insurgent living in that county increased by 25 percent.

So that's it: White supremacy and racism undeniably drive the Trump-led revolution we all are experiencing.

And it is working. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance says one-fourth of the world's population lives in a "backsliding democracy," and the United States is one of those nations.

The institute puts us there because of what it says is our racial inequality in voting rights, election integrity and violent insurrection.

So, how concerned should lovers of democracy be?

Very concerned! Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, who presided over her state's Trump-contested election in 2020, put it this way to The New York Times:

"If people in general, leaders and citizens, aren't taking this as the most important issue of our time and acting accordingly, then we may not be able to ensure democracy prevails again in '24."

Dec 27, 2021

Unvaxxed People: You're to Blame

I cannot understand why everyone who is eligible to be vaccinated against Covid-19 isn't vaccinated. And why won't these people wear masks? Don't they realize how cruelly self-centered they are being?

Not only are they willing to endanger themselves, but they're even willing to drag other people, people they've never even met, into that danger with them.

Consider it especially from the point of view of view of doctors, nurses and other health-care professionals who must treat them when ambulances drop them off at their hospitals. These non-vaxxers are literally forcing already-exhausted doctors and nurses to risk their health and, in the extreme, even their lives simply because these people won't take a shot.

Yes, these people – these eligible but unvaccinated people who are mostly responsible for hospitals across the nation suddenly having to deal with overcrowding again.

The numbers of hospital admissions are growing faster right now than they have at any time since the pandemic's early days, and that increase can be traced directly to unvaccinated people. Unvaccinated people account for more than 90 percent of all hospital admissions for Covid.

But the medical world is not entirely blameless. For as selfish and thoughtless and cruel as the aforementioned may be, there is one group – we can only hope it's a small group – of purposefully unvaccinated persons who, if anything, are worse. They are the doctors, nurses and other health-care professionals who refuse to get vaccinated.

Raise your hand if you want unvaccinated doctors and nurses to treat you should you become hospitalized.

All this is happening in the face of the new, astoundingly fast-spreading omicron variant. As December dawned, the variant accounted for one percent of the cases in America. Only 20 days later, it was pushing 75 percent.

True, most omicron victims only suffer mild cases, but many don't. So many of them are ending up in hospitals that they are causing the rise in hospitalizations.

And even the mildest of cases of Covid infections can have long-term effects. A close friend of mine was infected by Covid a few months ago but it was so mild she almost missed it; at the time, she thought it was just a quick case of the sniffles. But it wasn't. It was Covid. And though it was a "mild" case, she has not regained her sense of smell.

And don't forget that the delta virus is still spreading its more venomous bite, especially among the unvaccinated.

So – except for those folks whose physical conditions or deeply held religious beliefs prohibit them from getting vaccinated against Covid-19, I can't see any reason for anyone not to be vaccinated.

I think it should be mandated by law. I know a lot of people claim no government has the right to tell them they must be vaccinated, but these very same people routinely obey the law and have their children vaccinated before they go to school.

Requiring Covid-19 vaccinations should be the law because they cause no harm, but rather they protect the recipients and everyone around them from a horrific disease that has killed more than 800,000 people in America (most of them unvaccinated), a number that is growing every day. What's the difference between that and mandating children be inoculated against various diseases?

Oh, well. One sort-of good thing about this rapidly spreading virus, if anything even sort-of good can be said about it, is that if it keeps up at this rate, we'll reach herd immunity soon. Virtually every person will be immune, most of us because we've been vaccinated, the rest because they've had the disease.

(Correction: In my last column (The “Real” Reality, 12/20/21) I began a closing paragraph, a direct quote, with the words, “An anthology that doesn’t even come close,” etc. The word “anthology” should have been “analogy.” Please forgive my senior moment.)

Jan 3, 2022

Democrats’ Future Is Brightening

Democrats enter 2022 limping, but there are growing reasons to be optimistic.

I wrote in this space a few weeks ago that “Democrats Can Win in 2022” (Nov. 22, 2021), and things are looking even better now than they did then.

Let’s begin with what Democrats have accomplished in the last year. Republicans and a couple of recalcitrant Democrats have prevented some of their main goals – so far – but, as Nancy Pelosi put it a few days ago, Democrats have had successes. They have helped vaccinate millions of people, sent relief checks to millions of families, worked to rebuild our middle class, fought to invest in our kids’ education, taken bold action on climate change, and protected our health care from Republican sabotage.

It’s true that Republican-led state legislatures are passing all sorts of laws to discourage voting among Black people and poor people, normally Democratic voters. Lawmakers in 41 states have filed hundreds of bills that would allow election officials to overturn voters’ choices, and more than 30 of those bills have become law.

But they’re failing a lot, too. Republican legislators in seven states proposed bills that would have given them direct ability to change election results, but not one of them passed.

Other good news for Democrats: Kentucky added more early-voting days and online registration portals, Virginia created a statewide preclearance requirement and made Election Day a holiday, and New York restored voting rights for some felons.

As for the upcoming midterm elections, Democrats have identified more than 50 GOP candidates who are on record as saying Trump won the election, and Democrats are going to hold their feet to the fire over it. Trump suck-ups in the Senate might believe that nonsense, or say they do, but it’s a good bet that most Americans do not. Not all Republicans are Trumppublicans.

And then there are the quitters. At least five powerful GOP senators who are up for reelection have said they are finished: Rod Portman of Ohio, Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, Richard Burr of North Carolina, Richard Shelby of Alabama, and Roy Blunt of Missouri. Each one of them creates an opening for Democrats.

Also remember President Biden’s \$1 trillion infrastructure plan and his \$1.8 trillion social services and climate change package. By the time the November elections get here, the infrastructure plan will

have heavy equipment out repairing roads, bridges, pipelines and more, and voters are going to love it.

They also will wonder why the social services and climate change package is being held up. After all, polls consistently show that Democrats and Republican voters alike like the plan; only Trump's Senate minions are opposed.

And then there's that criminal thing. Trump is being investigated by state and federal officials for allegedly committing 15 or more felonies. Some of those investigations will have to end soon, and if we go into the November midterms with Trump under indictment on felony charges, you have to wonder how many voters will support anyone who supports an obvious, even if unconvicted, felon.

Add that to the House special committee's investigation of the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol, and the part Trump played in that, and the GOP happy picture dulls even more. The committee has signaled it is about to start looking into Trump's participation in the riot as a criminal matter, so it's likely we'll go into November with Trump formally accused of anything from insurrection to sedition to treason. I wonder how popular he would be then.

The upshot of all this is that by the time the November midterm elections get here, Democrat voters may be so fed up with Republicans trying to deny them the vote, and so ticked off at a former president under criminal indictment(s), that it could lead to the biggest Democratic victory in history. And by the 2024 presidential election, the GOP might be stuck with their leading candidate being a convicted felon.

Sure, it's a far-out dream. But if we want to protect our democracy from devolving into fascism, or something like it, we'd better go for it.

Jan 10, 2022

GOP Wants to Destroy Democracy

The Republican Party is, without a doubt, laser-focused on destroying our democracy.

Democracy depends on elections that voters believe are fair and honest, but Republicans are openly and shamelessly attacking that ideal on two levels.

On the state level they are doing everything they can to prevent left-leaning people from voting. With the use of supercomputers, they have turned gerrymandering into an art form. They have filed hundreds – hundreds! – of bills to shorten voting times, make mail-in voting hard if not impossible, reduce or eliminate the use of drop boxes, move voting polls to hard-to-reach locations or locations where parking is tightly limited, allow election officials to overturn voters' choices, even allow themselves to substitute their choices for the voters' choices, and more.

And on the federal level House and Senate Republicans are marching in near-perfect lockstep to prevent Congress from doing anything about it, such as pass voting rights laws that would interfere with what the GOP-led states are doing.

Sadly, so far they have been getting away with it. Because of the Senate's filibuster rules, Trump-controlled Republicans and the two Democrats marching with them – West Virginia's Joe Manchin and Arizona's Kyrsten Sinema – continue to have their way. The tail keeps wagging the dog.

But maybe, just maybe, that GOP dream is about to explode.

The biggest roadblock to getting anything done in the Senate has been the filibuster, which in effect means 60 of the 100 senators must vote yea to pass most bills. And since they have 50 votes plus the two Democrats, they're depending on that.

But, last week, for the first time, President Biden announced his support for ending the filibuster. He said, "If the only thing standing between getting voting rights legislation passed and not getting it passed is the filibuster, I support making the exception of voting rights for the filibuster."

To which Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, who has labeled the state legislatures' new laws as "anti-democratic," replied with a promise that the Senate will vote on changing the filibuster rule on or before Jan. 17 (which, perhaps coincidentally, is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday).

Schumer added, "We must ask ourselves, if the right to vote is the cornerstone of our democracy, then how can we in good conscience allow for a situation in which the Republican Party can debate and pass voter suppression laws at the state level with only a simple majority vote, but not allow the United States Senate to do the same?"

There are two flies in that ointment: Sens. Sinema and Manchin, both of whom are threatening to block the filibuster reform. If either does so – and Sinema promises she definitely will – Republicans win.

That would pave the way for Republicans to take over at least one of Congress' two houses, which would destroy any chance of passing any voter rights legislation, clear the path for Republicans to win the 2022 midterm elections, and set up Donald Trump to become our next president. At that point democracy dies.

I cannot believe – I will not believe – that Americans will do that to America.

There is reason to hope. Last Thursday (Jan. 6!) Biden, for the first time, released a torrent of criticism at Trump over his leading the Capitol insurrection, and at Republicans in general for their "un-American" efforts to "subvert" elections in states they control.

"Right now," he said, "in state after state, new laws are being written – not to protect the vote, but to deny it; not only to suppress the vote, but to subvert it; not to strengthen or protect our democracy, but because the former president lost. It's wrong. It's undemocratic. And frankly, it's un-American."

By speaking those words, Biden sharply raised the stakes for speeches he and Vice President Kamila Harris will make tomorrow in Atlanta. Both are expected to make the case that passing the voting rights bills is the best way, if not the only way, to stop the GOP from preventing eligible voters from casting their ballots.

Surely there are at least one or two Republican senators who will wake up before it's too late and understand they are on the verge of destroying democracy in favor of authoritarianism – fascism, neo-Nazism, dictatorship, despotism, call it what you will.

It's their choice: Democracy or Donald Trump. They can't have both.

Jan 24, 2022

Last Chance to Save Democracy

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell made a comment last week that should leave no doubt in anyone's mind – if any such doubt still exists – that the Republican Party is done with democracy.

McConnell said that if the GOP wins control of the Senate in November, and a vacancy occurs on the Supreme Court, he would not commit to allowing Joe Biden's nominee to come to a vote even if Biden still has two years left in office.

This is the same person who blocked a vote on Barak Obama's nominee when Obama still had a full year left in office, then blasted through Donald Trump's choice when Trump had about a month left.

That's democracy?

Add that to Senate Republicans' refusal to pass voting-rights and election-fraud bills, thus paving the way for GOP-controlled state legislatures across the nation to pass all sorts of anti-democratic and anti-Democratic laws.

Republicans are so confident they've won that at least 19 state legislatures controlled by Republicans have already passed voter suppression laws, laws that focus on people of color. They've filed hundreds of bills to shorten voting times, make mail-in voting hard, reduce or eliminate the use of drop boxes, move voting polls to hard-to-reach locations, allow election officials to overturn voters' choices, even allow themselves to substitute their choices for the voters' choices. They have been breathtakingly bold in gerrymandering electoral maps. And now Republicans in at least three states are proposing to establish police forces to hunt exclusively for voter fraud that election experts say barely exists.

And don't forget how Republicans are stocking Trump-approved people in offices that have control over elections, people who are likely to do his bidding to make voting go his way. He tried that in 2020 but didn't have enough time to get his people lined up. Now he has.

And on, and on, and on it goes. And now that the Senate has cleared the legislatures' path forward, we can expect a new flood of these laws and Trump-approved appointments to electoral offices.

It is no longer possible for anyone to say with a straight face that this is not an attack on democracy and a push for Trump to become America's autocratic – fascist! – leader. International groups already have noted that the United States is a democracy in decline, and November could seal that deal. If Trump-led Republicans win in November, Democrats will be out of power for years to come, even more stringent laws will be written, and we can kiss our democracy goodbye.

So what do we do now?

One idea is for Democrats to compromise with Republicans over the now-dead election bills and salvage whatever they can from them, but I hope they never do that. Republicans hold all the cards now and they know it, so why would they compromise away anything meaningful when doing so would benefit them nothing?

My hope is that instead of sticking our tails between our legs and compromising anything, or admitting any kind of defeat, we turn our weakness into our strength. We should declare an all-out blitz to make certain every voter in America, especially every voter of color, understands that Republicans are doing everything they can to prevent them from voting, and their only hope – democracy's only hope – is for them to walk through hell if necessary to cast their ballots in historic numbers.

After all, there are more Democrats in America than there are Republicans, and Democrats' problem has always been that Democrats don't vote. If they vote in November, democracy will win.

And if they don't vote, they can expect their children to learn that the Civil War was about states' rights, that the Capitol rioters saved America from ruin, and that racism really isn't and never has been a problem here.

If that sounds like I'm saying this is all about racism, I am. It is.

I know racism when I see it. I was born and reared in Jim Crow South Carolina, and as a young reporter I helped cover the desegregation of Alabama (Martin Luther King Jr. and George Wallace days) for The Associated Press.

After Wallace lost his 1958 bid for governor to John Patterson, he famously said that "no one will ever out-nigger me again." And no one ever did. He rode that attitude to the Alabama governor's mansion in 1962, then shocked the nation when he mounted a segregationist bid for president in 1964 and drew strong support far outside South. It was the first time the nation was forced to look at racism as something other than a Southern issue.

Wallace had tapped into a previously unrecognized nationwide racist sentiment, and it's that same population that Trump recognized in 2016, jumped on the wagon, and rode it to victory. That same nationwide sentiment still exists, and Trump is – Trump Republicans are – still riding it.

Don't think so? How many Black people did you see in that mob of Trump minions that stormed our nation's capital on Jan. 6?

And how about Trump's lie-filled speech in Arizona over the Martin Luther King weekend that was bursting at the seams with naked appeals to white grievance, like claiming that white people are being denied access to health care based on their race.

Want more evidence? Ponder Mitch McConnell's words last week: "(I)f you look at the statistics, African American voters are voting in just as high a percentage as Americans."

Think about that.

We have one more chance, the November mid-term elections, to get this right and save democracy. Please, Democrats, Independents and real Republicans, do your part. Don't let democracy die.

Jan 31, 2022

A Walk with Jim Crow

Black History Month, which begins tomorrow, holds a special interest for me. I grew up in Jim Crow South Carolina, came of age as the tide was just beginning to turn against segregation, later became a journalist and was privileged to help cover the waning days of Alabama Gov. George Wallace and the rising star of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. From those days to today, the status of Black people in America has been on a slow but steady ascendancy.

We're not there yet, but we've come a long way since I was born. As a reminder of where we were then compared with where we are now, I invite you to join me as I walk through those early days.

My father was a Methodist minister so we moved every four or five years. Thus I experienced Jim Crow in several towns and cities from the mountains to the ocean. I was born in Winnsboro in 1939, but my first memories are of Seneca.

And I promise I will never write a column this long again.

1941-45: Seneca

The first Black people I ever knew by name were Doc and Uncle Joe. I never knew their last names, and I doubt that many white people did. All the white people in town knew them and loved them, but still they were colored people – the phrase used then – and so they had to stay in their place.

Doc was a small, wiry man who delivered groceries for Mr. Barron's grocery store. Sometimes he would let us kids ride in the back of his covered pickup truck while he was delivering. I don't remember much about him, but I remember my older sister liked him.

I knew Uncle Joe better than I knew Doc. Uncle Joe was the cemetery's caretaker and he lived in a shanty at the foot of the cemetery. The shanty had a brick fireplace and an outhouse in the backyard. Every Sunday morning, Uncle Joe would walk up the hill to our church and ring the church bell to call all Methodists (white Methodists) to worship. Then he'd walk back home before the services began. Churches were segregated too.

I was inside Uncle Joe's living space once. I don't remember why or how we got there, but three or four of us white kids ended up in there for a few moments. A photograph in my mind is of one room with an open fireplace against one wall and a headboard-less bed against another. A pot-bellied, wood-burning stove occupies space near the kitchen, which takes up a corner of the room and has a sink with a hand pump for water. Next to the sink is a small, bare wooden table and one chair. I also remember that Uncle Joe appeared extremely nervous that we were there and herded us out of the door as soon as he could.

Railroad tracks split the town, and I recall a side of the train station had three doors in it, one marked "Men," the second "Women," and the third "Colored." Inside the train station were two water fountains, one marked "White" and one marked "Colored." They were the only restrooms and water fountains in town that Black people could use.

Black people and white people shopped effortlessly side by side in retail stores, except that Black people couldn't sit down anywhere, or try on clothes, or enter a restaurant, or use public restrooms, or drink from water fountains. And if they ran into a white person on the sidewalk, they would step aside and let the white person walk by.

I also recall a motion picture theater, known as "the picture show." To get in, a white person would buy a ticket at the front booth, which was under a brightly lighted marquee, walk inside, buy popcorn, have a seat, and watch the show. Restrooms were in the back, and you could smoke cigarettes there.

Black people were allowed, but they could not use the same entrance and could not sit near white people. One side of the building, which fronted a large weed-filled lot, was a huge, blank wall – solid white except for what looked from afar like two black holes in it. One hole was shaped like a half moon with the flat side down, and it was placed a few feet off the ground. The other, next to it, was a vertical rectangle that sprang from ground level and was bigger than a person. The half-moon shape was a hole-in-the-wall booth where Black people bought their tickets. They'd enter through the side door (the vertical rectangle), go straight up the stairs to the balcony, sit down and watch a movie about white people. If there were any Black people in the movie, they were depicted as either stupid or criminal or appearing with white people in some subservient ways such as living in African villages under the control of white missionaries or serving as mules for Great White Hunter expeditions. There was no concession stand or restroom for Black people.

Many white people kept cheap glasses or jars on hand should a Black person – maid, yard worker – ask for water. They would give the Black person water in that jar, then break it and throw it away so that no one would "catch their germs."

My father was transferred to Aiken when I was beginning the first grade.

1945-49: Aiken

I didn't know any Black people during the four years we lived in Aiken – at least, I didn't know any well. Some of our church's more affluent members had maids whose names I knew, but our relationship was mostly "Hi Minnie" and "Bye-Minnie." We never talked much beyond that, and we certainly never sat down at a table together. There was no animosity among us, no anger – at least outwardly. Outwardly, at least, everyone was friendly with everyone. There was just – separation.

I don't remember seeing many Black people at all in Aiken, except mainly Saturdays on Main Street. Black people I mostly recall were picking cotton in nearby Montmorency.

I don't recall the theater having a side entrance or a balcony, so I doubt Black people there ever saw a film.

I do remember one racially connected incident that happened when I was in the third grade. I brought the n-word home from school one day and, not knowing what it was, I said it in front of Daddy. He flashed with an anger I rarely saw in him. He let me know in no uncertain terms that I had used an ugly word, an insulting word, and I would never use it again – not in our house, not anywhere. He said some things about how every person deserves to be treated with dignity, but I didn't understand much of that. But I did understand, very clearly, that the word I would use from then on would be Negro – carefully pronounced KNEE-grow – and I would use it with respect. I have never used the n-word again.

As I was beginning the fifth grade, we were transferred to Greenville.

1949-53: Greenville

Greenville was the undisputed most conservative – read that white-oriented – city in South Carolina. It was (is) the home of Bob Jones University, a fundamentalist Christian school that was one of the most openly racist universities in America. Greenville also was (is) the home of Furman University, which was owned and run by the Southern Baptist Convention, which also was stridently segregationist. The influence those two universities had on Greenville is hard to overstate.

We lived in a middle-class all-white neighborhood, I attended an all-white school, all-white church, all-white YMCA, all-white movie theaters, all-white everything. All my friends and all my acquaintances were white, except for the maids. Beyond that, about the nearest I ever came to interfacing with Negroes were those sitting in the backs of the buses I rode downtown to see a movie or go to the Y, both of which were denied to Black people.

Matters involving the races were rarely discussed in my house or among my friends for the same reason we didn't talk much about Australians: They did not exist in our orb. Perhaps grown-ups talked about them among themselves, but not around us kids, and we kids never did. We might as well have lived in different countries, for in fact we did. Our generation didn't know enough Black people, or

even know enough about Black people, for them to come up in normal conversation. To us, separation of the races was neither a good thing nor a bad thing. It wasn't even a thing. It just was.

If Black people had a problem with "separate but equal," we didn't know about it. Nobody told us and we had no reason to ask.

We were transferred to Charleston when I was beginning the 9th grade.

1953-57: Charleston

It was in Charleston that I began to grow into an understanding of "separate but equal," how remarkably separate we were, and how just as remarkably unequal we were.

At school, we rented our textbooks – sometimes used, sometimes new – at the start of the year, and each book's condition was given a grade. At the end of the year, we turned them in and they were graded again. If the grade dropped, say from B to a C, we'd pay a fine and the book would be rented out again next year. If the book were graded D or F, however, it would be packed up with other D and F books and sent to a Black school where they would become some Black kids' textbooks the next year.

When our football team got new uniforms, the discarded uniforms were sent to Black schools for them to use. Same with anything else we didn't need or was beyond use.

Black schools were pathetic. Their students, using our old textbooks, were taught by Black teachers who had received even poorer educations than the students were getting. Black schools were often cases of the blind leading the blind.

I was a high school sophomore in 1954 when the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its ruling in the Brown vs. Board of Education case, which ended racial segregation in schools. The decision was the talk of our school the next day, but there was no anger, no angst, nothing but curiosity. Why should it be otherwise? We didn't dislike Black people because we didn't know any Black people, or anything about them, so why should we dislike them?

But we were curious. Very much so. We fully expected to be sharing our hallways and classrooms with Black people next year, but we didn't know any Black people so couldn't help but wonder what it would be like.

Understand: We were almost totally ignorant about Black people. One incident that illustrates that involved members of our basketball team. They worried about what would happen if Black boys tried out for the team but couldn't play up to our skill level. What would it look like if all white boys were on the floor playing and all Black boys were sitting on the bench? That would humiliate them, and we really didn't want to humiliate anybody. (We learned.)

The Sunday after the Supreme Court's ruling, Dad stood in the pulpit of our church (John Wesley Methodist Church in West Ashley) and announced that if any Black people came to our church because of the court's ruling, they would be fully and warmly welcomed and treated with the full respect we would show any other visitor. And if anyone in the congregation felt they could not live

with that, they may be more comfortable in another church. I don't know of anyone who left, but few if any Black people ever came.

After I graduated high school, I joined the Marine Reserve and headed for the Marine Corps recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C., for boot camp.

1957-1958: Marine Corps

Parris Island was intended to be a hell, and it was. Suffice it to say everything you have ever heard about the training at Parris Island is true.

On our first night we were assigned to our racks (double-decker beds), and my assigned rack mate was a black man from Pittsburgh. His name was Sloan, and almost instantly we became close friends. By the time we graduated three months later he had long become the best friend I ever had, and there is no doubt he felt the same about me. We helped each other survive the most miserable three months either of us had ever experienced.

After we graduated Parris Island we were bused directly to Camp Geiger in North Carolina where newly minted Marines undergo combat training.

For the first week we were locked down to the base, but when the week ended we were given our first off-base liberty since we arrived at Parris Island. It would be the first time in more than three months that we could escape the hard-wired military life and enjoy the thrill of being civilians for a few hours.

We couldn't wait. Sloan, two others and I showered, shaved, proudly donned our new Marine Corps uniforms, and joyfully headed for the gate. We had no idea where we were going or what we would do, but who cared? We'd be in a civilian world.

But when we got to the gate, the MP stopped us and told us we could not go on liberty.

We were stunned. Why not?

"Because this side of the fence is federal property and you can do as you like," he said. "But that side of the fence is North Carolina and it's racially segregated. There is no place you'd be allowed together."

Two of us were white. Two were Black.

We were all stunned, but I was humiliated. They were from the North; I was from South Carolina. I should have known that. I did know that, of course, but Sloan had long since ceased to be a Black person in my eyes, if he ever had been. He wasn't black or white. He was just my friend.

Suddenly, Sloan and the other Black friend spun around and without a word stormed away from the gate and back into the base.

The other white person and I followed. We didn't have to go on liberty, we told them. There was a lot to do on the base. We could catch a movie, go to the gym, grab a burger. But they didn't even turn around. Wouldn't even look at us. Wouldn't even speak to us. They just waved us off and kept walking. Fast.

After several blocks of pleading, we gave up. They were plainly too upset to even talk to us. We finally just stopped and watched them go. We didn't feel like off-base liberty anymore, so we shuffled back to the barracks. They were not there.

After that, the close friendship Sloan and I shared was never the same. We remained friends – there was never any animosity between us – but the warmth we had known was gone. A week or two later he moved to the end of the squad bay where a clique of Black guys was forming,, and our friendship lessened even more.

After the six weeks of combat training we were given a one-week leave, then I returned to Camp Geiger for six more weeks of advanced combat training and Sloan was assigned somewhere else. I never saw him again.

As my Reserve training ended, I was released from active duty and so it was time to begin college.

1958-59: College Years

Wofford College was a small, all-male, all-white college in Spartanburg. In 1958 all colleges in South Carolina – as well as everywhere else in the South – were all-white or all-Black. Wofford was white students, white faculty and white administrators, and Black maids, Black custodians and Black cafeteria workers. The cafeteria's manager was white.

I was not ready for college. About all I did was party every night and rarely cracked a book. After three semesters, including one-subject summer school, I was expelled.

Brevard College accepted me on probation, but the pattern repeated itself and after two semesters I was expelled again.

After that no college would accept me, so Dad told me I had made my choice, so now it was time to decide what I wanted to do with my life. I could live at home for now (home now was Greenwood) while I decided, but I had to grow up, get a job, leave home, and start my adult life.

All I knew was that I liked to write, and newspapers had writers, so I started seeking a job as a reporter. All I knew about newspapers is what I had learned as a sportswriter on my high school newspaper, but the Florence Morning News took a chance on me and offered me a job as a starting reporter for \$50 a week. That wasn't much even by 1960 standards, but I took it

1960-61: Florence

Like all other newspapers across the South, the Morning News employed only white reporters and editors. And neither did we cover anything involving Black people unless they were involved in a

crime. The exception was that, like most newspapers in the South, we did publish a page every Monday morning that contained news of the Black community. But we used only what Black people mailed in, mostly church events and social doings.

Although newspapers published virtually nothing important about the Black community, Black people around the South were beginning to stir. The Supreme Court had ruled in 1954 that school segregation was unconstitutional, but Southern school officials were still resisting. In 1957 nine Black students were blocked from integrating Central High School in Little Rock, Ark. In 1960, 6-year-old Ruby Bridges was escorted by four armed federal marshals as she became the first Black person to attend William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans.

Black people were demanding to be treated as equal citizens in other ways as well. In 1957 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. joined three other religious leaders and formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to corral the power of Black churches to work for equal rights. In 1960 four Black college students refused to leave a “whites only” lunch counter in Greensboro, N.C., sparking similar “sit-ins” at lunch counters across the South. And all throughout 1961, Black and white activists known as freedom riders were taking bus trips throughout the South to protest segregated bus terminals and attempt to use “whites only” restrooms and lunch counters.

It was against that background that, about a year after I started at the Morning News, I was offered a job with The Associated Press in Alabama. I leaped at the offer.

In the fall of 1961, I headed for a new life.

The Associated Press: 1961-1965

The increasing racial unrest was more obvious in Alabama than it had been in South Carolina. George Wallace had lost the 1958 Democratic gubernatorial primary to Ku Klux Klan-backed John Patterson, and Wallace had famously blamed it on being “outniggered” by John Patterson and he promised no one would ever defeat him that way again. And he kept his promise. He won the 1962 race for governor and shortly thereafter promised “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.”

But in reality, it was over for people like him. By April 1963 Dr. King and other civil rights leaders were gaining steam in their efforts to improve Black lives in Alabama. They had begun holding nightly “mass meetings” in Birmingham’s 16th Street Baptist Church, marching peacefully in the streets, picketing selected Downtown stores, and holding sit-ins at Downtown lunch counters. It led to riots and an eventual church bombing, but King kept pushing.

A month later, on June 11, Gov. Wallace literally stood in the schoolhouse door to live up to his “segregation forever” pledge and prevent two Black students from being admitted to the University of Alabama. It was mostly for show, however, as President Kennedy ordered the Alabama National Guard federalized and the Guard’s commander ordered Wallace to get out of the way. After a bit of speechifying, Wallace quietly moved away from the door and the two students were admitted. Alabama was desegregated.

Wallace kept on trying, though, and top government officials helped. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover labeled King with every name he could think of: communist, womanizer, felon, rabble rouser, but none of it stuck. President Johnson tried to persuade King to slow down and accept incremental advances, but King refused on grounds that Black people already had waited centuries too long for justice and he wanted justice now.

Later that year King delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech before 200,000 persons in Washington, D.C. The next year he was recognized as Time magazine’s Man of the Year, and a few months later he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1965, after law enforcement officers attacked and bloodied civil rights marchers in Selma, Ala., who were trying to march to Montgomery, King took over and successfully completed the march peacefully.

On April 4, 1968, while King was supporting striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tenn., he was assassinated at the Lorraine Motel.

But that didn’t stop the movement. And today, Black men and women who would have been picking cotton at the start of this column are today occupying leading roles in business, medicine, government, law, science, every profession you can name, including a Black man becoming president of the United States and a Black woman about to become a United States justice.

We can only wonder what this world would look like today if George Washington Carver had been allowed to have a decent education and a well-stocked laboratory.

Feb 7, 2022

Is Civil War Coming?

It’s time we started taking this talk about civil war seriously.

I started taking it seriously after reading what Barbara F. Walter said about it in her book *How Civil Wars Start And How to Stop Them*.

Ms. Walter is one of several analysts, known as the Political Instability Task Force, who have spent 30 years performing deep research into civil wars around the world, including searching for factors that reliably predict whether a country is ripe for civil war, so she has the credentials to speak on the subject, and she needs to be heard.

Ms. Walter’s group identified three factors that reliably predict whether a country is ripe for a civil war.

One factor is born when a dominant group loses its status – not only when it loses its political power, but more important when it faces a reversal of its status. The researchers call this development “downgrading,” and say it predicts which groups are most likely to initiate conflict.

A second factor occurs when a country is either transitioning toward or away from democracy. The task force used a system in which it rates countries from +10 to -10, +10 being the most democratic and -10 being the most autocratic. The countries that rated between +5 and -5, called the “anocracy zone,” are twice as likely as autocracies to experience civil war and three times as likely as democracies.

The United States is rated +5, which puts us in the autocracy zone for the first time since 1800.

The third factor happens when a political party becomes based on religion, ethnicity or race instead of ideology. It’s called “factionalism,” and when it’s combined with anocracy the combination is the best predictor of a civil war.

Put together, it says that if a dominant group in a country like ours faces a reversal of its status, if the country is transitioning away from democracy, and especially if one of its political parties becomes based on religion, ethnicity or race instead of ideology, that country is ripe for civil war.

Ms. Walter points straight at America when she concludes: “We are a factionalized anocracy that is quickly approaching the openly insurgency stage, which means we are closer to civil war than any of us would like to believe.”

If civil war comes, experts say, it won’t be like the American Civil War of the 1860s. It will be more like the Troubles in Northern Ireland, which was an ethno-nationalist “low-grade war” that lasted 30 years, or the long-running low-grade war in Colombia between the far-right government and far-left guerrilla groups.

In other words, the experts say, an American civil war would be a normalization of political violence that endangers basic security, and the Jan. 6 Capitol riot would come to be seen as its first step.

If history is a guide, America is due to fall. We’re overdue. You’re probably familiar with *The Story of Nations*, but please read it anew, and slowly:

From bondage to spiritual faith,

From spiritual faith to great courage,

From great courage to liberty,

From liberty to abundance,

From abundance to selfishness,

From selfishness to complacency,

From complacency to apathy,

From apathy to dependence,

From dependence to bondage.

Can you avoid seeing America in that?

Or this:

In his 1788 work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon listed five reasons Rome fell:

The rapid increase of divorce and the undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home.

Ever-higher taxes, and the spending of public money for free bread and circuses for the people.

The mad crave for pleasure, with sports every year becoming more exciting and more violent.

The building of the military when the real enemy was the decadence of the people.

The decay of religion, with religion fading into mere forms, losing touch with life and becoming impotent to guide the people.

And just a few days ago, not only did the Republican National Committee censor U.S. Reps. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.) and Adam Kinzinger (R-Ill.) for doing their constitutional duty, but it called the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol “legitimate political discourse.” It’s scary that the GOP so openly associates itself with what the experts say would be seen as the first step in any civil war.

All of that – Barbara Walter and her group’s research, *The Story of Nations*, the experience of Rome, the GOP’s official support of the Capitol riot – obviously portrays where America is and where America is headed. We’re headed downward, and a low-grade civil war is as likely as anything else to pull us the rest of the way.

But it doesn’t have to continue this way. History doesn’t have to repeat itself. The past doesn’t have to be prelude. There is still time to make our democracy work.

Democracy depends on all citizens keeping abreast of current events and voting, but that’s not happening in America. In the 2020 presidential election, 67 percent of citizens aged 18 and over voted, and that was the highest percentage of voters in the 21st century. But that means fully one of every three adult citizens did not bother to vote, and it was one of the most important presidential elections in our nation’s history.

We’ve got to do better than that in November. Way better. If we don’t, one way or the other, either by civil war or ennui, our democracy is gone and authoritarianism is in.

Knowledgeable people must vote in huge numbers, huge enough that those certain-to-come protests of a fixed election, led by Trump-approved federal election officials, will be laughable. Huge enough to send the anti-democracy movement back under the rocks from whence it came.

That makes it incumbent on every voter to spread the word to those who don't vote: "The Republican Party is doing everything it can to rob you of exercising your right, your duty, to vote. If stopping you from voting means that much to them, it should tell you how precious it should be to you. Walk through snow barefoot if necessary, but vote!"

And if democracy wins big in the election and civil war comes anyway, at least a democratic government will still lead the country.

It can be done. It must be done.

Feb 14, 2022

Book Censoring = Book Burning

In the 1930s, a group called the German Student Union began burning books it perceived represented ideologies opposing Nazism, as well as books by Jewish and leftist writers it did not like, such as Franz Kafka, Sigmund Freud and Upton Sinclair.

That wasn't the first time someone had tried to control other people's thoughts by burning books. In 213 B.C. Chinese Emperor Shih Huang Ti thought he could make people believe history began with him by burning all documents and written records in his empire.

It's happened in America, too. During the Red Scare period of the 1950s many Americans, spurred on by U.S. Rep. Joseph McCarthy (R-Wis.), began burning books they perceived as being pro-communist.

And it's happened here much more recently, although on a much smaller scale. In 2010 members of a small Florida church burned copies of the Koran to mark the ninth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. And just last week, hundreds of people attended a church service in Tennessee during which they gleefully tossed books they deemed "demonic" into a fire.

All these instances scream of ignorance, intolerance and fear, which have been at the heart of most book burnings throughout history.

There have been no large public book burnings in America recently, but their first cousin, book bannings, are suddenly increasing just about everywhere. And they can be just as chilling as book burnings, especially when they're done for the same reason as book burnings, which is to bury books that support ideas the bannings don't like.

For years, most of the complaints to school libraries regarded books that contained graphic violence, expressed disrespect for parents and family, were sexually explicit, exalted evil, lacked literary merit, were unsuitable for a particular age group or included offensive language.

But all that is changing. Sex and violence are still big, but increasingly the complaints to school libraries involve fears that the publications will present ideas, raise questions and incite critical inquiry among children that parents, political groups or religious organizations are not ready to address or that they find inappropriate.

In other words, pro-censor parents want to keep books away from their children that oppose ideas they believe in. To me, that's just too close to Nazi book burnings for comfort, and the fact that it's increasing in America is more than a little chilling.

And it is increasing rapidly. The American Library Association reports that attempts by school boards and other lawmakers are reaching numbers not seen in decades. The ALA says 330 attempts were made last fall alone, which was "unprecedented."

Sometimes, when book bannings discover they cannot ban books, they try coming in through the backdoor. For instance, far-right racists do not want books critical of such things as the Holocaust or slavery to be taught in schools, but they find they cannot ban them outright. So, they try to pass laws that accept those books only if they are balanced by books that support the Holocaust or slavery. If that's not possible, the thinking goes, no books critical of the Holocaust or slavery should be allowed either. The result? Mission accomplished: Children in those schools would not learn of the Holocaust or slavery.

And who is behind all this book-banning craze?

"Make no mistake," as the MoveOn organization said in a recent statement, "these are attempts by Republicans to wage a white supremacist culture war and march our country closer toward authoritarianism."

The statement said the GOP is led "by far-right politicians intent on stopping kids from learning about race, sexual orientation gender identity, different cultures, or even just an unbiased history of our country."

Administrators and political groups make up about 20 percent of all attempts to ban books. Other protestors are patrons (20 percent), and "others" (10 percent)

But parents form the biggest book-ban advocates in the United States. Fully half of all complaints to school libraries originate with parents.

Parents who support book-banning claim they have the right and the responsibility to decide what their children read, and they do. But they do not have the right to limit what books my children are exposed to. It's the job of librarians to fill their shelves with books they think are appropriate for their readers, and that right must never be diluted. Not if we are to remain a democracy.

Those who oppose banning books emphasize that the First Amendment gives anyone living in the United States — and that includes children — the right to receive and express any opinion or idea they like.

And the U.S. Supreme Court is on their side. In 1982, the school board of New York's Island Trees School District attempted to ban several books, including *Slaughterhouse Five*, because they were "anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and just plain filthy." The court ruled that public school officials can choose whatever books they want in their libraries, but once a book is in the library they cannot remove it unless it is "persuasively vulgar" or not right for the curriculum. They cannot remove a book only because they dislike the ideas that book expresses.

Think it's not a genuine problem? Here's ALA's list of the ten books, all of them classics, that parents try the hardest to keep away from their children—and, therefore, from yours and mine:

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

The Catcher in the Rye

To Kill a Mockingbird

Bridge to Terabithia

The Lord of the Flies

Of Mice and Men

The Color Purple

The Harry Potter Series

Slaughterhouse Five

The Bluest Eye

For book lovers, though, there is this good news: Librarians across the nation, and other organizations involved with protecting the printed word, refuse to take book banning lightly. Every September the ALA, the American Booksellers Association, the American Society of Journalists and Authors, the Association of American Publishers, and the National Association of College Stores sponsor "Banned Books Week – Celebrating the Freedom to Read."

The week is designed to "emphasize that imposing information restraints on a free people is far more dangerous than any ideas that may be expressed in that information." It highlights banned books, encourages readers to explore innovative ideas, and provides a variety of materials to promote free-speech events.

It's a wonderful week to visit your public library.

Feb 21, 2022

Con-Con: Danger Ahead

Although the attempt to call a Constitutional Convention has been flying under the radar for several years, its leaders are suddenly making a concerted effort to get it done as soon as possible..

And for Democrats, Independents and non-Trumpian Republicans, that should be a cause for alarm.

Ostensibly, the drive is to force a balanced budget amendment and establish term limits for members of Congress.

But scratch the surface and a far more nefarious reason appears, which is to rewrite the Constitution in a such a way that we would end up with a one-party autocracy governing America.

Or, as the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee contends, the convention would at least legalize discrimination, eliminate Medicare, kill Social Security, end Roe vs. Wade, and destroy voting rights (which several Republican-controlled state legislatures are already doing).

Do I sound alarmist? Read on.

The idea for a so-called Con-Con is being driven primarily by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEX), a lobbying organization founded and funded by the arch-right billionaire Koch Brothers. ALEX boasts a membership of more than 2,000 conservative state legislators – emphasis on conservative.

Their plan, which they barely pretend to hide, is to call the convention to add the balanced-budget amendment and establish term limits, then ignore all that once the convention is in session and create a whole new Constitution to their liking.

And they could do that very easily. Once a Constitutional Convention is convened, the delegates can do whatever they want. There are no limits. As Chief Justice Warren Burger wrote in a letter to Phyllis Schlafly in June 1983, “There is no effective way to limit or muzzle the actions of a Constitutional Convention. The convention may make its own rules and set its own agenda.”

It has been done before. In 1787, Congress called for a Constitutional Convention “for the express purpose of” revising the Articles of Confederation. But as soon as the convention convened the delegates made it clear they had no intention of revising the Articles of Confederation. Instead, they completely ignored Congress’ “express purpose of” stipulation and made it clear they were there to write an entirely new Constitution – which they did. They began work on May 25, and on Sept. 17 they produced a brand-new Constitution from scratch, an oft-amended version that we still live under today.

There has never been another Constitutional Convention, although there have been many attempts to call one.

Those pushing for a new convention now are close to succeeding. They need a total of 34 states (two-thirds of all state legislatures) to opt in, and so far they have 29. That makes it appear they need five more to make victory a reality, but maybe not.

At one point they had 32 states signed up, meaning they needed only two more to cross the finish line. But three of those states – Alabama, Florida and Louisiana – rescinded their vote, thus apparently increasing the need for five more. (The Nevada House of Representatives “purged” its resolution, but it’s questionable whether a one-chamber purge would be accepted as a rescission.)

But maybe none of that is a problem. If they can get just two more states to sign on, they’ll challenge the three states’ rescissions (and, if necessary, the Nevada House’s purge). Then, while the courts decide, they’ll go ahead with the convention, confident that the heavily conservative U.S. Supreme Court will see things their way.

If Con-Con supporters get their way and the convention takes place, any changes the delegates make will have to be certified by three-fourths of the state legislatures or state conventions (38 states). That sounds like a lot, but if things go the way in November that most pundits seem to think they will, that may not be a hard hurdle to clear.

What is the driving force behind this all-out attempt?

Trumpism, of course – which is to say racism, pure and simple.

Think not? Consider the case of U.S. Rep. Lucy McBath (D-Ga.), who staged a major political upset in 2018 to become the first Black person ever to represent the state’s 6th Congressional District – Newt Gingrich’s home turf. Two years later, after voters in her suburban Atlanta district favored Joe Biden over Trump by 11 percentage points, Republicans gerrymandered her district into one that Trump would have won by 15 points.

And consider these words by Ari Berman in the March-April 2022 issue of Mother Jones: “At the heart of Trumpism is the fear of a majority-minority future where white power no longer dominates. So it’s no coincidence that this battle is being fought hardest in the state (Georgia) where Black voters who vote overwhelmingly Democratic have the most to gain or lose.”

So yes, we should be alarmed. We must be alarmed.

Feb 28, 2022

Say it: Donald Trump is a Criminal

American jurisprudence says a person is innocent of a crime until proven guilty, which means that in the eyes of the law Donald Trump is pure as the driven snow.

But if you apply basic logic – if $A = B$ and $B = C$, therefore $A = C$ – Trump is as guilty as homemade sin. Such as:

It is a crime to destroy government property. Trump is famous for destroying government documents in his office. Therefore Trump is a criminal.

It is a crime to withhold presidential papers from the National Archives. Trump took boxes of presidential papers, some of them top secret, to Mar-a-Lago with him when he left office. Therefore Trump is a criminal.

It is a crime to sexually assault a person. Trump was recorded bragging about grabbing women “by their pussies.” Therefore Trump is a criminal.

It is a crime to interfere with elections. Trump tried to get Georgia’s secretary of state to “find” 11,780 votes so he could claim victory in the state’s presidential election. Therefore Trump is a criminal.

I’ll stop there, but the list of felonies he has obviously (logically) committed, or has been highly credibly accused of committing, goes on, and on, and on. The crimes include sedition, tax fraud, bank fraud, insurance fraud, real estate fraud, obstruction of justice (at least seven instances), marketing fraud, countless cases of violating the Hatch Act and the Emoluments Clause, and probably more.

Since Trump hasn’t even tried to hide his crimes, it amazes me he hasn’t been charged with something by now. (Imagine where matters would stand if this had happened to Barack Obama.)

But still it stands to reason that someday Trump will be convicted of something. And when he is convicted, the question will become whether we really want to see a former president of the United States behind bars.

Damn right we do! I do, anyway.

This is not out of spite, although I admit I despise the man for what he has done and is doing to our country. I can understand not wanting to see a former president in prison. Not a pleasant sight, for sure.

But if imprisoning Trump would be bad, not imprisoning him would be worse. It would prove to the world that America’s bedrock principle that no one is above the law is just so much hot air.

I’m not saying we should throw him in with the general prison population. Give him a private suite with an office if need be. But his freedom must be taken away from him. He is a criminal! He is an unindicted, unconvicted, malicious, serial criminal who should be charged, tried, convicted, and imprisoned.

One reason I’ve heard for people not wanting Trump imprisoned is that it could spark violence-prone groups like the Proud Boys into action, and it could. But we cannot let groups like the Proud Boys dictate anything to the United States of America. As the saying goes, let justice be done though the heavens fall.

But the thing is, many people – most people? – do not think Trump is a criminal. They believe that because no one has ever told them he is. They are the Trump Republicans who not only get their news

exclusively from Fox News, but they believe whatever Fox tells them. And Fox never even hints that Trump could be a criminal, so how could they know?

So why isn't the honest news media screaming that he's a criminal instead of tiptoeing around it. The news media's duty is to tell the truth, and the truth is that Donald Trump is a felon.

And all those Trump minions must be forced to accept that truth about him before November, before they fill the U.S. Congress and state legislatures with people who see only the driven-snow Trump.

That American jurisprudence thing is one reason the news media hasn't crowned him with the title, of course, as are the libel laws that accompany it. But truth is a deadly defense against any libel suit, so bring it!

Yet another reason for the reluctance is every real journalist's baked-in desire to be fair and "tell both sides of the story." As for that argument, though, I prefer the view the grizzled old newspaper editor made when he told his reporters, "If one person tells you it's storming outside and another person tells you the sun is shining, it is not your job to tell both sides of the story. It's your job to look out the freakin' window and see what the weather is."

When I was just starting out in my career in journalism, the mantra for reporters was to be objective. By the time I retired 30 years later, the profession had realized that being objective is an impossible mission. Certainly do your best to be objective, but realize you cannot be

For example, if Stephan Bannon and I were to cover a Donald Trump fundraising rally, anybody with a beating heart could tell who wrote what. No matter how hard we both tried to be objective, our unconscious choice of a lede, of the quotes we use, of the story's general tone, would give us away.

So, once objectivity became seen as impossible, the mantra became be fair. Good advice, yes, but nebulous advice at best.

So, what should a journalist say about Donald Trump and his crimes?

Look out the window and tell us what the weather is. Tell us the harsh truth. Hammer it home. Make sure that by November nobody alive can escape knowing the truth.

Donald Trump is a criminal.

Mar 7, 2022

Beltway Media and GOP Continue to Disappoint

I don't know which disappoints me the most right now, the new Republican Party or the Beltway news media.

The Republican Party for obvious reasons: their sudden abandonment of long-ingrained Republican principles in favor of a slavish dedication to an unconvicted felon, a compulsive liar (especially the Big Lie that he lost the 2020 presidential election because it was rigged), a racist, a would-be dictator, and now especially because he sides with a Communist dictator who sends tanks, warplanes and missiles into a peaceful, nonthreatening, neighboring, sovereign nation.

Trump has described Putin with words like “savvy,” “genius,” “peacemaker” and “pretty smart in taking over a country for two dollars’ worth of sanctions.”

And to top it all, Trump insanely bragged to a Fox News interviewer that Putin did not invade anyone while Trump was president and it never would have happened “if our election was not rigged. He understood me and understood that I don’t play games.”

The fact that Trump’s sycophants keep lapping it up is horrifying to democracy-loving Americans of all political stripes everywhere, including real Republicans, but we’ve had no choice except to get used to it.

But I’m just as disappointed with the Beltway news media for letting Trump and his minions get away with it. Instead of calling him out for his near-treasonous actions, the media has matter-of-factly described the Republican Party as being “divided” over Putin’s unwarranted attack.

Consider what the press saying about MAGA-aligned Republicans’ praise of Trump:

The New York Times: They are merely “America first” “isolationists.”

Politico: The party is facing “foreign policy factionalism.”

NBC News: Republicans are sending “mixed messages” and they are “a new brand of American Firsters,” “Republican doves” and “the libertarian right” that has an “anti-interventionist strain.”

The Washington Post: Republicans revealed a “a novel phenomenon” in siding with the Kremlin over the White House.

Furthermore, during at least the first few days after the attacks began, not one of them quoted even one Democrat or one expert on the rise of authoritarianism.

To which the media-watching Press Run replied:

“The Beltway press treats this as if it were nothing more than an inter-party squabble over taxes or immigration policy, not portions of the party tacitly supporting the largest land invasion in Europe since World War II, a possibly brutal blitzkrieg that could leave thousands of civilians dead. And spearheaded, ironically, by the former Soviet Union, which for decades served as the epicenter of right-wing suspicions and hostility, the proverbial Evil Empire.

“Today’s kind words for Putin would be like in 1990 after Saddam Hussein’s Iraq invaded Kuwait, if the Democratic Party had been ‘divided’ over whether the deadly incursion was a good thing or a bad

thing, and the D.C. press shrugging and treating it as normal political posturing. In truth, if a single elected Democratic official had even breathed a sentence of support for Hussein back then it would have been a huge story and created a maelstrom of media trouble for the party. Yet Republicans singing Putin's praise in 2022 is treated as no big deal."

It really adds up to a bizarre moment in American news media history, especially since it comes at a time while the media refuses to call Donald Trump the criminal that he is – "the unindicted, unconvicted, malicious, serial criminal who should be charged, tried, convicted, and imprisoned" that I described last week ("Say It: Donald Trump Is a Criminal, "Onward | Upward, 2/28/22).

That might change now that the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 Capitol riot said in a court filing last week that Trump and members of his campaign might have committed criminal conspiracy to defraud the American people and obstruction of Congress as he fought to remain in office.

So maybe now, maybe, we'll begin seeing the words "Trump" and "criminal" increasingly linked together in news dispatches from Washington.

But that doesn't mean the Trump Republicans will change anything. Even if Trump fades as a candidate, which appears to be happening now, Trumpism itself seems to be here for good.

That became clearer than ever last week when an official Republican report on the 2020 election in Wisconsin endorsed a host of debunked claims of fraud and false assertions about lawmakers' power to decertify President Biden's victory, lending credence to the conspiracy theories that have gripped Republicans in the state for more than 16 months.

Add that to Trump Republicans' continuing to pretend that there is no race problem in America, that they are not trying to keep Black people from voting, that gerrymandering districts to keep Democrats out of Congress is a good thing, that anyone should be allowed to carry guns anywhere... Well, that leopard ain't about to change spots, with or without Trump.

But If the Beltway media will come alive and start focusing on truth instead of mere facts, maybe it's not too late to change direction. There's always hope.

Mar 21, 2022

GOP Seeks a Dictator & What We Can Do About It

There was a time, not that long ago, when Democrats and Republicans stood shoulder-to-shoulder to protect American democracy from the growing scourge of dictatorships that is sweeping the globe.

No longer. Now Democrats are standing shoulder-to-shoulder to protect American democracy from the growing scourge of Republicans who are trying to destroy democracy and instigate a dictatorship. And they are doing it in the name of protecting democracy.

(Today's news media likes to use the word authoritarian to describe would-be dictators like Donald Trump, but authoritarian is such a weak synonym for dictator. I wish the news media would start using other synonyms, like despot or tyrant, or related words like fascist or neo-Nazi. That's what they are, and that's what they should be called.)

It is not hyperbole to say that Trump Republicans, who rule the party now, are trying to destroy democracy in the name of protecting it. Read on.

Secretaries of state in all 50 states and impartial observers from around the world have attested that the 2020 presidential election was the cleanest in American history.

And yet, Trump and his minions keep insisting, with absolutely no evidence, that he actually won the election. They say Democrats "fixed" the election and therefore stole it from him. In some places they're still trying to overturn it and install Trump as president.

They're also making a big show of protecting the 2022 midterm elections in ways that will damage faith that the results are honest.

Look at these recent developments:

The Republican-controlled Florida legislature created a special law enforcement agency to focus solely on what they call an urgent problem: that 0.000067 percent of voters suspected of committing election fraud.

The Republican-controlled Georgia House gave new powers to law enforcement agencies that investigate allegations of election fraud.

The Republican attorney general in Texas created an "election integrity unit" that will focus solely on investigating charges of election fraud.

And you can bet your bippy that the same type people who believe Trump's ludicrous "Big Lie" will be running those new agencies, and they'll certainly find what they're looking for even if it doesn't exist.

Furthermore, in state after state across the nation, people who believe the Big Lie (or at least say they do), and who believe state legislators and election officials have the authority to overrule voters' decisions (or say they do), are seeking election or appointment to those positions.

Since democracy depends not only on elections being honest, but also on voters' perception that they are honest, such actions could lead us to lose that perception. If that happens, democracy dies.

Not only are Republicans claiming Democrats fixed the 2020 election, but it is actually they themselves who tried to fix it. Consider these recent revelations:

Tina Peters, a Republican county clerk running for secretary of state in Colorado, was indicted on 10 criminal counts related to allegations that she tampered with election equipment after the 2020 election.

Mark Meadows, a former chief of staff for Trump, submitted voter registration forms that gave him and his wife's residential address – "where you physically live ... under penalty of perjury" – as a rented 14x62-foot mobile home with a rusty roof that he never spent a night in.

Trump's Republicans also doing everything they can to deny the vote to people who they think will not vote for republicans. Look at the recent experience in Texas.

According to The Texas Tribune, during the state's recent primaries 18,742 mail-in ballots were rejected in 16 of the 20 counties that have the most registered voters.

The Tribune pointed out that those counties rejected 6 percent to nearly 22 percent of the mail-in ballots cast. That almost certainly set a record since fewer than 2 percent were rejected statewide in the 2018 midterm elections. And in most places, especially in the areas around Houston, by far the most rejected ballots were from – surprise! – Black people.

That clearly was no accident. It was the direct result of Texas' ruinous new voter ID requirements.

Republicans also are using supercomputers to use gerrymandering to pack people of color into as few districts as possible so that regardless of the popular vote, the number of districts they can win is limited, and the ever-shrinking white majority will still control Congress.

Can they be stopped?

Oh, yes. Thanks to several courts, some of the Republicans' outrageous gerrymandering schemes have been thrown out and new lines drawn that give Democrats a fighting chance.

But stopping them in 2022 will depend on democracy-loving people not only voting but doing whatever they can to make sure others vote. And if you're willing, there's a lot you can do.

Try calling your local Democratic Party headquarters. You'll find they'll be delighted to hear from you and they'll show you specific ways you can make an important difference.

The League of Women's voters is another possibility. Some chapters have held classes on how to help get the vote out.

You might even contact the Environmental Voter Project at <https://www.environmentalvoter.org>. Those folks have an impressive record of turning non-voters into regular voters. They're not active in all states, but if they're active in yours you could make a meaningful impact. And if they're not in your state, maybe you could change that.

But whatever you do, please do something. We can win this thing. We will win this thing.

Apr 18, 2022

Quit Paying Kids to Play Games

I've been an avid fan of the University of South Carolina Gamecocks all my life. During football seasons I couldn't wait on Saturdays so I could sit down in front of the television with a big bowl of popcorn and spend three hours watching my Gamecocks take on some of the best teams in college football, and sometimes even win.

But no longer. Oh, I'm still a fan, just not an avid one. I'm content now just to check the sports pages the next morning to see how they did.

My retreat has nothing to do with the Gamecocks themselves, but with college sports in general. Specifically, it has to do with allowing college athletes to profit off their names.

I don't disagree with colleges paying kids – that's what most of them are – stipends beyond their grants-in-aid. Many of them come from families that don't have the wherewithal to finance any off-campus social life, and every college kid needs to have some sort of life away from the campus.

No, my complaint is who gets the money and who doesn't. You can bet the football players you see selling hamburgers on television will be the names you're familiar with, meaning the quarterbacks, running backs and wide receivers. The names you are not likely to see often are the linemen, meaning the centers, guards and tackles.

And that's what gets to me. If you've ever played football, or know much about the game, you know that the people who win or lose games are the linemen. But they never get much credit for their contributions, and now they'll rarely get much money. Only the people who they make stars will.

Ask most people who is the highest paid player on a professional football team and they'll probably say quarterback, and they'd be right. But ask who the second-highest player is, and they'd probably say running back or wide receiver. Rarely would anyone say left tackle, although that would be the correct answer.

The reason for that is that most quarterbacks are right-handed, which means when they fade back to pass they must turn their backs to the left side of the line. The left tackle's main job is to protect his quarterback's back, his blind side, and if he fails the quarterback can find himself being slammed around like a rag doll.

The same goes for the other linemen. They are supposed to give their quarterback three seconds to throw a pass. By that time the receivers have run their patterns and if the quarterback hasn't found one open by then he either must scramble or he'll find himself face down in the dirt ten yards behind the line of scrimmage, with the ball still in his hands.

The running backs also must depend on the linemen to open a hole for them. No hole, no gain, no matter how good the running back is.

Bottom line: If the centers, guards and tackles don't do their jobs, regardless of how stupendous the ball handlers are, the team loses. And oft-times the stars may be carried off the field with injuries.

It's also the centers, guards and tackles whose brains get rattled on every play, not just occasionally. So they're most likely the ones you'll read about a few years down the line suffering early dementia or worse.

But they're not the ones whose names are familiar to anyone but the most devoted football fans. They're not the ones you see hawking goods on television. They do the heavy lifting but they get little credit, and under the new rules they'll get virtually no money.

And that's what irks me. The guys who win the games get nothing, but those who totally depend on them get it all. Unfair.

And dangerous. If the system causes a lineman, especially a left tackle but really any lineman, to get jealous, some ball-handler could end up in a hospital.

As for the other so called "major" sports, a basketball player may win games because of his defensive abilities, but unless she/he is one of the top scorers she/he is not likely to get her/his name in the paper, and thus she/he won't be paid to sell soap on television. Neither is a super-great defensive baseball player who hits under .300.

And consider the swimmers, the track-and-field guys, the golfers, the tennis players, the rowers, the volleyball players. Unless they're good enough to reach the Olympics, forget about it. You'd have to be a super sports fan to recognize any of those names. They work just as hard as the stars do but get little credit. And, again, no money.

One solution would be for the stars to charge the advertisers top prices and divide their income with the people who made them stars.

And don't even get me started on what we pay football coaches. Suffice it to say that Clemson University could hire more than 80 qualified professors – eighty! – for what it pays Dabo Sweeney to coach a game, when just one college professor is worth more than 80 times to civilization than what any football coach is. Even further, it would cost Clemson the salaries of 20 to 30 college professors just to fire him.

I dream of a day when we admire people for what they give, not for what they get.

Apr 25, 2022

In Trump, Our Founders' Worst Fear Is Realized

I despise Donald Trump for all the evil he's pumped into our world, but I'm in wonderment about the people who believe in him.

Trump is following the path of Adolph Hitler, who advised would-be dictators to lie, lie big, lie often, and never apologize or back down from a lie even if it's proven beyond all possible doubt it is a lie, because enough people will follow you anyway.

That is exactly what Trump did early in his political career and he's still doing it. He told more than 30,000 documented lies or misstatements while he was in office, anything to make himself look good, and now he's sticking with his baseless "Big Lie" that the 2020 presidential election was stolen from him. And true enough, "enough people" are following him anyway.

Trump is the epitome of what our Founders feared the most: a demagogue in the White House. Webster defines demagogue as "a political leader who seeks support by appealing to the desires and prejudices of ordinary people rather than by using rational argument."

Or, as Megan Garber once wrote in *The Atlantic*: "(T)he key thing about demagogues, historically, is that they have been people who, by way of their very popularity, threaten the populace. They undermine the stability of a 'by the people' form of government particularly by turning 'the people' against each other. They represent a danger not just to electoral outcomes or political parties, but to democracy itself."

Can you not see Trump in those words?

It gets worse. Not only is Donald Trump a demagogue, but he's also a demagogue who exhibits all the symptoms that medical texts say define a person with narcissistic personality disorder. He is overly boastful, exaggerates his own achievements, pretends to be superior to others, lacks empathy for others, looks down on others as inferior, monopolizes conversations, always craves "the best" in everything, is disappointed when expected importance is not given him, and becomes impatient, angry, unhappy or depressed when criticized.

Those traits were spotted in Trump long before he was elected president in 2016. Six months before that election day, New York Times columnist Jennifer Senior nailed it when she wrote of how closely Trump matched the description of people suffering from narcissistic personality disorder. Her words (very slightly edited for clarity):

"They harbor skyscraping delusions about their own capabilities, exaggerate their accomplishments, focus obsessively on projecting power, and wish desperately to win. The grandiosity of their personalities belies an extreme fragility, their egos as delicate as foam. They live in terror of being upstaged. They're too thin-skinned to be told they're wrong. They love nothing more than engineering

conflict and sowing division. It destabilizes everyone and keeps them in control. And they're vindictive. On a clear day, you can see their grudges forever."

How is it possible that anyone cannot see that those words describe Donald Trump to a T? And how is it possible that any American would want a demagogue with narcissistic personality disorder to be our president, or would want his minions to control Congress and the courts?

But his minions believe in him. They follow him. They seem happy being led down the path toward authoritarianism – fascism.

Consider: Even though there isn't a whisper of evidence that supports Trump's "Big Lie" that the election was stolen from him, nearly 70 percent of all Republicans say they believe he was cheated. Polls consistently show more than 30 percent of all Republicans believe an armed insurrection may be necessary to "save" America, and about 50 percent of young Republicans believe a civil war may be the only way out. Seventy percent of voters at a recent Conservative Political Action Conference said they want Trump to be president.

Not only are Republicans flocking to Trump, but they are veritably crawling to him. The New York Times published a lengthy article a few days ago that documented a river of supplicants – senators, governors, congressional leaders – making the trek to Mar-a-Lago to pledge their love to Trump and seek his endorsement for their candidacies.

Candidates for federal offices often rent space at Mar-a-Lago for events. Some candidates pay to attend Mar-a-Lago fundraisers for other candidates, hoping for a brief encounter with Trump. Others have hired his advisers, hoping that will gain them an edge on getting his endorsement. Some bear gifts, others offer dirt.

Most nauseating of all, some candidates for state offices far away from Florida have run Trump-praising political ads on the Fox News channel in South Florida, hoping Trump will see the ads and endorse their candidacies. Nearly all the contenders in Ohio have done that.

The Times also showed how such boot-licking appeals for Trump's blessings go right to the top. Another article spotlighted how right after Jan. 6 both Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy were screaming for Trump's blood, but when they realized how popular Trump was remaining with his base, they did sudden, 180-degree turnarounds. McConnell voted against Trump's conviction for incitement of an insurrection, and McCarthy was in Mar-a-Lago having his picture taken with Trump.

Trump's fawners also are pouring money into his pockets. They've given him a war chest of \$120 million, which is more than double that of the Republican National Convention. Politicians and political committees seeking Trump's favor alone have spent \$1.3 million in rental fees to host events at Mar-a-Lago.

If there is any good news in all this, it is that there are early signs that, despite all the groveling, it may turn out that a Trump endorsement doesn't carry all the weight his grovelers think it does. Some cracks may be appearing in that wall. In Georgia, for instance, Trump recruited Sen. David Perdue to

run against incumbent Gov. Brian Kemp, yet Perdue is polling behind Kemp. Also in Georgia, Trump's hand-picked candidate for U.S. Senate, Herschel Walker, is proving himself to be such a lying political ignoramus that it's making Republicans nervous. In Alabama, Trump rescinded his endorsement of Mo Brooks for the Senate after Brooks sank in the polls.

And so it goes. Without holding a public office, Trump has the power to influence votes only if he is perceived to have that power. Lose the perception, lose the power. So, if his interventions in the GOP primaries do not bear fruit next November, he may quickly find himself relegated to the political has-been heap.

But even if the Republican Party were to relegate Trump to the sidelines, there is still bad news. The fascist-like movement he started will still be alive, strong, before us, and it will not fade away. So we must deal with it.

And deal with it we can. There's a lot that we as individuals can do to help turn the tide. We can stay abreast of what is happening in our world and get involved. We can volunteer; political candidates and Democratic Party headquarters needs volunteers to make telephone calls, stuff envelopes, whatever. We can write our representatives in Washington and at the state house (snail mail carries much more power than emails do). We can contribute money to candidates and organizations we believe in. We can talk it up among our friends. We can encourage the "good" Republicans, the real ones, the ones we used to be able to talk with. We can vote and encourage everyone around us to vote. We can spread the word in our own individual ways. You can forward this column to your friends, and especially to your foes. We can all help nationally by working locally. We can!

What we cannot do is allow ourselves to drift into surrendering the future of our nation to a demagogic Hitler wannabe with a narcissistic personality disorder, or to the sycophants who follow him.

May 2, 2022

A Fox News Replacement

Back before we canceled cable television, I was an avid TV news watcher. I flipped through all the news channels – CNN, PBS, MSNBC, Fox News, and to a lesser amount of time, the networks' news shows. But I was always careful to keep Fox News high in the mix for the same reason I tuned in to Rush Limbaugh's radio show every chance I got. I like to hear the best of what the right wing has to say, and I like to hear it in the strongest possible terms, so I can test my own ideas.

But when we canceled cable, Fox News went with it. And when Ross Limbaugh died, there went that. So I've been casting around for an online of far-right source to follow, and I've hit upon The Epoch Times. I knew it was what I was looking for when its website showed a smiling Donald Trump saying how it is "one of my favorite news sources," and a photo of Sean Hannity saying, "Love The Epoch Times. I read The Epoch Times daily."

So I sampled a few of its stories. From my memory...

First was an exposé of how the Biden administration is covering up studies that show covid vaccinations are causing heart problems, including death. But there were problems with the story.

For one thing, it was based on a single source, whose name was given but whose only listed qualifications were limited to being called “an authority in his field” by The Epoch Times. Nothing more. No connection with any organization. No mention of any credentials. Nothing.

And neither were there any quotes from anyone in the Biden administration responding to the charges. There were a couple of canned quotes, picked up from old news stories, but nothing fresh to give the other side of the story.

Another story was an exposé of what it said was absolute proof of massive voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election. It said a film was about to be released that showed people picking up bags of mail-in ballots from people and stuffing them into ballot drop boxes. If true – if true! – the process would be illegal. But even so, the photos do not hint of any fraudulent votes being cast. Neither do any of the other voice-overs. So really, what’s the point? Where’s the fraud.

The next story I read was another exposé, this one headlined:

“Nonprofit Pushing Jan. 6 Ballot Disqualifications

Is Funded, Led by Left-Wing Activists”

The lede sentence read, “Just minutes after Donald Trump was sworn in as president in January 2007, People for Free Speech (PFS), working with RootsAction, another obscure left-wing activist group, launched the website ImpeachDonaldTrumpNow.org.” The story goes on to say the PFS has moved on from that and is now trying to remove five of Trump’s strongest supporters from their respective ballots.

“Although officially a nonpartisan educational nonprofit, PFS’ most notable activities since being organized in the wake of the Supreme Court’s 2010 Citizens United decision have all been directed at Trump and others.”

Well, duh. That’s no surprise. They’ve been open about who they are since the first day. An organization that launches a website to impeach a president on his first day in office certainly isn’t trying to hide its leftward tilt. (By the way, PFS has a strong point: Trump was openly vulnerable to impeachment the instant he took office because of his involvement with his hotel down the street. That was a clear violation of the Emolument Clause, although the U.S. Supreme Court dodged the issue until Trump was out of office, then ruled it had become a moot issue.)

The story continues to prove that not only is PFS a leftist organization, it also gets most of its funding from people identified with the left. Well, duh again.

It’s worth noting who PFS wants eliminated from seeking office, and why it wants them eliminated.

The targets are U.S. Reps. Andy Biggs (R-Ariz.), Paul Gosar (R-Ariz.), Madison Cawthorn (R-N.C.), and Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.), and Ariz. state Rep. Mark Finchem, who is running for secretary of state.

In each case, PFS wants them prohibited from seeking any public office under the provisions of the 14th Amendment, Section 3, which reads that no person can hold public office who has taken an oath to support the Constitution as an elected or appointed federal or state official, and has “engaged in rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof.”

Remember why PFS wants them out?

Biggs – for assisting the Jan. 6 rioters.

Gosar – for praising the Jan. 6 rioters and anti-election efforts.

Cawthorn – for provoking the rioters in a pre-riot speech, and later supporting those rioters who had been arrested as “political hostages.” (Cawthorn also has been accused of having had an inappropriate relationship with a male aide, participating in inside trading, falsely suggesting that his Republican colleagues regularly throw cocaine-driven orgies, trying to carry a loaded pistol onboard an airplane [second time], and driving with a revoked license [second time]. These have nothing to do with his seeking office, of course, but even Republicans are beginning to want him begone.)

Greene – for her insurrectionist actions, including advising that Trump should declare martial law to keep Joe Biden out of office. As of this writing, she’s testifying she’s lost her memory about a lot of that.

Finchem – taking part in a protest that preceded the Jan. 6 riot; claiming “substantial evidence” that the 2020 election was a fraud; tweeting photographs of rioters on the Capitol steps; and later claiming leftists had instigated the violence.

So the important question here should not be who is financing the attempt to keep the five from holding office. The important question is why anyone would object.

Anyway, I’ve found my Fox News replacement.

May 9, 2022

It Was a Bad Week for Liberals

Last week was a bad week for liberals.

First, Politico broke the news that U.S. Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. had written a draft opinion that would virtually reverse Roe vs. Wade. And second, Ohio Republicans nominated J.D. Vance, a one-time Never-Trumper who became a Trump bootlicker, to be their U.S. senator.

Start with the high court's opinion. It reeks. Consider:

This is the first time in history that the Supreme Court rejected a constitutional right that it had specifically issued.

The three Trump appointees made it clear during their confirmation hearings that they considered Roe vs. Wade settled law, and they respected settled law. Then they leaped on their first possible opportunity to prove themselves perjurers. That might not be enough to get them impeached, but they all should resign in shame.

The court's impending action, plainly adds fuel to the complaint that the court has become politicized to the point the justices' personal feelings now outrank their devotion to the Constitution. It comes atop the Senate's refusing for 293 days to even consider President Obama's appointment of Merrick B. Garland to the court, saying a retiring president should not have that power, then slamming through President Trump's selection of Amy Coney Barrett eight days before Joe Biden was elected president – effectively allowing the Republicans to steal two seats on the court.

As Margaret Atwood wrote about anti-abortionists, the court would be forcing women to have babies against their will, effectively forcing women into slavery. The court cannot force you to wear a mask, but it can force you to have a baby.

A decision to override Roe Vs. Wade could pave the way for all kinds of future mischief by the court. What will it mean for same-sex and interracial marriages LGBTQ rights, oral contraception, or sexual intercourse among consenting adults?

These are all personal rights not mentioned in the Constitution, but whose existence the court has inferred from the 14th Amendment, which limits the government's ability to take away people's liberty. Courts have interpreted that to imply that people have a right to privacy and personal autonomy over decisions involving their bodies and relationships.

Alito emphasized that his wording "concerns the constitutional right to abortion and no other right," but many legal sources immediately ridiculed him for it. As Lawrence Tribe, a Harvard Law School professor, put it, "That's not how principled adjudication works. Either you're being a political hack or your 'only abortion' bit is BS."

Republican-controlled state legislatures are having a field day with the impending decision. About half the states are expected to quickly make all methods of abortion illegal as soon as Roe is derailed, and some of their bills are downright draconian. In Louisiana, for example, a legislative committee last week advanced a bill that would allow homicide charges against people who get or perform abortions.

Some states, notably in New England and the far West, are making plans to provide abortions for out-of-state women who need them.

But even that might not work. Republicans in Congress already are planning to block Democrats' effort to codify abortion rights into federal law and, if they take over Congress in November, make any anti-abortion ruling by the court mandatory on all states.

So prepare for a return to back-alley abortions. If you are too young to remember those days, just be prepared to read about the butchered bodies of desperate young women being discovered in cheap hotel rooms.

As for J.D. Vance's nomination in Ohio, that's bad news for liberals because it indicates a Trump endorsement still carries a lot of power. Vance was considered an also ran before he switched sides and became a Trump supporter, but after the endorsement he won the nomination on the first ballot.

But, a silver lining to these clouds seems to be appearing. Year after year, polls consistently show most Americans approve of letting women control their own bodies. A Supreme Court ruling that overturns Roe could very well inflame Democrats into a voting frenzy that would overcome GOP gerrymandering and place Democrats in strong control of both houses of Congress.

And as far as the power of Trump endorsements go, it's way too early to say what that power will be when November gets here. A lot will happen between now and then, probably including several felony charges being filed against Trump. We can hope that would shake some Trump minions awake and force them to realize what damage the man has caused our nation.

We can hope. We can vote. We can win.

May 23, 2022

Damn the Great Replacement Theory

One of the most insidious, ignorance-based, racist-driven expressions making the rounds these days is "the great replacement theory," which holds that liberal elites are making an orchestrated effort in America to displace white people with people of color.

The term originated in a 2011 book by French writer Renaud Camus, who coined it to describe what he saw as an effort by French elites to relax immigration laws so more Muslims could enter the country and replace the ethnically French population and culture.

For a while it remained a fringe idea that festered in the darkest corners of the internet, but more recently the term has spread around the world. In America it has become a rallying cry for Republicans, nearly half of whom, according to recently published polls, believe it is true.

A lot of that belief can be traced to Fox News host and Trump favorite Tucker Carlson. According to a New York Times analysis, Carlson has promoted the idea on more than 400 episodes of his show, which is super-popular among MAGA Republicans.

But Carlson is far from the only powerful GOP source who is pushing it. Some of the party's most powerful congresspersons are behind it.

One example is Elise Stefanik of New York, the third-ranking House Republican who is widely seen as a possible running mate to Donald Trump in the 2024 presidential election. She ran an ad on Facebook last year that said, "Radical Democrats are planning the most aggressive move yet: a PERMANENT ELECTION INSURRECTION. Their plan to grant amnesty to 11 MILLION illegal immigrants will overthrow our current electorate and create a permanent liberal majority in Washington."

Other big-name Republican congresspersons who have bought into the idea include Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, Matt Gaetz of Florida and Chip Roy of Texas. Each of them has publicly espoused a version of it that maintains Jews are trying to replace white people with nonwhite immigrants to destroy western culture.

If the "great replacement theory" was just another cockeyed fringe idea emanating from the far right, we could ignore it. But it isn't, and we can't. It is an insidious, noxious call to action that has inspired a grim litany of atrocities around the nation, has cost numerous innocent people their lives, and portends more such atrocities are to come.

The massacre of 11 persons at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue in 2018, the murder of a woman at a Passover service in a Poway (Calif.) synagogue in 2019, the massacre of 23 persons at an El Paso Wal-Mart in 2021, and this month's slaughter of 10 persons at the Tops grocery store in Buffalo – every one of them was carried out by arch-racists who say they were motivated by the replacement theory. So was the slaughter of 51 Muslim worshipers at two New Zealand mosques in 2019.

But it's not just the major, headline-making attacks that are so frightening. The FBI says there has been a noticeable spike in hate crimes in recent years. In 2019, for example, there were 1,972 reported hate crimes against Black people; in 2020 the number leapt to 2,871, a one-year increase of nearly a thousand persons.

All this is deeply affecting America's Black community. A nationwide Washington Post-Ipsos poll taken after the Buffalo massacre revealed more than three-quarters of Black Americans are worried that they or someone they love will be attacked for no other reason than they are Black.

Among the poll's other findings:

Most Black respondents said they were saddened by the attack, but only 8 percent said they were surprised.

Seven in 10 said they believe more than half of white people hold white supremacist beliefs.

Before the Buffalo rampage, 42 percent of Black Americans thought this is a "good time" to be Black in America. After the shooting, only 34 percent thought so.

More than half of Black Americans said racism will get worse in their lifetimes. Just one in 10 said life for them will improve.

So, what's the answer? How do you persuade a bigot that the amount of pigment in a person's skin has nothing whatsoever to do with that person's character or abilities?

Unfortunately, you can't persuade them. Racist ignorance is too potent a motivator for mere facts and logic to overcome.

What we can do is vote – that is cardinal – but we also can make sure that everyone around us votes to send those ignorant racists back home.

We also can listen to what most Black people told the Post's pollsters they believe would do the most to reduce crime: Increase funding for economic opportunities in poor neighborhoods (55 percent) and increase the number of police officers patrolling those communities (24 percent).

It would be a start.

May 30, 2022

Red Tsunami? Hogwash!

If you keep up with current events at all, you've heard pundits and politicians alike claim that November's midterm elections are going to produce a red tsunami.

Don't believe it. Once the primaries season ends Republican office-seekers have to go toe-to-toe with Democrats, and Democrats are loaded with ammunition.

Start with what is on everyone's mind right now: guns and gun control.

We're all thinking about the 19 children and two teachers who were slaughtered last week at a school in Uvalde, Tex., and the 10 Black persons who were murdered a few days before that in a Buffalo grocery story.

But those two atrocities just add to the list of mass murders that have been happening in the United States. Don't forget the 60 deaths in Las Vegas, 49 in Orlando, 26 at Sandy Hook, 13 in Columbine.

Keep in mind that an average of 321 persons are shot every day in the United States, including 65 suicides and 42 murders.

And consider this: If you define mass shootings as those in which four or more persons are killed, there were 101 mass shootings in the United States between 1998 and 2019. The closest any other nation came to that number was France, with eight.

The thing about these numbers is that Democrats have been screaming for more than a decade to pass gun-control laws that could at least slow the carnage, but Republicans have paralyzed them at every turn. They won't even allow small steps.

They do it mostly by twisting the Second Amendment to make it seem the amendment absolutely guarantees that "the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."

The Second Amendment does use those words, but stopping there produces a half-truth, which can be more sinister than an outright lie. You never hear a Republican mention the first part of that sentence. The full sentence reads, "A well regulated Militia, being necessary for the security of a free State, the right of the people to bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Big difference. Huge difference.

Republicans talk about arming teachers, putting armed law enforcement officers on every school campus, even teaching civility. They pray, they offer platitudes, they wring their hands. But they do nothing.

Even though America has more guns in private hands (more than 400 million) than any other nation in the world, and despite America's having some of the loosest gun laws on the planet, Republican senators don't even want to talk about it. The Democrat-controlled House just passed two more bills aimed at reducing the butchery, but the tail-wagging-the-dog Republican senators were trying to keep the bills from even being debated.

After every atrocity Republicans go on a rant about how mental illness is at the root of the violence, but experts in mental health are slamming that back down their throats. They say Republicans are giving mentally ill persons a bad name, and that mentally ill persons are far more likely to be victims than perpetrators. Besides, every nation in the world has mentally ill persons, but no country has as many mass shootings. Where is the logic in blaming the mentally ill?

The silver lining here is that Democrats, with Buffalo and Uvalde fresh on everyone's minds and more atrocities likely before November, will pound away on those crimes against humanity until every person in the United States understands how Republicans are using a false reading of the Second Amendment to protect those murderers.

They will see that Democrats alone are doing everything they can to prevent more such calamities, and the NRA-infested Republicans are doing everything they can to prevent anything from changing. That will certainly resonate with Americans of all stripes who do not want to see all those people dying in vain and want to see something concrete done about it.

Another piece of good news for Democrats is that Donald Trump's influence over Republican voters appears to be waning, evidenced by the drubbing Republican voters gave his pet choices in Georgia last week, and the stinging defeats his choices took in Idaho and Nebraska. At this rate, his endorsement could even become an albatross around the necks of those Republicans who brag about his support.

For example, by the time the November elections arrive, Trump probably will be facing indictment for any number of the felonies he has so openly committed, such as sedition, tax fraud, bank fraud,

insurance fraud, real estate fraud, obstruction of justice (at least seven instances), marketing fraud, countless cases of violating the Hatch Act and the Emoluments Clause, and probably more.

And although it's not a crime per se, testimony before the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection has revealed that the then-President Trump even supported the hanging of his own vice president, Mike Pence. Even if Trump didn't mean it, he said it. How despicable is that?

Add to that his bragging about grabbing women's crotches, bribing his "university" students to keep quiet about his cheating them so it wouldn't become a campaign issue, stealing money from his own charity to buy a life-sized photo of himself to hang in his Mar-a-Lago resort, bragging about paying virtually no income taxes because only stupid people pay income taxes, pointedly being allowed into Russia when more than 900 American leaders were blacklisted from the country forever, et cetera.

Surely all that will awaken at least some Republicans to the obvious. One must ask: How many decent people of either party, come November, will want to vote for anyone who brags about being endorsed by a despicable, lying, felonious, crotch-grabbing, income tax-dodging, student-bribing, democracy-killing, election-denying, Putin-praising, vice president-threatening, charity-raiding, abortion-denying, probably mentally ill would-be dictator? If a majority of voters do, America is dead. But I have more faith in my fellow countrymen than to believe they will do that.

And do not forget that Democrats have forced Republican senators to vote on several issues they desperately wanted to avoid, such as those involving gun laws, Trump and the Jan. 6 insurrection among others, because it put their names indelibly and undeniably on record as to where they stand. Remember how GOP senators condemned Trump over the insurrection before they didn't? Democrats have a bank of those votes now and they plan to pound Republican office seekers with them as the November elections approach.

Yet another piece of upcoming events sure to help Democrats bigtime is the conservative-ruled Supreme Court's expected decision to overturn *Roe vs. Wade*. Polls constantly show that most Americans, by far, believe a woman should have control over her own body, and MAGA Republicans are going to be rightfully saddled with taking that away from them, especially once they tie it in with the flood of horrid anti-abortion laws being passed in such places as Oklahoma and Texas.

Oklahoma wants no abortions after conception. Texas wants people to be financially rewarded for turning in abortion patients and providers, and even those who help pregnant women. And so it goes in one GOP-controlled state legislature after another.

Still another reason for November optimism among Democrats is the Republicans' nationwide effort to pass draconian laws that would deny the vote to people who are likely to vote Democratic, mostly meaning people of color.

For example, Arizona's state legislature wants to replace existing IDs with new voter ID cards that would require a passport or citizenship certificate, and it would no longer permit tribal IDs to be used at the polls. Other states want to require fingerprints, limit early voting, all but kill mail-in voting, limit the number of polling places, put polling places in hard-to-reach areas, and on, and on, and on. All that could backfire by giving affected folks an extra impetus to get to the polls.

Republicans always claim they are writing these laws to make sure the elections are fair, but every indication (except for Trump's ludicrous Big Lie) is that the 2020 presidential election was the cleanest in history.

There's something else Democrats can do if they'll just do it. Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment mandates that states lose part of their congressional delegation if they unduly restrict the right to vote. Look it up. It has never been used, but it could be and it should be. It could become a nuclear weapon against those people who want to deny others their right to vote.

Yet still another plus for Democrats come November is that Republicans are offering no platform of what they want. Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has even said they won't release one until after the election.

But really, it matters not. We know what Republicans want. They want to kill Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and Obamacare. They want to further lower taxes on the wealthy and large corporations while increasing taxes on the middle class and maybe even the poor.

By contrast, Democrats want to increase taxes on the wealthiest among us who now average paying 8 percent of their income on income taxes (compare that with what you pay), make corporations pay at least a minimum tax (many of the biggest ones pay nothing at all), and improve life for the poorest among us.

Throw in the probability that people will begin associating the infrastructure improvements they see happening in their neighborhoods with President Biden, who spearheaded it, and begin to understand that his failures to get other mammoth, people-helping bills through Congress were blocked by Republicans...

Red tsunami in November? Hogwash.

There could be a blue one, though.

Jun 6, 2022

World Faces Catastrophe -- Unless...

It is no secret that our planet will face a catastrophe if its average temperature exceeds 2 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial conditions.

If it happens, Earth will be a lot drier, which scientists have proven will affect our economies, food production, water availability, infrastructure, shelter, health, just about everything. Hurricanes will be more powerful and more numerous. The number and size of forest fires will explode. Ecosystems will be destroyed. Many species, especially those in coral reefs and Arctic areas, will vanish. Melting

Greenland and arctic ice will cause sea-level rises so severe that low-lying coastal regions and small islands will disappear under the waves. Virtually no aspects of our lives will escape the pain.

So what are the world's governments doing about it?

Talk, mostly. Although almost every nation on the planet has signed a legally binding pledge to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, a biennial report issued last week by climate researchers at Yale and Columbia universities said only Britain and Denmark were on track to do so. Britain is doing it by replacing coal with natural gas to produce energy, but the researchers say that's just picking the low-hanging fruit and its progress may not be sustainable.

Only two other countries, Namibia and Botswana, appeared to be nearly on track to reach their goals, but their emissions were minimal to begin with and the experts said their progress may not be sustainable as their economies develop.

As for the other 176 nations in the report, not one was on track to meet their pledge. Not one! And it appeared that the biggest sinners – the United States, China, India and Russia –will be emitting half the world's greenhouse gases in 2050.

The United States was leading the march downward. On climate metrics we plummeted from 15th place in 2017 to 101st place in 2019, the last year covered by the report. That placed the U.S. behind every other wealthy Western democracy except for Canada, which ranked 142nd. Over all, America dropped from 24th to 43rd place. And we stayed the world's No. 2 emitter of greenhouse gases, second only to China.

The cause for America's sudden, severe drop can unquestionably be blamed on Donald Trump, because during his four years in office he virtually ignored climate change while championing the producers of coal and oil. (Since the report's last year covered 2019, the report did not reflect President Biden's efforts to improve the climate.)

But regardless of who's to blame, here we are. And nobody is more discouraged over that than the 270 scientists who form the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which is responsible for giving the world's governments the information they need to make decisions about the climate.

Two-thirds of those scientists interviewed by Nature magazine said they have given up hope that we will avoid the 2-degree temperature rise by 2050, and a majority said we are facing at least a 3-degree rise by century's end, and even a 4-degree rise.

A few of them have even suggested they should all just walk out, just quit doing research until the governments do something concrete with the information they already have. They point out that they have proven the links between human activity and rising temperatures, but the United Nations has held 26 global warming summits with little to show for them.

A walkout is not going to happen, though. Most scientists on the panel think it's a cockamamie idea and aren't about to go along.

But the strike-prone scientists have a point. Look where we are and where we came from. Only 5 degrees Celsius (about 9 degrees Fahrenheit) separates us from the last Ice Age, which ended 15,000 years ago. At that time 32 percent of the world's surface was covered by ice; today only 10 percent is, and we're rapidly losing that.

Or consider this: The average global temperature has risen nearly a full degree Celsius since 1880, but two-thirds of that has occurred since 1975. And every year in this century ranks among the warmest years on record.

Or this: According to a report issued last week by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the amount of planet-warming carbon dioxide in the air is 50 percent higher now than it was in the late 19th Century, when the Industrial Revolution began. It said there is more carbon dioxide in the air now than at any time during the last 5 million years.

So we get to the question: Why? Why aren't the world's governments doing everything they can to save the planet from destruction?

And the answer plainly is money, at least the love thereof. That came home to me a couple of weeks ago when The New York Times interviewed a panel of Republicans about their thoughts on current events. When the interviewer asked them what they thought the world's biggest problem is right now, every one of them named something affecting their pocketbooks, such as inflation or the rising cost of gasoline. Not one of them mentioned the rising temperatures or anything else involving the environment. Not even one.

The solution is simple – simple, not easy: put other people's problems before your own. It's the lesson all the world's great religions have been teaching for centuries. If everyone would do that we would have no environmental problems. For that matter, neither would we have hunger, hatred, wars, crime. In a word, we would have Utopia.

It seems fewer and fewer people are hearing that message, but there's always tomorrow.

There's always hope.

Jun 13, 2022

Why I Quit Flying Our Flag

I hate this, but I no longer fly the American flag as I once did.

I used to fly it. Boy, did I ever. I flew it 24 hours a day, 365 ¼ days a year. Even though official flag etiquette says it should not be flown in the rain, I disagreed with that vehemently and flew it anyway because my flag retreated from nothing, certainly not a little rain.

It's not that I thought America is greater than other nations, or is even great at all. It is not great, nor has it ever been. If you disagree with that, talk with some descendants of the indigenous people who were here when Europeans first landed on their shores, or to descendants of Africans who those Europeans forced to come here to be their slaves.

Better yet, read the book *Overthrow*, by Stephen Kinzer, which details how American leaders have overthrown 14 governments that displeased them, either to impose America's ideology, increase America's power, or gain control of valuable resources. The book's 384 pages don't even include the many times we have defended friendly regimes against popular anger or uprisings, or the times we quietly supported coups or revolutions organized by others to overthrow their governments. Kinzer strictly limits his book to the times we acted alone to overthrow legitimate foreign governments.

No, America is not and never has been great. But we have always aspired to greatness, and it was to that aspiration that I proudly flew my flag.

But no more. Not now. Now, it seems, the Trumpian Party has confiscated our flag. I don't know how they did it, but they did it. Whenever I drive down a street nowadays and see an American flag flying in someone's front yard, I can't help but think the occupants of that house must be ignorant Trumpians.

I realize that the phrase "ignorant Trumpian" is redundant, but that's what comes to mind when I pass those houses. I picture the occupants sitting in their living rooms watching Fox News, believing what Fox News spoon-feeds them, and probably confirming what they see there by checking with QAnon. After all, anyone who will believe a man who lied to them more than 3,000 times can't care about truth. Can't care about reality.

I mean really, how ignorant, or stupid, does one have to be to believe that our (Democratic) government ordered the slaughter of those children in Uvalde because it would help them pass gun-control laws. Slaughter children to pass a law to stop the slaughter of children?! It boggles the imagination that anyone, anyone, would buy into such hairbrained idiocy. And yet, they do.

But, thinking of Trumpians as ignorant is more bearable than the alternative, which would be to think of them as knowledgeable, purpose-driven traitors to democracy, people who favor authoritarianism – fascism, neo-Naziism, whatever other synonym you want to substitute.

Look, we all know that democracy can exist only if people have faith in elections. And Trump not only is supporting candidates for public office who buy into his lunatic "Big Lie" that he won the 2020 election "by a landslide," but perhaps more importantly he is supporting candidates for state offices who believe his fantastical lies, people who would control elections, such as the secretary of state in most states.

If these people get into office, you know they will claim that any loss by any Trumpian – especially Trump himself should he decide to run again – will be the result of voter fraud. They'll start declaring the 2022 midterm election returns are corrupt. If enough people believe them, goodbye democracy and hello dictatorship by whatever name – or at least Vladimir Putin's version of communism.

Which brings us back to the why I no longer feel comfortable flying the American flag. Sadly, I just feel it's not my flag any longer. It has come to represent a political philosophy – authoritarianism – that I abhor.

The fascination with authoritarianism that is sweeping our country astounds me. Maybe it's because the savagery perpetrated by the fascists Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini have faded over time and fascism just doesn't generate the horrors in Americans' psyches that it once did. Except for Jews, of course. They remember as if it happened yesterday.

So do I, and so do others of a certain age. I'm 83, and I have dim memories of World War II, such as my mother crushing tin cans and leaving them outside my bedroom window where a truck would pick them up and cart them off to be melted and formed into ammunition for our troops overseas, or the top half of all cars' headlights painted black to make it harder for German bombers who want to bomb them. That's the kind of Americans-against-Nazism flag I would wave.

But no longer. Those days are gone, at least temporarily. Now we're divided between those who love democracy and want to know the truth, and those who want a dictator and don't care about the truth. How could they care about truth when they believe a man whose lies flow like water from a fire hose, a man who follows Hitler's advice to would-be dictators to lie, lie often, lie big, and never retract or apologize. They should be ashamed, but instead they're proud.

So it's their flag now, at least temporarily. It almost makes me think the rest of us should adopt that version of the American flag that has black stripes instead of white, and skulls instead of stars. At least temporarily.

We have one big chance to regain our flag and our democracy, and that will be on Nov. 8. It may be our last chance.

We can do it.

Jun 20, 2022

Will We Make the Capitol Riot Hearings Matter?

We're six hours into the House's hearings on the Jan. 6 Capitol riot, and the question looms: Are they making a difference?

And the answer is: apparently not.

Only 19 million people watched the opening session, a number that represented slightly less than one percent of the registered voters in America. Most of them were Democrats, but there were a few Lincoln Republicans.

Trump Republicans largely ignored the hearings, but about 3 million of them did watch Fox News' Tucker Carlson during the time period, and that's depressing.

It's depressing because 3 million people exist in America who are willing to let Tucker Carlson spoon-feed them his take on the hearing rather than watch the hearing itself and decide for themselves.

And what did those 3 million hear?

Carlson: "It tells you a lot about the priorities of our ruling class that the rest of us are getting yet another lecture about Jan. 6 tonight – from our moral inferiors, no less. ... They are lying and we are not going to help them do it."

He also called the riot a "forgettable minor outbreak by recent standards, that took place more than a year and a half ago."

A forgettable minor outbreak? It was the worst attack on our Capitol since the War of 1812. It resulted in five deaths, countless injuries, and millions of dollars in damage to the Capitol. It brought the nation to the brink of a constitutional crisis. And it damn near got Vice President Mike Pence and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi murdered.

Think I'm exaggerating? The hearing last Thursday revealed that a confidential witness who traveled to Washington with the violence-prone, extreme rightwing Proud Boys would have killed Pence and Pelosi if they could have found them. They were armed with baseball bats, pepper spray, thumb restraints and American flags with flagstaffs sharpened into spears. They were chanting "Hang Mike Pence!" and they got within 40 feet of him. Several senators were warned they would be killed if they didn't "get behind" Trump.

Minor outbreak indeed. But you can bet those 3 million Trump minions sopped up Carlson's nonsense like his words were flowing water and the minions were parched sponges.

The hearings have accomplished one thing at least. Although too few people are paying attention, the Justice Department is locked on to every word as the committee unveils strong evidence that Trump committed even more felonies before, during and after the riot.

I say "even more" felonies because he already was facing the real possibility of being charged with a slew of them that happened before and during his term in office. I won't list them here because I've done that twice already, but if you're interested in refreshing your memory you can click onto my former posts [Similar Stories](#), [Opposite Results](#) and [Say It: Donald Trump Is a Criminal](#).

As for the possible (probable) new charges against Trump, testimony before the committee showed that before the insurrection Trump had been repeatedly told he had lost the election and that his attempts to invalidate the vote were unconstitutional. During the insurrection he sent emails to the already-frenzied rioters that inflamed them even more to hunt down Pence. And after the election he conned his own disciples into giving him hundreds of millions of dollars for an election defense fund that didn't even exist. And still those disciples adore him.

And remember: All this testimony is coming not from Democrats with axes to grind, but from Trump Republicans – Trump’s family members, his friends, his White House staff members, his appointees to other high offices.

If anyone has ever deserved prison time, it’s Trump. And justice demands he should serve it. I realize that would spark trouble in the streets but so be it. I agree with Paul Finkelman’s famous quote: “Let justice be done though the heavens may fall.”

It probably won’t happen, though. Trump Republicans don’t seem to care, and what’s left of Lincoln Republicans are staying mostly silent. But wow! Had it been Barack Obama, or someone who looked like Obama, you know full well Republicans would have removed him from office and lodged him in prison long, long ago – or lynched him.

But although it would deeply satisfy if Trump were to spend some time behind bars, it really is a secondary issue. What we really should be paying attention to right now, in addition to the fact that our planet is dying, is that our democracy is rotting. As The New York Times put it in a recent editorial:

“(T)he importance of the hearings isn’t simply about holding Mr. Trump, his allies and the flag-draped thugs storming the halls to account. The hearings challenge all Americans to recommit to the principles of democracy, ask how important those values are to us and face the threats posed to our democratic way of life.”

We know that for a democracy to exist the people must have faith in their elections, and recent polls show up to 30 percent of Republicans have lost that faith. In addition, more than 100 Republican primary winners back Trump’s outrageous election fraud claims. They actually believe Trump’s fantasy-world lies; either that, or they just don’t care.

The good news is that there are more Democrats in America than there are Republicans. The bad news is that Democrats don’t vote as much as Republicans do.

But this year has all the earmarks of that reversing, plus the hope that at least some thinking Republicans will conclude that although they don’t like Democrats’ philosophy, this year they’re the lesser of two evils.

And once word gets out that what Republicans really want is to terminate Social Security, Obamacare, Medicare and Medicaid, decrease taxes on corporations and rich people and increase taxes on the middle class, grant everyone absolute gun-ownership rights, and replace our democracy with a Trump-led autocracy, well, I still see a real possibility of a blue tsunami coming in November.

Otherwise, if it turns out that American voters decide that inflation and gas prices matter more than saving our democracy and our planet, our nation is doomed.

It is not too late for common sense to prevail.

Jun 27, 2022

SCOTUS Rulings Offer Democrats a Huge Opportunity

Now that the dust is settling from the Supreme Court's destruction of a woman's right to control her own body, I am left with two strong conclusions: What is horrendous news for the nation can be glorious news for the Democratic Party's chances in November.

It's not only the court's Roe vs. Wade decision that raises that hope. It's also those decisions that involved gun control, government involvement in religion, where it appears to be heading regarding the environment, and what it all portends for the future.

Let's take those one at a time.

Roe vs. Wade: Poll after poll leaves no doubt that a wide majority of Americans did not want Roe overturned, and rarely does that percentage drop below 60 percent. Those voters would agree, I believe, with the description of human life that Jennifer Haigh expressed so well in her novel Mercy Street. I have liberally edited her words for length and content, but I have stayed meticulously accurate with her meaning:

What makes a woman a person? Her mind and her memories, all that she has done and felt and known and created and thought and wondered and seen and understood. But the fetus inside her? It has no thoughts or memories. It has made nothing, understood nothing. It is a mute, unthinking knot of tissue – alive, yes, but unformed, unconscious, incapable of tenderness or reasoning or even laughter. And yet, the fetus now becomes what matters the most. The woman carrying it, that complex creature formed by 20 or 30 years of living in the world, becomes simply the means of production. Her feelings about the matter, her ideas and needs and desires, don't matter at all. Yes, the fetus inside her is a living tissue, no question. But it is not a living person. It is, at most, raw material. The woman carrying it can, if she wishes, make it into a person. But what is the point of making another person when the woman herself, already a person, counts for so little?

Mitch McConnell, the Senate minority leader, has bluntly promised that if Republicans gain control of Congress in November they will impose a nationwide ban on all abortions.

So, a vote for Republicans in November will be a vote for a nationwide ban on all abortions.

Gun Control: The court ruled in June that Americans have a broad right to arm themselves in public. Republicans, who plan to make crime-fighting an important part of their campaign this year, contend that giving Americans that right will help protect everyone.

Really?

The Think Newsletter reports numerous studies that confirm that deregulating concealed-carry restrictions actually increases violent crime – substantially.

One study found that loosening gun-carry laws increased violent crime 13-15 percent.

Another found that the change increased the handgun murder rate by more than 10 percent.

A third discovered that gun homicide rates were 11 percent higher in states with lax carry laws compared to those with stricter laws, and that mass shootings were 53 percent higher in lax-law states.

Other studies show the same thing, that restricting gun carrying reduces gun mayhem. It is thus no surprise that gun deaths in 2020 hit a record high of more than 45,000, which coincides with record gun purchases and the further loosening of gun carry laws.

So, a vote for Republicans in November will be a vote for more mass shootings, more murders, more accidental shootings, more suicides, and more gun bedlam.

Government involvement in religion: The court struck down a Maine law that prohibited religious private schools from receiving taxpayer dollars.

Maine's legislature quickly responded by forbidding discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation. Since both schools that brought the suit do discriminate along those lines, they have signaled they will not accept taxpayers' dollars.

It was a clever move by the legislature, and it will have a great impact across the nation as more states follow Maine's lead, and most religious schools are right-wing institutions that also discriminate so it will keep taxpayers' money out of their pockets as well.

But many religious schools do not discriminate so the ploy will not affect them, and the government will have a foot inside the door to sending public money to religious schools.

Does it matter? Yes, absolutely! The so-called wall between church and state was built more to keep the government out of religion than it was to keep religion out of government. Let governments give money to religions and it's the first step toward governments controlling those religions. That should be repugnant to everyone regardless of religious faith or lack thereof.

So, a vote for Republicans in November will be a vote to let government start controlling religion.

The Environment: The court has not ruled on an important environmental matter before it now, but all indications are that it soon will, and that the rule will be devastating to government's authority to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from power plants, which is a form of pollution that is heating the planet toward destruction.

The case is West Virginia vs. Environmental Protection Agency. Plaintiffs contend that the EPA, and other federal agencies that set rules and regulations that affect the American economy, should not

have that power because they are not directly answerable to the public. That power, they contend, should be in the hands of Congress and Congress alone.

Nice thought. However, for decades Congress has delegated that responsibility to the various agencies because they have the scientists and other specialists who understand the intricacies involved and can act quickly to changing conditions. Congress, on the other hand, is so gridlocked it has trouble moving the most innocuous legislation.

And there's the rub. It is exactly what the Republican attorneys general involved in the case want. They, along with conservative legal activists and their funders, want to prohibit the government from taking any action that would limit the polluters from making money, even if it means letting them poison the planet

Making matters worse – that is, making it more likely that the Supreme Court will rule in their favor – this has been a multi-year effort by people who not only have ties to the coal and oil industries, but to five of the six conservative Supreme Court justices themselves (Clarence Thomas preceded them). The plaintiffs and their backers share many of the same donors as those who helped launch the five justices to the bench.

Lisa Graves, executive director of the progressive watchdog group True North Research and a former senior Justice Department official, put it this way in an interview with The New York Times: "It's a pincer move. They are teeing up the attorneys to bring the litigation before the same judges that they hand-picked."

So, a vote for Republicans in November will be a vote to destroy our planet.

What *Roe. vs. Wade* portends for the future. Justice Thomas has said, and all three liberal justices have fearfully agreed, that the same rationale the court used to demolish *Roe* can be used to destroy a long list of other rights Americans hold sacred. It could be used to overturn cases that established rights to same-sex consensual relations, same-sex marriage, contraception devices such as birth control pills, intrauterine devices and morning-after pills, and who know what other personal choices people make.

So, a vote for Republicans in November will be a vote for surrendering our most personal decisions to the government.

The only way out of this morass is to vote our way out, which means voting in such overwhelming numbers that even Donald Trump will have to admit there was no election fraud.

It can be done. It must be done. It will be done.

Jul 4, 2022

It's Time to Get Radical

Almost two and a half centuries ago, our nation's Founders fought a war to free us from the tyranny of King George III, and today, Independence Day, we celebrate their success.

But also today the Republican Party is doing everything it can to lead us back into a kind of tyranny that would rival King George's, and they are succeeding. Look at what is happening in all three branches of our federal government and you'll see it.

The Supreme Court is controlled by nakedly partisan far-right justices who have lifetime appointments and who are openly using their powers to deny us our long-held freedoms. They are doing it regardless of the numerous polls that show the overwhelming majority of us want the opposite.

During the last month alone, the justices denied women their right to abortion, a decision that also portends danger for so much more, such as gay marriage, intimate rights of unmarried gay people, or any people, and every form of birth control imaginable short of the rhythm method.

The justices paved the way for more guns on the streets, even though history proves that's going to increase gun-related mayhem in public and unnecessary deaths.

They eliminated the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to regulate carbon emissions from power plants, not only making it much harder for the government to regulate our deteriorating environment but also endangering the authority of other agencies that ensure the cleanliness of our air and water, the safety of our food, drugs, vehicles and consumer products, and the honesty of our financial firms.

They even got their foot in the door to allowing taxpayers' money to flow to private religious schools.

Even more dangerous, just before the justices adjourned for the season, they announced they will hear a case in their next term that would give state legislatures the power to set their own election rules and would deny state courts much authority over them. It would allow the various legislatures to set all their own election-related rules, regulations and congressional district lines. It would open the door to rules that would allow legislatures to choose presidential electors. Chaos in our election system would certainly result as different states wrote different rules that would certainly often conflict, such as voting eligibility for presidential elections.

Worst of all, such a decision would give those right-wing Supreme Court justices an awful lot of power to sway presidential elections, as they would decide all the questions and conflicts that would certainly arise among the states.

But it's not only the Supreme Court we need to worry about. It's the lower federal courts as well. As president, Trump nominated 234 lawyers to judgeships. Three now sit on the Supreme Court, 174 sit

on federal courts of appeal, and 54 are federal district court judges. These are the people who, among much else, keep on approving congressional district lines that Republicans have clearly gerrymandered to protect themselves.

All that gerrymandering means the House of Representatives could soon fall under the control of far-right Republicans. That could happen even if a strong majority of voters cast ballots for Democrats

The Senate is as bad because less than half of the nation's population elects 82 percent of the senators; or, looked at another way, 18 percent of the population elects 52 percent of the senators. That's because most senators come from rural states in the Midwest that lean strongly far right. There isn't much anyone can do about that, it being the result of two senators per state regardless of size.

But Democrats could at least change the filibuster rule, which means 60 votes are needed to pass almost any legislation. In a Senate that is divided 50-50 among Democrats and Republicans, that means Republicans virtually rule the Senate. The tail wags the dog, and nothing gets done.

And, finally, the presidency. The electoral college system of counting votes means a presidential candidate could win the popular vote by 7 million votes and still lose by an electoral college landslide – which Hillary Clinton did in 2016.

So yes, democracy is clearly losing to those who would deny us the freedoms our forefathers were willing to die for.

And Democrats are doing pitifully little to stop them and save democracy, although they could if they would. It would take some gumption, but they could do it.

We didn't get into this place overnight; Republicans have been pushing their conspiracy theories since the 1990s, especially during Bill Clinton's presidency. And now that they have the momentum, we can expect them to put the pedal to the metal and not look back. They don't care what the majority wants anymore, and they don't care what you think about them and their tactics. They have the power and they will use it.

So yes it took time for us to get into this mess, and yes it will take time for us to get out. But the longer we take to get started, the deeper we let authoritarian-leaning Republicans dig our democracy's grave.

There is much that can be done.

The Senate can eliminate the 60-vote filibuster and return to letting objectors try to talk to death any bill they do not like. Let the majority rule again.

We can put term limits on Supreme Court justices, and we can pack the courts with more members to compensate for then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's and Donald Trump's packing the court. Remember how McConnell refused to let President Obama nominate a candidate with a year to go, then let Trump name one with days to go?

We can insist on ending gerrymandering by either party by establishing nonpartisan panels to draw congressional districts. We should get those panels established now, get objective new lines drawn nationwide, and hold new elections. Not wait ten years.

We can get rid of the electoral college system and let the people decide elections by direct vote. (The electoral college was set up, in part, to make candidates pay attention to smaller states. But unless you live in one of the so-called battleground states, how many times did a presidential candidate visit your state during the last presidential election?)

Sound radical? Yes, it is radical, but so what? Sometimes radicalism is called for. Our Founders were among the most radical people in history, and as a result we live in a democracy.

There's nothing wrong with – and everything right with – being radical if that's what it takes to protect our democracy. We owe it to our Founders and to ourselves, and to our children, and to our children's children. We owe it to history. It's the only way. Otherwise, we give our country to the oligarchs and totalitarians.

It will be a long road, so we need to start now.

And vote, vote, vote.

Jul 18, 2022

Our Democracy Is Gone

It's time that we democracy-loving Americans face the horrifying truth: we no longer live in a democracy.

We live in an oligarchy. In a democracy the majority rules. In an oligarchy the minority rules. We live in an oligarchy.

Evidence? Although there are far more Democrats than there are Republicans in America, and despite the fact that Democrats control two of our government's three branches of government, the legislative and executive branches, the Republican Party's arch-conservative wing is in full control of the country.

We got ourselves in this place because for many years we failed to deal with what was unveiling right before our eyes, which was that extreme-right anti-democracy militants were taking over the Republican Party, and the party, although shy in numbers, was taking over state and federal governments.

Now that they have secured that power, they are using it to press their extreme-right ideas into law as fast as they can – into U.S. Supreme Court –approved law. They're pressing full steam ahead and they don't care what you or I say about it. They are not looking back.

Look clear-eyed at our government's three divisions as they exist right now, and it becomes clear how the GOP's radical minority has taken charge and is using its power to the fullest.

The star of the show is the Supreme Court and its supermajority of super-conservative justices, who suddenly seem to be rubber-stamping the Republican Party's every wish while ignoring the will of the majority.

Last June alone the court abolished women's right to abortions, lessened gun laws in ways that are certain to increase already out-of-control gun mayhem, weakened the government's ability to protect our environment, opened a door for taxpayers' money to flow to religious institutions, and allowed Republican-controlled state legislatures to adopt obviously gerrymandered congressional maps – all GOP dreams.

The court also signaled it might soon end the rights of gay persons to marry, or to have intimate relations if they are not married, and destroy women's legal access to virtually every kind of contraceptive there is – even more GOP dreams.

Perhaps most dangerous of all, the court also has signaled it might let all the states write their own election laws, a ruling that would certainly lead to election chaos, the destruction of faith in election laws, and thus the final nail in our democracy's coffin. Ultimate GOP dream!

But as far as courts go, it is not just the Supreme Court we need to worry about. State courts now often have archconservative, Republican-appointed judges who do their party's bidding. Just a few days ago the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that drop boxes cannot be used for absentee votes, a victory for Wisconsin Republicans who are trying to limit voting in big cities where lots of Democrats live.

In the Senate, the tail continues to wag the dog. Hard-right Republicans stay in control because the two-senators-per-state rule gives unbalanced power to Midwestern rural states, and those states tend to lean hard right. Although the Senate is split 50-50 between the two parties, Republicans have used the filibuster rule, plus almost 100 percent party loyalty, to stay in complete control.

The House: Republicans across the nation have gerrymandered congressional districts so successfully that it's going to be tough for Democrats to keep control of the House in November regardless of how many Democrats vote.

If Republicans do get control of both houses of Congress, look out. They're eager to start working on their strongly held but rarely mentioned desire to abolish Medicare, Medicaid, Obamacare and Social Security, among other things.

As for the presidency, If Republicans do get control of the House in November, they are setting up to impeach President Biden – reason to be decided. The same party that tried to impeach Bill Clinton for lying about having sex with a woman, and then exonerated Donald Trump from impeachment two times despite knowing he was guilty as charged, now wants to manufacture a reason to impeach Biden. How Un-American can you get!

Now look closely at the people who are behind all this and it becomes chillingly clear what drives them. It's the same thing that drove the Ku Klux Klan in the early 1920s, George Wallace in the 1960s, and Donald Trump ever since he's been in politics: racism, pure and simple. White supremacy.

In her new book, *The Second Coming of the K.K.K.: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition*, Linda Gordon draws chilling parallels between the Klan of the 1920s and the Republican Party of today. The driving force for both, she shows, is the preponderance of white, rural and small-town Americans who despise immigrants and are suspicious of science.

Ms. Gordon does not pretend that today's Republicans are as bad as the K.K.K. was then, but she points out the undeniable fact that they both depend on the same sources for their energy.

Donald Trump obviously leads this GOP parade, at least for now, but he didn't start the parade. He just saw the wagon moving and hopped on.

No, George Wallace should be credited with starting it. Wallace saw something in the 1960s that the rest of the nation did not see, which was that racism was not confined to the South, as most people then assumed, but that it existed across the nation in substantial numbers. He shocked the nation in 1968 because he mounted a presidential candidacy built on pure racism and yet did surprisingly well in states far beyond the Deep South.

Trump picked up on that recognition, and bigots across the nation – many of them closet bigots but bigots nonetheless – recognized a brother and flocked to his side. Undoubtedly he also draws support from other people for other reasons, but that one's always there. It's always a big part of him.

Republicans may abandon Trump soon, especially once they've digested the inescapably devastating testimony from the Jan. 6 hearings, but they will not abandon the overall cause, which is the destruction of democracy and the installation of an autocracy.

Republicans know that a democracy survives only if its citizens stay informed, vote, and trust in the election's outcome. So, the GOP is trying to both limit the vote and destroy our faith in elections.

GOP-controlled state legislatures around the nation are passing laws daily that will make it harder for Democrats, especially Democrats of color, to vote; and they're trying to get "their" people into election positions where they will have some authority over how elections are run and votes are counted. By "their" people, I mean people such as those who actually believe Trump's 2020 election victory was stolen from him and can easily be manipulated to lean Republicans' way if any questions come up while counting ballots.

Sadly, the new Republicans cannot be appeased. They do not hear logic, do not hear truth, do not hear humanity calling, do not hear anything that would cloud their ever-quicken power. They have the power, they're using it, and they will continue to use it to the fullest extent possible. Despite what the clear majority wants.

Since people like that cannot be appeased, they can only be defeated. And we, the clear majority of Americans, can defeat them – but only if we vote in numbers so big they will steamroll any chance of Republicans successfully claiming the election was rigged, which they already are planning to do. We must vote even if it means walking barefoot ten miles through the snow. We simply must.

My daughter has a bumper sticker on her car that reads, Bad Politicians Are Elected By Good People Who Don't Vote.

It doesn't have to be that way. It mustn't be that way. Not this year. It is not hyperbole to say that winning big at the polls this year may be our last chance to save our democracy.

Jul 25, 2022

An Ocean Divides Us

Republicans and Democrats have at least one thing in common: both want to radically reform government.

But there their similarities end, for both want to do it in radically different ways.

Republicans, despite being the minority, are in control of government now and are showing what they want by using their power to get it, even though it's the opposite of what the great majority of us want. They have ended the protections of Roe vs. Wade, weakened gun laws, weakened government's ability to protect the environment, and opened a pathway into sending taxpayers' money into religious institutions.

They have signaled they intend to make abortion illegal everywhere, abolish gay people's right to marry or even have intimate relationships, deny women legal access to virtually every form of contraception, roll back LGBTQ rights, and let every state set up its own laws and rules regarding federal elections.

And, although they are not talking about it, they also want to terminate Medicare, Medicaid, Obamacare and Social Security.

Finally, most of all, they want to abolish our democracy and replace it with an autocracy.

Republicans are not campaigning on any of those points, of course. They're focusing instead on blaming Democrats for our increasing crime rates, runaway inflation and high gas prices – which are very strange choices, to say the least.

As for crime, Republicans consistently block gun control laws that would reduce crime. Instead, they support loosening gun laws to allow more guns to flood the streets and play a big part in increased crime.

As for inflation, it is a worldwide problem that our government has little or no control over. Inflation is not the Democrats' fault.

The same goes for gasoline prices. They are set on the international market and our government has little to nothing to say about it. But even if rising gas prices were the fault of Democrats, wouldn't that mean Republicans should laud Democrats because gas prices are coming down now?

If Democrats want to protect America from all that, as I've often written in this space, then democracy-loving persons must vote in huge numbers in November's midterm elections. If we don't, our democracy probably will die.

But winning the election big is just the first step. If Democrats win in November we must be prepared to use that fresh power and move immediately to step two, which will be to move boldly to bolster our democracy.

We could begin by getting rid of the Senate filibuster rule that keeps letting the tail wag the dog. Return Senate debate to the days when a filibuster meant talking a bill to death.

Then get on with passing Biden's Build Back Better plan and writing his environmental ideas into law. Congress must also codify into law the protections of Roe vs. Wade, people's right to marry whomever they wish, women's right to any contraception of their choice, and, especially, protect our elections' integrity.

We also must stack the Supreme Court with more members – or de-stack it by adding members, which is a more accurate word under the circumstances. Remember how Mitch McConnell, then the Senate majority leader, refused to let Barack Obama nominate a justice during the last year of his presidency, but let Donald Trump nominate his third one when Trump had just a few days left? That was court-stacking. Re-balancing the court by adding members would be to de-stack it. While we're at it, we should discuss term limits for justices.

Or be even more radical. It is fast-becoming ridiculous to let nine unelected people whose jobs are guaranteed for life make binding and often intimate decisions for the other 334-plus million of us. We need a big-time change.

The problems are, what do we want to change to, and how are we to get there? Unfortunately, there are few options to either question. Not many of us want to turn over any of the court's powers to Congress, not the nonfunctioning body Congress has become. But reforming the court's basic structure in most other ways would require changing the Constitution, a complicated and involved process that could take years, and ultimate success would not be a given.

An argument for keeping the status quo is that all cases that come before the court hinge on purely legal questions, so trained legal minds should have the final word. That's the way the court is set up now, but it doesn't have to be that way. Strangely, the Constitution does not stipulate who has the final authority to interpret what the Constitution means. The court evolved to what it is through years of dispute that finally settled on giving that power to a few legal minds. But again, the Constitution doesn't say it has to be that way.

So, what to do?

Create citizens' assemblies, maybe? Robert Lempert, a principal researcher at the RAND Corporation, wrote an essay for the July 19 issue of Noema Magazine, published by the Berggruen Institute, that explains the new idea of citizens' assemblies. He writes:

"Similar in some ways to a jury, a citizens' assembly is a body formed from randomly selected citizens who engage in structured deliberations that recognize multiple viewpoints, then move to consensus on important issues. Such assemblies differ from juries in having more participants, more structured deliberative processes and an ability to summon experts to inform them."

He also writes: "Most of the Supreme Court's judgments are not controversial. But on some occasions, a court ruling regarding the constitutionality of some legislation or government action can have major implications on American life," and that's when a citizens' assembly would take over.

"While many details obviously need to be worked out it's worth exploring how such a process might work."

Beyond revamping the courts, though, we also need to get rid of the Electoral College. Let the people's direct votes choose the president. Because of the college, Hillary Clinton trounced Donald Trump by 7 million votes but lost the election because Trump trounced her in Electoral College votes. That's because presidential election campaigns have become five-state affairs only, and the rest of us do not matter.

The Republican Party has no ideas it wants to talk about; Mitch McConnell has even bragged that Republicans will release their platform after the November elections. In the meantime we can look and see what they are doing.

Meanwhile, Democrats are bursting with ideas that could go a long way toward making America truly great, and all they need to implement them is a few more votes in Congress.

We voters can give them that, but to do so we must show up at the polls in record numbers that will overcome all the Republicans' vote-prevention shenanigans and give Democrats that power.

If we don't do that, we deserve what's coming to us.

Aug 1, 2022

The GOP Has Lost It

The Republican Party has either gone blind or gone bonkers. Maybe both. Or maybe lunacy is a better word.

For starters, most Republicans (by most counts, about 65 percent of them) still believe Donald Trump won the 2020 presidential election, despite their only evidence being the baseless word of the eternally lying Trump himself. Every nonpartisan poll watcher who participated said the election was the cleanest in history, and more than 60 state and federal judges, many of whom Trump appointed, have said there is nothing to their complaints. And still his minions insist he won.

But wait. There's more.

Republicans are doing the same thing now with climate change by pretending it isn't happening. That became especially clear last week when the Gallup organization published the results of a poll that asked, "How much do you worry about the quality of the environment – a great deal, a fair amount, only a little or not at all?"

The result showed that showed only 14 percent of Republicans aged 55 and older—that's fewer than two persons in every 100 – replied "a great deal," and only 18 percent in the 35-54 age group did. In other words, only about a third of middle-aged and older Republicans worry much or at all about the environment, although the overwhelming evidence shows that ignoring the deteriorating environment is slowly killing us.

Consider: St. Louis is pummeled with nine inches of rain in one day and massive floods in Kentucky kill dozens of persons; meanwhile, the folks farther west are experiencing near Dust Bowl conditions. The Colorado River, which serves 20 million people, is drying up. Lake Mead is a shadow of its old self. California is burning again. Record heat waves across America that feature triple-digit temperatures are becoming so common that 100 million Americans from Arizona to Boston are, have been or soon will be under heat emergency warnings. The heat is killing trees so rapidly that the United States has announced it will plant a billion trees to compensate. The Great Salt Lake has lost 50 percent of its water in recent years, and if conditions don't reverse soon – an unlikely possibility without a lot of human help – Salt Lake City will soon be hit with winds carrying clouds of poisonous arsenic that now covers much of the lake's bottom. It's come to the point that many Democrats are all but begging President Biden to declare a national climate emergency. Europe is facing an unrelenting and unprecedented heat wave that is melting highways and bending railroad tracks to the point that trains have slowed to a crawl. And on, and on, and on it goes.

But instead of seeing the obvious, Republicans mock it as hyperbole. They claim that technologies that do not exist on a viable scale, such as carbon capture and storage, and "clean coal" (whatever that is),

are our saviors, while such solutions as wind and solar power and electric cars are unreliable and too expensive.

Thanks largely to the GOP's refusal to help, America's failure to sufficiently tackle climate change has caused the Democratic Republic of Congo to offer to auction off vast amounts of its rainforests, including tropical peatlands that store huge amounts of carbon, keeping it in the ground and thus from contributing to global warming.

A spokesman for the Congo said their only goal for the auction is to earn revenue to reduce poverty in their country, and why should the Congo sacrifice if the United States, one of the world's leaders in destroying the environment, is doing so little?

How serious is that? Irene Wabiwa, who oversees the Congo Basin Forest Campaign for Greenpeace, says the drilling "will cause a climate catastrophe, and we will all just have to watch helplessly."

There may be at least a spark of hope that Republicans will wake up to reality. According to Gallup, 32 percent of Republicans aged 18-34 said they worry a great deal about the environment, which is more than double the rate of their grey-haired brethren. That still means two-thirds of them don't take climate change very seriously, but compared with their parents it's a lot, and it could indicate a generational split might be developing in the party.

(Incidentally, the GOP rate compares with 64 percent of Democrats in each of the three age categories who worry "a great deal" about the environment. By age group, that's about five times more than the GOP seniors, 3.5 times more than its middle agers, and double the young Republicans.)

One explanation of the GOP's strange attitude probably can be traced back to a 1998 in-house memo written by the American Petroleum Institute that The New York Times uncovered. It read in part:

"Victory will be achieved when average citizens 'understand' (recognize) uncertainties in climate science ... Unless 'climate change' becomes a non-issue, there may be no moment when we can declare victory." The memo went on to say that the institute "could manipulate journalists and the broader public by muddying the evidence."

So again I ask: Why can't, or won't, Republicans see the obvious?

But wait. There's more. It involves two things that happened last week.

First, Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., agreed to include hundreds of billions of dollars for climate and energy programs and tax increases to subsidize health care and lower the cost of prescription drugs. His capitulation did not guarantee the package would pass – several Democratic senators said they want to study the details before signing on – but it was a huge step in that direction.

As Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, put it, the measure would be "by far, the biggest climate action in human history. Nearly \$370 billion in tax incentives, grants, and other investments in clean energy, clean transportation, energy storage, home electrification, climate-smart agriculture, and clean

manufacturing makes this a real climate bill. The planet is on fire. Emissions reductions are the main thing. This is enormous progress. Let's get it done."

All 50 Republican senators despise the package – after all, it concerns the climate – but if the 50 Democrats hold together and Vice President Kamala Harris casts the deciding vote, there is nothing the Republicans can do about it.

So what did they do? That's the second thing that happened last week. They pouted.

The Senate last June had passed the bipartisan Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act by an overwhelming 84-14 vote. The bill was designed to provide medical benefits for veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxins during their military service.

But when the House returned the bill for a procedural clean-up, the Republicans killed it.

The vote was widely seen as revenge for the reconciliation package's resurrection – but it attacks sick veterans, not congressional Democrats. It is beyond my imagination to understand why Republicans could possibly think attacking sick veterans who have risked their lives for our country could be a good thing.

It probably will help Democrats in November. Just like the GOP's other decisions, it probably will.

As I said, lunacy.

Aug 8, 2022

Good News for Pro-Choice

There has been a stream of good news recently for those of us who believe women should have the legal right to control their own bodies.

Begin with Kansas, one of the reddest states in the nation where voters overwhelmingly supported Donald Trump over Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential race – 56-42 percent. Last Tuesday, those same voters overwhelmingly rejected (59-41 percent) a proposed constitutional amendment that would have stripped women of their right to have an abortion.

That margin is astonishing by itself, but it is made even more astonishing because the referendum was held on primary day, a day that traditionally attracts a higher percentage of hardline Republicans to the polls. It also was a day when Democrats didn't have many reasons to turn out, and the question was worded in such a way that a yes vote meant a no and a no vote meant yes – all tricks Republicans used to increase their chances of winning.

The margin has even persuaded some unrelentingly strong abortion-hating GOP political candidates to soften their stand.

So what caused the difference? Motivated Democratic voters! Despite having little to vote on other than a woman's right to abortion, Democratic turnout was up 60 percent compared with the turnout in 2018 when Democrats were deciding who they wanted for their gubernatorial candidate.

That could be a harbinger of good news to come because Kansas isn't alone. A new Gallup poll shows that nearly four in 10 Americans say they have felt the urge to organize or join a public demonstration, and the abortion issue is far and away the leading cause of that. Thirty-one percent named abortion as their No. 1 reason, followed by Black Lives Matter (22 percent), women's rights (19 percent), civil or equal rights (11 percent), and government or political issues (10 percent) – all issues that Gallup said are driving Democrats and liberals more than anyone else.

And, a New York Times analysis showed that around 65 percent of voters nationwide would reject a similar initiative to roll back abortion rights, including in 40 of the 50 states.

President Biden also is getting more involved. On Wednesday, he directed his health secretary to consider assisting women traveling out of state for abortions. The order calls on Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra to consider inviting states to apply for Medicaid waivers when treating low-income women who are forced to cross state lines for reproductive health services.

The executive order also directs Becerra to consider ensuring health-care providers comply with federal nondiscrimination laws to ensure women receive medically necessary care, and to improve research and data collection on maternal health outcomes.

Further, Biden's administration sued Idaho over a law set to take effect later this month that would inhibit emergency room doctors from performing abortions that are necessary to stabilize the health of women facing medical emergencies.

That order follows Biden's earlier call for HHS to explore all options to support women who live in states that have severely limited abortion access.

Put all that together and Democrats are ready to use the abortion issue assertively in campaigns across America.

I hope they do, and since conservative Christians are the primary drivers behind the so-called "pro-life" effort, I especially hope pro-choice candidates will force them to answer two questions:

On what biblical passage(s) do you base your opposition?

Why do you call yourself pro-life when you are not?

Regarding the first question, there are some 280,000 words in the Bible, depending on the translation, and "abortion" is not one of them. Further, nothing in the Bible even comes close to indicating abortion is wrong.

Most foundational Jewish texts assert that a fetus becomes a person at birth, and Jesus neither mentioned the word “abortion” nor even alluded to it. He went so far to say he didn’t disagree with a jot or tittle in the Hebrew Bible. Today’s Jews feel so strongly about it that they are making the case that the Supreme Court is violating the Constitution by interfering with their religious rights.

If conservatives would take the time to look, they would learn that opposition to abortion has never been about religion. It has always been about politics, pure and simple.

In the late 1970s the IRS began threatening the tax-exempt status of the arch-fundamentalist Bob Jones University in Greenville, S.C., because of its unswerving segregation policies. High-powered Christian nationalists – among them Bob Jones Sr., Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and Paul Weyrich – decided to “restore America’s moral foundation” by creating a hot-button issue that had nothing to do with segregation that they could use to take over all governmental bodies. They settled on abortion, and it worked so well it resulted in the massive anti-abortion movement we have today, not to mention minority control of the government. Look it up.

Regarding the second question, if you really were pro-life you would care as much about babies as you do about embryos. But you don’t.

If you really cared about unwanted babies, especially babies the mother cannot afford, you would be willing to pay taxes sufficient to rear those children at least through high school. Doesn’t it make logical sense that if the government forces something, the government should pay for it?

Furthermore, if you say you are pro-life, you should shriek against military service, capital punishment and lax gun laws. But you don’t. And if you don’t, you owe it to us pro-choice folks to explain why you are not a hypocrite.

We’re waiting on your answers.

Aug 15, 2022

Lock Him Up!

It’s time to put Donald J. Trump in prison.

If anyone has ever deserved it, he does. The Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington counts 48 crimes that the Department of Justice investigated while he was president or running for president, and that doesn’t include crimes he may have committed while in office that haven’t been investigated yet, or crimes he may have committed after he left office.

Trump has been credibly accused of committing too many crimes to list here, but they include sex crimes, obstructing justice, lying on financial disclosure documents, campaign finance violations, willful destruction of government documents, criminal solicitation to commit fraud, conspiracy to commit sedition, and more.

The list does not include crimes involving the Trump Organization that New York and Georgia authorities are investigating, nor crimes he allegedly committed after he left office, such as more than one election law violation, conspiracy to commit sedition, and even treason. A treason conviction is considered so serious that it can carry the death penalty, although certainly no one expects that in Trump's case.

And all those allegations came before the FBI seized 20 boxes of items from Mar-a-Lago last week, some of which were marked secret, top secret, and even "sensitive compartmented information." That last one is a level above top secret. Anything carrying that designation is considered so sensitive that only a small handful of government officials are allowed to see it.

This has all been classic Trump. His entire life has been marked by lying, cheating, stealing, swindling, accosting women, tromping on the Constitution, ignoring any social rules that get in his way, et cetera.

But still his bootlickers love and respect him. Can you imagine what these same people would be saying if this were about Barack Obama?

This new development is especially scary because The Washington Post reported last week that FBI agents were searching Mar-a-Lago for classified documents about nuclear weapons, among other items. That could be crucially important because if information like that got into another nation's hands, such as Russia, they could use it as a roadmap on how to build weapons specifically designed to neutralize our weapons.

We don't know specifically what those boxes contained, but several news agencies have submitted formal requests to see the affidavits that contain much of that information. A federal judge has given the government until 5 p.m. today to respond to those motions.

For his part, Trump has been all over the place.

He said the nuclear weapons issue was a "hoax," which it plainly was not. A federal judge had to approve the search based on the FBI's showing him overwhelmingly strong reason to believe it would succeed, and the FBI obviously did. Subsequent events proved him right for approving the raid.

Trump said the FBI planted evidence, but he presented no evidence to back that up.

He said all the material he had was "declassified," but it was not.

He said the FBI could have had all the information it wanted simply by asking for it, but that is not true either. Last spring, the Justice Department subpoenaed Trump for the information, and although Trump complied, he did not comply fully or truthfully. Instead, he kept at least some of our nation's most important secrets at home – secretly.

Trump said Barack Obama took sensitive material home when he left the White House and that some of it was nuclear ("Word is, lots"). Not true again. In reply to that accusation, The National Archives

and Records Administration issued a statement that said it had obtained “exclusive legal and physical custody” of Obama’s records when he left office, and nothing is missing.

And so the questions must be asked: Why did he do it? Why did Donald J. Trump take our nation’s most important secrets home with him and secretly keep them? And, most important of all, what has he been doing with them?

He’s had those super-secrets since last Jan. 20, 2021 the day he turned over the reins of government to Joe Biden. That’s more than one year and six months. What was he doing with them all that time?

One possibility is he needed them for espionage. That is not an accusation, but it is a possibility that must be considered. If there is another logical possibility, I haven’t heard it. But I’m open if someone has one.

Consider the possibility. Trump has been strangely pro-Putin since the beginning, and rumors persist that Putin is blackmailing him. They’re just meaningless rumors, of course, unless there’s something that give them legs. And there is. It’s not evidence, it’s more like markers in the sand. Remember how he accepted the word of Putin over his own intelligence-gathering professionals? Remember that one-hour secret conversation he had with Putin that never was explained? Remember how, when he was president, he kowtowed to Vladimir Putin’s needs while weakening our links with our West European allies?

Again, it’s just a rumor. But it’s also a possibility that must be considered.

Returning to Trump’s future, there is no death penalty in it, although a case could be made for it. But prison time? Absolutely!

I don’t care if he spends his sentence in one of the so-called country club prisons. I don’t even care if he’s allowed to have his hairdresser show up three times a day. And although it would be sad if pro-Trumpers rioted in the streets, if it happens it happens. As Paul Finkelman famously said, “Let justice be done though the heavens may fall.” I wholeheartedly agree. Trump must serve time behind bars, regardless of what it costs. His freedom must be taken away from him.

It would be a national tragedy for him not to serve time. For one thing, it would set a horribly dangerous precedent for all future presidents because it would give them carte blanche to commit any crime they wanted to without any fear of being charged. After all, if we can’t put away a man who has been credibly accused of committing more than 50 crimes – including treason, for heaven’s sake – why would any future president have to worry about being charged with anything, much less convicted?

Even more important, if Trump does not go to prison, we are telling the world that our Constitution’s promise that all Americans are treated equally under the law is rubbish.

If Trump is to be indicted though, it must be done soon. The statute of limitations’ clock is ticking, and the window for getting an indictment is closing.

No one knows exactly when that day will be because Trump's case is special. Normally, the statute of limitations involving most of the crimes Trump may have committed expires in five years after the crime has been committed. But because the Department of Justice believes the Constitution precludes it from indicting a sitting president, a case can be made that the clock doesn't begin ticking until he leaves office.

Trump would prefer the former, of course, because that would drastically reduce the time before the statute of limitations runs out. And since it's Trump's Supreme Court that probably will decide the question, it's time to get cracking on those indictments.

Trump has the right to be represented by the best lawyers his money can buy, and he deserves every one of his constitutional rights, including a fair trial.

And then he needs to go to prison, because We the People deserve our rights too, and one of them is having our worst criminals removed from society and put in prison.

Aug 22, 2022

And Still the GOP Believes

A few days ago, as the news sank in that a former president of the United States was credibly being investigated as a possible traitor, it struck me as horrifying news for the nation, but good news for Democrats in November.

After all, how could all those Republican candidates who have made fawning over Trump a key plank of their campaigns stay with him now? He unquestionably took home with him many of our nation's most important secrets, most secret secrets – secretly! I know only two plausible reasons why he would have done that, and both are illegal:

he wanted the information as souvenirs and thought it was legally his, or

he wanted to sell or trade the information to someone, Vladimir Putin perhaps.

What candidate could possibly continue bragging about the support of a person who has that kind of albatross hanging around his neck? Politically, I thought, Trump's fawners were dead.

And then reality hit. Instead of Republicans' deserting him in large numbers, they were flocking to him in large numbers. Without offering any evidence, they were accusing the FBI of planting evidence, of making an unnecessary, unprecedented, unthinkable and unconstitutional raid. Some of them were calling for the FBI to be defunded, dismantled, even "destroyed." They used words like "Nazi" and "tyrant." Many were calling for war – armed war!

"Tomorrow is war," declared Steven Crowder, a conservative commentator with 1.9 million Twitter followers.

“This means war”, The Gateway Pundit wrote in an on-line post.

Trump supporters flooded social media sites with brazen demands for weapons and armed conflict.

The near unanimity of that hatred began to weaken soon as more moderate voices in the party who, although they still supported Trump, wanted to make a more restrained case for defending him.

So even so the temperature cools a bit, the support for Trump remains strong, even though there is every reason to believe that he violated the Espionage Act – was a traitor. Not only that, but the accusation was also pumping new energy into Trump-backed Republican campaigns.

It’s hard to accept, but there really are people out there who value protocol and unsupported rumors about the FBI over the legitimate fear that their former president may be a traitor.

That’s an ugly fact, but then, this new Republican Party spews ugly. Rome, Ga., home of U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, is a microcosm. It is not uncommon for people there to walk around wearing t-shirts emblazoned with slogans like “The Only Good Lib Is a Dead Lib”, and “Liberals Are Traitors” complete with nooses. Passersby often greet them with “Let’s Go Brandon.”

It’s like that in Trumplands across the nation, especially in rural areas, and they are winning a chilling number of Republican primaries. Here’s a look at how candidates Trump backed were doing in a recent tabulation of primary results.

Governor: won 8, lost 3, and 4 are pending.

U.S. Senate: won 6, lost 0, and 9 are pending.

U.S. House: won 88, lost 2, and 29 are pending.

Trump also backed several local and state candidates in swing states who believe the 2020 election was stolen from him and are running for important positions directly involved with elections. If these people are elected in November, they will have important voices in deciding any questions concerning the 2024 presidential election, including vote counting.

But maybe, just maybe, all this will turn out to be good news for Democrats after all. They suddenly have a lot going for them.

Begin with the passing of major people-pleasing legislation over solid Republican opposition. I’m talking, of course, about the landmark package of climate, health and tax provisions that President Biden just signed into law.

The bill, which provides for a sharp reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, is the biggest climate protection bill in American history, and it re-establishes America as the world’s leader in safeguarding the environment.

The Act also will make the most substantive changes to health care policy since Obamacare was adopted more than a decade ago. It reduces the cost of health insurance and prescription drugs. It will give Medicare officials the power to negotiate the prices that pharmaceutical companies charge. And the primary recipients will be poor people, working-class people and middle-class people – voting people.

Finally, the Act will force all corporations to pay a minimum 15 percent tax, which is remarkable because many of America's largest corporations haven't paid taxes in years. Nothing.

More successes: Democrats in Congress forced the first significant gun control legislation in more than a decade. Inflation is slowing. Gas prices have dropped to their lowest price since last March and they are headed downward. The economy is improving. We have the lowest unemployment rate today than we've had in 50 years. And don't forget that \$1.6 trillion social spending act, tangible evidence of which should be showing up in voters' neighborhoods soon. Democrats led successful bipartisan efforts to bolster the U.S. computer chip industry to lessen our dependence on China, and to help military veterans who suffered from burn pits.

And more.

Add to all that the white supremacy base of today's Republican Party; GOP-driven denial of women's right to control their own bodies; draconian election laws they wrote (and are writing) to deny the vote to people of color, who are likely to vote Democratic; Republicans' drive to lower taxes on corporations and the rich; and Senate Minority Mitch McConnell's refusal to announce a GOP platform until after the November Election.

Certainly do not overlook the words of the Senate's president pro tempore, Vermont Republican Patrick Leahy, who has been talking about increasing the costs of Medicare, increasing the cost of Social Security, and increasing income taxes on the poor and middle class.

And more.

Finally, I have to believe that there are enough decent Americans out there that once the truth sinks in that our former president really is being investigated for treason, among more than 50 other felonies, surely, come Election Day, there won't be enough Trump-supporting Americans left to elect anybody to anything. If there are, we deserve what we get, and American democracy dies.

Help certainly will come from what's left of the Republican establishment, the Lincoln Project, many of whom – most of whom? – would rather have Democrats controlling the nation than Trump minions. They're likely to either vote for Democrats in the General Election or stay home.

Now that primary season is coming to an end, it would seem all Democrats have to do is pound all this into voters' awareness and make sure everyone fully realizes how crucially important it is to have a large voter turnout in November. If Democrats and other democracy-loving people do that, we can increase our hold on the Senate and protect our control of the House despite all the gerrymandering Republicans got away with. A blue tsunami remains a distinct possibility.

We have 11 weeks left to get it done.

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(Correction: In last week's Onward|Upward column, Lock Him Up, I said Trump held our nation's supersecret files at Mar-a-Lago for six months. That was wrong. He held them there for one year and six months.)

Aug 29, 2022

American Autocracy? Possible

Adolph Hitler was one of the most brutal autocrats who ever lived. He ordered the murders of seven million Jews and gypsies, basically because he thought his race was superior to theirs, and he had the power to do it.

Donald J. Trump is no Hitler, of course, although he is an autocrat, a white supremacist, and he did let many thousands of persons die during the pandemic's early days while he was declaring it a hoax, something for which he has never apologized.

But although he's no Hitler, he is a meticulous follower of Hitler's advice to would-be authorities, which was to lie, lie often, lie big, and never admit to lying or apologize for lying. Keep lying even if your lie has been proven beyond doubt to be a lie, because enough people will stay with you to make it worthwhile.

Trump has done that religiously, and for him it has worked. He's an autocrat and he's a pathological liar, which includes staying with his ludicrous Big Lie that he won the 2020 presidential election, but despite that (not to mention being suspected of committing more than 50 felonies including treason), he is the Republican Party's de facto leader, very well may become the party's choice to become our next president, and is leading the party's movement toward America's becoming an autocracy, preferably with him as the autocrat (or tyrant, or dictator, synonyms that seem to describe him better).

The writer Steve Schmidt described Trump's danger, leanings, and power-despite-setbacks this way:

"Between 2015 and today, Donald Trump has become the leader of an autocratic movement that is the greatest threat to the endurance of the American Republic since secession and the Confederacy. During this time, Donald Trump was narrowly elected president of the United States, was twice impeached, and incited and led an insurrection. He installed a cult of personality over the hollow leadership of the RNC and state parties that demanded obedience in return for favor and advancement."

It is not unthinkable that we could lose our democracy to an autocracy, regardless of whether Trump is the president. Trump may have started the movement, but it has its own legs now so that's where the party is headed with or without Trump.

Other nations have lost their democracies, and we could too. Government records show that 41 countries were full liberal democracies in 2010, but only 32 still were by 2020.

The good news here for Democrats – and every other American who wants to keep our democracy – is that voters who lean Democrat are beginning to pay attention and get active. A poll performed for TheUnion, a group of pro-democracy organizations paid for by the Lincoln Republicans (the real Republicans), showed that people now worry more about losing their democracy than they do anything else, including inflation and any other economic topic that have long topped the list.

Abortion is having a huge impact on women, which is more good news for Democrats and democracy lovers because women comprise a large and crucial voting bloc and they are registering to vote at record levels– “astonishing levels,” as one observer put it. The political data from TargetSmart reports that since the Dodds decision, women registering to vote have outnumbered men by large margins, 11 points in Ohio, for example.

A Pew poll released last week shows that 56 percent of voters say the right to abortion is very important to them for the midterm votes, up from 46 percent before the Dobbs decision.

Referendums and special elections also are showing how the Dobbs decision is having an effect. In New York, Pat Ryan, a Democrat running to fill a vacancy in Congress, campaigned hard on abortion freedom while his Republican opponent, Marc Molinaro, sidestepped the issue. Molinaro was expected to win easily, but Ryan won by two points. Big upset.

And so the trend is clear. But so is the reality that Republican-controlled legislatures in several states have gerrymandered their districts so effectively that Democrats hardly stand a chance. This is especially true in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Ohio where state judges have ruled that their maps are so starkly one-sided they are illegal. Nevertheless, legal or not, those maps will be in effect come November's midterm elections, making it hard for Democrats to win there, even with a large turnout.

Hard, but not impossible. Upsets like the one in New York, and especially the stunning Kansas referendum, have that anything is possible.

But for the possible to happen – that is, for democracy to be saved – democracy must work like it's supposed to work. All citizens must inform themselves of what is going on and use that knowledge to participate and vote.

Unfortunately, a glance at history proves that most people don't do that. Most people don't vote. Look at the last five midterm elections and compare the percentages of people who voted with the number of people who were eligible: in 2002, 41 percent; in 2006, 41 percent; in 2010, 42 percent; in 2014, 37 percent; and in 2018, 50 percent.

The tumultuous 2018 midterms were held during Trump's term, and even then on half of the nation's voters did their part. For the rest of the century until now, not even half of the eligible voters bothered to show up. And so here we are.

But if democracy works in November, as it increasingly appears it might, enough people will prove their love for democracy by showing up at the polls and making that dreamed-for blue tsunami a reality.

Democracy depends on it happening. November may be our last chance.

Sep 12, 2022

Is Trump a Traitor?

The question must be asked, and it must be answered as soon as is humanly possible: Is our former president a traitor?

Specifically: What did Donald J. Trump do with all those secret, top-secret and supersecret papers he hid at Mar-a-Lago for 18 months?

More specifically: Did he share them with Russian President Vladimir Putin?

If he did, the damage to America will be stupendous, so is imperative that the truth be known as soon as possible.

The reasons to suspect that Trump might have committed treason by sharing our secrets with Russia is his longstanding propensity to serve Russia's interest above America's, plus his strange relationship with Russia's President Vladimir Putin. Please, let me refresh your memory:

Even before Trump was elected president in 2016, he publicly asked Russia to hack Hillary Clinton's emails.

After the election, when American intelligence agencies told Trump that a wide-ranging group of Russians had probed state voter databases for insecurities; hacked the Clinton campaign, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and the Democratic National Committee; tried to hack the campaign of Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., and the Republican National Committee; released politically damaging information on the internet; spread propaganda on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram; staged rallies in Florida and Pennsylvania; and floated a business proposition for a skyscraper in Moscow to the Trump Organization, he dismissed the charges out of hand. Later, at the 2018 Helsinki summit, he met privately face-to-face with Putin for two hours. And then, when asked at a post-summit news conference whether he believed his agencies' report or Putin's denials, Trump replied, "President Putin says it's not Russia. I don't see any reason why it would be."

Trump also interfered with the Mueller investigation. Mueller's probe focused on Russian attempts to disrupt the 2016 election, possible coordination between associates of Trump and Russia, and whether financial crimes were committed by any of the president's associates. In June 2017, following Trump's firing of former FBI Director James Comey, the special counsel investigation expanded to examine whether Trump had attempted to obstruct justice. He denies it, of course, and no charges were ever filed due to his attorney general's unwillingness to cross his boss. But Sara Azari, a practicing attorney who specializes in white-collar crimes, said in her book, *Unprecedented*, that Trump could be indicted for nine instances of obstruction. She said any capable lawyer could easily convict him of at least five counts and probably could convict him of three more. She said there was insufficient evidence to prosecute the remaining one.

In 2018 Trump recklessly removed troops from northern Syria and allowed Russian forces to take over American bases.

In 2020, he unilaterally invited Putin to rejoin the Group of Seven's annual meeting, from which Putin had been banned ever since he illegally annexed Crimea in 2014. The move allegedly upended the meeting.

Also in 2020, Trump surprised senior officials in the White House, State Department and the Pentagon by removing nearly a third of U.S. troops from Germany. The move weakened U.S.-Germany relations, harmed NATO – and benefitted only Russia.

U.S. intelligence told Trump in 2020 that Russia was paying bounties to Taliban fighters in Afghanistan to kill Americans, and Trump ignored it. He didn't even lodge a diplomatic protest. Nothing!

Trump went to Russia and held a two-hour secret conversation with Putin, details of which have never been released. Remember how sheepish Trump looked a few minutes later while sharing a podium with a confident-looking Putin?

After Joe Biden became president, it was discovered that Trump and Putin had at least a dozen rambling, off-the-cuff calls and person-to-person meetings over the four years Trump was president. It is not known what was said during any of those contacts.

And then there are those persistent rumors that insist Putin has something on Trump and is blackmailing him.

Put all that together and there are plenty of reasons to suspect that Donald Trump might have given Vladimir Putin what The Washington Post described as "documents that detail top-secret operations so closely guarded that many senior national security officials are kept in the dark about them."

But the courts, which should be clearing the way for the investigation to proceed unencumbered and at full speed, appear to be on Trump's side. When U.S. District Judge Aileen M. Cannon, a Trump appointee, agreed with Trump that a special master must be appointed to review the records seized from Mar-a-Lago before the criminal investigation can resume, not only did she give the appointee

power to filter materials that might be subject to attorney-client privilege, but also anything that might involve executive privilege.

Legal specialists across the country pounced on the decision. They said Trump is not a president, so he has no executive privilege. Some say such a search could take years. Others say the decision is extraordinary, unusually broad, and represents an unprecedented intervention by a federal judge into a criminal investigation.

“It’s not something courts do,” Jonathan Schaub, a former Justice Department attorney, told Reuters. “It’s giving him (Trump) a whole lot of special treatment.”

So now a telling time begins. Last Thursday, the government appealed to the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta, where six of the 11 judges are Trump appointees. If the government loses there and appeals again, the case will go to the U.S. Supreme Court where three of the members are Trump appointees and three more lean hard right.

The upshot: It is imperative that the American public knows as soon as possible what Donald Trump did with all those government secrets for such a long time, and so the investigation must continue unhindered, at full speed, and without any delay. But delay is exactly what Trump wants the most, and the court system from here on out is ripe with possibilities for delays.

Meanwhile, at the district court level, Judge Cannon has some important decisions to make. She ordered both sides to suggest to her two names of prospective special masters,

and though both sides complied, both sides objected to the other’s suggestions. She also asked them what if anything should be prohibited from being inspected, and how long the inspection should last, and again both sides objected vehemently to the other’s suggestions.

What Judge Cannon does now could tell us a lot about where this criminal investigation into Donald J. Trump is headed.

Sep 26, 2022

What Have We Become?

Whatever happened to us Americans? Where did we go wrong? We used to be a people who demanded that our public officials, especially those running for or serving in high office, show some integrity and decorum. No longer.

Think back to 1972. Republican operatives were caught breaking into the Democratic National Committee Headquarters in Washington’s Watergate building. Two years later, when the Oval Office tapes revealed that President Richard Nixon had conspired to cover up activities that took place after the break-in and had later tried to use federal officials to deflect attention from the investigation, he was cooked. The House Judiciary Committee approved three articles of impeachment against him that

accused him of obstruction of justice, abuse of power, and contempt of Congress. When Nixon realized his support among Republicans had evaporated, he resigned. He escaped prosecution because President Ford pardoned him.

Or remember Gary Hart? In 1987, Gary Hart was the front-runner for the 1988 Democratic presidential nomination when rumors began swirling that he was having an affair. He denied it and challenged reporters to follow him if they didn't believe him. So they did follow him, and they caught him red-handed. It forced him to quit his campaign in disgrace in May. He re-entered the race in December, but he fared so poorly in primaries that he soon dropped out for good.

Democrat Bill Clinton was serving his second term as president in 1988 when he had sex in the Oval Office with a 22-year-old White House intern. The House of Representatives passed two impeachment articles that accused him of using the powers of the presidency to obstruct the investigation and that he lied under oath, but the Senate acquitted him. It was the first time Congress had impeached a president since 1868, when it impeached Andrew Johnson on 11 counts.

And who could forget the 2004 presidential race? Former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean was the front-runner for the Democratic nomination when he made his famous pledge to his supporters: "Not only are we going to New Hampshire," he yelled jubilantly, "we're going to South Carolina! And Oklahoma! And Arizona! And North Dakota! And New Mexico! We're going to California! And Texas! And New York! And we're going to South Dakota! And Oregon! And Washington! And Michigan! And then we're going to Washington, D.C., to take back the White House!"

And then came his loud, guttural, energetic scream: "Yaaaaaaaay!!!"

American voters quickly decided they did not want a president who exhibited that kind of decorum, and Dean was history.

Now compare those stories with the story of Donald Trump, whom millions of Americans want to be our next president.

For starters, just last Thursday New York Atty. Gen. Leticia James sued Trump, some family members and two business associates for (allegedly) overvaluing his businesses to lenders and the government by billions of dollars. She listed 200 instances and called it "staggering fraud".

It's a civil proceeding because her office has no power to file criminal charges in this case, but it would prevent Trump and his family members from ever again owning a business in New York, force him to pay a huge fine, and it could shatter the entire Trump Organization.

She also turned the information over to federal prosecutors in Manhattan so they can consider whether he committed federal crimes, a possibility she described as "plausible."

But that's just a minor annoyance for Trump when compared with his other legal problems, which include the investigation involving classified documents he took to Mar-a-Lago, which could end in charges of treason; the Justice Department's criminal investigation of the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol, which also could end in charges of treason; the Georgia investigation into felonious election

interference; the Manhattan district attorney's criminal case against the Trump Organization; The Westchester County district attorney's criminal investigation into whether the Trump Organization cheated on taxes; The Washington, D.C.'s, criminal investigation of the Jan. 6 Capitol riot ; the E. Jean Carroll defamation suit, in which she claims Trump slandered her for calling her a liar when she accused him of raping her; the Mary Trump lawsuit, in which Trump's niece accuses him and his sister Maryanne of defrauding her out of millions of dollars; The U.S. House of Representatives' Jan. 6 lawsuit, in which the House is suing him and others for trying to prevent Congress from certifying the Electoral College vote on Jan. 6; the Eric Swalwell suit, in which the California representative accuses Trump and two others of violating a federal Civil Rights Law and of encouraging "violent conduct and inflicting emotional distress" on the lawmakers present in Congress Jan. 6; The Capitol Police Jan. 6 lawsuits , in which two police officers claim that Trump incited the riot that caused them serious injury; the Michael Cohen lawsuit, in which Trump's former "fixer" claims that Trump (among others) retaliated against him after he said he was writing a sell-all book about his years working for Trump; a class-action suit against Trump, along with his closest family members and the Trump Organization, which accuses them of "a pattern of racketeering activity" and of "defrauding thousands of working class individuals"; The NAACP Legal Defense Fund's lawsuit, which accuses Trump and others of violating the Voting Rights Act and the Ku Klux Klan Act by attempting to overthrow the 2020 presidential election; and the Trump Tower assault lawsuit, in which five individuals are suing Trump and others over the allegation that Trump's then chief of security hit one of them on the head while they were protesting outside Trump Tower.

And those are just his legal problems. A big question that has been surrounding Donald Trump like a cloud for years is: Is he mentally ill?

And the answer is: Of course he is.

I think we all suspected it, but now we have some damning evidence. Dr. Bandy Lee, an assistant professor of clinical psychiatry at Yale University, publicly diagnosed him recently as being "criminally mentally ill and a danger to society."

Lee is more than qualified to make that diagnosis. She spent years interviewing, evaluating and treating hundreds of violent offenders, including leaders of prison gangs.

In making her evaluation public she broke the American Psychiatric Association's code of ethics, which expressly forbids its members (she is not one) from diagnosing anyone without personally examining them first. She says she broke that rule because Trump "represents a criminally physical threat to Americans' safety, and making the public aware of that outranks any APA code of silence."

Lee told Mother Jones magazine that Trump's psychological profile is the same as that of other violent offenders. "There is typically a developmental arrest caused by early trauma or abandonment. As adults, they still act like children in the playground, convinced that might makes right. They often can't stop bullying others." That's Trump.

She also said violent people tend to be frozen in an early developmental stage: Like young children, they rarely consider the concerns of others and tend to obey only those whom they fear. That's also Trump.

“For Trump, the only reason not to do something – even something that is likely to harm others – is to avoid punishment. And since he has rarely been held accountable for any misdeeds, he has come to believe that he has carte blanche to do whatever serves his immediate needs.”

The takeaway from all this is that Donald Trump is a mentally ill felon— a severely mentally ill, dangerously violence-prone felon, who may have committed treason twice. And this is the person whom millions of Americans want to become president of the United States.

One must wonder why any American, much less millions, would even consider voting for a person like that. If this were fiction, no one would believe it.

Which makes me ask again: Whatever happened to us Americans? Where did we go wrong?

Oct 3, 2022

How to Read Banned Books

“Where books are burned, in the end people will be burned.” -Herman Heine

One of the most insidious waves breaking over America these days is the practice of banning books. As far as I’m concerned (I and countless others), book banning is hard to distinguish from book burning, a favorite of fascists everywhere.

But it’s here, it’s big time, and it’s growing. PEN America, an organization that champions free expression, reported this month that 86 school districts in 26 states have banned 1,586 books in the past year, reflecting a new trend that PEN labeled “alarming.”

Most of the banned books deal with race, gender or sexual identity. About half are for young adults and most are fiction. But more than 15 percent are history books and they include biographies of such people as Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela, and such writers as Toni Morrison and James Baldwin.

The book-banning movement is not necessarily spontaneous; after all, one national poll after another makes it clear that the great majority of Americans oppose it no matter their political persuasion. PEN America has identified at least 50 organizations that are pushing for book bans at the local, state or national level, including eight that have among them at least 300 local or regional chapters. PEN America also has identified 38 other groups that do not appear to have any connections with any national, local or regional body. It is telling that most of them have formed since 2021.

The practice of book banning extends far beyond just trying to protect children, however. Universities and colleges in states controlled by conservative legislatures are grappling with those legislatures’ efforts to control what their professors teach, and by implication what libraries circulate, such as:

Oklahoma is considering a bill under which professors at public colleges are prevented from purveying anything that suggests “that America has more culpability, in general, than other nations for the institution of slavery; that one race is the unique oppressor in the institution of slavery; that another race is the unique victim in the institution of slavery; that America, in general, had slavery more extensively and for a later period than other nations.”

Under laws proposed for Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Wisconsin, “professors could not discuss affirmative action or reparations for the descendants of enslaved people, even to disagree with them..”

Mississippi’s legislature would prohibit faculty from using any materials that raise the idea that “the State of Mississippi is fundamentally, institutionally, or systemically racist.” The bill would muzzle private schools as well as public ones, and that would include Mississippi’s eight Black institutions.

Even Congress, or at least a significant part of Congress, is getting in on the act. House Republicans included it last week in their plan for the country, which they call their “Commitment to America.” The plan, only one page long, presents some vague aspirations, but it focuses on the MAGA party’s radical extremes while making those extremes sound mild.

For instance, the part that involves book banning is labeled “A Future That’s Built on Freedom”, but the words hardly mean what they appear to mean. In this case, as current-events writer Heather Cox Richardson put it a few days ago, the words mean “giving parents control over their children’s education (more book banning and laws that prohibit making subjects uncomfortable).”

Parents defend book banning’s morality by saying it demonstrates benevolent public concern for morality. Besides, they say, they not only have the right to keep their children from reading books they don’t want them to read, but they also have that responsibility.

In that they are right. But they most certainly do not have the right to prevent me from providing my children with books I want them to read.

There is so much wrong with banning books. It is evil. It is a fundamental suppression of ideas, a form of control, a deeply undemocratic act because it imposes restrictions on everyone for the sake of those calling for the bans. It is the twin sibling of book burning, which always has been a basic tool that fascists use to control people.

The good news here is that book banning/burning today does not, cannot, and will not work. You can ban and burn all the books you want to, but you can’t do anything about books online. Books online are here to stay and are oblivious to flames and bannings.

And, most important, they are available and free to anyone. Just access the QR code below and it will lead you to the Brooklyn (N.Y.) Public Library’s collection of nearly 1,000 books that have been banned. Browse, pick and read as you will.

The code has a history. An Oklahoma English teacher – I am sorry I do not know her name – shared it with her students, and as a result Oklahoma is trying to revoke her teacher's certificate. The New York Times then published the code under the headline, "Only Cowards Ban Books."

I copied it from The New York Times to share with you in hopes you too will pass it on. This code belongs on every freedom-loving reader's desktop, refrigerator or bedside table. I hope everyone reading this will keep it and forward it to friends and acquaintances.

God bless libraries and Librarians.

Happy reading!

Oct 10, 2022

Civil War Has Begun

It's time for us to face the unthinkable, horrifying truth: Civil war in our nation has begun.

That is not hyperbole. It's real. A movement by many millions of Americans who favor autocracy over democracy – read that, MAGA Republicans – has been sweeping across the country since the FBI raided Mar-a-Lago, and its adherents have signaled they will use violence if necessary to get it.

It's hard to pinpoint when it began, but a confession of sorts by Trump loyalist Roger Stone indicates it was underway by July 2020. By that time Stone was insisting that Trump would never accept the results of the election. And then, one day before the election, he said, "Fuck the voting, let's get right to the violence!"

Since then, MAGA Republicans have been openly attacking democracy's most sacred pillar: faith in elections. They know that democracy is dead if we lose faith in our elections. As the Supreme Court said more than a century ago, "Voter rights are preservative of all rights."

Autocratic Republicans are treating elections with such contempt that it's tantamount to attacking democracy. They are openly working hard to sow distrust in the upcoming midterm elections by providing reasons the elections cannot be trusted. And they're trying to control elections in general so they not only can restrict how, when and where people can vote, but even who can vote.

One way Republicans plan to sow distrust in our elections is by training poll watchers, volunteers who will physically observe the voting and the vote counting. There's nothing wrong with poll watchers, but Republicans appear to be training poll disturbers, not poll watchers. Some of these "poll disturbers" appeared at vote-counting sessions in 2020, and many more are expected in November.

Another way to sow distrust is by trying to throw out tens of thousands of voter registrations and ballots in battleground states. Groups in Georgia have challenged at least 65,000 voter registrations, claiming their addresses were wrong. Activists in Michigan challenged 22,000 ballots from voters who

had requested absentee ballots for the state's August primary. Texas residents sent in 116 affidavits challenging the eligibility of more than 6,000 voters in the Houston area. Arizona, Pennsylvania, on it goes.

The groups claim voter fraud at every turn, ignoring the fact that state and federal judges, including some whom Trump appointed, threw out more than 60 attempts to prove fraud. The groups also dismiss the fact that impartial election observers from all over the world agreed that the 2020 presidential election was one of the cleanest elections in American history, if not the cleanest.

Yet another way Republicans are attacking democracy is by openly backing QAnon's stated attempt "to control the election system." QAnon announced at a recent conference that it has formed a group of Trump-backed, election-denying candidates for state-level offices that control elections. Those who win could help execute Trump's plot to rig the 2024 election and install him in the White House for a second term. As Trump himself once said, "Sometimes the vote counter is more important than the people who vote."

If their plan were to work it would be ruinous for our democracy. And it is working. The Washington Post last week identified 299 election-denying Republicans who are seeking Senate, House or state offices in 48 of the 50 states, and far more than half of them – 174 – are in red districts where they are expected to win. Another 51 races are expected to be close, and only 74 Republicans are expected to lose.

In addition, Republican-controlled legislatures across the nation have enacted a wide array of laws that overhaul their election systems, always making it harder for people to vote, and many more such laws are in the pipeline. Further, they have used supercomputers to gerrymander their states so precisely they are virtually certain to win any race.

And the Supreme Court, which has become little more than a wing of the pro-autocracy MAGA Republicans, opened its fall season last week with several items from the Republicans' wish list atop its docket. As a headline on The Washington Post's Opinion page put it recently, "You thought the Supreme Court's last term was bad? Brace yourself."

Not only will the deeply conservative court decide major disputes over affirmative action, gay rights and free speech, but also disputes that involve fundamental structures of democracy. Such as:

A North Carolina case involves the so-called "independent legislature" doctrine. The case originated when the state's supreme court declared that the GOP-controlled legislature had gerrymandered the congressional districts so blatantly that they were "unconstitutional beyond a reasonable doubt." The legislature replied that the Constitution's election clause means the legislature alone can determine elections in a state, unchecked by the state courts or even the state constitution. It appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, and if the court rules in its favor legislatures across the nation will have virtually unfettered power not only to draw district maps, but also to determine how, when and where a person can vote. They could even determine who can vote. It could throw elections in the United States into turmoil. The court won't rule until after the elections, however, so the upcoming midterm elections will use the challenged map.

In Alabama, a case challenges the Republican-controlled legislature's gerrymandering of congressional district maps, claiming it gives white people, who comprise 63 percent of the population, total control over 86 percent of Alabama's congressional seats. Regardless of what happens in the North Carolina case, a court ruling in the Alabama legislature's favor could open the door to more gerrymandering throughout the nation, thus giving legislatures even more control over which party, and which color, controls Congress.

There is every reason to believe that the court's decisions will closely reflect the MAGA Republicans' wishes. The court showed no restraint during its last session as it handed down such democracy-smashing decisions as those that eliminated the right to abortion and allowed taxpayers' money to go to religious institutions.

And now it is showing every indication it is ready to resume the pace. Four of the nine justices have hinted they agree with the North Carolina and Alabama legislatures, so even if Chief Justice John Roberts should try to cool things by voting with the liberals, it would do no good. The four other conservatives, three of whom were appointed by Trump, would still prevail.

And then there are the threats of violence, sometimes coded and sometimes blatant, coming from just about everywhere in the Republican Party. Trump keeps warning that if things don't go his way there will be riots in the streets, which his toadies hear as marching orders. Indications in the just-beginning Oath Keepers' trial strongly indicate they fully expected there would be violence at the Capitol on Jan. 6, and they had valid reasons to believe that's what Trump wanted.

There are many other reasons to believe civil war is underway. Take Herschel Walker. He's a bald-faced liar. He's lied about his business accomplishments, his academic successes, his relationship with law enforcement. Serious, unanswered questions involving domestic violence swirl around him. And even though he is an anti-abortion absolutist – his campaign's major plank is a total ban on all abortions – we now learn he paid for a girlfriend's abortion. He vehemently denied it, even said he didn't even know the woman, but she produced the check he wrote and a get-well card he signed. So that's another lie. His own son vehemently turned on him because of that one.

And yet Walker is still running neck-and-neck with incumbent Democrat Raphael Warnock for Georgia's U.S. Senate seat. One must ask why anyone of any party, much less half of Georgia, would vote for a person like that under any circumstances. And the answer is clear:

MAGA Republicans will do anything to win in November! They care about nothing else! Nothing!

We can't even talk to one another anymore. Marriages have failed because of the divide. Entire families have split. Long and close friendships have ended.

Put all that together and if we're not in the opening salvos of a civil war, where are we?

But we can win this war. We can talk to people who are targeted by Republicans' stop-the-vote attempts and help them understand how valuable their vote must be if so many people are working so hard to keep them from using it. We can volunteer through our local Democratic Party's headquarters to drive people to the polls who have no other transportation. We can volunteer in other ways. We

can make certain everyone knows how important voting is. Especially this year with our democracy at stake.

And then we can vote in such huge numbers that the results will snuff out any attempt to call the elections fixed. Such a vote would drive the autocratic Republicans back into the darkness from whence they came.

It can happen. If democracy is to survive, it must happen. It will happen, but only if we make it happen. If only we vote.

Oct 17, 2022

Trump Always Knew He Lost But Still Keeps Lying About It

The juxtaposition of two events from last week's news struck me hard:

The first event involves the Jan. 6 special committee hearings. Anyone who watched those hearings, especially the last one (which I missed but caught up on), cannot possibly doubt that our former president, Donald J. Trump, actively sought to subvert our Constitution by trying to illegally overturn the 2020 presidential election that he knew he had legitimately lost. Anyone of any political or moral leaning cannot deny that – if they saw that hearing live or studied it later.

The committee laid out in great detail – all of it from the mouths of Trump White House insiders – how Trump was so humiliated that he lost the election that he could not deal with it. That's why, as Congress met to verify his loss on Jan. 6, he urged the crowd he had summoned to Washington to march on the Capitol.

He knew that many of them were armed with firearms and other weapons – clubs, spears on the ends of flagstaves, Molotov cocktails, explosives – and yet he urged them to march on the Capitol.

"If you don't fight like hell you're not going to have a country anymore," he preached to them. He even tried to join them, and he would have had not the Secret Service, seeing what was happening, forced him back to the White House. Then he retreated to his dining room, flipped on his television, and watched the events unfold in the Capitol without raising a finger to stop them, as he certainly could have and should have.

The committee subpoenaed Trump to testify, thus giving him a chance to clear his name, but of course he refused to comply. Instead, he wrote the committee a 14-page letter that I will not reprint here, but I hope you will Google it and read it. Even if you are a died-in-the-wool Trump fan, you will be amazed at how preposterous that man can be.

The second event involves a New York Times investigation published last Saturday that revealed a vast majority of Republican candidates running for U.S. Senate or House, and for the state offices of governor, secretary of state and attorney general, have publicly expressed doubt about the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election. The Times identified more than 370 of them blasting away with such recorded quotes as “We know it and they know it: Donald Trump won”; “That election was stolen from us”; and “Trump won, and everyone knows it.”

My question is how those candidates can possibly face their voters now and explain how they were so duped – are so duped? – to believe such an easily provable lie, especially one made by a man who is known to be a habitual liar. The Washington Post documented more than 30,000 lies he told during his four years in office, which is an astonishing 21 lies per day, every day, for four years, including a mind-bending 504 lies the day before the election.

How is it possible that anyone not yet in the grave could believe anything Trump says, especially when it is recalled he also is a vulgar, racist, Putin-fawning, veteran-mocking, twice-impeached, crotch-grabbing, tax-cheating, felonious, possibly traitorous, dictator wannabe – to name a few of his attributes – loser?

And more important: How can any knowledgeable American of any political leaning, who isn't a confirmed authoritarian, possibly even consider voting for any candidate who believes or ever did believe such outrageous lies? Any candidate of any party who is that gullible should never be allowed to make decisions that affect every one of us in the nation.

But many people will vote for those candidates. Millions of MAGA Republicans get all their news from sources like Fox News and Brietbart and believe they are honest purveyors of news, and they will surely still vote for them.

Unless, of course, Democratic candidates hold those GOP candidates' noses to the grindstone and force them to explain how they could be so deceived.

But even that might not work, because so many of those voters appear to be more concerned about inflation and gas prices than they are our government's possible overthrow. As Atlantic magazine writer David Frum summed up the Jan. 6 committee's hearing in a tweet: “Decisive (and) irrefutable documentary evidence that the 45th president of the United States tried to overthrow the US Constitution by violence, no big deal, just another news day.”

Which takes us back to that New York Times investigation, which found that about 70 percent of Republicans running for those top offices had questioned the election of Biden although he won seven million more votes and 74 more electors than did Trump. And of that 70 percent who questioned Biden's victory, Trump endorsed 70 percent of them.

And therefore, according to the Cook Report, which handicaps races for Congress and governor, nearly two-thirds of those candidates are favored to win.

But there is even hope in that. The Times' investigation was completed before the Jan. 6 committee proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that Trump knew from the get-go that he had lost the election and decided to protect himself by duping his loyal followers for two years.

Maybe, just maybe, enough of his sycophants will wake up before Nov. 8 and decide they don't like being made to look like fools. There is always hope.

Oct 24, 2022

Comparing the Promises...

Let's compare what the Democrats and Republican parties are offering voters this year.

Begin with the Democrats, who basically are offering to extend what they've started – and, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll taken in early October, voters are loving it.

Democrats were the driving force behind the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act, which has become so popular that Republicans who voted against it are now claiming credit for it.

The Democrats' Inflation Reduction Act (granted, a bad name) allows Medicare to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies and caps certain drug costs, including insulin (83 percent favor it).

Democrats also passed the first gun control law in decades (around 85 percent approve), are canceling student loan debt (55 percent approve), are working to finance action against climate change (65 percent approve), and support supplying Ukraine against Russia (73 percent). Republicans were onboard with supporting Ukraine at first, but they changed course when their leader Donald Trump pressured them to favor Russia.

Now let's look at what Republicans say they would do if they were to gain control of Congress, which is... who knows?

When Minority Leader Mitch McConnell was asked last January what Republicans would do if they gained the majority, he famously replied, "That is a very good question. I'll let you know when we take it back." He later told donors that party leaders plan "to just attack the Democrats."

Although there are a lot of laws Republicans would love to pass, it won't happen. As long as Joe Biden is in the White House he can veto any bill that reaches his desk, and Republicans surely won't have enough votes to override him.

But, given the chance, they would make Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security renewal every five years or so, or even make them part of the annual budget so Congress would have to vote on their continued existence every year; outlaw all or most abortions; drastically cut taxes on corporations and

the rich (how'd that work for Britain?); reduce efforts to protect the environment from climate change; cancel affirmative action for colleges and universities; give parents more power to ban books in schools; and more .

But even if the MAGA Republicans were to gain control of the House and not the Senate, they could still cause horrific damage to America. Although it's not getting much attention, their recently disclosed economic agenda would refuse to increase the nation's debt limit unless Democrats agreed to major cuts in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. That's horrifying because failing to pay the nation's bills on time, even for a minute, would ignite a worldwide financial catastrophe.

They've threatened to do that before, and the threat alone worked. In 2010, they weaponized the debt limit against the Obama administration and extracted spending cuts they could not have achieved any other way.

And those Republicans were the real Republicans, not the far more radical MAGA Republicans who are in charge now. Some economic pundits have warned that MAGA Republicans might care less about achieving policy goals than they do about exploding the world's economy on a Democratic president's watch.

They have good reason to say that. Bloomberg Government reported recently that all four Republicans interested in serving as House Budget Committee chairman all said they would refuse to raise the debt ceiling next year unless Democrats agreed to entitlement cuts and work requirements on safety-net programs, all of which are abhorrent to Democrats.

Even if Republicans won the House and nothing else, they also would certainly terminate the special committee that's been studying the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol, which somehow they consider was a legitimate protest.

They could and would stymie anything Joe Biden tried to do.

They probably would impeach Biden for some trumped-up charge.

They certainly would open investigations into a whole slew of topics, especially Hunter Biden's finances, even though he is not a public official and there has been no evidence, only speculation, that his father profited from any of his business dealings.

A GOP-controlled House also would cripple a Democratic Senate because it would not be able to get any bill past the House and would be limited to approving Biden's judicial selections.

Finally, both parties are expressing fear that our democracy is on the line in November, but there is a big difference in their definitions of democracy. Democrats believe the heart and soul of a democracy is faith in elections, and our differences should be decided at the ballot box; Republicans are trying to destroy faith in those elections unless they win, and they want to establish an authoritarian government.

Evidence? Even though impartial election observers from all over the world and the secretaries of state in all 50 states agreed that the 2020 presidential election was one of the cleanest in history, if not the cleanest, the great majority of GOP candidates for important state and federal offices, something like 70 percent of them, will not say they will accept the election results if they lose.

And now comes the truly bizarre. Even though the huge majority of American voters strongly approve of the Democratic Party's direction, a recent New York Times/Siena College poll revealed that 49 percent of likely voters said they will vote for Republicans and only 45 percent said they will vote for Democrats. A third of them said they would even vote for a Republican who believes Trump won the 2020 election.

Why? Virtually all polls say they're more concerned with inflation and rising gas prices, and they trust Republicans more than Democrats to handle it.

That's nuts, of course. For one thing, although Republicans promise to solve those problems, they have never even offered a hint as to how they would do that.

Making that promise even more nuts is that there is no way they could possibly deliver. Inflation and rising gas prices are global problems that neither our president nor Congress can do much about. Biden is using every tool available to him, but there just aren't many tools.

If Republicans know of a way to solve these problems unilaterally that has escaped everybody else, now is the time to tell us what it is. They will not, of course, because they cannot. It does not exist. Nevertheless, nuts as it may be, inflation and gas prices appear to be the driving force behind the decisions of around 40 percent of likely voters.

MAGA Republicans especially like to harp on crime, but they're the only ones who insist on allowing teen-agers to carry military-grade rifles wherever and whenever they wish, and those weapons are often used in the most horrific crimes. What blatant hypocrisy!

One more thing: the environment. Climate scientists have been telling us for years that if we don't stop crucifying our environment we will soon pass the point of no return and make Earth unfit for human existence. Simply stated, if we don't take care of this problem now, we all will die.

Democrats want to solve the problem. MAGA Republicans won't even admit there is a problem.

If democracy is to survive November's election, it is up to democracy to work as it should – that is, people must vote in large numbers. And therein lies the good news. For instance, through the first five days of early voting, in-person voting Georgia was up 70 percent over 2018, Florida was up 50 percent, and requests for mail-in ballots in North Carolina were up 114 percent.

It is happening. We can win.

Oct 31, 2022

The GOP's Blatant Hypocrisy

Although MAGA Republicans refuse to present any kind of cohesive platform for what they plan to do if they gain control of Congress, we can learn a lot from their candidates' campaigns, and they are loaded with hypocrisy. A few examples:

Democracy: I've written so much about our possible loss of democracy that I'm sick of it, but one more time, briefly...

A recent New York Times/Siena College poll showed that 71 percent of all Americans believe democracy is under threat in the upcoming elections, but MAGA Republicans, while claiming they love democracy, are openly and hypocritically pushing for authoritarianism (nice word for fascism).

They've been so successful that only 7 percent of those polled rank the possible loss of democracy as the most important issue facing our country. They've made the other 93 percent worry more about their own pocketbooks, meaning inflation and gas prices, although both those are global issues that our government has few tools to fight.

Election integrity: This is connected to democracy, but here the MAGA Republicans don't even pretend to hide their hypocrisy. They claim they believe in elections, which is the heart of democracy, but their actions prove otherwise.

Look at them: Threats of violence against election officials. Widely circulated election misinformation. Voter suppression. Voter intimidation. The strong majority of GOP candidates for state and federal offices who refuse to say they will accept the election results if they lose. In elections for state offices, 27 candidates for secretary of state, which oversees elections, and 30 candidates for attorney general, which defends the laws governing those elections, refusing to accept the legitimacy of the 2020 election results. Blatant gerrymandering that virtually guarantees Republicans' success in many races. Intensely divisive rhetoric. Lies.

That's not just me speaking, by the way. That's the assessment last Thursday of the dispassionate Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, of which the United States is a member.

The organization also warned that attempts of GOP candidates to discredit the integrity of our election system "have snowballed enormously" since the 2020 election. MAGA Republicans have trained thousands of people to be poll watchers this year, but it remains to be seen whether they will be watchers or disrupters. In 2020 they were disrupters, and there is no reason for anyone to believe the leopard will change its spots for this election.

Also, more than 60 percent of Republicans say they believe Trump's ridiculous, totally unfounded lie that the 2020 election was stolen from him. That number has held steady since shortly after the

election, and 71 percent of them say they are “somewhat or very willing” to vote for candidates who believe that lie.

Crime: Republicans have been making crime control one of their major issues, but that’s hypocritical because the plain truth is that red states consistently have higher rates of violent crime – defined as murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault – than do blue states. This is true even though blue states have a higher population of residents in urban areas, which tend to have higher crime rates than rural areas.

FBI statistics show that trend has been holding true at least since the turn of the century, and in some places the difference is stark. In 2020, for example, bright red Oklahoma’s murder rate was double that of New York’s and 50 percent higher than California’s. There is no reason to think things have changed.

And although Republicans promise to reduce crime if they regain power, they have not said how they would do it, other than to let almost anyone carry almost any firearm almost anywhere they wish. History proves that anger plus access to firearms produces people getting killed.

Deficits: Republicans love to harp on our country’s deficits, the annual difference between what the government takes in and pays out, but that also is hypocritical. As Politifact points out, Republican presidents since Ronald Reagan have exploded deficits, while Democrats have reduced them.

Reagan sent the deficit from \$70 billion to \$175 billion. George H. W. Bush raised it to \$300 billion. Bill Clinton got it down to zero – zero! But then George Bush’s unfunded wars soared it to \$1.2 trillion. Barack Obama got it down to \$600 billion. Donald Trump increased it \$1.38 trillion. And so far, Joe Biden has reduced it by \$1.75 trillion, including a record \$1.4 trillion this year, although much of that was due to Covid-19.

Looking at those numbers another way, the A-Mark Foundation says Reagan increased the deficit by 94 percent, the first Bush by 67 percent, the second Bush by 1,204 percent, and Trump by 317 percent. Clinton reduced it by 150 per cent and Obama by 53 percent. The foundation will not calculate Biden’s performance until his term ends.

Taxes: Again, MAGA Republicans have announced no formal plans, but their candidates’ campaigns make it clear they want to pass massive tax cuts for rich people and corporations – in other words, bring back Reagan’s supply-side economics that have never worked for anyone but rich people and corporations.

The idea is that cutting taxes on the rich will allow them to invest in their ventures and the spoils will trickle down on the rest of us. But history proves that trickling always seems to go into multimillion-dollar second and third – or fourth and fifth – mansions and football-field-long yachts. Besides, who wants to be trickled on?

Democrats want to raise taxes on rich people and corporations.

The economy: Republicans like to brag they're better at growing the economy than Democrats are, but once again that's hypocritical because facts prove the opposite is true. Four of the five presidents who have overseen the largest economic expansions since World War II have been Democrats.

The Bureau of Economic Analysis compared the average GDP growth per quarter among presidents since World War II, and the results are: Kennedy, 5.5 percent growth; Johnson, 5.07 percent; Clinton, 3.82; Reagan, 3.64; Carter, 3.32; Nixon, 3.07; Eisenhower, 2.55; Ford, 2.28; the first Bush, 2.26; the second Bush, 1.8; and Trump, 1.

The environment: Last Tuesday, the United Nations issued a report that said the planet is on track to warm by an average of 2.1 to 2.9 degrees Celsius by 2100 compared with pre-industrial levels. That's far higher than the 1.5 degrees Celsius cap that environmental scientists say is the threshold beyond which the earth will face catastrophic flooding, wildfires, droughts, heat waves, food and water scarcity, and the extinction of millions of mammals, birds, insects and plants.

Republican response? Don't believe the scientists.

Truthfully, Democrats don't have a lot to brag about here, but at least they're trying. At least they believe science. The United States, one of the planet's top offenders, has taken some action along with China, the other leading culprit, but climate negotiations between the two have been frozen for months.

So again I plea, vote, and make sure everyone you know votes. I have to believe that the great majority of Americans believe in democracy, and using that basic tool of democracy is the only way we can save democracy.

Nov 7, 2022

Once Upon a Time...

Once upon a time, in a land that now seems far, far away, we Americans settled our differences at the ballot box.

If our side won, we would celebrate and then get down to running the country. If our side lost, we'd figure out why we lost and then get down to planning for the next election.

No more. That world crumbled in the early morning of Nov. 4, 2020, the day after election day, when Donald J. Trump began claiming he won the election but Democrats, the crooked media and big money interests stole it from him. Within days he was claiming he had "so much evidence, so much proof" of fraud that it could not be denied.

At that moment, a respected, legitimate political party began transforming into a hateful, violent, brutal mob, and civil war was underway (see *Civil War Has Begun*, published 10/10/22).

Trump didn't have a shred of evidence to back up any of his claims, of course. All 50 secretaries of state, many of them Republicans, confirmed the vote count was accurate. A flock of disinterested international election observers said the election was perhaps the cleanest in history. And then judges and justices throughout the land, some of whom Trump appointed, threw out more than 60 of his lawsuits because they were all so patently absurd. And since our presidential and midterm elections are run by more than 8,000 local governments and almost 90 percent of Americans cast paper ballots, it is impossible to rig a national election.

But despite all that, Trump's lackeys believed him anyway. Even though he told more than 30,000 lies during his term as president, including a mind-bending 504 lies the day before the election, at least 60 percent of them still believed him.

And, incredibly, unbelievably, they still do. Even after a parade of White House insiders' testimony to the Jan. 6 special committee proved that Trump knew on election night he had lost, they believe he won. More than 70 percent of them say they are willing to vote for candidates who say they believe he won.

Which brings us to tomorrow, and unfortunately we know what's going to happen. Tomorrow night, GOP-trained election observers will try to disrupt the vote-counting process in several states, especially the so-called swing states. They did in 2020, and there are more of them now than there were then. Thousands more.

We also know that any MAGA GOP candidate who wins tomorrow will claim the election was clean, and any who lose will claim it was rigged. After all, the great majority of Republicans running for state and federal office refuse to say they will accept the election results if they lose.

There probably will be violence. It already has begun. Since the Jan. 6 committee began hosting prime-time hearings in June, the nonprofit Advance Democracy has identified a sharp increase in threats of violence, including death threats, against key witnesses and committee members. Most of the threats are being made on right-wing online forums – including Truth Social, Trump's social media company. Some of them seek to organize armed groups to engage in more violent insurrection.

Also since the Jan. 6 committee convened, violence and threats of violence against elected officials have increased noticeably, culminating (so far) with the recent attack on House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband. While he lay in a hospital intensive care unit with a skull fracture and other injuries, MAGA Republicans made jokes about it, and lied about it. Many of them claim Democrats planned and executed the attack to bring them more votes on election day. Others claim Mr. Pelosi was having a homosexual affair and his partner became angry and attacked him. Trump even said the glass pane was broken from the inside, proving the attack was a fraud.

All utter nonsense, of course. But MAGA Republicans have proven time and again they'll believe utter nonsense, as in if Trump says it, it must be true. Really now, men, can you imagine being caught lying to your wife 30,000 times over the last four years, including 451 lies yesterday, then telling her you're going to catch a movie alone – and expect her to believe you? Show me the difference, MAGA Republicans.

But perhaps worse than MAGA Republicans' threats of violence are the threats of what they want to do if they take over Congress. I've been over this a thousand times, but one last time before the election, here's some of what they want.

They want to destroy democracy and replace it with autocracy; totally obstruct Biden's agenda; weaken or kill Social Security, Medicare and Obamacare; deny the ballot to as many people as they can, especially people of color; reduce taxes on corporations and the rich, thus assigning the burden of repairing our crumbling infrastructure to the poor and middle class; empower state legislatures, not us voters, to choose presidential electors; weaken efforts to protect our dying environment; strengthen people's right to carry virtually any firearm virtually anywhere they want; impeach President Biden, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, and probably others; terminate the Jan. 6 special committee's investigation of the Capitol insurrection, but open investigations into Attorney General Merrick Garland, Hunter Biden, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the FBI's raid on Mar-a-Lago, the evacuation of Afghanistan, immigration policies, and more; refuse to increase the debt limit, even though it's necessary to pay for things Congress has already approved, and even though it would cause a global financial meltdown; repeal the expansion of the IRS, which is intended to uncover tax cheaters; increase MAGA Republicans' power on Congress' Steering Committee, which determines committee members and helps set Congress' agenda; abolish the Department of Education; block future aid to Ukraine; allow tax money to flow to religious institutions; prevent women from regaining control of their own bodies; and unleash the far-right Supreme Court to rubberstamp its will in such areas as gerrymandering, letting states make their own election rules, dictating what people can do in their own bedrooms, who they can marry, what if any contraceptives they can use, Affirmative Action, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Finally, if you missed President Biden's televised speech last week, please at least read news stories about what he said. He was powerful. He was right. Democracy is on the ballot tomorrow.

There is still time. Forget the polls. We can win – but only if we vote, in big numbers.

Nov 14, 2022

My Swan Song

After writing Onward|Upward every week for more than a year, it's time to move on. This will be my last post.

I'll explain why I'm moving on in a minute, but first I want to thank those of you who have been with me since my first column appeared on Sept. 6, 2021, those who joined me later and never left, and particularly those who took the time and made the effort to reply with emails. You know who you are, but you'll never know how much you meant to me.

I also want to thank the MAGA Republicans for your comments (although I must say I hope you don't act that way in front of your children – and what is a Nazi socialist anyway?).

I keep up with Fox News and used to listen to Rush Limbaugh because I like to put my ideas up against the best that MAGA types can offer, and I'm happy to report that I never, not once, had any trouble swatting away their accusations. Most of them by far were based on nonsense, like the claim that Nancy Pelosi spent government money to buy herself a jet plane so she wouldn't have to stop in St. Louis to refuel on her way home to San Francisco. I always asked folks who sent those things to provide their source, but none ever did.

I also have two persons I need to thank by name, and my wife, Sue, tops the list. Sue is always the first and last editor of everything I write, and she has saved me more than once from humiliating myself with dumb errors, like writing Nancy Mace when I meant Nancy Pelosi. She's been a constant encouragement, but more than that she has always been honest enough to tell me frankly, even mercilessly, when something I've written isn't the deathless prose I thought it was.

The other person is Todd Chas, my behind-the-scenes partner without whom O|U would never have seen the light of day. All I do is write the column and turn it over to Todd before the Monday deadline, and he does everything else. He designed the format to begin with, and every week he chooses the art – sometimes he creates the art – that accompanies each post. He also files the column with the company that distributes it to subscribers (more on that later), schedules it to run, and much more – all without pay or recognition, and always with encouragement and never with a complaint.

Among much else that Todd does, he also founded and leads Charleston Good, a nonprofit whose mission is to “develop, support, and promote nonprofit and grassroots people, projects, organizations and collaborations in the (South Carolina) Lowcountry.” He also publishes the weekly newsletter Changers, and if you live in the Lowcountry it's well worth looking into.

As for my reasons for moving on, there are many, but one is the company that distributes my writing. The company is Revue, which is owned by Twitter. I have nothing against Revue per se, but since Elon Musk bought Twitter I want nothing more to do with it.

Musk is a self-declared “free speech absolutist” who appears likely to allow back such banned writers as Trump, conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, My Pillow CEO Mike Lindell and former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke. Musk has fired some of the folks who keep watch over Twitter's content, so watch out for racists and pornographers to appear.

Musk has every right to do that, just as I have the right not to be part of it. It seems many advertisers agree, so Twitter might not even be around at all for much longer.

Another reason for ending this column, which has always been a labor of love for me, is that it's time to let my labor start paying some bills. Onward|Upward has been free from Day One, and I have loved giving it away because it let me blow off a lot of steam. But the research, the writing, the rewriting, more rewriting, and still more rewriting, takes an enormous amount of time. (I'm not one of those writers whose first attempts only need light editing; I sweat blood over every word.) I'll need that time to focus on other projects.

So I'll still be writing, only for other venues. But toward that end, please don't unsubscribe. I'm keeping the site open and, although it won't be often, I will be posting some articles here in the future that I think you might be interested in. I'm not gone forever.

With that said, just one more thing: Thank you again, profusely.

- Skip Johnson

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Skip Johnson is a retired multiple award-winning newspaper reporter, columnist and editor, and author of three books. As a reporter, Skip helped cover the desegregation of Alabama for The Associated Press, and later became chief political writer for The Orlando Sentinel-Star, state capital bureau chief and political columnist for The Tampa Tribune, and religion editor and columnist for The News and Courier of Charleston, S.C. He also served as night city editor of The News and Courier, city editor of The Herald-Statesman of Yonkers, N.Y., and managing editor of The Standard-Times of New Bedford, Mass. Skip recently published *The Year 2020, A Day-to-Day Diary of a Debacle*, which is exclusively available as an ebook. Skip previously authored *The Gospel of Yeshua: A Fresh Look at the Life and Teaching of Jesus*, and *A Charleston Primer for Yankees: History with a Southern Accent* (republished as *Charleston: The Brief History of a Remarkable City*). He also has edited two other books and screenplays that won awards in international competitions. Skip and his wife, Sue, live in Charleston.