the weekly standard

COWABUNGA!

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End of the Phony 'War on Women'?

There are many reasons to celebrate the thumping Democrats took in the midterm elections, but near the top of the list is the fact that the phony "war on women" has become a losing ploy for Democrats. With a lot of help from the media, Democrats in 2012 managed to tar every Republican candidate in the country with the moronic rape speculations of Todd Akin and Rush Limbaugh's insults of birth control activist Sandra Fluke. Obama ran up a 56-44 margin among female voters (though Romney won a majority of married women). In 2013, Democrats managed to get a party hack narrowly over the finish line in the Virginia governor's race by hammering his socially conservative opponent with similar war-on-women propaganda. The race turned out to be very close, and Terry McAuliffe's huge margin with single women was credited with the victory.

Flash forward to this year's election. Democratic senator Mark Udall lost to Republican Cory Gardner in Colorado, even though Gardner was pilloried over birth control and abortion. Gardner smartly countered by taking Louisana governor Bobby Jindal's suggestion that the GOP come out in favor of over-the-counter birth control. North Carolina's Thom Tillis also came out in support of an OTC pill. This may well have helped him pull off his upset of incumbent senator Kay Hagan.

As a result of this GOP maneuver, Planned Parenthood made the astonishing decision to oppose over-the-counter birth control. Even though expanding access to birth control is a foundational goal of the organization, they declared it a "political ploy." The truth is that Planned Parenthood would lose money if birth control were easier to get, because birth control prescriptions are a "lead generator" that gets young women into their clinics—and potentially coming back for the more expensive and disturbing services they offer.

By the end of the campaign, Udall in particular had become a punch line. He was being openly derided as "Mark Uterus," and the *Denver Post* shocked everyone by endorsing Gardner and calling Udall's "obnoxious one-issue campaign . . . an insult to those he seeks to convince." Udall still didn't back down, however. One liberal group started running unintentionally comical ads in Colorado claiming Cory Gardner was going to ban condoms. Could this get worse? Yes. The day before the election, Udall was heckled in the middle of a speech by one of Colorado's biggest Democratic donors. The rich heckler later told a *Guardian* reporter that "f—ing abortion is all he talks about. He should not talk about it any more whatsoever. There are so many other issues."

Meanwhile in Texas, Wendy Davis, the media darling who rose to national prominence for unsuccessfully opposing the state's ban on late-term abortions with a dramatic statehouse filibuster, lost badly. How's this for a shellacking? The supposed women's issue candidate lost female voters by 5 points, and her opponent Greg Abbott got almost double her share of the vote among white women, 65-34.

Oh, and Sandra Fluke just happened to be running for the California legislature this year. She lost by a nearly two-to-one margin. She lost to a fellow Democrat, but her national profile as the face of subsidized birth control pills didn't appear to do her any favors.

Now Democrats are going to have to reassess things. It turns out Republicans aren't against birth control, they just don't want to pay for someone else's. A majority of Americans still oppose late-term abortion, which is illegal in the vast majority of European countries. And when the media don't cartoonishly and unprofessionally insist one idiotic politician speaks for the entire Republican party, it turns out that these are issues the GOP can campaign on—and win. ♦

Stamp of Disapproval

You never know where discord might emerge in political Washington, but even The Scrapbook was surprised—and disheartened, really—to learn about the bruised feelings at the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee of the U.S. Postal Service.

What is the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee (hereafter CSAC), you ask? Appointed by the postmaster general, it's a panel of interested players—graphic designers, political types, museum curators, advertisers, artists, a sportscaster (Donna de Varona), and, of course, Prof. Henry Louis Gates Jr. of Harvard—charged with advising the Postal Service on the selection of commemorative stamps.

Most of CSAC's deliberations, in its history, have been comparatively placid; and so far as The Scrapbook is aware, no great controversy has ever embarrassed the Postal Service on the issue of commemorative stamps. Until recently, that is.

Americans who still affix stamps to envelopes may have noticed, in recent years, that commemorative issues have acquired a certain commercial character. This may have begun as long ago as 1992, when the Postal Service issued its 29-cent Elvis Presley stamp and, during the selection process, invited interested citizens to choose between different versions. At the time, of course, The Scrapbook's preference was for the bloated, jumpsuited, 1970s, he's-the-king version; but Americans ultimately voted for the hipper, trimmer 1950s model Elvis. Since then, deceased pop culture icons, seasonal favorites (Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer), sports stars (Wilt Chamberlain), and blockbuster images (Harry Potter) have joined the ranks of the commemorated, along with the usual

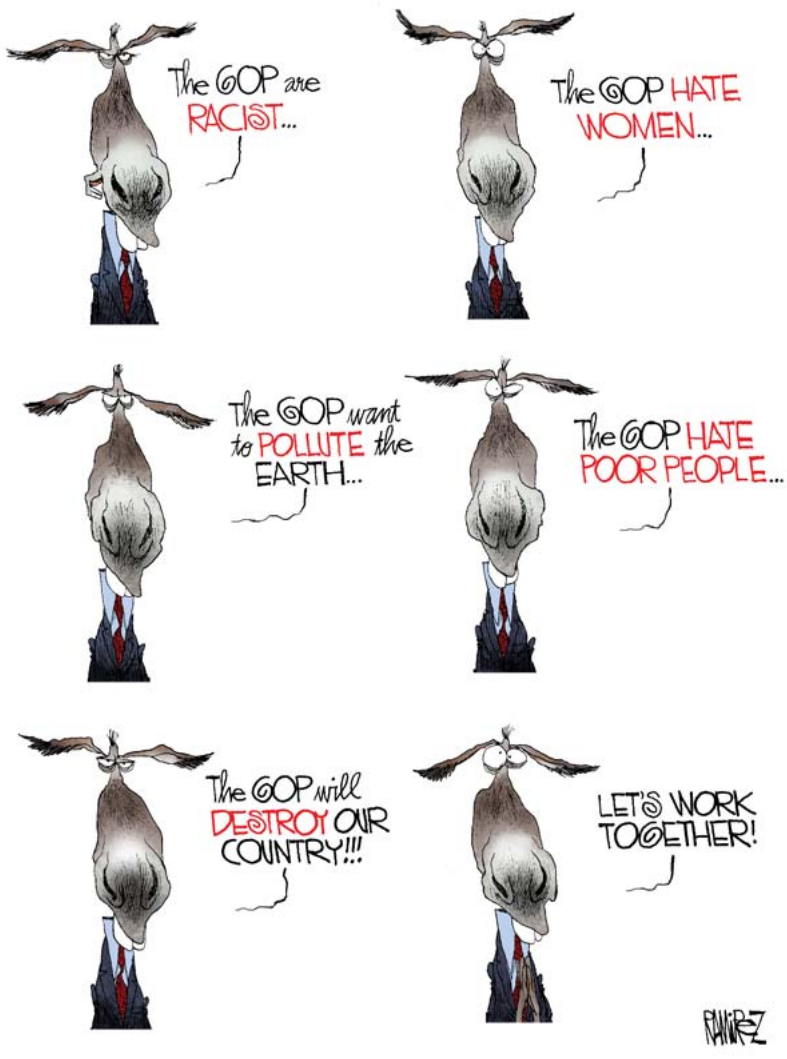
secretaries of state, poets and novelists, and Black History Month favorites.

No doubt, among stamp collectors and post office customers, opinion is mixed on this trend; but for Cary R. Brick, an ex-congressional staffer and former CSAC member, it is an occasion for outrage. Writing in a recent issue of *Linn's Stamp News*, Brick complains that the struggling Postal Service has sold its soul to "pie-in-the-sky marketers" and commercial interests at the expense of "traditional" stamp themes. In the breathless words of the *Washington Post*, "the cloistered world of postage stamps is roiling again with public airing of dissent in the ranks of the secretive [CSAC]."

At this point, The Scrapbook should declare its position. We, too, like "traditional" subjects—we cherish, for example, our dwindling supply of 23-cent F. Scott Fitzgerald (1996) stamps—and would draw a line somewhere on blatant "commercial" themes. But we like the oddball, humorous, ever-so-slightly surprising ones as well, and don't feel especially ashamed about it. Moreover, as a practical matter, if the survival of the U.S. Postal Service is at stake, then let us have more of what postal customers evidently want.

And less of Cary R. Brick's attitude. For in his furious *Linn's* essay, Brick betrays a certain bias that is all too revealing. The Postal Service and its CSAC, he declares, may be choosing new stamps "with the same profit motive as Big Macs, Slurpees, jeans or neighborhood tattoo parlors," and those unseen, unnamed, unabashed marketers "come from the corporate world of soft drinks and Wal-Marts." (Cary Brick, by contrast, "care[s] deeply about the stamp program.") So, in Brick's view, the American economy, and our varied, unconventional, and astonishingly benevolent market, is essentially a huckster's paradise, a back-alley scheme for turning a buck, an unrefined neighborhood of Big Macs, Slurpees, tattoo parlors, and Walmarts.

Come to think of it, a commemorative Slurpee stamp might not be such a bad idea. ♦



Obama's Pen Pal

With the Republicans winning control of the Senate last week, The Scrapbook is hopeful that the country might be protected from the Obama administration's worst foreign policy instincts, especially regarding Iran. At the end of this month, the interim agreement with Tehran over its nuclear program expires, and many are concerned that the White House is likely to settle for a very bad permanent agreement. After all, Obama aides have made it clear that an Iran deal is Obama's foreign policy priority—as central to his legacy, they say, as the Affordable Care Act.

The race is on, then. The new Senate won't be sworn in until January, and already the White House is looking at ways to get around Congress in order to ink an agreement with the mullahs. That the administration is intending to go around the representatives of the American public is in keeping with the primary colors of its Iran policy—secrecy and subterfuge. Most recently, for instance, an unnamed Obama official insulted Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, while another boasted of having deterred Israel from striking Iranian nuclear facilities. "Now," the anonymous Obama toadie bragged, "it's too late."

It's hardly surprising that a White House that launches anonymous attacks on allies reaches out secretly to

adversaries. As the *Wall Street Journal* reported last week, Obama sent a letter to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in mid-October about their shared interest in stopping the Islamic State. However, Obama is reported to have written, U.S. assistance in battling IS depends on Iran signing a nuclear deal.

This contradicts the administration's longstanding denials that they are making any links between Iran's nuclear file and other issues. The White House says nuclear talks are just about that one issue, and not, for instance, Iranian "interests" around the region, from Beirut to Baghdad, Damascus to Yemen. The evidence points rather to the fact that the White House is making a more comprehensive accommodation with the Islamic Republic.

It's not simply about the nukes, but a partnership between the Obama White House and the clerical regime, a new relationship that will entertain all sorts of issues, including, for example, the Islamic State, while excluding traditional regional allies. After all, insulting someone behind his back is not how one acts toward a friend, and sending a letter to promise gestures of goodwill is not how one treats an adversary. No, even if they won't own it publicly, the Obama White House has turned American Middle East policy upside down. The question is whether the new Senate will be able to right it again, in time. ♦

Buy This Book!

Our colleague Jonathan V. Last has assembled an all-star cast of contributors for his dazzling new collection, *The Seven Deadly Virtues: 18 Conservative Writers on Why the Virtuous Life is Funny as Hell.* Among them are many who will be familiar to you—Andrew Ferguson, Matt Labash, P.J. O'Rourke, Christopher Caldwell, Joe Queenan, and Sonny Bunch—and many more who should be. What are you waiting for? Get thee to Amazon.com now! ♦

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They Like Mike

Of all the rituals I count on to give my life shape, there is none so sacred as witnessing my former brother-in-law, Mike Benton, stand for local office in our pleasant burg of Calvert County, Maryland. Though my wife's sister wound down with Mike two decades ago, he and I have a same-time-next-cycle arrangement, in which we use each quadrennial Election Day to catch up on the families, celebrate public service, and drink until we can't feel our legs.

Since 2002, I have detailed in these pages Mike's losing seasons. He was stomped for clerk of the court—a position he learned of after reading his daughter's grade-school report on the subject. He was humiliated in the county commissioner's race, finishing 9th out of 11. But then came last cycle, when he finally won a spot on the town council of North Beach, his home turf that snugs up against the Chesapeake Bay, helping him reclaim electoral glory he hadn't known since winning Northern High School's "Best Looking" in 1984.

Now 48, Mike's seen many changes since our last ride. He married his former campaign treasurer, Tina, and they had Little Mike (who is not little at all—when the hulking 3-year-old is asked his age, he simply replies, "Big"). After selling his real-estate company, Mike's a financial planner and certified "Go-Giver" success coach.

The former Marine used to campaign relentlessly, holding signs along frozen highways for a month at a time in fingerless gloves, keeping his middle digits free for voters/hecklers who yelled obscenities. But there's a slackness to his campaign efforts this time out—the anticlimax of incumbency replacing the thrill of the chase. He has spent no money, relying on his old "Got Mike" signs, which list a moribund email address. He answers the door with belt unfastened. "There's no time," he says of his state of undress. It's two days before the election, and he needs to start campaigning, fast.

Even at a recent candidates' forum, Mike felt a little off his game. Everyone else gave a prepared statement, but he hadn't bothered drafting one. When his turn arrived, Mike stood up, boldly bluffing, "I'm all in!"

Candidate Mike with wife Tina and campaign workers

"What the hell does that mean?" I ask. "That's what everybody else wanted to know," Mike shrugs.

We hit the streets, and that afternoon's 20-knot winds, as luck would have it, blow us into Neptune's Pub, our first and last stop of the day. As we tuck into plates of "Billy's Bad Ass Wings" and some beers, Mike is warmly greeted by a steady procession of fishing-charter skippers, old real-estate clients, and the tattooed woman who knows him from the "Mondays with Mike" sessions he conducts at an area unemployment office, where he uses get-up-and-go optimism to blow some confidence into the sails of the downwardly mobile. "I don't want to coach the guy with the third Jaguar," Mike says, "but the guy who everyone says, 'You're screwed, you're a loser'—I wanna be that guy's coach, because that was me, that is me."

Mike hasn't campaigned traditionally, he stipulates, because he spends every day in his unpaid perch as town councilman out among the people, even volunteering to do their jobs for a day, such as working as a beach attendant picking up cigarette butts, or helping public works snake the sewer system. I ask him what he learned from the latter stint. "That North Beachers need to eat more vegetables from our farmers' market," he says.

At the polls, I vote my conscience—no easy feat, as I haven't had one since around 1997. Then I join Mike to catch election returns at the town council building. All the eccentrics are out. There's the erratically toothed Junior Lubbes, a scrap-metal hoarder who is also running for the job, boasting that he reads on a 10th-grade level and needs to get elected to see what's going on inside that building, since he doesn't have cable. Then there's Josh Brown, a former *American Idol* aspirant who serves chili and '70s funk music out of his tent, saying if elected, he intends to "paint the town in glitter!"

Mike is easily reelected as North Beach's leading vote-getter. He's trashing his old signs tomorrow—maybe he'll give them to Junior—as he now has his eye on the 2018 mayor's race. Later, at the victory party, reelected mayor Mark Frazer thanks his town council for helping him in the fight. I elbow Frazer, and tell him Mike would like to say a few words. Mike and I have been surreptitiously hitting my cooler for the last six hours, so Mike hasn't had time to prepare a speech.

But he squares up to the barroom with the intrepidity of the victor, letting North Beach know, "I'm all in!"

Matt Labash

COURTESY OF MICHAEL BENTON

the weekly Standard

Catching the Wave

Back before incoming senators Tom Cotton and Cory Gardner and Joni Ernst and Dan Sullivan were born, before new House members Elise Stefanik and Lee Zeldin and Mia Love were a gleam in their parents' eyes, the Beach Boys said it best: "Catch a wave and you're sitting on top of the world."

And so the Republican party sits—if not quite on top of the world, at least on top of the political scene. The headlines of the same New York papers that told us it wasn't going to be a wave election blared the wavy news on Wednesday. "Riding Wave of Discontent, GOP Takes Senate," announced the *New York Times*. "Republicans ride wave of anger against Democrats to recapture Senate," confirmed the *Daily News*.

THOMAS FLUHARTY

Needless to say, when Democrats rode to power nearly a decade ago, at a time when voters were even more discontented with the state of the country and the winning party even angrier at the sitting president, it wasn't described by the media as a wave of discontent and anger. It was a wave of hope and change. If liberal anger was acknowledged, it was righteous anger; if progressive discontent was noted, it was healthy discontent.

Of course, there's no reason for Republicans to accept the media characterization of their victory. Indeed, there's every reason to mock it. As one Republican tweeted Wednesday, "Who knew 'riding a wave of anger' could be so much fun?" And the crowds at GOP candidates' headquarters on election night didn't look discontented or angry. Their mien was cheerful, their mood buoyant, their expressions hopeful.

Republicans are now the party of hope and change. Two weeks ago, we asked in this space, "Supposing Republicans win a big victory on November 4. What then?" Our answer: Celebration. "Because the result—assuming it's as strong as it looks 12 days out—will be worth celebrating."

So we write this in an upbeat mood, enjoying the thrill of victory. And part of that enjoyment for those of us in the curmudgeonly caucus admittedly involves relishing the despair of Democrats, mocking the plight of progressives, and delighting in the shock of the media. Schadenfreude is some of the best freude. But always we hear, in the back of our mind, the cautionary voice of the slave who rode next to the emperor in his triumphal procession, reminding him that this, too, shall pass.

And so, as we also wrote in that editorial two weeks ago, "the celebratory mood, though heartfelt, will be brief." We know that "this sixth-year election, like its predecessors, was mostly a negative and backward-looking referendum on the incumbent," and that its results "are probably of limited utility in indicating what will happen next in the drama of American politics."

What will happen next? That's not easy to predict, or easy to control. The new congressional majorities, we presume, will try to mitigate the damage President Obama can do, amass some real accomplishments, and develop a conservative governing agenda. Then comes 2016.

History suggests there are reasons for optimism. Parties rarely hold the White House for a third term. There is almost always a considerable dropoff from a president's reelection vote to the vote for the nominee of his party four years later—enough of a dropoff to send President Obama's Democratic successor to defeat. The Republicans have the attractive younger candidates; the Democrats look as if they'll be nominating yesterday's person, someone who tried and failed before, the next in line.

On the other hand, recent polls have Hillary Clinton running ahead of various Republicans. The exit polls Tuesday night had 43 percent of voters saying Clinton would make a good president, but only 29 percent for Jeb Bush, with Rand Paul, Chris Christie, and Rick Perry trailing a bit behind.

Yet when Hillary Clinton was matched up with an unnamed Republican, she trailed 39 to 34, with 24 percent saying it depended on who the Republican was. Even if one adjusts for the likely 2016 electorate, the base Republican vote is as great as the base Hillary vote. The right Republican can win in 2016.

Is that right Republican one of the names tested in the exit polls? Perhaps not. Perhaps a Paul Ryan-Marco Rubio ticket—the ticket we suggested in January 2011 for 2012—would fit the bill this time? Perhaps a ticket of governors—Scott Walker and Susana Martinez?—is the way to go. Or senators—Ted Cruz and Kelly Ayotte? Or maybe it's time to go bold, go young, and go Army, with a Class of 2014 pairing of Tom Cotton and Joni Ernst? Who knows? We don't.

Republican primary voters will decide. The Beach Boys were also prescient about GOP dreams for 2016:

Maybe if we think and wish and hope and pray it might come true
Baby, then there wouldn't be a single thing we couldn't do.

But thinking and wishing and hoping and even praying won't be enough. Hard work animated by enlightened patriotism will be needed to ride another wave in 2016.

Wouldn't it be nice?

—William Kristol

President Impervious

At the end of his opening statement at the traditional postelection presidential press conference, Barack Obama offered this assurance: "I continue to believe we are simply more than just a collection of red and blue states," he said. "We are the United States."

Those words were a deliberate echo of the memorable keynote address he delivered a decade ago at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. They were powerful then because his passionate delivery suggested he deeply believed them, and because many Americans wanted to believe them, too.

Last week, Obama recited those words impassively from a prepared statement. They followed a series of clichés and preceded a list of empty promises. His words no longer move the country. Even Barack Obama doesn't seem to believe much that comes out of the president's mouth these days.

The Age of Obama may be over, but his presidency continues, alas. It's pointless to engage in debates about whether he's still "relevant." He's the president. That's always relevant. From extraconstitutional power plays on immigration to naïve and dangerous nuclear negotiations with Iran, his influence remains in very important ways.

It's clear, though, that the Obama project has failed. He sought to alter the political trajectory of the country, to put it on a "fundamentally different path," as Ronald Reagan had, to "restore faith in government," and to "make government cool again." It didn't work, thanks to a series of scandals and six years of policy failures.

A few exit polls from last week make this clear. Nearly six years after the Obama administration's $1 trillion stimulus, 22 percent of the electorate rate the current economy "poor" and 48 percent say "not so good." Only 28 percent say the economy is "good," and just 1 percent believe it's "excellent."

Voters not only believe things are bad today, they are deeply pessimistic about the future. Nearly two-thirds of the electorate (65 percent) believe the country is on the "wrong track," and an extraordinary three-quarters of voters say life for their children will be the same (27 percent) or worse (48 percent) than it is today.

Not surprisingly, these voters blame the Obama administration. Just 10 percent say they are "enthusiastic" about the administration and 29 percent say "satisfied," but 32 percent say they are "dissatisfied" and 27 percent say "angry."

They're not looking to Washington for help. Just 3 percent of respondents say they trust government "just about always," and 17 percent say "most of the time," while 60 percent trust the government only "sometimes," and 18 percent "never." Other polling in recent weeks shows that faith in government is at post-Watergate lows.

So what do you do if you're the party of government? One answer: Do everything possible to make sure that those who still believe in government show up to vote. That worked for Democrats in 2012, when the failures weren't as broadly understood as they are today and Obama was more popular. It failed miserably in 2014, when Obama's policies were on the ballot but he was not.

A second possibility, following the example of Obama at his press conference: Pretend that things are going well and that the results of the election represent a failure of the electorate to understand the success of his policies. Obama insists that the economy is humming and that Obamacare is a success, but he worries "that the way we are talking about issues isn't working."

Nor does a third approach seem very promising: Nominate Hillary Clinton, a creature of Washington and former member of the Obama administration, to recast stale liberal ideas as the path to American renewal.

The immediate task for Republicans is comparatively straightforward: Make clear that the failures over these past six years are not merely the result of one man's incompetence but reflect flaws inherent in an approach to governing that puts the state at the center of solving our problems. The problem is liberalism or progressivism or whatever "ism" the left embraces next to salvage its failed ideas through rebranding.

There are already calls from the conventional-wisdom set in Washington for Republicans to demonstrate their willingness to work with the president and to make clear that they can be a "responsible" governing party. We're all for responsibility and good governance, but Republicans control Congress, not the White House, and there are limits to what they can do.

Barack Obama has repeatedly demonstrated—by his words and actions immediately after elections in 2008, 2010, and 2012—that he believes "compromise" happens when Republicans agree with him. He made clear in his press conference last week that he's not about to change.

It's been a long six years. Two more to go.

—Stephen F. Hayes

From Success to Success

It was a banner night for the GOP.

BY JAY COST

The 2014 midterm elections were a referendum on Barack Obama's performance as president. He has done a bad job, and most Americans know it. Accordingly, the American people used the only means they had of making good their disapproval: They elected Republicans.

The president's standing in the states with major Senate battles was uniformly terrible. The media conducted exit polls for 10 of the 11 Senate races where the GOP won or nearly won Democratic-held seats. Obama's job approval ranged from 23 percent in West Virginia to 43 percent in New Hampshire, with an average of just 37 percent. Republicans won on average 72 percent of the anti-Obama vote, and in most states 80 percent.

It helped that Republicans challenging Democratic Senate incumbents made few gaffes, unlike several candidates in 2010 and 2012 whose blunders ceded winnable seats to Democrats. The only place where candidate quality seems to have damaged a Republican challenger was New Hampshire, where 52 percent of voters said Scott Brown, from neighboring Massachusetts, had not lived in the state long enough. Those voters went for Jeanne Shaheen by 89-10 percent. As for Virginia, Ed Gillespie displayed no obvious weaknesses and took bold policy positions on health care. But he was enormously outspent, and the national party failed to see the potential for a pickup before it was too late.

Tillis in North Carolina

Ernst in Iowa

Cotton in Arkansas

At this writing, ballots are still being counted in Alaska, and Louisiana will hold a runoff in December. But it appears the Republicans, when all is said and done, will have picked up 9 Senate seats, giving them a majority of 54-45.

This Senate majority will be as large as the one seated in 1995, but much more conservative. That year, the Republican caucus included many nominal, moderate, or otherwise unreliable Republicans, notably John Chafee of Rhode Island, Mark Hatfield of Oregon, Jim Jeffords of Vermont, and Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas. Some such Republicans remain—Frank Murkowski was succeeded by Lisa Murkowski—but their numbers have shrunk. My informal count has them declining from about 15 in 1994 to less than half a dozen today. The group of solid conservatives, meanwhile, has grown. The Senate already had many such members, like Mike Lee, Ted Cruz, and Tim Scott. But now they are set to be joined by Tom Cotton, Ben Sasse, and Joni Ernst. My back of the envelope calculations suggest that the number of solid conservative senators has risen from about a dozen in 1995 to 20 or so today.

As for the House, ballots are still being counted, but Republicans should exceed their high-water mark there since the Great Depression. According to exit polls, they will have done so by winning about the same share of the vote they carried in 2010. The reality for Democrats in the House is that a majority is probably foreclosed to them until 2019 at the earliest. Neither party's presidential nominee has had much in the way of coattails when running for a third consecutive term. So even if the Democrat wins the White House in two years, the GOP is strongly favored to keep the House through the 2016 elections.

The races for governors' mansions provided some real drama. Surprising Republican pickups in Illinois and Maryland and surprising holds in Florida, Kansas, and Maine gave Republicans a slight edge. But in state legislatures, Democrats were eviscerated. The National Conference of State Legislatures reports that Democrats will hold fewer state legislative seats than at any time in nearly a century. Among GOP highlights: Republicans picked up the state house in West Virginia and tied the state senate; they won both chambers of the Nevada legislature; they won the New Hampshire

IMAGES: NEWSCOM

Jay Cost is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

and Minnesota houses; and they reclaimed the New York senate.

What do these results tell us about 2016? Pundits note that a midterm blowout for the out party often fails to yield a big victory two years later (the Democratic sweep of 1986, for instance, was followed by the Republican triumph of 1988). Similarly, a good showing by the incumbent party in a midterm is no guarantee the party will hold the White House in 24 months (thus, Democrats held the line in 1978, two years before Jimmy Carter was ridden out on a rail; George W. Bush defeated Al Gore just two years after Democrats defied historical norms to pick up House seats in 1998).

Perdue in Georgia

McConnell in Kentucky

Love in Utah

Moreover, Democrats rightly note that the electorate will be different in 2016. It will be younger and less white. Can Republicans win it? The answer is yes, but they have to improve their performance with key voting blocs.

Democrats invariably overstate historical trends when they argue that midterm elections favor Republicans. Hardly true—look no further than 2006 or 1998. And this points to the anxiety that Democrats should have moving forward. Since Obama emerged on the national scene, the Democrats have largely given up trying to reclaim white, working-class voters, especially in the Border South and Midwest, leaving them for Republicans to poach. Obama has emphasized turnout and mobilization of new nonwhite voters—rather than persuasion of voters the Democrats have lost.

The problem for Democrats is that so far only Barack Obama has proved able to make this coalition a winner. Indeed, the exit polls show that the 2014 electorate was less white than any midterm electorate in history. Yet Republicans roughly matched their 2010 share of the nationwide vote for the House. They did slightly better among nonwhite voters than in 2010 and substantially better than in 2008 or 2012. According to exit polls, House Republicans won a little more than 26 percent of nonwhite voters, up from 18 percent in 2008 and 2012. Combine that with 60 percent of whites, and you get the GOP's comfortable victory of 2014. If they hold, these shares will probably yield victory, though a narrower victory, in the 2016 general election.

Nationwide, House Republicans took half the Asian vote, a marked improvement from the last several cycles. Moreover, they won 36 percent of Latino voters, an 8-point improvement over Mitt Romney's performance (but still trailing George W. Bush's haul in 2004). Unfortunately, the exit polls in Colorado do not break down the nonwhite vote, but it looks as though Republican Cory Gardner did about as well with Latinos as House Republicans did nationwide. Ditto Rick Scott in Florida. In Texas, Greg Abbott won 44 percent of Latino voters, and even a narrow majority of Latino men. There was no exit poll in Nevada, but Governor Brian Sandoval (the first Hispanic elected statewide in Nevada when he won the attorney general's office in 2002) took 70 percent of the total vote, which implies an extremely strong showing among Latinos.

What about African Americans? Nationwide, the black vote reverted roughly to the pre-Obama mean. Turnout among African Americans was about the same as in 2010 (12 percent), and Republicans won an estimated 10 percent of their vote. Squaring off against Obama, John McCain and Romney managed only 4 percent and 6 percent, respectively.

Still, Republicans have a lot of work to do with nonwhite voters. Opponents of the "Emerging Democratic Majority" thesis, like me, have never disputed that the demographics of the electorate are shifting. Quite the contrary: The demographics of America have always been shifting—since the first new immigrant group, the Scots-Irish, began arriving on our shores decades before the revolution was fought. But as demographics shift, so do political coalitions. This gives Republicans openings to make inroads with new voting groups. Moreover, we are still having the same fight about government—bigger or smaller?—that we have been having since the 1790s. The changing composition of the electorate has not altered that one whit.

Though demography need not be destiny, it is up to strong, smart Republican candidates and strategists to "defy" it. They have much work to do, not just with Latino voters but also with African-American voters, who are often overlooked in Republican conversations about the American political balance.

Unfortunately, there was only one Republican standout on the African-American vote this cycle: John Kasich, Republican governor of Ohio, carried 26 percent of the black vote on

LEFT AND CENTER, NEWSCOM; RIGHT, AP / RICK BOWMER

his way to a landslide reelection. In some of the most contested races—the Georgia and North Carolina Senate battles, for instance—Republicans won an even smaller share of the black vote than House Republicans nationwide. In the Tar Heel State, Republican Thom Tillis carried just 4 percent of African Americans. These are terrible numbers for Republicans, and they should be flashing "Red Alert" signs in the halls of Congress and the offices of the Republican National Committee.

The black vote is not part of the demographic shift that is altering the Democratic party. The African-American share of the U.S. popula-

Rauner in Illinois

Scott in South Carolina

Scott in Florida

tion has remained relatively constant, around 13 percent. Its power in recent electoral cycles has come from enhanced turnout for Barack Obama (from about 11 percent of the electorate in 2004 to 13 percent in 2008 and 2012) and especially the shrinking of the share won by Republicans (from 11 percent for George W. Bush to about 5 percent for subsequent GOP presidential candidates).

The shift in the black vote is often overlooked in the story of Obama's success, but this is a mistake. The parties are so closely matched in the battleground states—Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia—that even modest movement in their black electorates can be decisive. Even if the black vote returns to its slightly more GOP-friendly historical trend line when Obama is no longer on the ballot, Republicans need to understand that the old status quo is still terrible for them.

Conservatives sometimes respond that they are disinclined to cater to blacks as a group because they prefer to construct policies for the whole country. This claim does not withstand scrutiny. Republicans boost all sorts of groups or interests—farmers, small businesses, families with children, students, seniors, and so on. Republican leaders often propose and adopt programs with particular groups in mind. Why not African Americans? The black experience in the United States is unique, and uniquely difficult. Take one example: According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the employment-population ratio among whites is 60 percent; among African Americans it is 55 percent. And black employment at its recent peak in the late 1990s was only as high as white employment has been during the present prolonged jobs recession. So among African Americans, the jobs recession is *decades* old.

If Republicans are sweating their margins in presidential elections in those critical swing states—*and they should be*—it is past time for them to think seriously about the challenges facing black America, craft a salable agenda to address those unique problems, and—most important—invest political capital in enacting it. Republicans haven't committed fully to this since the 1950s, when Dwight Eisenhower took a strong and politically risky stand for blacks in Arkansas in 1957 and signed civil rights legislation in 1957 and 1960. Not coincidentally, Ike was the last Republican president to perform reasonably well with African Americans. The time for GOP lip service to black voters is over.

The good news is that the election results vindicate a slew of Republican governors who have been smart innovators and might be able to think creatively about this issue should they run for president. Scott Walker in Wisconsin, Rick Snyder in Michigan, and John Kasich in Ohio all won solid reelection victories Tuesday night. Add to them Rick Perry in Texas, Bobby Jindal in Louisiana, and Mike Pence in Indiana, and it is undeniable that the GOP has a slate of seasoned executives who could produce a fantastic presidential nominee capable of fresh thinking. Moreover, the Senate Republicans are increasingly distinguished, and several conservatives among them could make formidable presidential contenders.

The Democratic bench, by contrast, was further depleted in the midterms. Hillary Clinton stands as a potentially strong nominee, but apart from her the Democratic roster looks thin—both for the time being and in the foreseeable future. Democrats will have only 17 governors, a grim number (though results are not final in two states at this writing). Governorships are the minor leagues for presidential candidates. The best of the best hone their skills there before making a run for the pennant.

Two years in politics is a lifetime. A new recession could sweep out the last vestiges of the once supposedly "enduring" Democratic majority. Or an economic boom could give the president's party a new lease on life. Either way, there is more work for the GOP to do. Fortunately, the leadership class in the party is stronger than it has been in decades, and there are good reasons to believe it is up to the challenge. ♦

LEFT AND RIGHT, NEWSCOM; CENTER, AP / MIC SMITH

The Colorado Comeback

Undoing the Democrats' blueprint.

BY ROB WITWER

Cory Gardner stunned Coloradans in February by announcing he would give up a safe seat in the House to challenge Democratic senator Mark Udall, a well-liked incumbent with no obvious weaknesses. It was a huge risk, despite a strong Republican tailwind. The energetic young congressman from the eastern plains was effectively betting his political career that he could do something no Coloradan had done since 1978: defeat an incumbent U.S. senator.

Colorado Republicans were over the moon. The winningest GOP campaign manager in Colorado history, Dick Wadhams, said what was on everyone's mind: "If Cory can't win this, nobody can."

Those words were not just a rallying cry, but a warning. The euphoria that accompanied Gardner's announcement soon dissolved into serious concerns that the Democratic machine would chew him up, as it had so many GOP candidates before.

By April, Democrats had committed half a million dollars to ads attacking Gardner on abortion. By June, Udall personally escalated the attack: "Because this really matters, it's important you hear this directly from me," Udall told the camera. "My opponent, Congressman Gardner, led a crusade that would make birth control illegal and sponsored a bill to make abortion a felony, even in cases of rape and incest."

It marked the beginning of what would become the most relentlessly negative single-issue race (or as the *Denver Post* put it, "obnoxious one-issue campaign") in recent memory—and a reminder of the formidable machinery Gardner faced.

Cory Gardner and wife Jamie on election night

The Democratic strategy is no secret, but it has successfully dispatched every major statewide Colorado GOP contender for the past decade. Here's how it works. First, establish the narrative that the Republican candidate is extreme, narrow-minded, and obsessed with social issues. Second, wait for him to confirm that narrative, either through a gaffe or a loose remark. Third, having reduced the candidate to a caricature, use state-of-the-art data and voter mobilization to bring the election home.

As simple as this technique may seem, it requires the combined efforts of many different groups, which is the essence of what has been called the Colorado Model: a coordinated network of large donors, organized labor, environmentalists, teachers' unions, trial lawyers, and dozens of nonprofits specializing in various elements of political infrastructure.

This election, the Democrats took the Colorado Model across the country. In February, the *New York Times* reported that Udall's colleague and friend Senator Michael Bennet, who himself narrowly defeated Colorado GOP challenger Ken Buck with a "war on women" strategy in 2010, would run the national effort to retain the Senate as chair of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

Everything about the DSCC's plan had a Colorado connection. Executive director Guy Cecil, a former Bennet chief of staff, would employ the voter registration and get-out-the-vote methods pioneered in Bennet's impressive victory. Even the name of this strategy to hold the Senate—the "Bannock Street Project"—was a nod to Bennet, referring to his 2010 Denver field office.

It all made sense: Colorado Democrats had run the table for a decade, and everyone was looking for a little sprinkle of that Colorado magic.

Given their track record, perhaps the architects of the Bannock Street Project could be forgiven for boasting to the *Times* about their "fundamentally different choice" of putting resources into turnout and field operations over television advertisements. They declared that targeted Senate races "would live and die by the strength of data available [in] the voter file."

As Gardner campaign manager

NEWSCOM

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Chris Hansen read those words, he had another thought: What about the candidate?

Hansen's first exposure to electoral politics was as a $500-a-month canvasser in a San Diego city council race in 2005, the year after Colorado Democrats began their amazing run. He still considers himself a "ground guy"—adept at the nitty-gritty work of going door to door for votes.

But when given one of the most important campaign jobs in the country this year, Hansen reduced his philosophy to a short sentence: "Believe in Cory." In Hansen's mind, the essence of a campaign is not spreadsheets, walk lists, or voter files, but ideas and issues—and, above all, the candidate who embodies them.

As the summer wore on, so did Udall's attacks on Gardner over birth control and abortion. But rather than succumbing to the narrative or falling back on his heels, Gardner pivoted. His ads took a distinct "direct-to-camera" character, with the candidate looking voters in the eye to discuss issues like the economy, health care, leadership, and bipartisanship. This casual, likable approach evoked the style Mark Udall himself used so effectively in 2008.

It was clear the race's dynamic had fundamentally shifted when legendary *Denver Post* reporter Lynn Bartels noted in a debate that Udall had earned the nickname "Mark Uterus," and asked whether his campaign had pushed the issue too far.

Yet instead of sensing their attacks had lost any semblance of believability, Democrats and their allies doubled down. The "jump the shark" moment came in the final week of the campaign, when NARAL ran an advertisement seriously suggesting that a Gardner victory would lead to a condom shortage.

When the narrative collapsed, Udall was left with nothing but the Democrats' mythical "ground game," which became his closing argument. "You are an army with clipboards. Put those clipboards up. Those are the weapon of choice," he told volunteers two days before the election. There was no sustained effort to make a case for his reelection, no attempt at persuasion, no bid to justify his progressive vision for Colorado. Nothing.

Much has been made of the Democrats' infrastructure advantage in Colorado, and with good reason. It may have saved Governor John Hickenlooper in a year when Democrats lost gubernatorial races in Massachusetts, Maryland, and Illinois. On the margins, infrastructure matters.

But the best sales team in the world still needs a product to sell. As 2004 will be remembered as the birth of the Colorado Model, perhaps 2014 will prove its demise—the year Democrats became so enamored of their data, modeling, analytics, and voter mobilization strategies, they forgot that voters still want to be given a reason to vote for someone. Cory Gardner gave Coloradans one—and made his gamble pay big. ♦

Electing Federalism

States, not just senators, will check and balance the administration. BY ADAM J. WHITE

Tuesday's elections reinforced constitutional checks and balances against the Obama administration's excesses, but not just in the most obvious way. For all the attention rightly paid to the new Senate majority, there's another important set of newly elected officials who may soon push back against federal overreach: state attorneys general.

Unlike their federal counterpart, most state AGs are elected by the voters, not appointed by their respective governors. And on Tuesday, Republican AG candidates won 19 of 31 elections, giving them a majority of 27 state AGs to 23 for Democrats.

State law often empowers the attorney general to litigate in the name of the state and on behalf of the state's people. And thus state AGs have led a wave of litigation against the Obama administration, challenging federal regulatory programs and other efforts that exceed the limits set by the Constitution and federal statutes. As Fred Barnes has noted in these pages ("The Last Redoubt," July 22, 2013), "the AGs, who often attack the administration in packs, have done more than Republicans in Congress, statehouses, or anywhere else to block, cripple, undermine, or weaken Obama's initiatives."

The AGs' constitutional challenges were epitomized by the coalition of 26 states that challenged the Affordable Care Act's individual mandate in cases that culminated, to the states' disappointment, with the Supreme Court's 2012 decision affirming the mandate as a federal tax. Similarly, 21 AGs filed briefs in last term's *Hobby Lobby* case, arguing that the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act limited the administration's power to require employers to pay for employees' contraceptives.

Arizona attorney general-elect Mark Brnovich

But the states' role in nonconstitutional cases challenging federal regulatory programs has been just as important. A coalition of states challenged the Environmental Protection Agency's signature regulatory program, the new permitting requirements for greenhouse gas emissions; they ultimately succeeded this year in convincing the Supreme Court to strike down the EPA program in part, with Justice Antonin Scalia writing for the Court that the EPA had violated the "core administrative-law principle that an agency may not rewrite clear statutory terms to suit its own sense of how the statute should operate." In 2015, the Supreme Court may hear a similar challenge to the administration's attempt to stretch the terms of the Affordable Care Act: States are challenging the administration's attempt to subsidize health care exchanges set up by the federal government for nonparticipating states, when the plain text of the act provides that such subsidies can cover only exchanges "established by the State."

Faced with no serious prospects for legislative achievements in the next two years, the administration has made no secret of its intention to rule unilaterally, through agency regulations and executive orders rather than legislative compromise. Fittingly, several state AGs put the administration's regulatory agenda at the center of their campaigns.

Bill Schuette, Michigan's incumbent AG, highlighted on his campaign website that he had "been fighting the catastrophic side effects of Obamacare in the courts every step of the way." Oklahoma's Scott Pruitt has been highly critical of the EPA (among other agencies), including the newly announced rules to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from existing power plants; he called President Obama's Climate Action Plan "a plan that has no legal basis or the force of law" and "will undoubtedly lead to higher electricity rates, job losses and increased manufacturing costs as coal-fired power plants . . . are taken offline."

Newcomers are no less critical of the administration. Arizona's newly elected AG, Mark Brnovich, previously directed the Goldwater Institute's Center for Constitutional Government. In September he criticized the EPA's newest climate-change regulations for existing power plants as "an affront to the law and further illustration of the Obama administration's contempt for its co-equal branch of government—Congress—and disdain for the very states from which the federal government derives its power." He added that, "once elected Attorney General of Arizona, I pledge to join states in challenging the legality of these federal regulations, if they are not promptly

AP / ROSS D. FRANKLIN

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withdrawn, or significantly revised to reflect the concerns of stakeholders."

The most vociferous of the newly elected AGs may be Adam Laxalt, grandson of former governor and senator (and President Reagan's unofficial "First Friend") Paul Laxalt. In May, *Politico Magazine* noted that Laxalt's campaign "constantly pound[ed] on Obamacare and federal government overreach, saying attorneys general are the last bulwarks against incursions from Washington." Warning that "Nevadans know the ever-increasing interference out of Washington, D.C. makes it harder for the working people of Nevada and small business owners to create jobs and grow the economy," Laxalt pledged that as AG he would "fight back against the policies that tie the hands of job creators here at home, and . . . work to defend free market principles," from "stifling regulations coming out of the Department of the Interior to Obamacare's healthcare mandates." (*Politico* further noted that Laxalt's rhetoric might "be problematic politics when it comes to winning an election in what is after all a purple, not a red, state"; Nevada voters evidently saw less of a problem there.)

In suits against the federal government, the states have a technical advantage over private litigants: According to the Supreme Court, state plaintiffs are "entitled to special solicitude" from courts on the question of whether they have "standing" to bring their lawsuits. This may seem like a legalistic point, but at a time when the administration has been very aggressive in disputing challengers' legal standing to bring lawsuits, even this marginal difference could prove significant. (And ironically so, given that the Supreme Court announced this "solicitude" in *Massachusetts* v. *EPA*, the 2007 case in which Democratic AGs from a variety of states persuaded the Court to require the Bush administration to move forward on greenhouse gas regulation.)

But the states' most important advantage is more practical: Unlike private parties, sovereign states and independently elected AGs are much less susceptible to political pressure by the administration to sign on to controversial regulatory programs. Such an approach was central to the administration's initial formulation of climate-change regulations for auto companies, according to a House Oversight Committee report detailing the White House's pressure on auto companies not to challenge those regulations in court.

In the long run, the Senate's power to conduct oversight of the administration, in conjunction (finally) with the House, and to exert other gravitational pressure on the executive branch is the most powerful means for checking and balancing the administration. But in the short run, states may provide the most immediate means for restoring constitutional balance, in the courts of law and the courts of public opinion. Together, Congress and the states can provide, as Madison famously offered in *Federalist* 51, "a double security" for "the rights of the people": the separation of powers at the federal level, and the division of power, politically and legally, among the federal government and the states. ♦

Inroads in Some Very Blue States

The governors' surprise.

BY MICHAEL WARREN

CNN morning host Alisyn Camerota wanted to know: Where had Chris Christie been the night before, when it became clear Republicans would take control of the Senate? The New Jersey governor's voice was hoarse, his eyes drooping. "I was in 19 states in the last five days," Christie replied, cracking a weary smile. "So last night I was at home." Yes, but the next morning, he was back at it, making it to CNN (and Fox News and NBC's *Today Show*) to discuss the underreported story of Election 2014. Keeping the House and winning the Senate was all well and good. However . . .

"My focus last night was on my governors' races," he told Camerota. As chairman of the Republican Governors Association, Christie spent the last year crisscrossing the country to stump for GOP candidates. He raised $102 million as chairman, an October 31 RGA press release trumpeted. In a postelection memo sent to donors and candidates, the RGA reports it spent a total of $130 million and even "went into debt" investing in their successful Maryland race.

"Governor Christie made the election of Republican governors his number-one political priority," says Phil Cox, the RGA's executive director.

Overall, it was a banner night for "Christie's" races, though surely the candidates themselves deserve some of the credit. The GOP now holds 31 governorships to the Democrats' 17, a net gain of 3. (Final results are still outstanding in Vermont and Alaska.) Republicans successfully defended eight governors in states Barack Obama won twice, including John Kasich in Ohio, Paul LePage in Maine, and what the RGA called the all-important "trifecta": Rick Snyder in Michigan, Scott Walker in Wisconsin, and Rick Scott in Florida.

Republicans held on in problematic races in Georgia and Kansas, the latter of which had incumbent Sam Brownback coming from behind to win after trailing his Democratic challenger since August. The only GOP

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incumbent to lose was Pennsylvania's Tom Corbett, in a seat considered long gone to the Democrats.

The GOP didn't slouch in its safer seats, either. The party easily picked up Arkansas's open, Democratic-held governorship, completing the GOP's takeover of the state. Republican incumbents in Oklahoma, South Carolina, Alabama, Iowa, Idaho, Wyoming, Tennessee, and South Dakota all won with at least 55 percent of the vote, sometimes a lot more. Once hailed by national Democrats as the party's champion to "turn Texas blue," state senator Wendy Davis's campaign became a joke as she lost to attorney general Greg Abbott by more than 20 points. Susana Martinez, the GOP governor of New Mexico, was reelected by 15 points in a state Mitt Romney lost by 10 points. In Nevada, which Obama won in 2012 by 6 points, Republican Brian Sandoval won reelection with more than *70 percent* of the vote.

Sweeter still for the GOP were the party's takeovers of Democratic seats in some of the bluest states in the country, including Illinois, Maryland, and Massachusetts. "That's a really good night for Republicans to win in those blue states, and as a blue state governor myself, and as a Republican, I was particularly gratified," Christie said on CNN. Here, the RGA chair has some bragging rights. During the campaign, Christie visited Maryland four times and Illinois eight times. In Massachusetts, the RGA outspent all the Democratic-affiliated outside groups by $3 million to help Charlie Baker defeat Martha Coakley.

Speaking of Coakley, it didn't hurt that Republicans in those states faced particularly flawed Democratic candidates. In Illinois, Republican businessman Bruce Rauner defeated incumbent Democrat Pat Quinn by nearly 5 points, winning every county but Cook (which includes Chicago). "Pat Quinn was a pretty open target," says Tim Schneider, the state Republican chairman. Quinn succeeded impeached Democrat Rod Blagojevich in 2009 and barely won election in his own right the next year. As governor, he temporarily raised income tax rates 67 percent while unemployment in the state climbed—it dropped off in the last year only because the labor force shrank. Polls showed Illinois residents overwhelmingly opposed the tax hike, and Rauner ran hard against it, suggesting Quinn would likely make the increase permanent if reelected. Voters seem to have made the same calculation.

Chris Christie with Maryland's Larry Hogan, November 2

In addition, Rauner made the unprecedented (for a Republican) decision to campaign actively for black votes in the Windy City. Starting in July, Rauner visited between three and seven Chicago churches every Sunday, focusing on his message of improving the city's failing public schools. The effect wasn't a huge shift in support away from Quinn, but turnout in Chicago was lower than it was in 2010. Rauner earned 21 percent of the Chicago vote, more than the previous Republican candidate's 18 percent four years earlier.

Republican Larry Hogan did nearly as well in Maryland as Rauner did in Illinois. A successful commercial real estate broker, Hogan faced off against Democratic lieutenant governor Anthony Brown to succeed the term-limited Martin O'Malley. A Democrat from Baltimore, O'Malley has presided over an eight-year decline in Maryland's standard of living as well as higher taxes—"a tax on rain" went the refrain from the Hogan campaign.

Brown represented a third O'Malley term, and as Maryland voters began to balk at that prospect, Hogan slowly rose in the polls. Democrats resorted to negative ads attacking Hogan on issues like gun control. One featured a frightening (and ludicrous) scenario of Maryland under the NRA-endorsed Hogan, with machine guns leaning casually against trees in leafy suburban neighborhoods. The attacks didn't work; nor did eleventh-hour appearances on Brown's behalf by Barack Obama and Hillary and Bill Clinton. Hogan won by nearly 5 points and in all but three counties and the city of Baltimore. It was, says Phil Cox of the RGA, the most surprising race of the year.

Maryland was one of those 19 states Christie visited in the final week, and Republicans won the governors' races in all but 4 of them. That's the power of the big man from Jersey. A scan of the headlines showed a narrative setting in. CNN: "Chris Christie's big moment." The *Wall Street Journal*: "Midterm wins boost Chris Christie's standing." The *New York Times*: "Christie gains some clout for 2016."

Whether primary voters will be swayed by Christie's ability to raise money and boost fellow Republicans remains an open question. But perhaps an unintended consequence is that Christie didn't simply help his fellow Rs—Scott Walker, John Kasich, Susana Martinez, Bill Haslam, and others—win their governorships. He also added to the competition for 2016. ♦

AP / JOSE LUIS MAGANA

The morning after, but no regrets

President Obama's Response?

Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah—for 74 minutes.

BY FRED BARNES

From time to time there comes a moment when a president is expected to say something meaningful about an event that has just occurred. President Obama faced such a moment last week after Republicans swept the midterm elections and captured the Senate. He had nothing interesting, much less meaningful, to say. But he did offer a few comments that were palpably untrue.

Obama fancies himself an eloquent speaker, a clever politician, and a world-class leader. You'd never know it from his performance at the press conference (or from earlier ones). Offering his interpretation of the election, Obama said the message from voters was "Get stuff done." Republican attacks on his policies, his presidency, and Obama himself were the centerpieces of the campaign. In siding with Republicans, what stuff did voters have in mind? Obama didn't say.

Indeed, he suggested the election didn't matter much ("two-thirds of the people who were eligible to vote just didn't vote"), though he had worked with party officials in an effort, unprecedented in a midterm election, to drive up Democratic turnout. He had said that, while his name wasn't on the ballot, his policies were. Yet that didn't matter much either.

Presidents aren't required to have press conferences. The Constitution doesn't mention the subject. But sessions with reporters are a longstanding tradition at the White House. FDR met daily with the press, but his comments were off the record. JFK overwhelmed reporters with his charm. George W. Bush held dozens of press conferences, but failed to win the press over.

Obama is unique. No president has uttered more words, yet said less of importance, at press conferences. No president has been less specific. No president has failed as often to seize an important moment to say something significant, or quotable. No president has filled the air during a presidential press conference with so much boilerplate, so many clichés, and such a multitude of evasions. A few examples:

Asked if there was anything his administration should change as a result of his party's losing the election, he said, "The point is it's time for us to take care of business."

Asked if he should have done more to build ties to congressional Republicans, he said, "I think that every day I'm asking myself, are there some things I can do better? And I am going to keep on asking that every single day."

Asked why it's taken nearly six years to decide the fate of the Keystone oil pipeline from Canada: "There's an independent process. It's moving forward."

Asked if he'd agree to kill the medical devices tax enacted as part of Obamacare, which Republicans have noisily advocated for years: "Let's give them time to tell me."

Asked about being a "lame duck" with only two years left in his presidency: "The one thing I want the American people to be confident about is that every day I'm going to be filling up my time trying to figure out how can I make their lives better."

Obama has a rare ability to utter many words when a few would do. Here's how he noted that he and Republicans might occasionally disagree when they talk:

"There's not going to be perfect overlap. I mean, there are going to be some ideas that I've got that I think the evidence backs up would be good for the economy, and Republicans disagree. They're not going to support those ideas. But I'm going to keep on arguing for them because I think they're the right thing for the country to do. There are going to be some ideas

NEWSCOM

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that they've got that they believe will improve the economy or create jobs that, from my perspective, isn't going to help middle-class families improve their economic situation, so I probably won't support theirs."

Can you imagine listening to that bombast for 74 minutes, as reporters had to last week? And some of them have been covering such press conferences, taking notes, making recordings, and attempting to digest this wordloaf for nearly six years. Journalists not assigned to the White House can take the easy way: skip the Obama speech or press conference and read the transcript.

What untruths did Obama utter? He said, "I think it's fair to say that I've shown a lot of patience and have tried to work on a bipartisan basis as much as possible, and I'm going to keep on doing so." Substitute "indifference" for "patience" and "partisan" for "bipartisan," and the statement would have been true.

On immigration, Obama made a claim every pro-immigration Democrat knows is false. "This is an issue I actually wanted to get done in my first term, and we didn't see legislative action." He didn't see it because he delayed immigration reform to his second term so it wouldn't jeopardize his reelection.

If you watched the press conference, you can now understand why folks were leaving Obama's campaign speeches early. Pity the poor reporters who don't have that option. ♦

Walker Wins Again

Has anyone broken more progressives' hearts than Wisconsin's governor?

BY JOHN MCCORMACK

Scott Walker has won every round of his long fight with Big Labor in Wisconsin, but it wasn't until November 4 that he delivered the knockout punch. In his third gubernatorial election in four years, Walker defeated Democratic challenger Mary Burke by 6 points. It was the same margin of victory he had in the 2010 Republican wave and just a point shy of his 2012 performance in a union-funded recall.

Scott Walker

Walker's victory has secured the conservative reforms he implemented in his first term and will encourage other governors to follow his lead. It should also make him a serious contender for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination if he wants it—which seems likely.

Some of Walker's opponents have tried to console themselves with the belief that he triumphed simply because Republicans win low-turnout midterm elections, while Democrats win high-turnout presidential elections. "President Obama went into Milwaukee" and "did all he could do," a distraught MSNBC host Ed Schultz said on election night. "He went to the base. This was a base election. He just apparently didn't get out enough people."

But in reality, the election didn't come down to turnout. Walker could have survived 100 percent turnout in the liberal bastions of Milwaukee County and Dane County (which includes Madison, the capital and home to the state's flagship university). Burke could have netted the same number of votes in Milwaukee and Dane counties as President Obama, but if everything else had stayed the same, Walker still would have won.

Walker's victory was broad-based. Independents backed him by 10 points, and the racial composition of 2014 voters (88 percent white and 6 percent black) wasn't that different from the electorate that showed up for the 2012 presidential contest (86 percent white, 7 percent black), when Obama won the state by 7 points.

The key to Walker's success was his performance among middle- and lower-income voters. Walker won those earning more than $100,000 by 20 points, just as Mitt Romney had in 2012. But he won voters earning between $50,000 and $100,000 by 17 points; Romney only won them by 1. Those earning less than $50,000 Walker lost by 9 points—whereas Romney lost them by 25. As reporter Molly Ball pointed out in the *Atlantic* earlier this year about that last group, "whether Democrats win these voters by a 10-point or a 20-point margin tells you who won *every national election for the past decade*."

Walker won over more of the middle- and working-class for one reason more than any other: His decision to balance the state's budget by curtailing collective bargaining ultimately proved successful and popular. But it was far from clear that this would be the case when he took on the unions soon after he entered the governor's mansion.

In March 2011, while thousands of protesters occupied the state capitol and Democratic legislators hid in Illinois to prevent a vote on Walker's collective bargaining bill, unions successfully portrayed Walker as an enemy of teachers and public education. A Rasmussen poll found that 56 percent of Wisconsin voters sided with the

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unions and 41 percent with Walker. That May, after Republicans found a way to push the bill through the legislature without Democratic assistance, a survey by Public Policy Polling showed that Walker would lose a recall election, if held, by 7 points.

But by the time the recall took place in 2012, stories of Walker's reforms helping schools and lowering property taxes proliferated in the press. Walker's Democratic opponent, Milwaukee mayor Tom Barrett, couldn't name a single school that had been hurt by the law. In 2014, Mary Burke intentionally avoided discussing Walker's reforms. A Marquette poll taken just before the election found voters supported Walker on collective bargaining by a 10-point margin (52 to 42 percent). It's little wonder Burke relentlessly talked about jobs and the economy instead. But that didn't work either.

Whether Walker can translate his middle-class appeal into a successful presidential campaign remains to be seen. He'll be able to run for the Republican nomination as someone who can be trusted to govern as conservatively as possible, but no further than what's possible. Walker was the only governor in a blue or purple state, besides Maine's Paul LePage, who opposed Obamacare's Medicaid expansion. But Walker never took on any kamikaze missions, and he criticized the 2013 government shutdown. His pragmatism, as well as education reforms that included ending teacher tenure and expanding school choice, could help him appeal to moderate Republicans.

Walker will, of course, face plenty of challenges if he seeks the nomination. In a crowded field of impressive speakers, Walker will have to overcome the perception that he lacks charisma. He will also need to do more than simply point to his record in Wisconsin—he must develop a serious national economic agenda and show that despite his lack of experience in world affairs he has a clear foreign policy.

But those are things Walker won't need to accomplish until 2015. For now, he can enjoy his victory and an end to the constant campaigns of the past four years. ♦

Obama's Makeover of the Judiciary

Will the new Senate slow the march of liberal judges onto the circuit courts? BY TERRY EASTLAND

With Republicans in control of the Senate for the first time since Barack Obama took office, the president may find it harder to appoint left-wing lawyers to judgeships. Whether he compromises on some of his nominees, including any to the Supreme Court, may depend on the willingness of the new Republican majority to engage the president on judicial philosophy.

The GOP wave hits—right in the judiciary.

For six years, the Democratic Senate has supported President Obama's efforts to use his nominating power to turn the federal courts in a liberal direction. Central to this project has been the goal of creating Democrat-appointed majorities on the 13 circuit courts of appeal.

As the legal affairs writer Ed Whelan has observed, these courts are especially important, since they handle upwards of 60,000 cases a year, while the Supreme Court decides well below 100. The circuit courts function as mini-Supreme Courts, having the last word in almost all of their cases. They can establish precedent for their circuits on previously unaddressed issues. And agreement among the circuits on a particular matter may dissuade the Supreme Court from accepting it for review—a critical objective for an administration wanting to keep certain issues out of the hands of the Republican-appointed majority on the High Court. Obama thus has sought to nominate—especially to the circuit courts—ideologically sympathetic lawyers young enough to serve for many years.

Since Obama became president in 2009, the number of circuit courts with majorities appointed by Democrats has increased from one to nine. Right now Obama has seven circuit vacancies to fill: one each on the Third, Sixth, Seventh, Eleventh, and Federal circuits and two on the Sixth. A second vacancy on the Seventh Circuit is expected early next year. Republicans created five of those seven vacancies, observes Russell Wheeler of the Brookings Institution, an authority on judicial selection. If Obama is able to fill those seats as well as the other two vacancies, and also the one that opens in the new year, the appointments won't create any new Democrat-appointed majorities, says Wheeler.

There are 57 circuit judges, however, who are eligible to take senior status (meaning they are at least 65 and their age plus years of service totals 80). Twenty-nine of these judges are Republican appointees. Wheeler says that if, in addition to filling the eight aforementioned seats, Obama were able to replace two of the Fifth Circuit's six senior-eligible Republican appointees

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and one of the five in the Seventh Circuit—assuming those judges claimed senior status—both circuits would have Democrat-appointed majorities.

While it may seem likely that Obama will finish his presidency with Democrat-appointed majorities in all but two circuits, it bears noting that many senior-eligible judges stay on for years, which is why Wheeler cautions against predicting that all of them "will suddenly leave active status in the next two years." He also notes other imponderables that could affect the number of vacancies, such as deaths and resignations.

Wheeler argues from analogy in trying to figure out how many circuit seats Obama might fill during the balance of his term, given a Republican Senate: "If the Senate in 2015-16 were to add proportionately as many circuit judges to Obama's 2014 total as the Senate added in 2007-08 to Bush's total, it would confirm 10 or 11 more judges." That estimate may prove correct, though the measure of success for Republicans is the judicial philosophy of nominees.

Last November, under Majority Leader Harry Reid, Senate Democrats seeking to advance Obama's goal of a more liberal bench went so far as to eliminate the 60-vote supermajority required to end debate and proceed to a vote on judicial nominations (except those to the Supreme Court). Only the support of a simple majority of senators present and voting—51 senators at most—was henceforth necessary for confirmation. This change in the rules, which ended the minority's right to filibuster judicial nominees, was made in order to prevent the Republican minority from blocking the confirmation of the president's most liberal nominees and to ensure, as the *New York Times* explained, that "left-leaning judges, some of them young and who could serve for decades, were nominated."

For the administration and Senate Democrats, the demise of the filibuster has accomplished what they wanted. According to Wheeler, it enabled the confirmation of at least six circuit bench nominees to whom Republicans objected, mainly on grounds of judicial philosophy. Presumably, none of the six would have been confirmed had the filibuster not been eliminated.

That Republicans now control the Senate means, of course, that they control the confirmation process. Their majority enables them to stop an unacceptable nomination at various points: They can deny the nominee a committee hearing; they can vote the person down in committee; they can refuse to schedule a vote on a nomination sent to the floor; and the full Senate can vote to reject the nomination. The Republicans' majority status also strengthens their negotiating position with the White House, making it more likely that a mutually acceptable candidate will be chosen for a given seat.

How Obama approaches judicial selection—and how Republicans respond—now becomes an important story and will remain so until the Senate shuts down judicial confirmations, probably in the summer of 2016 if Senate custom in presidential-election years is followed.

Obama—he of the emphatic statement that all of his policies, "each and every one," were on the midterm ballot—will be under pressure from the base of his party not to concede that judicial philosophy was "on the ballot" and, by implication, rejected. The base will want Obama to keep nominating liberals. Republican senators, however, may be strengthened in their resolve to challenge Obama on judges by the apparent success of ads in several Senate races won by Republicans; the ads sharply criticized Democrats seeking reelection for supporting Obama's judicial nominees "with radical backgrounds," as one ad put it.

The day after the midterms, a remarkable skirmish broke out in Washington among aides to some Republican senators and their allies in legal and media circles. It turns out that a few Republican senators are interested in reinstating the judicial filibuster. This would mean that a 60-vote supermajority was again required to end debate on a nomination and move it to a vote. Whether the idea will gather support and

actually be voted on sometime in the next two years is a question.

Even if the judicial filibuster were revived, though, it's hard to imagine its actual use during the next two years: The Republicans will have no need of it, as they will have other means of ending a nomination, and the Democrats will have no interest in opposing a Democratic president's nominee.

The real issue is what would happen in 2017 should the filibuster be reinstated. Opponents of such a change argue that, if the Democrats won the presidency and the Senate in 2016, the new Democratic Senate would again eliminate the filibuster, as it did last year, thus making it easier to get the new Democratic president's most liberal nominees confirmed. But if the Republicans won the presidency and the Senate and remained committed to the filibuster, that would make it harder to get the new Republican president's most conservative nominees confirmed.

Opponents of reviving the filibuster argue that it "would cement a partisan double standard," as Sen. Orrin Hatch and coauthor Boyden Gray (White House counsel to the first President Bush) wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* last week. Thus, "when Democrats control the White House and Senate, judicial nominations need only 50 votes; but when Republicans control both, judicial nominations require 60 votes, allowing Democratic minorities to block Republican nominations."

The likely new majority leader, Mitch McConnell, hasn't taken a position on this matter, at least not publicly. Aides to several senators told me he expects senators will discuss the issue among themselves. It pits what one aide called the "institutionalists," who think the filibuster can moderate the often contentious politics of judicial selection, against those who see no point in going back, especially since that would disadvantage Republicans.

While the senators ponder this matter, more pressing business will soon be upon them—such as deciding whether or not to confirm whatever nominees Obama sends to the Senate in his last two years. ♦

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The Sick Man of Asia

North Korea's downward spiral.

BY DENNIS P. HALPIN

In 1853 Czar Nicholas I, in a conversation with the British ambassador, reportedly coined the phrase "sick man of Europe" to describe the decaying Ottoman Empire. The corrupt and debt-ridden Ottomans soon dragged England, France, and Russia into conflict in Crimea, just as the czar had feared. The slow, painful demise of the Ottoman Empire then involved the great European powers in a series of Balkan crises, culminating in the 1914 assassination in Sarajevo that triggered World War I.

Write this down: I'm perfectly healthy.

Kim Jong-un's recent reemergence with cane in hand, after a prolonged period of absence from the limelight, seems the perfect embodiment of North Korea's position as the "sick man of Asia." Just as a prosperous and powerful Europe grappled for decades, ultimately unsuccessfully, over what to do about its weakest link, the strong and prosperous Pacific powers have faced, so far unsuccessfully, the dilemma of a weak but nuclear-armed North Korea. A series of diplomatic formulae, including the Agreed Framework, the Six-Party Talks, and, most recently, the aborted Leap Day Agreement of 2012, have all come to naught. Pyongyang, like Constantinople, seems on perpetual life support, gasping for air but never quite expiring.

The transition to rule by the third generation of the "Baekdu bloodline" (descendants of North Korea's founder and anti-Japanese guerrilla fighter Kim Il-sung) in December 2011 has been anything but smooth. The "juche" state was left in the shaky hands of the inexperienced, vain, and insecure Kim Jong-un, who lacked the extended period of apprenticeship that his father Kim Jong-il enjoyed before he assumed the reins of power.

Kim Jong-un's vanity has been on display in the promotion of costly yet impractical construction projects that would be worthy of a pharaoh. These public works involve the mobilization of the masses—soldiers and students in addition to laborers—in "speed campaigns" to achieve hasty completion according to Kim Jong-un's whim. The projects, including an elaborate ski resort, a refurbished amusement park, and an aquarium with a dolphin show, have done little to address the chronic malnutrition and meager living standards of a people isolated in an island of poverty in the midst of the most economically dynamic region of the world.

The projects, ostensibly undertaken to promote tourism, reflect the young

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general's narcissistic lifestyle, as vividly described last year by retired basketball star Dennis Rodman. Rodman had made a visit with Kim Jong-un to the latter's pleasure island, complete with horseback riding, free-flowing alcohol, and yachts.

The indulgent lifestyle probably also explains the use of a cane by thirty-something Kim Jong-un. He allegedly suffers from a series of debilitating illnesses—including obesity, gout, diabetes, and high blood pressure—usually associated with individuals twice his age. The report that he was near death or had even died during his prolonged absence from the public eye, however, was not credible. Even Henry VIII, who engaged in a similarly lustful and lavish lifestyle that ravaged his body, managed to hang on until the age of 55.

Further, the trip to South Korea by a high-level North Korean delegation for the closing ceremony of the Asian Games in Incheon in early October, in the midst of Kim Jong-un's mysterious disappearance, belied the rumors of a possible coup. None of the inner circle of National Defence Commission vice chairman Hwang Pyong-so, Vice Marshall Choe Ryong-hae, and Kim Yang-gon, a secretary of the Korean Workers' party (KWP), would have left the North Korean capital if credible coup rumors had indeed been circulating.

Still, it has been quite noticeable that in almost three years in power, Kim Jong-un, who once lived as a student in Switzerland where he was reportedly an avid fan of Western sports teams and rock music, has not dared to leave the country. This indicates a degree of insecurity and is in marked contrast to his father, Kim Jong-il, who is thought to have traveled three times to China and once to the Russian Far East during the last two years of his life. Kim Jong-un's lack of an invitation to visit Beijing, North Korea's sole ally in the world, has reached the point of embarrassment—especially after President Park Geun-hye of rival South Korea was invited on a state visit to Beijing in 2013, which was reciprocated by a visit to Seoul of Chinese president Xi Jinping this summer.

Despite the comment in September by China's ambassador to South Korea Qiu Guohong, as reported by South Korea's Yonhap News Agency, that a visit by Kim Jong-un to China "is likely to be made down the road," no visit seems possible at least for the rest of this year. While Kim Jong-un recovers from ankle surgery carried out by a team of European doctors, according to news reports quoting South Korea's National Intelligence Agency (NIS), Xi Jinping is preoccupied with preparations for the November 10-11 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Beijing.

Then there is the question of the increasingly frosty relations between the two erstwhile allies. Kim Jong-un's father was always careful to treat China, North Korea's economic and energy lifeline, with a degree of respect, even traveling to China in May 2011, although in frail health, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between China and North Korea. Kim Jong-un, however, has treated China with barely veiled contempt, causing Beijing to lose face when he went forward in early 2013 with a nuclear test despite Chinese admonishments to cease and desist. He then publicly purged and executed his uncle, a key Chinese ally, after condemning him for "economic crimes" linked to a foreign power—obviously a reference to China.

The present nadir in the Sino-North Korean relationship was highlighted in a report in South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo* newspaper on the "chilly relations" reflected in a recent message from Pyongyang to Beijing. "North Korean leader Kim Jong-un made no mention of friendship in a congratulatory message to China marking its National Day on Wednesday (October 1)," the paper noted. "The omission hints at how badly ties between the allies have deteriorated." This was followed on October 29 by a reassertion by Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi of Beijing's commitment to "denuclearizing North Korea," according to Yonhap.

Wang Yi's statement was seen as a reaction to U.S. Forces Korea commander General Curtis Scaparotti's recent statement to reporters in Washington that he "believes" that North Korea has the capabilities to build nuclear-tipped missiles, although he has no evidence to confirm that assumption. Wang's remarks also appeared to be an attempt to frame China's position on the ongoing issue of the nuclear-armed "sick man of Asia" before the APEC summit, where it is likely to be a major agenda item.

The APEC summit in Beijing this year will probably dance around the North Korean nuclear issue, as was the case at past summits. Regional eyes will instead be focused on the "history issue" and whether President Xi Jinping, in the traditional Chinese role of host, offers a handshake to Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe. Abe brought this issue to the forefront once again by his visit last December to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, which contains the spirit tablets of convicted war criminals. In the fixation over history, Kim Jong-un will likely once again get a pass on his nuclear arsenal.

As the European heads of state fretted but ultimately did little about the "sick man of Europe" until disaster engulfed the continent, so the Asian powers at APEC will likely continue to fret about the "sick man of Asia" but take few coordinated actions. Kim Jong-un, cane in hand, will continue to hobble forward with his nuclear arsenal, made possibly even more menacing with delivery capability in the form of nuclear-tipped missiles.

If the spoiled and belligerent actions of the "sick man of Asia" lead to regime instability in Pyongyang, Beijing does have Kim Jong-un's older half-brother Kim Jong-nam waiting in the wings in exile under its protection. Periodic diplomatic calls by the United States and others for a "complete, verifiable, and irreversible" denuclearization of North Korea, though, remain a pipe dream. North Korea, thus, will continue to slowly spiral downward toward ultimate disintegration, like the Ottomans a century ago, with one important difference—the sick man in this case is armed with nuclear weapons. ♦

The Afghan Handover

It's not too late for the president to rethink his arbitrary end date

By Jonathan Foreman

Kabul

With less than two months to go until the end of the mission, the International Security Assistance Force headquarters in Kabul can feel a little forlorn. You still encounter an amazing mix of uniforms, headgear, ethnicities, and accents, with Macedonian troops brushing shoulders with soldiers from Mongolia. The gym is still packed at all hours. There are still civilian contractors walking around with pistols strapped importantly to their hips. But the national support element clubhouses are empty, the PXs are closing, and major ISAF participants like the French and Canadians are long gone. An organization that was once so large its operational command had its own separate base at Kabul airport and was in command of 150,000 troops from 48 nations—a quarter of the world's countries—is shrinking rapidly.

U.S. Army Black Hawk at Kabul airport

In a huge and complicated engineering operation, vast bases are being closed and stripped, or handed over along with their power and water plants to Afghan forces who may or may not be able to staff and operate them effectively. ISAF, which had already largely shifted during the course of 2014 from a combat mission to one described as "train, assist, advise," is now down to 34,000 personnel; there will be little more than 10,000 by the end of the year.

Of course, the war is not over. Come January, ISAF will morph into a NATO-led partnership called Resolute Support Afghanistan. "A noncombat mission in a combat environment" as one foreign colonel called it, Resolute Support is supposed to train, advise, and assist Afghan security institutions in what you might call their higher functions: budgeting, corruption oversight, civil-military relations, recruitment, strategy and planning, and intelligence gathering.

The plan is to have a hub in Kabul or Bagram and four or five spokes. The Germans will run the training and advisory command at Mazar in the North, the Italians will do the same in Herat in the West, and the United States will be in charge of the other bases, which are likely to be in Kandahar, Jalalabad, and Bagram.

Planning for the new mission, including raising the required number of troops, was severely delayed by ex-president Karzai's refusal to sign a Status of Forces Agreement and Bilateral Security Agreement, and also by the election crisis over the summer. NATO is now frantically trying to ensure that it has the 12,000 soldiers it calculates are the minimum needed for the mission to work. If it doesn't get the full complement of troops from NATO and 14 partner states, Resolute Support will be cut down to only four spokes. That would not be a good thing, either for the training mission or for the wider goals of the alliance in Afghanistan.

America and its allies need their own sources of intelligence in Afghanistan. This is not simply because Afghan corps commanders have a tendency to exaggerate Taliban numbers in an effort to get more funds and more support. It's also because the drawdown has prompted neighboring states—some concerned about the vacuum, others malevolent—to increase their activity in Afghanistan.

The Resolute Support advisers also need to be able to defend themselves should things go wrong. Although the safety of the foreign advisers will ultimately depend on the Afghan Security Forces, there is a "force protection" element built into Resolute Support; it is not clear if it is nearly large or strong enough.

The rebranded NATO-led organization will shift the training, advice, and assistance from the tactical realm to Afghanistan's ministries and corps commands. The hope

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is to make the Afghan government and military leadership capable of sustaining their 350,000-strong forces in the field.

This will be a considerable challenge. For a host of cultural, political, and historical reasons, it can be much easier to teach Afghan soldiers infantry tactics and weapons handling than to impress the essentials of modern logistics, joint operations, and fire support on their senior commanders, or to get the generals and politicians to ensure that soldiers and police are consistently, adequately paid and supplied with food, water, and fuel.

On the other hand, one of the things that quickly becomes apparent if you spend time at ISAF headquarters in Kabul or in the regional commands, or if you visit the specialized bases where ISAF personnel are "training the trainers," is that after more than a decade in the country, and many mistakes, ISAF's advisers really "get" Afghans and Afghanistan.

The learning curve was long and was not helped by rotations of troops and units that all but ensured the frequent loss of hard-earned institutional knowledge. The ISAF personnel you meet these days, however, are not only impressively able and experienced (it's common to meet officers, enlisted troops, and civilians who have done multiple tours) but also movingly devoted to Afghanistan.

As you might expect, they have few of the illusions that beset many of the first commanders and aid workers who arrived here in 2002; but neither do they tend to be so cynical about getting things done "the Afghan way" that they're willing turn a blind eye to rank incompetence and corruption.

On the Afghan side, if you speak to the generals about international assistance you inevitably hear a litany of requests and complaints—they need more heavy weapons, more close air support, and of course more money. Relay those complaints and requests to ISAF commanders and you're likely to hear depressing and comical anecdotes, such as the recent discovery by an ISAF officer of an Afghan Army warehouse filled with brand new NATO-supplied high-tech anti-IED devices. The Afghan National Army did not know it had been supplied with these devices because the troops that accepted delivery were essentially illiterate and had no idea what was in the boxes.

As time goes on, though, such debacles seem to be less frequent, not least because illiteracy is dramatically lower both in the army and in Afghanistan in general. It's now easier for the government and the military to hire people who can fill out the forms upon which tasks like the supply of spare parts depend and use the computers that are the basis of all the management systems that ISAF has tried to teach.

A combination of accumulated effort and accumulated cultural awareness has enabled ISAF to transform the way the Afghan Army is paid. Some 85 percent of the soldiers now have salaries paid directly into personal bank accounts they can access through ATMs installed at all the big Afghan bases. This is a revolutionary change, as formerly they were paid in cash from money supplied to their corps commanders—with all the potential for mischief that you might expect. Many Afghan soldiers are said to believe that they were given a 25 percent pay raise this year; they weren't, it was just that for the first time they got their full salaries unaffected by the generals' skimming.

It can be much easier to teach Afghan soldiers infantry tactics and weapons handling than to impress the essentials of modern logistics, joint operations, and fire support on their senior commanders, or to get the generals and politicians to ensure that soldiers and police are consistently, adequately paid and supplied with food, water, and fuel.

It's not a foolproof system. It's possible that some generals and defense officials will figure out a way to input nonexistent personnel or whole ghost units into the system and take their salaries. But it's one of several instances in which ISAF advisers have come up with mechanisms that make government more efficient while removing opportunities to steal or otherwise abuse the power of the state.

Another example is the way the British officers who set up and advise the Afghan National Officers Academy (sometimes called the "Sandhurst in the Sand" after the U.K.'s equivalent of West Point) established a selection system highly resistant to the usual nepotism and tribal influence. All candidates who come to the academy at Qargha are given randomly assigned identity numbers before they take a week of physical and academic tests. Only one person on the entire base has the list that matches numbers to names—the British colonel in charge of the training team. That means that the Afghan commander and his staff can honestly tell any powerful individual who contacts them hoping his influence will ensure the selection of a particular candidate that they are simply unable to game the system for him.

On the purely military side of things, thanks to years of hard work by NATO and ISAF trainers and advisers, units of the Afghan National Army not only can fight in an organized and effective way, but are often more proactive than they used to be. This, along with the shift to "Afghan-led" operations, is one of the reasons why the Taliban

suffered such high casualties this year. Not only was the 2014 "fighting season" Afghan-led and largely successful, but the security forces managed to protect a massive double election process that the Taliban had sworn to disrupt.

On the other hand, the United States and ISAF allowed the ANA's better units to get used to being ferried to the battlefield in American helicopters and to have highly effective ISAF close air support on speed dial; next year they will have to do without both. They do have helicopters of their own—and will have more, along with a score of Tucano ground attack planes—but beginning in 2015 the Afghan Army and police will no longer have even the possibility of consistent support and backup from first-world air forces, and no one knows how they will do.

In general, Afghan realities are complex and confusing. The more you talk to people here, the more contradictory stories you hear, and the harder it is to get a sense of how things are really going. Some people say with confidence that the Taliban is increasingly fractured and has lost much of its raison d'être with the departure of most foreign forces; others insist that Mullah Omar's Quetta Shura retains enough influence to be a useful interlocutor. Some foreign officials scoff at the way their Afghan counterparts blame insurgency and terrorism on Pakistan's intelligence service; others regret the failure of Washington and its allies to put more pressure on Islamabad to stop sponsoring terror groups like the Haqqani network.

Afghan special forces training with counter-IED equipment

On the one hand, corruption, incompetence, and a leadership culture shaped by a toxic combination of Soviet-style and Central Asian warlordism are rife in the Afghan military establishment. On the other hand, the tactical skill and courage of much of the Afghan Army is undeniable. Some senior ISAF and Afghan Army commanders insist that the Afghan Local Police program, which enlists villagers in local defense forces, has generally been a success; others are equally convinced that the ALP are unreliable at best and prone to banditry and moonlighting for the Taliban.

Still, even off the record, the ISAF commanders both at the top and in the training missions tend to be relatively optimistic about the direction Afghanistan is going. They draw considerable comfort from the performance of the Afghan Security Forces during the 2014 fighting season, and in particular during the two elections. If there was ever a time in which the Afghan military might have split along ethnic and regional lines it would have been in between the two elections. The fact that nothing of the sort took place arguably outweighs an ongoing lack of cooperation between the army and the country's many police forces and the ability of insurgent groups to carry out high-profile attacks in some areas.

They can see that in terms of trends within Afghanistan time is on their side. With every passing year the proportion of the adult population that is young, literate, and either urban or connected to the world beyond the village by mass media, mobile phone, and Internet grows by leaps and bounds, while the backward conditions that created warlordism and then the Taliban are becoming a distant memory.

Some see signs of an osmotic influence. Many Afghans have had more than a decade of exposure to professionalism, to a modern, Western style of military leadership, to the advantages of merit-based promotion, and to organizational cultures that prize individual responsibility.

If you go to, say, the Afghan special forces training base at Camp Commando on the outskirts of Kabul, you can see the effect of this. The officers there from the commanding general down are fit and serious with little sign of that well-fed indolence that indicates high status in many Middle Eastern and Asian societies. While there are still some older generals in the Afghan Army who sport airborne or ranger patches in empty imitation of American advisers, the officers and NCOs here wear patches they have actually earned at elite schools in the United States or Europe. They come back from those crucibles with fundamentally altered ideas of rank and hierarchy.

That said, the ISAF and NATO leaders here were all shaken to some degree by the election crisis and by the way that Karzai's delay in signing the Status of Forces and Bilateral Security agreements risked a total pullout of foreign forces. The fact that the Taliban was unable to obstruct the election and the dispute was finally resolved in the form of a nascent national unity government was therefore reassuring.

They are also all well aware of the political problems here that will require international involvement and large-scale donation for decades to come. For instance, there is no way that Afghanistan with its limited government revenue

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could by itself sustain security forces of any significant size for decades to come. They fear, as do many Afghan politicians, that without foreign military forces on the ground, and with new crises emerging in the Middle East and Africa, Western donors may lose interest in the country.

They also think that the timeline of the new mission is far too short. NATO has not specified an end date for Resolute Support. Theoretically it could last until the end of the Bilateral Security Agreement two decades from now. But in practice it is set to finish by the end of 2016, because of President Obama's insistence that all U.S. troops be gone by then. His plan for half of the U.S. contingent to be pulled out by the end of 2015, regardless of conditions on the ground, essentially rips the heart out of the whole exercise. It will leave the training mission understaffed and largely undefended.

The president's politically determined end date for Resolute Support, like his previous 2014 deadline, undermines the mission in several ways. It will encourage the insurgents, who know they just have to hold on for two years. It discourages ambivalent allies and supporters in Afghanistan and abroad. It will demoralize soldiers and civilians who know they will have to leave regardless of where their mission stands. And it may well encourage a cynical "screw-it" attitude on the part of personnel who understandably don't want to be killed or maimed for a cause that the U.S. government clearly does not believe in.

The new president, Ashraf Ghani, has indicated that the duration of Resolution is too short. Senior NATO leaders, both military and civilian, Afghan government officials, and members of civil society, the people at the top of the international aid effort here, and even the reflexively cynical Kabul press corps, all agree. All of them are hoping against hope that the disaster of Iraq will inspire the president to revise his decision. Certainly you would think that all that has happened in Syria and Iraq might prompt the administration and its supporters in the U.S. media and think-tank world to be less complacent about the fate of Afghanistan.

The one thing that has given hope to many people here at ISAF is that Germany's Angela Merkel is said to have given a classified briefing to the Bundestag in which she said that Germany would push for a longer mission. If President Obama could be persuaded by her example to go for a condition-related date of departure, rather than the rigid deadline he has so far embraced, then perhaps the vast amount of effort and sacrifice, blood and treasure, spent in Afghanistan will not have been given in vain. ♦

The first Earth Day, New York (1970)

Clearing the Air

A refreshing account of the environmental movement. BY STEVEN F. HAYWARD

One criticism that can be made of Patrick Allitt is that he usually writes with the historian's "objective" detachment, concealing his own opinions or conclusions about his subject matter. His previous histories, on religion and on American conservatism, are very well done; but at the end you have no idea whether Allitt approves of, or agrees with, any of the figures or ideas he treats.

That is not the case with this new history of postwar environmentalism in America. He explains in the preface that his editors at Penguin "wanted me not just to describe and explain the environmental debates of this era but to stake out a clear position." This he has done. But the result is a lovely orphan of a book that deserves widespread readership and course adoption yet is likely to end up in the literary equivalent of a foster home. It is an orphan because it is critical of the established environmental orthodoxies (especially on climate change) while not fully aligning itself with the most vocal critics of environmentalism, who tend to demand unequivocal red meat. As such, *A Climate of Crisis* represents a commendable risk on Penguin's part.

Such is the polarization of environmentalism these days that, from a publishing point of view, the safest path is to go all-in with one of the fortified camps, deploying the usual set-piece artillery volleys about neo-Malthusianism versus market cornucopianism.

A Climate of Crisis
America in the Age of Environmentalism
by Patrick Allitt
Penguin Press, 336 pp., $29.95

Steven F. Hayward is the Ronald Reagan distinguished visiting professor at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Public Policy.

SANTI VISALLI / GETTY IMAGES

The virtue of Allitt's history is a fresh approach to familiar themes and controversies, and from a perspective only occasionally brought to bear on the subject. Even if he has a few details wrong, or incomplete, he gets the larger story right. While he ratifies conventional sensibilities about the permanence of environmental problems—between the Malthusian pessimists and the optimists who think environmental problems are manageable—Allitt doesn't hesitate to declare, "My own view is that the optimists have been right on most of these questions." This conclusion, stated at the outset, is uncongenial to environmentalists and inconvenient to journalists, who tend to be environmental activists with bylines.

Environmentalism is often traced to 19th-century Romanticism or Theodore Roosevelt-era conservationism. But Allitt chooses to start his timeline with the arrival of the atomic bomb at the end of World War II. The Bomb represented something new: Previous apocalyptic specters were thought to be the work of God, or chance; but with the Bomb, the prospect of a purely man-made apocalypse had come of age. Environmentalism, Allitt suggests, became a free rider to this new anthro-apocalyptic mood, as media sensationalism combined with the desire of environmental scientists to get a piece of the action. Add to this mix the "crisis entrepreneurs" (my term) of environmental activism, and the subsequent bureaucracy created around it, and you have all the pieces in place for the bitterly polarized world of today.

Allitt decries the extreme polarization over the environment while affirming the importance of environmental problems. He gives good summary accounts of the main episodes and figures of early modern environmentalism, from the deadly 1948 smog siege of Donora, Pennsylvania, to the Cuyahoga River fires of the 1950s and '60s—along with sketches of Rachel Carson, Paul Ehrlich, Garrett Hardin, and Barry Commoner, among others. But early on, he lays out the ground for discounting the central outlook of environmentalists without directly calling them to task for their intellectual errors.

For example, Allitt writes: "History also demonstrates that there is a vital link between industrialization, wealth, and environmentalism. Only wealthy societies practice environmental protection on a significant scale." Moreover, the developing world has not the luxury of adhering to the whims of wealthy Western environmentalists precisely because environmentalism is a luxury good: "In the early stages, however, it is much better to have 'dirty' industrialization than none at all. Industrialization is the only way for societies to overcome mass poverty."

He pours subtle scorn on Paul Ehrlich and the population bomb crowd, recalling some embarrassing statements of regret that malaria had been conquered and shocking indifference to the human rights violations that China's one-child policy requires. He also notes the "authoritarian overtones" that accompany many environmental enthusiasms.

These and other hard-won truths have gained grudging acceptance among many environmentalists, and one of Allitt's stronger points is his tribute to the many figures who contested the simple-minded Malthusianism of environmentalism but who also tend to be ignored or slighted in most histories. It is long past time for the more complete recognition Allitt gives to the trenchant criticisms and revisions of environmental thought from Julian Simon, Petr Beckmann, Wilfred Beckerman, Aaron Wildavsky, and Ben Wattenberg. Allitt also offers some subtle treatments of the nonconforming thoughts of figures inside the environmental establishment, such as Daniel Botkin and William Cronin.

The author can be faulted for not giving enough appreciation to the school of thought known as "free market environmentalism" and the widening circle of revisionism in environmental economics this small but potent group has initiated. Allitt hastily lumps the FME school with the "Wise Use" movement, which was a very different and more directly political phenomenon. Likewise, Allitt's account of "deep ecology" (such as the radical Earth First! movement) downplays its significance and influence: "The radicals' impact on national policy was negligible," he thinks. Moreover, "the radicals were a valuable part of the era's environmental debates." To the contrary; the Earth First! crazies enabled so-called mainstream organizations, such as Greenpeace, to make considerable headway with equally extreme demands, which, while seldom fully successful, always abetted overregulation by the Environmental Protection Agency and other agencies.

But *A Climate of Crisis* is a history, not a policy analysis, and while one might wish for more detail on any one of these figures or arguments, it would have made for a much longer book. And whatever transient weaknesses arise from the author's blessed existence outside the deep weeds of this vexing subject is more than made up for in his splendid chapter on climate change. Here, Allitt bows not at all to the conventional pieties. Once again, as a historian, he does not try to wade into any of the main points of the scientific controversies. Instead, his historical perspective tells him that "predictions have always said far more about the world in which they were made than about actual future realities." He's even optimistic that the next generation of scientists will relish taking down the "consensus" of the present generation, because that's how science often works.

Better still, Allitt engages in some useful thought experiments that policy wonks seldom put forward:

> [F]ew have paused to ask: How would we benefit now if your grandparents and great-grandparents had exercised more self-restraint and self-denial [with regard to fossil fuel use]? Would we live better if they had exercised greater prudence and self-control? In most instances the answer is surely no. . . . The rising human carbon footprint may be troublesome, but it is a side effect of the creation of immense benefits. The search for remedies is worthwhile so long as it does not do more harm to society than the ostensible benefits it seeks to achieve.

Why can't more Republicans, rightly skeptical of the conventional climate agenda, state the matter like this? The real value of Allitt's book for the political class may well be that it invites them to embrace its central disposition that "environmental problems are *manageable* problems." The worst thing that can happen to environmentalism is for Americans to figure out that environmental problems are not catastrophic, but normal problems to be addressed in a routine way.

Patrick Allitt's wide-gauge historical approach is a valuable complement to the many scientific and policy critiques that have piled up over the years. At the moment, *A Climate of Crisis* is not being widely reviewed or discussed because it doesn't conform recognizably to the usual fault lines. But sometimes understatement from a fresh perspective is more effective than repeated attempts to deliver hammer blows. ♦

B&A

The Jaundiced Eye

An English satirical talent hits his stride.

BY WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Although Edward St. Aubyn has received handsome praise from a number of more than respectable novelists and critics, my sense is that he is still something of a secret, less known than he should be to readers who try to keep up with contemporary fiction.

What brought him to significant attention was the issuing, in 2012, of the *Patrick Melrose Novels*, a collection of four books in a sequence that concluded in 2011 with a fifth book, *At Last*. Although there is much that is satiric and comic in the sequence, neither word is the right label for these novels, the protagonist of which is an aristocratic, highly literate Englishman whose life is traced from his devastating childhood to his troubled adulthood. Since a subtle combination of the harrowing and the hilarious makes the Melrose books one of the finest achievements in recent decades, some consideration of them is in order before turning to St. Aubyn's new novel, a freewheeling fantasy about the machinations of a Booker-type prize committee.

Never Mind, which launched the Melrose series in 1992, features the sexual abuse of Patrick as a child by his monstrous father, David, whose other misdeeds include the rape of his wife, Eleanor, which eventuated in Patrick's birth. In the second novel, *Bad News* (all have snappy two-word titles), Patrick, now deep into alcohol and hard drugs, travels to New York to secure his deceased father's ashes while engaging in a terrifying two-day stretch of over-the-top injections and consumption. In *Some Hope*, which follows, a stay at a treatment center and ensuing sobriety, though of a tenuous sort, sees him functioning as one of many characters in a large house party in Gloucestershire, attended by a feisty and unpleasant Princess Margaret. *Mother's Milk*, next in the sequence (and St. Aubyn's best novel), shows Patrick as father to two boys: the impossibly articulate Robert, age 5, and Thomas, only recently born. The final novel, *At Last*, is set at Patrick's mother's funeral and offers a roving look at the cast of characters, most of them met previously. At the end of the book, Patrick, separated from his wife and children, determines to make an effort toward possible atonement.

Lost for Words
by Edward St. Aubyn
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 272 pp., $26

Reviewing the Melrose books, James Wood called them "some of the strangest of contemporary novels. . . . On every page of St. Aubyn's work is a sentence or a paragraph that prompts a laugh, or a moment of enriched comprehension." Wood found St. Aubyn to be a colder, more savage writer than either Evelyn Waugh or Oscar Wilde, distinguished predecessors in the line of acerb wit. One of St. Aubyn's sentences gets at the central concern of all these novels: Patrick, apropos the difficulty in giving up things one is addicted to, tells his ex-lover Julia, "Forget heroin. Just try giving up irony, that deep-down need to mean two things at once, or be in two places at once, not to be there for the catastrophe of a fixed meaning."

Other sentences, taken more or less at random from *Mother's Milk*, show that Patrick's (and St. Aubyn's) irony always contains a little kick of surprise. Thinking about taking his infant Thomas to visit, for the first time, his virtually speechless grandmother, who is confined to a nursing home, Patrick muses: "She wouldn't be able to say much, but then neither would Thomas. . . . They might get on really well." Of his dependence on an anti-anxiety medication, Patrick admits that "he definitely had a Tamazepan problem, namely, that it wasn't strong enough." Of his wife's mother, Kettle, we are informed: "Kettle was a supreme source of useless advice, fed by the deep wells of her own uselessness as a mother." When Patrick imagines a superhero, he is to be called Whateverman: "Not an action hero like Superman or Spiderman, but an inaction hero, a hero of resignation."

There is a wonderful episode when the family goes to New York City, and on the plane, an obese family tries to wedge themselves into seats bordering the Melroses; Robert dubs them The Airbags, their vague faces "merely sketches on the immensity of their

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bodies." Food is especially toxic in the novels: Dessert at the house of some unpleasant acquaintances consists of "a slimy mound of custard in a puddle of caramel." The horrible Venus Pizza, a foodery in New York where the Melroses mistakenly find themselves, has a handwritten sign in the window stating "GOD BLESS OUR TROOPS," which gave no hint of the "disgusting food that was being prepared indoors." An unbelievable combination of pineapple, Swiss cheese, and smoked chicken, all served with French fries and onion rings, elicits from Robert the following: "Everything is 'mouthwatering' . . . what does that mean? That you need a huge glass of water to wash away the taste?" To which his father replies, "It's more like a police report on what they found in someone's dustbin than a dish."

This new novel is a slighter effort than the Melrose ones, but it is no less effective in its skewering of the so-called Elysian Book Prize committee, with its five feckless members and their dubious procedures to decide on the year's outstanding novel. There's no focus on a central figure: Things move quickly from one to another committee member, as well as to assorted related characters. The committee's chairman, Malcolm Craig, is a onetime undersecretary of state for Scotland who lost his job as the result of an ill-advised speech and is hoping to recoup his losses. He gets his secretary to skim through the prize submissions for ones with a "Scottish flavour," and she comes up with three titles, the most impressive being *wot u starin at*, a "harsh but ultimately uplifting account of life on a Glasgow housing estate." Malcolm wants the committee to choose a novel that "really hits the spot when it came to new voices, the real concerns of ordinary people, and the dark underbelly of the Welfare State."

St. Aubyn's skill as a master mimic of language, both dead and pretentious, is strongly on display, and is found equally in the excerpts he provides from the various submissions and in the thoughts and aspirations of the panel's members. The panel also includes Jo Cross, whose byword is Relevance; Penny Feathers, herself a second-rate novelist whose hair in middle age has remained "resolutely mahogany, matching her eyes, but increasingly at odds with the sad story told by the sags and creases of her loosening skin"; and Tobias Benedict, who misses all the meetings because he's touring the country playing Estragon in a hip-hop version of *Waiting for Godot*. The only sympathetic member (and one of the few such characters in the book as a whole) is Vanessa Shaw, a sharp-talking Cambridge don who believes only in "good writing" and is openly scornful of the other members' different agendas. When chairman Malcolm, laying down the ground rules for awarding the £80,000, declares that the social responsibility of the committee demands they award the prize to someone who really needs the money, Vanessa retorts, "It's lucky Proust and Nabokov aren't competing this year . . . or Henry James or Tolstoy." She is broken in upon by Jo, who charges her with showing off how much she's been reading.

Edward St. Aubyn

SIMON HOLLINGTON / ZUMA PRESS / NEWSCOM

The plethora of characters makes St. Aubyn's shifts from one to another often seem less than inevitable; but he gives ample attention to Sonny Bandanpur, a rich Indian whose 2,000-page novel, *The Mulberry Tree*, does not make the Long List (preparatory to the final Short List). Sonny determines to bring his devoted man of all seasons, Mansur, to the awards dinner for the purpose of assassinating Malcolm. But Sonny's Aunt Lakshmi ("Auntie," as she is known) has received a place on the Short List for her book *The Palace Cookbook*, a compilation of Indian recipes handed down through the ages and mistaken by the judges for a novel. When interpreted through the lens of Foucault, it becomes a serious contender for the prize, thus somewhat abating Sonny's killer rage.

St. Aubyn is marvelous at imagining brilliant computer programs to aid the hardworking novelist, such as a "highly addictive software" called Ghost, which can be upgraded to Gold Ghost and Gold Ghost Plus. The hack novelist Penny Feathers finds it extremely useful:

> When you typed in a word, "refugee" for instance, several useful suggestions popped up: "clutching a pathetic bundle," or "eyes big with hunger"; for "assassin" you got "ice water running through his veins," and "his eyes were cold narrow slits." . . . When you looked up "thought," you found "food for" and "perish the." She could scroll and click, scroll and click all day with the word count going up in leaps and bounds.

There is also Alternate Narrative, an "empowering and proactive" software that allows the reader to choose alternative outcomes. St. Aubyn's eye and ear for the fatuous is everywhere on display: Penny, an especially good target of humor, opines that "the wonderful thing about historical novels is that one gets to meet so many famous people." And the physically repellent get their due, as a slimy literary agent named John Elton sports "a disastrous hair transplant": "The raw red patches of stitched skin formed little islands of dying hair in a shining ocean of baldness." Quite beautiful, really.

Although there are a few "positive" characters in this stew of nauseous bookchat and moral sleaziness, we come away from *Lost for Words* thinking less about the turpitudes of London literary pseuds than about the author's extraordinary ability to make us delight

in fraudulent writers and writing—in what the committee's chairman thinks are "fresh, original, and exciting new voices." Henry James wrote of Anthony Trollope's "complete appreciation of the usual." Edward St. Aubyn's complete appreciation is directed rather at the distasteful and the bathetic, made vividly present through sentences that are always alive and crackling. ♦

B&A

Polishing the Brass

A critical look at commanders and commanders in chief. **BY JAMES M. BANNER JR.**

Maxwell Taylor, Robert McNamara, John F. Kennedy (1963)

In a country as disposed to war as the United States has been, the relationship between the commander in chief and his admirals and generals is as critical as that between the president and Congress. Just how critical that relationship may be is the theme of this book, the first full-length history of its subject. It should be required reading in the White House, the Pentagon, and Foggy Bottom—in this, and every succeeding administration. The history it relates is sobering.

Matthew Moten is the kind of authority you'd want for a guide through the subject: As the former head of West Point's history department, an Iraq war veteran, and a former legislative aide to the Army chief of staff, he has the broad field and staff experience essential for understanding political-military relations in their many forms—and from inside. He's thorough, disenthralled, critical, and balanced in his judgments. No one can dismiss what he writes.

Presidents and Their Generals
An American History of Command in War
by Matthew Moten
Belknap Press, 456 pp., $39.95

Moten isn't the first historian, the first military officer, or the first elected official to bewail the current state of civil-military relations. Among historians, Richard H. Kohn has preceded him with the greatest authority and urgency, although not with Moten's narrative sweep or particular focus. Moten concentrates on what he calls political-military relations, a narrower set of connections than those between the military and larger society. Even then, Moten has unfortunately little to say about the mutual responsibilities that Congress and the military may have to each other: *Presidents and Their Generals* focuses hard on the office of the president and the top officers of the major armed services.

High-level American political-military relations, Moten believes, have gone through three phases in our history. The first, lasting from George Washington's presidency in the 1790s until Abraham Lincoln's in the 1860s, was a kind of exploratory season when roles and conventions were cobbled into being, and senior military and civilian officers gathered a sense of what might and might not work to create and implement military strategy. The second, from Lincoln's presidency through Franklin Roosevelt's in the 1940s, was the high point—the classical age—of relations between presidents and their senior commanders, decades during which understanding between the White House and the military services was functional and firm, and roles were clear. From the Truman presidency on—the third phase—things have fallen apart.

At the heart of the best relations between presidents and their generals, Moten emphasizes, is "mutual trust born of candor, respect, demonstrated competence, a shared worldview, and an expectation that each partner would take responsibility for the decisions made." Conflicts, "both natural and inherent," will exist. But mature professionals—the presidents representing political society and the generals (Moten specifically emphasizes generals, not admirals) representing an institutional hierarchy—can work through them. The best have done so.

As he did in so many respects, George Washington established the template for the entire history of

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James M. Banner Jr. is a historian in Washington.

political-military relations in his bearing and acts during the American Revolution. Resisting pressure from others, fending off a prospective *putsch*, and swallowing his pride, Washington resolutely kept military leadership subordinate to political authority. Had he not done so, the nation's history, to say nothing of the military clauses of the Constitution, would have been vastly different. Not that Washington had it easy, or avoided serious mistakes; but his great stature ensured that he would not face opposition during his presidency from his top military officers—or be held to account publicly, as his successors were.

Once Washington left the scene, presidents were in deeper waters. John Adams faced a disloyal secretary of war, whom he eventually had to fire, as well as the opposition of one of Washington's great revolutionary military aides, Alexander Hamilton. It did not help that, until West Point had graduated many young men, military officers did not think of themselves as professionals who had to comport themselves accordingly. Commissions and service assignments were as political as they were military, based on favoritism as much as competency. Even when a president—James K. Polk being a good example—had first-class generals to fight his wars, he could not be sure that they weren't angling for a presidential nomination under the opposition party. Polk, a Democrat, was justified in his suspicions: Both Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor sought the presidency as Whigs. Trust in one's senior officers did not come easily under such circumstances.

Abraham Lincoln opened his presidency in the same fix. The difficulty he had in finding his own trusted supreme commander is an oft-told story. George B. McClellan wouldn't fight, and he undermined Lincoln politically. Only when the president turned to Ulysses S. Grant did he find a commander with whom he could have mutual trust and respect. Together, the pair led the Union to victory. It made things easier that Grant disavowed any interest in the presidency, that both men could grow fast into their respective responsibilities, and that both had what Moten calls "character." The result was "the first true strategic collaboration between a president and supreme commander in American history, one that has yet to be surpassed."

It's no doubt that because of his sympathy with Lincoln and Grant (and who could not have it?) Moten's study comes most fully alive as he writes about the almost century-long period after their wartime collaboration when presidents and commanders worked in as close synchrony as is imaginable. Moten's two case studies here are Woodrow Wilson's relations with his European commander, John J. Pershing, and Franklin Roosevelt and his generals, especially George C. Marshall. While I can only mention the nuances of Moten's evaluation of these partnerships, he presents them as generally harmonious and very much to the nation's benefit, even if Pershing exercised military authority too independently, an independence exploited later by Douglas MacArthur. FDR and Marshall—one informal and ebullient, the other formal and correct—had a harder time trusting each other than did Lincoln and Grant. But their eventual mutual confidence and respect, oiled by Harry Hopkins, created the last great partnership between politics and military affairs in the White House.

From then on, relations have gone downhill, and Moten is unsparing in his characterizations and criticisms. Having gained "suzerainty" during World War II, the supreme generals and admirals, against previous experience, secured a place "near the apex of the Washington power structure." They took on institutional, rather than military and advisory, values. The insubordinate MacArthur made all presidents after Truman distrustful of their generals, many of whom, from Dwight Eisenhower's military advisers on, became "company men," part of a "professional assembly line [presidents] could not control." It didn't help that recent wars have been those of choice, making presidents select military chiefs who might offer public support as much as disenthralled advice.

The quintessential story of this era concerns Douglas MacArthur. Had it not been so serious—had he not gone so far beyond the bounds of good sense and controlled ego—MacArthur's conflict with Washington would, as it occasionally can, seem laughable, so egregious was the general and so timid were his superiors in Washington (including Truman) about disciplining him. All misunderstood the need for presidents to be free to involve themselves in military operations to some extent and for generals to think of strategic and international affairs. Then there was John F. Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs, which permanently altered any successor president's confidence in his military counsel. That fiasco also elevated the wily Maxwell Taylor, whom Moten severely criticizes, to be "Kennedy's general"—and subsequently the figure on whom Lyndon Johnson relied too much for bad advice. It was, declares Moten, "dysfunctional political-military relations that initially misled the nation into tragedy in Vietnam" and then kept it mired there.

Moten reserves his most detailed analysis, as well as his severest criticisms, for our most recent presidents, supreme commanders, and cabinet secretaries, and for the institutional structures at the highest level of the executive branch. It's difficult to fully capture the number and sharpness of his strictures. Very few senior officers, both civil and military, escape his arraignment. Much stems from the fact that the chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are no longer required to seek the advice and consent of their service commanders. Colin Powell was as wily as Maxwell Taylor, and more partisan. The reputations of Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, Tommy Franks, and others will not gain by Moten's evaluation of their judgment and behavior. Many others meddle in partisan politics and lend their names, after their service, to one or another of the political parties. Moten is not the

first to call these men to account; but his is the first work to set their actions into historical context.

Nevertheless, Moten is careful to remove some of the onus of error and self-aggrandizement from individuals alone by insisting that "participants on both sides of the [political-military] relationship are handicapped by their own institutional cultures. . . . Admitting that both sides shoulder parts of this responsibility [for the common defense] does no violence to military professionalism." Given the range of Moten's history, it may be unfair to ask for more. After all, a sweeping history cannot be a comprehensive one. Yet one of the missing opportunities in Moten's case-study approach is any attention to two great commanders who became presidents: Andrew Jackson and Dwight Eisenhower. Yes, we learn (as we must) of that other great general-president, George Washington; and another, William Henry Harrison, puts in an appearance, although as military leader alone. But we would have gained much from learning more about how Jackson and Eisenhower, two large historical figures from different eras, one of whom was a supreme commander in the field, moved from one role into another while carrying the residue of the first with them. Given Moten's concerns about the deterioration of relations between presidents and commanders since 1945, it would have been useful to learn what, if anything, an experienced senior officer brings to the White House that those without senior military experience do not.

More regrettably, Moten relies on narrative to make his points. He doesn't draw them together or put his own experience to use by suggesting what specifically—through law, institutional reform, or practice—might be done to improve on recent experience. What, for instance, ought to be undertaken to reform the culture of the Pentagon? He also does not reflect on how it might be possible to build trust between a commander in chief and his most senior generals, or how to prevent too much trust between a few people from leading the nation into disaster. In what resides the "character" that, as in the case of Lincoln and Grant, makes the best relationships work? How do institutions and practices create trust and character? Should they be expected to do so? Moten's brief list of desirable reforms does not begin to approach the difficulties he has astutely portrayed. He would, for instance, reform the National Security Acts of 1947 and 1949 and disband the Joint Chiefs of Staff in favor of a National Military Council whose members would serve renewable two-year terms. But it's hard to see how such few, and entirely institutional, reforms would solve the problems Moten has analyzed.

Nevertheless, *Presidents and Their Generals* makes a signal contribution to the historical knowledge of its subject over the long sweep of our nation's history. It's probably the case that a history of command in war in other nations, and at other times, would reveal more of what Moten's subtitle calls simply an "American history" of its large subject. It's surely the case that Americans need to understand better than they do what might be going on in the highest councils of government as their armed forces march, sail, and fly off to battle. Precisely because it hasn't been a pretty picture in recent decades, the subject is worth the attention of us all. ♦

B&A

Millepied à Terre

Will success in Los Angeles translate to Paris?

BY SOPHIE FLACK

Last month, Benjamin Millepied's contemporary dance collective, the L.A. Dance Project, had its New York debut at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Howard Gillman Opera House. What Millepied has accomplished in two years with LADP is extraordinary: He's assembled private donors to fund the company, managed to attract high-caliber contemporary dancers, and commissioned works from some of the most exciting choreographers, composers, and visual artists working today. But what is most admirable about his approach to directing is his unapologetic programming philosophy: He is anticommercialism, which is risky for a young company. He wishes to challenge his audience and refuses to pander to expectations or wealthy donors.

Millepied himself choreographed the first work of the evening, "Reflections," which was followed by "Murder Ballads," choreographed by New York City Ballet's resident choreographer, Justin Peck. The program concluded with William Forsythe's atmospheric "Quintett." Each work played on the theme of the group dynamic and how individuals fit into the group. All three choreographers seemed interested in experimenting with the range of what classical forms could do and how far they could push things while remaining within some recognizable framework.

Naturally, some were more successful than others.

"Reflections" is aptly titled because it mirrors Millepied's movement aesthetic as a member of NYCB: He favors gentle shifts of weight, soft hands, and quiet landings to loud, bravura movements. While it wasn't the strongest ballet of the evening, I give him mad props for having the chutzpah to include his own ballet in a program alongside two of the greatest choreographers of the 21st century.

Sophie Flack, author of Bunheads, *has contributed to the* Wall Street Journal, *the* Boston Globe, *and* Ballet Review.

And while it's admirable that Millepied credits the five dancers, artist Barbara Kruger, and composer David Lang as collaborators, the effect was that there were simply too many cooks in the kitchen. Many of the dancers are accomplished choreographers in their own right, and Barbara Kruger's billboard-like sets, which gave the space an urban feel, were at odds with David Lang's minimal piano score. Because of the chorus of creative input, the tone felt inconsistent from section to section, sometimes shifting within a single musical phrase. Without a central choreographic voice, many of the movements seemed to wash over the score rather than interact with it. The intent to share creativity with other artists isn't intrinsically a problem, but there needs to be a consistent voice dictating the tenor of any piece.

The conclusion explored the group dynamic, but came across as an afterthought: None of the dancers seemed to connect with one another. Millepied's lofty intention, to create something collaborative and interdisciplinary, was ultimately more exciting than the piece itself, and the ballet puttered out at the end.

"Murder Ballads" was a welcome explosion of energy. Twenty-seven-year-old Justin Peck's choreography was nuanced and thoughtfully planned: This is an intelligent work. From the bold sets by Sterling Ruby, made of painted horizontal panels that appear etched away at the surface, to the mathematically considered score, to Peck's ability to showcase each dancer at his or her best—all left me gobsmacked by the talent of one so young.

Peck is known for collaborating with hip musicians, and the score by Bryce Dessner reminded me of Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*. Its live performance by Eighth Blackbird was wonderfully energetic with an upbeat American sensibility. Using balletic forms, traditional structures, and fervent musicality, Peck manages to make classicism feel contemporary and fresh. His dancers leaped backwards, and the complex partnering seemed playful without feeling silly. At one point, the female dancers stepped in time on their partners' torsos, and there was a repetition of palms placed on the floor, a gesture rarely seen in classical ballet. Here, it felt organic.

While plotless, there was a wonderful dialogue between the dancers: Peck is expert at choreographing for a group while showing off individual strength, even as the group dances in unison. Randy Castillo's strikingly sharp shifts of weight and direction and Anthony Bryant's controlled elegance were riveting.

"Quintett," choreographed in 1993 by William Forsythe, is not an easy ballet to sit through. The black, void-like backdrop and Gavin Bryars's haunting score, *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet*, in which a vocal loop is overlaid with orchestration, set us in a no-man's land, a timeless, placeless realm. While the repetitive nature of the score may be grating to some, of the three ballets, this one gets under your skin, and lingers. I found myself humming the lyrics the next day.

It's clear why "Quintett" is one of Forsythe's more obscure works. Still, there were some terrific moments: Rachelle Rafailedes pressed her cheek to the floor in a sort of shoulder-stand while propped against her partner, unfurling her legs into a straddle-split. It was beautiful. And the way Julia Eichten held her palm against her partner Randy Castillo's head as he turned was wonderfully unexpected, especially in the midst of a largely bleak and meditative piece.

"Quintett" seemed an example of Benjamin Millepied's insistence on challenging his audience instead of pandering, and challenge us he did. Not surprisingly, the audience seemed a little lost at times: At least one person left in the middle of the performance, and there was an ill-timed (if well-intended) smattering of applause in the middle of one musical phrase. Despite the difficulty of the piece, "Quintett" received a standing ovation—although it was unclear if it was for the final ballet or for the company in general.

Scene from 'Murder Ballads'

JULIETA CERVANTES

On November 1, Millepied assumed the coveted position of director of one of the most elite dance institutions in the world, steeped in the classical tradition: the Paris Opera Ballet. This is a far cry from a nine-person, privately funded collaborative, and he acknowledges that, in Paris, he won't be able to mimic what he's done with L.A. Dance Project: "It's not about shaking things up or being provocative, it's about making smart decisions." He says that he intends to remain involved with LADP on an artistic level, but the company will be run by others. It will be interesting to see how that works. ♦

B&A

In the Comfort Zone

Beating the heat with the help of technology.

BY THOMAS JOHNSON

Air conditioning is a hot topic in the nation's capital. An article in the September 16 *Washington Post* announced, "The Obama administration is preparing to introduce major steps to phase out production of a popular chemical coolant [R134-a] used in refrigerators and air conditioners, citing growing evidence that the substance is contributing to the warming of the planet." That story serendipitously coincided with the release of this book, in which the author explores how the current political clamor surrounding air conditioning is just the latest in a long series of passionate responses to artificial cooling that have run parallel to its century-long evolution.

One might assume that a history of air conditioning would necessarily be a dry, academic exercise; but Salvatore Basile makes clear that he is more interested in exploring the nuances of changing societal attitudes toward air conditioning than in "trac[ing] the technical development of" the invention. This will come as a relief to readers more inclined to lively, well-researched nonfiction narratives than scientific manuals. Nevertheless, Basile offers enough information about mechanics to be able to explain cogently, and in layman's terms, why predecessors to the modern air conditioner were ineffective, and why the invention as we know it today succeeded where its forebears had failed.

His descriptions of these various apparatuses, and some of the seminal buildings in which they were first installed in the first half of the 20th century, are augmented by his inclusion of relevant archival drawings, photographs, and advertisements. These are often accompanied by snarky captions: He writes of the primitive Improved Air Cooling Apparatus as "an instant fix for any hot room—that is, as soon as a waterproof vat was nailed up on a nearby wall to hold ice and a bucket was positioned below to catch the runoff."

Cool
How Air Conditioning Changed Everything
by Salvatore Basile
Fordham, 288 pp., $29.95

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

One of the attributes that can make Basile's prose both entertaining and occasionally trying to read is the exasperated tone with which he relates historical attitudes toward (and responses to) summer heat. He scolds 19th-century physicians for insisting that "perspiration-drenched people *never* . . . remedy [overheating] by removing any clothing," and he scoffs at "the lash of Victorian etiquette . . . [that] simply would not admit that there was any such thing as unbearable summertime heat." Given the nature of such attitudes, the reader is more likely than not to laugh and shake his head in disbelief—as Basile seems to intend him to do. On the other hand, Basile's disdain for certain archaic social norms might prove grating for anyone who opens the book with the expectation that the author will maintain a (perhaps old-fashioned?) standard of objectivity.

Nevertheless, Basile's frustration with federal bureaucracy in his discussion of the history of artificial cooling in government buildings will strike a responsive chord among most readers. Throughout a series he entitles "Washington's Hot Air," Basile describes the bipartisan squabbling that long delayed air conditioning from being installed in the Capitol and in the White House—and continued even after the technology had been installed. He relates how both the Senate and House established their own committees on ventilation, the latter declaring in 1928 "that, in the previous 35 years, nearly 300 congressional members had died while in office." While this "statistic was enough to frighten lawmakers into . . . vot[ing] $323,000 for air conditioning to be installed in both the House and Senate chambers," it did not stop Rep. John Rankin, Democrat of Mississippi, from decrying the newly installed system in highly partisan language: "This is regular Republican atmosphere, and it is enough to kill anybody if it continues."

One of the best aspects of Basile's study is that it examines the many institutions that *did* change—mostly for better, but some for worse—because of the advent of air conditioning. Any reader interested in new forms of media that came to prominence in the 20th century—film, radio, television—may be surprised to find how integral air conditioning proved in creating hospitable environments for the production and consumption of entertainment in these new formats. Radio's Clicquot Club Eskimos, for example, would "perform, at least when cameras were around, in fur parkas" as a means of promoting Clicquot Club Ginger Ale: "The show . . . was miserably hot business" until the band relocated to the newly renovated NBC studios, where "they . . . were finally able to make music in air-conditioned comfort." ♦

Thomas Johnson is a writer in Maryland.

B&A

Portrait of an Age

The high-end literary adaptation is now the province of HBO. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

The HBO miniseries *Olive Kitteridge*, featuring the Oscar-winning actress Frances McDormand delivering what may be one of the greatest performances ever recorded, is nothing short of a masterpiece. We have come to expect work at this level from HBO, but it's still interesting to contemplate the cultural changes represented by the fact that *Olive Kitteridge*—an adaptation of Elizabeth Strout's novel-in-stories, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2009—was made for the small screen.

Olive Kitteridge tells the story of a person of no particular significance, a small-town math teacher married to a local pharmacist with whom she has one sullen son. Strout's book is a full-bodied portrait of the Maine town in which Olive has lived all her life. The miniseries zeroes in on Olive specifically over the course of 25 years. We first see her as an old woman on the verge of suicide. The questions director Lisa Cholodenko and screenwriter Jane Anderson ask are these: What has brought Olive to this pass? Why has she fallen into such despair?

The four hours that follow send us and Olive back and forth through a quarter-century to explain. We learn that Olive was and is a profoundly difficult woman, intelligent and no-nonsense and bereft of warmth—especially in contrast to her amiable husband Henry (Richard Jenkins), whose love for Olive seems to baffle them both. And though they are surrounded by the great beauty of the Maine coastline, and though Olive revels in the flowers she cultivates carefully throughout her life, the characters are constantly being made aware of the way in which life can suddenly descend into ugliness and menace, and how, in the lives of every person they meet, there are painful secrets, shameful tragedies, and impossible heartbreaks.

Olive Kitteridge
Directed by Lisa Cholodenko

This sense of fragility is brilliantly rendered by Cholodenko, who can turn an ordinary evening drive through town into a nerve-wracking journey through the Dark Forest. Olive refers to herself as a "witch," and so do the children with whom she interacts throughout; but in her cruelty there is always wisdom, and her pinched worldview features uncommon perception and notes of remarkable grace. *Olive Kitteridge* is an achingly beautiful film that is, unexpectedly, as riveting as a thriller.

In the 1980s or '90s, *Olive Kitteridge* would have been a feature film released by a major studio in time for awards season. A literary adaptation based on a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel was prestige Hollywood's stock-in-trade in those years. But in 2014, studios make very few intimate family dramas of this sort, and even fewer literary adaptations. Their prestige book-based fare is far more likely to be adapted from bestselling nonfiction. The Oscar race for 2014 is looking like a fight between *Unbroken* (based on the Laura Hillenbrand retelling of the amazing life of Louis Zamperini), *American Sniper* (based on Chris Kyle's memoir of his time in Iraq), *The Theory of Everything* (about Stephen Hawking), *The Imitation Game* (about the tormented British codebreaker Alan Turing), and *Big Eyes* (about the painters Walter and Margaret Keane).

Truth to tell, most of Hollywood's high-end literary adaptations have fallen flat, even though they were designed to make their studios proud and win Oscars. It may be that the need to compress their plots to fit a two-hour running time usually makes the stories seem sketchy and incomplete in comparison to what had been on the page. Hollywood has always done a wonderful job of raising fictional junk (like *The Godfather*) to empyrean heights; it has never been anywhere near as successful doing justice to literarily ambitious novels. *Olive Kitteridge* follows the British model of televised literary adaptation. It runs twice as long as it could have run in a theater and, by setting the right pace and tone, captures the essence of Strout's rich book.

The subject matter of *Olive Kitteridge* is also anathema to today's studios. Intimate family dramas of this sort are now almost exclusively consigned to the realm of the "independent film." Cholodenko, who made the much-garlanded lesbian-mom film *The Kids Are All Right* a few years ago, happens to be a master of the grainy, hand-held, artisanal approach that characterizes most indies. But *Olive Kitteridge* wouldn't have worked had it been filmed in that manner; it required a classical cinematic gloss, in which formal camerawork and pristine cinematography serve as an analogue to a novelist's lyrical prose.

That is what HBO's sponsorship made possible; that, and the time and space to tell the story properly. And that is why HBO and Frances McDormand will be winning prizes for *Olive Kitteridge*—and why a two-hour movie version starring Jane Fonda made in 1994 likely would not have. ♦

HOME BOX OFFICE

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

"A flurry of campaigning across the nation as Election Day nears"
—Washington Post, *November 2, 2014*

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BY GRADY F. JEDD, MICHAEL JOHNSTON, AMY SCHAUB-GONZALEZ, JAMES W. MACKY, AND AHMAD AL-ABASI

AP / ROBERT F. BUKATY

A sign in snowy Farmer's Bluff, Minnesota, urges locals to do their duty as citizens, which many in fact did.

With votes in dozens of elections across the nation now cast and counted, the flurry of campaigning that took place in the lead-up to Election Day appears to have come to a sudden close.

For nearly two years, politicians, volunteers, and special interest groups have been engaged in continuous and often contentious campaigning in an effort to affect how other citizens might vote in the election that has just concluded. Most of these people were members of the two major national political parties, either Democrats or Republicans, though some were members of various smaller and independent parties. In the months and weeks before the election, these groups would organize gatherings, often of large numbers of people in public places and with members of the media present. These events were designed to promote specific candidates, who themselves would frequently attend these mass gatherings, making speeches in the hopes of convincing voters to support them. But now, with the election over, all signs seem to indicate that the need for further campaigning may have all but disappeared.

"Well, the election's over, so… no," declared erstwhile senatorial candidate Scott Brown, when pressed about whether he would be holding more campaign events. Indeed, Mr. Brown's reaction appears consistent with the behavior of other former candidates: Trips to campaign offices by Post reporters indicate that many of them are no longer open, or are being packed up. Similarly, most municipal parks and charming local dining establishments show no signs of ongoing or imminent campaigning, and numerous local VFW halls displayed a conspicuous lack of bunting.

That being said, some experts believe that more campaigning could begin very soon. "There's a presidential election in 2016," said White House spokesperson Josh Earnest, referring to the upcoming presidential election in 2016, before concluding, "Who let you in here?"

With another election approaching, indicators appear to be pointing to the possibility that certain factors, which have yet to fully play out, seem likely to indicate

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the weekly Standard

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