

**MAKE MARCO
GREAT AGAIN**
JOHN MCCORMACK

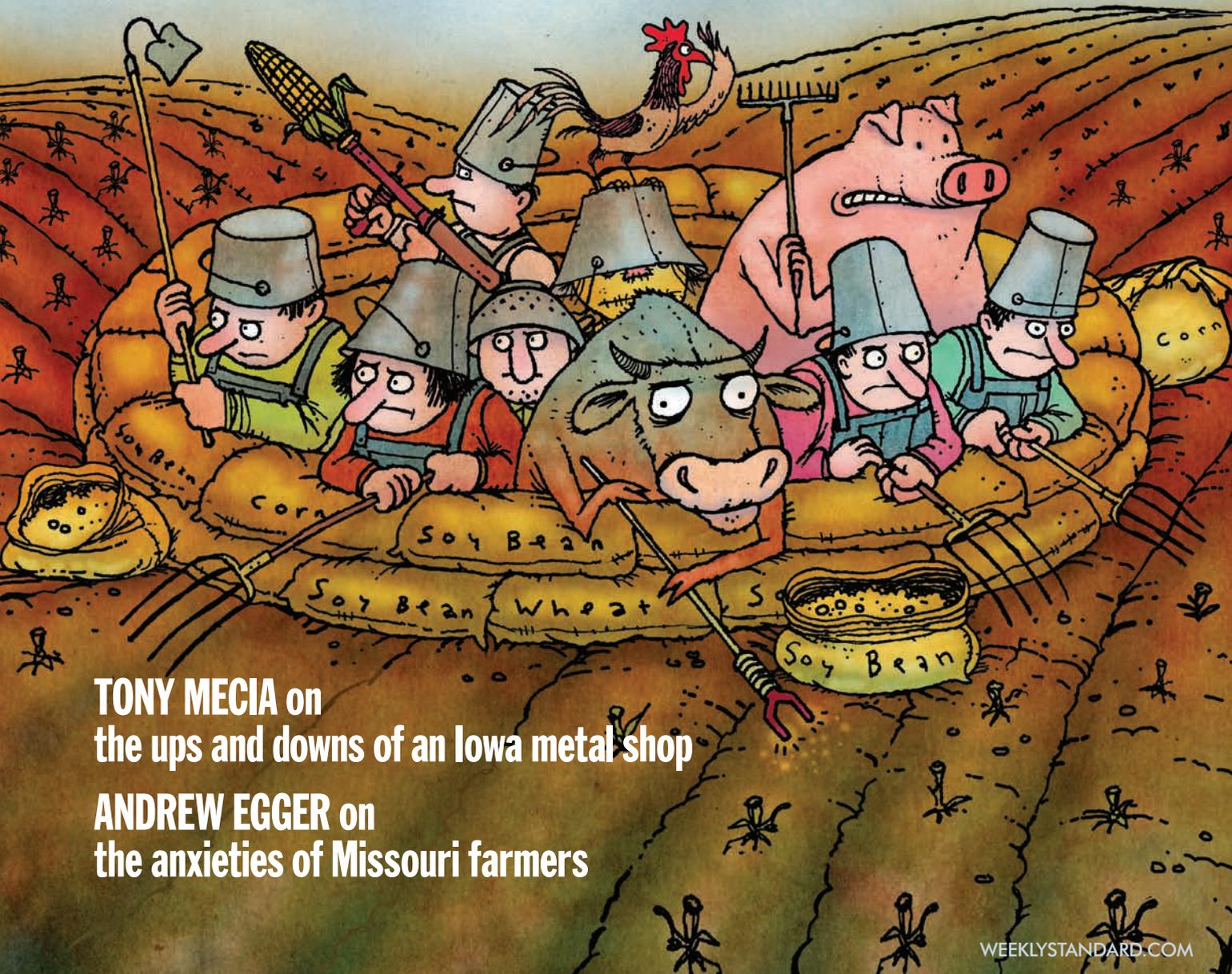
the weekly

Standard

AUGUST 20 / AUGUST 27, 2018

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On the Front Lines of the Trade War



TONY MECIA on
the ups and downs of an Iowa metal shop

ANDREW EGGER on
the anxieties of Missouri farmers

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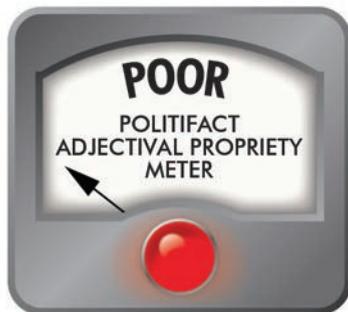


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Fact Check: It Depends!

The fact-checking industry has grown tremendously in recent years, and mostly for good reason. Half-truths, outrageous rumors, and outright fabrications are common enough without the Internet. They are ubiquitous online. When fact-checking is well done (by, for instance, Glenn Kessler at the *Washington Post* or THE SCRAPBOOK's fave, our WEEKLY STANDARD colleague Holmes Lybrand), it aids the intelligent reader's capacity to negotiate the sea of online confusion.

But it's often done poorly—and, as Mark Hemingway has ably documented in these pages over the years, with absurdly obvious political bias. Among the worst offenders: PolitiFact, which in 2012 served as a de facto arm of the Obama reelection campaign. The trouble with fact-checking political claims is that politics is a highly rhetorical sphere: Participants make their



cases with extravagant oratory, one-sided arguments, over-the-top exaggeration, and only occasionally outright lies. It's a place where fact-checking can help, but a bit of flexibility doesn't hurt.

All this came to mind this week when we read a PolitiFact entry on one of Donald Trump's recent remarks. You might think this fact-checking watchdog would have an abundance of material to work with from the 45th president without resorting to

tendentious hairsplitting. But you would be wrong. The Trumpian assertion that moved the PolitiFact's scrutineers to action? This one: "In the second quarter of this year, the United States economy grew at the amazing rate of 4.1 percent." PolitiFact's objection wasn't to the data—the economy really did grow at 4.1 percent in the second quarter—but to the adjective: amazing.

"This is a strong showing in the context of recent history," PolitiFact's Louis Jacobson writes, "and the highest since the third quarter of 2014. But most economists would not use the word 'amazing' to describe it." Remarkable, maybe. Impressive, perhaps. But *amazing*? Come on, Mr. President!

Jacobson's final assessment on Trump's statement: "Strong, but not amazing." Our assessment of his fact check: amazingly dumb. ♦

Fusion for Dummies

Election season is upon us, and you know what that means—idiotic trickery dreamed up by campaign hacks and political consultants.

Consider: New York election law allows candidates to run for office under multiple party labels. Thanks to the state's "fusion candidacy" laws, a smaller party—say, New York's Independence party—can endorse a Democrat or Republican, and that candidate appears on the ballot as its nominee. The upside for the smaller party is that if it garners more than 50,000 votes, it has a guaranteed place on the next election cycle's ballot. The upside for the candidate is that his or her name appears on the ballot more than once.

New York statehouse candidates of both parties do the same thing, as a report in the *New York Times* pointed out, with the weird result that Governor Andrew Cuomo will appear on the same Independence



party ballot line with, for example, Rep. Chris Collins, who has called the governor "a bully, a blackmailer, and an extortionist." Also on the Independence line will be congressional Republicans whom Cuomo is trying to defeat by funding their Democratic opponents.

It's not just New York. The strategy of fusion candidacies is practiced in some other states, too, though perhaps not as competently. In South Carolina, Democratic gubernatorial candidate James Smith tried to

get the nominations of the Green, Libertarian, and Working Families parties. Evidently Smith's genius consultants weren't aware of the state's "sore loser" law that bans candidates from running in a race in which they've already lost a primary. On August 4, the South Carolina Libertarian party voted against Smith as its nominee—meaning he's now lost a primary and may be ineligible to run in the general election. The Smith campaign insists his name was "withdrawn" before the vote, but neither the timing nor the legality of the alleged withdrawal is clear at this point.

The practice of fusion candidacies is a deliberate attempt to take advantage of the dumb and the uninformed—people who vote for a candidate because they see his or her name listed more often than others. There's no evidence that it even boosts the candidate's overall numbers, but consultants get their clients to do it anyway. We suspect Smith will find a way to

LLAMA: BIGSTOCK

stay on the ballot in November, but it would serve him right if he couldn't. ♦

Patronizing the Revolutionaries

In Europe and North America, museums just can't win. It takes wealthy people and large corporations to keep them operating, but left-wing artists and intellectuals don't like wealthy people and large companies.

It's a tough spot to be in, but the Design Museum in London might have seen this debacle coming. The museum this summer hosted an exhibition titled "Hope to Nope: Graphics and Politics 2008-18" featuring politically themed works of graphic artists, from Shepard Fairey's "Hope" poster depicting Barack Obama to various Women's March posters and a grammatically problematic sign reading "It's not about me, it's about we." The exhibition purported to explain "how graphic design and technology have played a pivotal role in dictating and reacting to the major political moments of our time." We're not sure how something could play a pivotal role in dictating and reacting to a series of major moments, but we're reasonably certain that if you're a museum and you feature the creations of a lot of left-wing artist-agitators, you're asking for trouble.

The trouble came when the artists featured in "Hope to Nope" heard, according to the *New York Times*, "that the Design Museum had rented its atrium to Leonardo, one of the world's largest aerospace and defense companies, for a drinks reception in July." They "expressed shock when they learned about the reception, and asked for their works to be removed from the museum."

It must be a blissful world where such a thing is shocking, but the offended artists got more out of it than shock: Not only did they get their work exhibited; they earned media attention about the exhibition and



called attention to their moral superiority. A hat-trick!

The graphic artists decided not just to ask that their works be removed; they showed up to remove them themselves. On the morning of August 2, a little posse of artists arrived at the museum holding placards bearing the words "THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE PATRONISED" and "#NopeToArms." Evidently they were

expecting a showdown, but the museum staff had politely packed up the items awaiting retrieval—whereupon the artists felt obliged to remove the artworks from their packages in order to display them to waiting photographers.

If you're in London, the exhibition continues until August 12, sans the works of a few ungrateful twits. ♦

Disband the Team

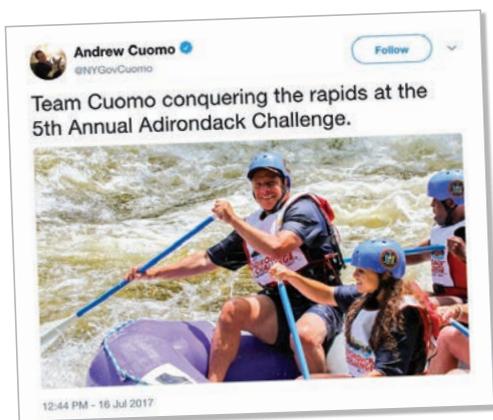
IS THE SCRAPBOOK the only one who's grown weary of the word *team* used where it doesn't belong—outside the world of sports? For a year or two after Olympic teams were called Team USA



ALISDARE HICKSON

or Team France, it was cute to refer to your company or office as “team” this or that. Then politicians got in on the action—Gov. Nikki Haley called her staff “Team Haley,” and so on.

We had hoped it would go away, but it hasn’t. A few instances from just the last few days: A piece on CNN.com—“Giuliani says Trump team will respond to Mueller about interview later Wednesday”—speaks of “Trump’s



legal team” and “the president’s team” and also of “Mueller’s team.” A piece in the *Jerusalem Post* speaks of the White House’s “Israeli-Palestinian peace team,” the president’s “Middle East peace team,” and the White House’s “policy team.” The ever-capable Gerald Seib concludes a column in the *Wall Street Journal* by noting that “the president has a team that seems devoted to letting Trump be Trump.” A piece on cybersecurity in the *Washington Post* notes that the “Trump team” isn’t doing enough, but that fortunately “security teams of U.S. companies” are doing a lot. In the *Seattle Times* we read of a “team” responsible for homeless camp removals: “The team will grow to approximately 30 permanent members.”

Sometimes the word can have a nice passive-aggressive edge to it, too. In his new book *World Without Mind: The Existential Threat of Big Tech*, Franklin Foer recalls writing a piece for the *New Republic*, which he then edited, that sharply criticized Amazon. Foer received a terse email indicating that the retail giant had decided to yank its support for the magazine. “It was signed,” he recalls, “Team Amazon.”

Why is everything now a “team”? We wonder if it’s an attempt to describe the otherwise dreary goings-on of politics, government, and corporate America in the more lighthearted language of sports. Maybe it’s the typical American habit of thinking every human interaction has to have a winner and a loser. Or maybe Americans have become so prosperous and entertainment-obsessed that we think of everything as a game.

Whatever the reason, why not call offices and companies and agencies and delegations by those nouns and not by the word *team*? Teams are for fun, and we’re pretty certain that nobody on Special Counsel Mueller’s “team” is having fun. Enough with *team* already.

Signed, TEAM SCRAPBOOK. ◆

’Merica

A July 27 game between the Houston Astros and the Texas Rangers featured a few minutes of pointless delight. Chris White, a Marine veteran, made the unusual decision to remove his trousers and shirt, brandish his Stars-and-Stripes-themed underwear—*silkies* is the military term—and sprint across the outfield. He broke at least one security guard’s tackle, gave 42,000 people a laugh, and surrendered peacefully.



Why did he do it? “If I can make you laugh for at least five minutes, then you’re not thinking about that dark space that you can potentially be in,” White said afterward. “And if I can gear it toward patriotism, to me, I consider that the holy grail.”

Utterly senseless and delightful. Well done, Marine. ◆

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The Shiner-ing

At some point I resolved not to go gently into middle age. I was not searching for a new lifestyle, or one to recommend to others. Not for a second did I think of writing a motivational book on how to be happy in your 40s.

The change in direction happened spontaneously, and at times recklessly. With steadily increasing vigor, I resumed a level of physical activity I had not known since childhood and never looked back.

It's been fun, I can report, but also humbling.

Twice in the last three months I have come home from Wednesday night practice with a black eye. My sport, by the way, is Gaelic football, a fast, occasionally brutal, turnover-riddled cross between rugby and soccer that is a national sport of Ireland, a country I have never even visited.

If only I were in fourth grade and had earned these stripes standing up to the class bully! Instead I was simply playing defense.

I try to be one of those irritatingly persistent defenders, always keeping pace with the person who has the ball and throwing my hands in any direction the ball might be sent. And I was doing no more than that when another player frantically pulled the ball away from my greedy hands while thrusting his jaw in the direction of my face, which I withdrew too slowly to avoid contact. The result was a brushstroke of blue and green below my right eye.

These things happen, right? In a week or so, the bruise faded.

The second time, I was again playing defense. My teammate was guarding the man with the ball, who looked,

I thought, something like a civilian version of the Incredible Hulk: large-pawed, massive-shouldered, and pretty fast for a guy who, when standing still, measures about 6'2".

In the first half, Civilian Hulk had knocked my shoulder with his shoulder, sending me spinning like a top out of bounds. I realized then that it would be wise to avoid the superhero, but, on defense, one goes to where the action is.



So, as the other defender harassed Civilian Hulk, who was striding powerfully toward our goal, I stepped into position and threw my arms out, ready for the double team and hoping to force a bad shot. But instead of going around me, Civilian Hulk decided to go through me, running head first into the left side of my nose.

Several people attested to hearing the knock of skull on facial bone. I, too, heard the awful, depressing sound—depressing, I think, because it sounded inanimate, like an object hitting the floor, which was all wrong because you knew it was living, breathing flesh that had caused that hollow knock.

I walked off the field, wondering if my nose was broken, saying, “That’s it. I’m done.”

A kind woman on the sideline took a photo of my face to show me the damage. It didn’t look that bad, but it felt like a headache throbbing inside my nose. Fortunately, the pain did not get worse. After a few minutes of rest and some ice to my schnoz, I rejoined the game and finished the second half.

The next morning, the color on my eye was a deep raspberry. It looked like someone had finger-painted the inside of my eye socket. “It’s like a really big tear,” my son Ben said.

Wearing a shiner, I feel anything but shiny. I feel dimmed. Everything else about me becomes secondary. All people see is my black eye.

At work, my colleagues all wanted to hear the story, which led to many learned comments about it being time to hang up my cleats and the importance of not being “that guy.”

A cliché in its own right, “that guy” is invoked for any number of venial sins: yelling angrily from the sidelines during a children’s soccer game, wearing a blue dress shirt with a white collar, knowing a little too much about food or beer or wine. “That guy” is an all-purpose

loser, but his greatest failing is that he is oblivious to his failings. He doesn’t know that he is “that guy.”

And he doesn’t know the world has reduced him to this one thing. Like the other day, I was standing in line with Ben at a fast food restaurant when a beautiful young woman walked past and looked straight at me, holding my gaze just long enough that it seemed intentional. For a split second, I thought it was possible that she was looking at me because she found me attractive. Nope, I realized, she was just looking at my black eye.

DAVID SKINNER

‘Very Standard’?

‘**T**his was a meeting to get information on an opponent, totally legal and done all the time in politics—and it went nowhere. I did not know about it!’ So tweeted President Donald Trump on August 5. He was referring to members of his immediate family and his campaign team having met with Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya at Trump Tower on June 9, 2016.

The president’s former attorney Michael Cohen is (according to media reports) willing to testify to special counsel Robert Mueller that Trump knew about the meeting before it happened. Cohen’s an unreliable witness, but such testimony would directly contradict Trump’s claim that he knew nothing about the meeting.

A quick recap. Rob Goldstone, the publicist who initially connected Veselnitskaya and the Trump campaign, had written in a message to Donald Trump Jr. that “the Crown prosecutor of Russia . . . offered to provide the Trump campaign with some official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father.” Don Jr. agreed to a meeting and replied: “if it’s what you say I love it.”

As late as July 2017, Don Jr. maintained that the meeting was about Russian adoptions. But with the revelation of the email exchange with Goldstone, in which the candidate’s son accepted the meeting on the basis of receiving “information that would incriminate Hillary,” it became clear that Don Jr.’s original story was meant to mislead. It may be true, as the president insists, that “zero happened from the meeting.” But the more relevant fact is that the eldest son of the Republican nominee sought information from a foreign adversary for the purposes of affecting the outcome of a U.S. presidential election. Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort attended the meeting and so did the president’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner (he says he left early).

Trump doesn’t deny any of this. At a July 2017 press conference, he sought to minimize the significance of the meeting by admitting the attempt to collude: “It’s called opposition research or even research into your opponent. I’ve had many people . . . call up—‘Oh, gee, we have information on this factor or this person or, frankly, Hillary.’ . . . Politics is not the nicest business in the world, but it’s very standard where they have information and you take the information. . . . In the case of Don, he listened. I guess they talked about—as I see it, they talked about adoption and some things.”

But the meeting was never meant to be about “adoption policy”; it was always about defeating Hillary Clinton.

Don Jr. now says that he was the victim of a bait and

switch, and indeed it’s not difficult to imagine him as a dupe. We tend to doubt that Don Jr., Manafort, or Kushner committed any crime by holding the meeting. But there is no excusing the shamefulness of the thing. Political campaigns are often approached by people claiming to possess dirt on opponents, but Veselnitskaya’s presentation of herself as a tool of the Russian government puts this affair in a whole new class of loathsomeness.

It’s clear that even these amoral operators understood the meeting was inappropriate. How else to explain the cascade of lies they told to cover it up? These include saying that:

- There were no contacts between the campaign and foreign governments.
- There were no contacts with Russians.
- There were contacts with Russians but they weren’t improper.
- The Trump Tower meeting was about policy matters.
- The Trump Tower meeting was about routine “opposition research.”
- The Russians never produced the material they’d promised.
- There’s nothing improper about accepting opposition research from a foreign adversary.

Each defense lasted until facts emerged to render it inoperative.

Among the more dispiriting aspects of this sordid affair is the untroubled, nothing-to-see-here-folks attitude of Trump surrogates, Republican officeholders, and most of the conservative media. Once upon a time, conservatives were keenly aware of the importance of norms. They are the reason a society does not need to spell out laws to govern all possible behaviors. It is precisely the normative pursuit of virtue that has allowed America to be a land of freedom and liberty. Rick Santorum used to make this point on the campaign trail all the time. Bill Bennett wrote an entire series of books about it.

Republicans ought to be castigating the president over the Trump Tower meeting, not covering for him. Even if they support him more broadly. And what would it cost them? Nothing. They could say, “While the meeting does not appear to have been illegal, it was unethical and has no place in American politics. Trump and his campaign were wrong to do it and should be ashamed of it.” You can say that and still support the president, still want to vote for him in 2020, still want The Wall.

The problem, as always, is that Trumpism doesn’t allow for honest appraisals or piecemeal support. If you’re in for a

penny, you must be in for a pound. Defending norms was one of the bedrocks of conservative thought right up until the winter of 2016, at which point Republicans suddenly became contemptuous of the very idea of norms.

We suspect Republicans will come to regret their new “anything goes” rationalization. Will it be okay for Elizabeth Warren’s presidential campaign to seek copies of Donald Trump’s still-secret tax returns from hackers working for North Korea? Or for Bernie Sanders operatives to meet with Iranian regime cutouts for dirt on Trump cabinet officials?

It wasn’t long ago that Republicans were concerned about foreign meddling in U.S. elections. In 1996, when evidence

surfaced that China was funneling money to the Democratic party, including the Clinton-Gore campaign—remember the fundraiser at the Buddhist temple in Hacienda Heights attended by Al Gore?—GOP leaders demanded an investigation. In 2015, when credible evidence emerged that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had used her position to enrich the Clinton Foundation, Republicans called it another indication that she lacked the character to be president.

But the fact that Trump and his closest advisers were keen to get their hands on opposition research generated by America’s greatest foreign adversary is no big deal for Republicans. How far we’ve come in just two years. ♦

A Tale of Two Cultures

On July 7, Colombia inaugurated a new president, Iván Duque, a young conservative who won office by promising pro-growth policies and vowing to take a tougher stance against gangs and drug cartels. Duque has major challenges ahead of him. The chief division in Colombian politics remains that between the urban elites and the rural poor. Marxist-Communist ideals still prevail among large numbers of the poor, and although the country’s two largest revolutionary groups—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, and the National Liberation Army, or ELN—have declined in strength, both continue to operate.

Real as these challenges are, though, they haven’t stopped Colombia’s economic progress. Foreign direct investment continues to increase; growth is at a respectable 3 percent; and unemployment, at around 9 percent, is manageable. Duque sees economic growth as the key to alleviating Colombia’s political and social animosities. He’s right. The country’s greatest challenge is to include the nation’s rural poor majority in the next decade’s prosperity. Hence his plans to deregulate the country’s agribusiness, coal, and oil industries; cut business taxes; and simplify the tax code. He believes in the rising tide. Twenty years ago, Colombia was a failed state. Thanks to the remarkable efforts of Álvaro Uribe (president 2002-10) and his successor Juan Manuel Santos, a country with limited natural resources is on the path to peace and prosperity.

Colombia’s neighbor Venezuela is indescribably more blessed geographically—with the world’s largest proven oil reserves, eighth-largest natural gas reserves, and rich mineral deposits. Yet the Caracas government no longer publishes economic figures because they would only reveal the truth that there is no economy. Venezuela is in permanent depression. President Nicolás Maduro’s solution to inflation, which tops 110 percent every month, has been to remove five zeros from the country’s worthless currency. Nobody knows

what the unemployment rate is, but most young men can only find a living by bartering or stealing. Bands of starving Venezuelans—people on what’s grimly termed the “Maduro diet”—roam the streets looking for shops to loot or trash cans to rummage.

The causes of the Venezuelan catastrophe are wholly internal. *Chavismo*, the warped ideology of Maduro and his allies—named for the president’s predecessor, Hugo Chávez—is totalitarian in its aims and brutal in its means. The state dictates all, and it exists exclusively for the protection of its *chavista* masters. Maduro controls the major institutions of government and shows how easily ordinary socialism—state ownership of the means of production—becomes the rulers’ ownership of everything. Oil is the only reason Maduro’s government hasn’t collapsed. The *chavistas* use the cash from state-owned oil company PDVSA to buy off the military and other officials.

Which brings us to the August 4 assassination attempt during a speech by the dictator. It seems to have been carried out with explosives strapped to a pair of small drones. No one knows if it was a genuine assassination attempt, but the likelihood is that it was staged to supply a pretext for imprisoning Maduro’s enemies. He has openly blamed several people, including two main opposition leaders, Juan Requesens and Julio Borges.

On August 8, U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley visited the Colombian town of Cúcuta, along the border with Venezuela, to announce \$9 million in U.S. aid to help the starving Venezuelans fleeing westward in search of food and basic medical care. We wish the hip progressives of the United States, many of whom once loudly praised Chávez, could have been there, too, and seen what state control of the private sector has done to a once-prosperous nation. Emaciated Venezuelans aren’t fleeing war. They’re not fleeing a country that lacks resources. They aren’t fleeing the devastation of a natural disaster. They’re fleeing socialism. ♦

ANDREW FERGUSON

Manafort Agonistes

When potential clients crossed the threshold into his dark and paneled office not far from the White House, Clark Clifford would give them a little speech. Yes, he told them, he could offer them his “extensive knowledge of how to deal with the government on your problems.” And certainly he could give them “advice on how best to present your position to various departments.”

But, he said: “If you want influence, you should consider going elsewhere.”

Clifford served as Harry Truman’s closest aide for five years, and when he quit the White House and set up his own law firm, he refused to call himself a lobbyist, much less a man of influence. He protested when others applied such terms to him, and as he grew in stature and years they didn’t dare. With his patrician air and elegant suits and the wing tips that shone like the finish on a limousine, he was a lawyer, a counselor, an adviser, a “wise man,” who occasionally, almost as a courtesy, might agree to guide his clients through the labyrinths of the capital and offer a word here or there to one appropriate official or another. But lobbying? “Lobbyist,” in Clifford’s day, was a vulgarity. You might as well call Caruso a crooner.

Thus it came as a shock to many people when, towards the end of his career, federal prosecutors revealed in court filings that not only was Clifford a lobbyist, he was a crook too. He was charged with fraud, conspiracy, taking bribes, and lying to investigators in a shady bank deal. Because of his age the charges were eventually set aside, and Clifford was allowed to retire, a relic from another age, protesting his inno-

cence until his death, at 91, in 1998.

Clifford’s indictment in the early nineties coincided with the period when Paul Manafort began to make real money, as people in his line of work say. I like to think of the coincidence as a passing of the baton, from one generation, one era, to the next. Manafort too had worked for a great president, Ronald Reagan, though at a much more distant remove than Clifford’s intimacy with Truman. Still, enough of the presidential aura lingered to intoxicate the pigeons who gathered at the threshold of his townhouse in Alexandria, Virginia.



Manafort specialized in overseas clients. We used to call them kleptocrats: tyrants with large, mysterious bank accounts and zero scruples in dealing with domestic rivals.

Nigeria gave his firm \$1 million in 1991, Kenya came across with \$660,000 a year later, the Philippines gave another million, and so on. These dollar figures were obtained at the time by the Center for Public Integrity and published in a report titled, with the understatement typical of good-government groups, “The Torturers’ Lobby.” If you include fees Manafort received from a Maoist rebel group in Angola, these clients alone brought him more than \$3 million from 1991 to 1992—close to \$6 million in today’s dollars.

What did Manafort do for his money? All his clients, notwithstanding their abysmal human rights records, received foreign aid from the U.S. government. They wanted more. They hired Manafort to help them get more. Having more, they could in the future afford (among other things) to pay Manafort more to get the U.S.

government to give them still more. Registering as a foreign lobbyist, he described his services like this: “participation in the development and implementation of a strategy to aid in the procurement of foreign assistance.” Over time, like many of his peers, Manafort simply stopped registering as a foreign lobbyist and went about his work unmolested. A dirty job, yes, but somebody had to do it.

Before too long, though, it no longer looked like a dirty job, at least in the judgment of permanent Washington, which fattened right along with the swelling fees to Manafort and his contemporaries. Democrats and Republicans alike joined in—the firm of Frank Mankiewicz, a faithful Democrat beatified from his days working with Robert Kennedy, received \$14 million from blood-caked governments in 1991 and 1992. Soon political consultants of both parties were winging their way to the emerging “democracies” of Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa, hiring themselves out to befuddled beginners, bagging clouds of free-floating cash, and spreading their expertise like malaria. All this bipartisanship made criticism difficult: At last, Republicans and Democrats could agree on *something*.

From the start there’s been an insouciance to Manafort that only adds to his air of malevolence and crudity. When he was caught hoovering up federal public housing subsidies for wealthy clients in the last year of the Reagan administration, he was called before a congressional committee, which greeted him with appropriate revulsion. His testimony was one long shrug. Sure, he said: “You could characterize this as ‘influence peddling.’” He was proud to be a member of the noble fraternity of lobbyists, and every lobbyist in Washington seemingly felt the same.

And so it went into the new cen-

ture, leading at last to the courtroom in Alexandria, where Manafort stands trial for laundering the vast sums of money he has sucked from foreign kleptocrats of a more recent vintage. The judge has disallowed evidence of the defendant's style of life; the jury won't be able to consider the \$15,000 ostrich jacket, or the \$18,000 karaoke machine, or the gluttonous, globe-

spanning accumulation of real estate. It's too bad, because Manafort's grandiosity and his execrable taste are indicators of something more damning even than money laundering: the lobbyist's lack of shame over the trade he has worked, legally, for 30 years.

Every now and then I pine for Clark Clifford, who had the good manners to be a hypocrite. ♦

COMMENT ♦ PHILIP TERZIAN

Brett Kavanaugh and the problem of hyperpartisanship

It's been a little over a month since Judge Brett Kavanaugh was nominated to succeed Justice Anthony Kennedy on the Supreme Court, but somehow it seems longer.

This might be caused by the tendency of summertime to pass more slowly in the mind than other seasons, or it may be due to the peculiar political genius of the man who nominated him. For while Kavanaugh's selection was greeted with the standard pronouncements we associate with Republican judicial appointments—"In selecting . . . Kavanaugh [Donald] Trump has put reproductive rights and freedoms and health care protections for millions of Americans on the judicial chopping block" (Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y.)—the now-familiar series of daily crises and media breakdowns we associate with the Trump presidency have shoved Kavanaugh onto the sidelines. For the moment, at any rate.

Opposition to Kavanaugh is ubiquitous on the left as well as vociferous, and the stakes are indisputably high: Republicans enjoy a razor-thin majority in the Senate, which might well disappear in a few months' time; Democrats suspect that Kavanaugh is unlikely to supply the swing vote Kennedy occasionally furnished on

a divided court. And yet, while the Democratic leadership in the Senate is unanimously opposed to Kavanaugh and will deploy all the tricks of the trade to slow his ascent, the Republican leader—Mitch McConnell of Kentucky—is not one to be outmaneuvered in such circumstances, as we learned two years ago.

Still, the important fact to remember is that McConnell was a member of the Senate 31 years ago when Judge Robert Bork found himself in Kavanaugh's place, and while the political landscape is significantly altered since 1987, McConnell has not forgotten the painful lessons of the Bork nomination.

McConnell begins, of course, with the same tactical advantage enjoyed by Democrats for much of the past century: command of the process. For the key to undermining Bork was not principle, or impassioned argument, but delay. As is well remembered, especially by Republicans, Bork was subject to an extraordinary—and extraordinarily successful—campaign of professional criticism and personal abuse. The chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), was pleased to delay public hearings for three arduous months. By the time Bork appeared

before Biden's panel, his cause was already lost.

At the time, opposition to Bork, especially in its more scurrilous manifestations, was regarded as a startling breach of political protocol—leading, among other things, to the telling neologism of "borking" nominees. And in a sense, this was true. For decades the Senate had tended to defer to presidents on judicial nominations on the grounds that elections have consequences and that the Senate's primary interest should be the lawyerly qualifications, not the legal opinions, of individual nominees.

Just a year before Bork's candidacy, for example, the decidedly conservative Judge Antonin Scalia had sailed through the Senate on a unanimous vote, and as late as 1993, Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg benefited from the genteel tradition of declining to answer how she might vote on hypothetical cases.

In truth, however, senatorial courtesy was a modern exception, not the historic rule. Most failed nominees to the Supreme Court date from the 19th century, and in very nearly every instance, partisan politics was the dominant, often exclusive, factor. Even in the modern age, nominees of undoubted distinction sometimes found themselves in partisan cross hairs.

Charles Evans Hughes (1862-1948)—in my view, our most notable specimen of statesman-jurist—is a case in point. A successful attorney and professor of law, reform governor of New York, the 1916 Republican presidential nominee, secretary of state, and a judge on the Permanent Court of International Justice (World Court) in The Hague, Hughes had even served for six years as associate justice of the Supreme Court before running for president. But when Herbert Hoover appointed him to succeed William Howard Taft as chief justice (1930), Hughes bore the full brunt of progressive distaste for his brand of liberal Republicanism—and not least, the need for a scapegoat three months after the Great Crash.

In those days, Supreme Court nominees did not customarily testify



before the Judiciary Committee, and so Hughes was obliged to maintain a dignified silence while the opposition raged and stormed on the Senate floor. Indeed, so mortified was he by the phenomenon that he asked the president to withdraw his name to preserve his stature, but Hoover declined—and Hughes was confirmed (52-26). Not so lucky, however, was Hoover's next Supreme Court nominee, a distinguished North Carolina jurist on the federal bench, John J. Parker, who was rejected by a single vote.

In both instances, the quality of Parker and Hughes as potential justices was not in dispute; the issue was politics. Hughes personified the East Coast/Wall Street establishment that particularly agitated Western progressives of both parties, and Democrats were confident that Congress would soon flip in the deepening Depression.

These same ingredients recurred a generation later—not when Ronald Reagan named Judge Bork, but when Richard Nixon nominated Judge Clement Haynsworth to the Supreme Court in 1969. By then, Democrats had controlled the presidency and Congress very nearly without interruption since 1930, and the election of Nixon—who had been vice president in the only GOP administration in nearly four decades—was seen as a particular affront. Moreover, in the fractious 1960s, Nixon gained votes from the old Roosevelt coalition by appealing to the cultural conservatism of the (traditionally Democratic) South—the Southern Strategy, so-called.

Haynsworth, chief judge of the Fourth Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals and a genteel South Carolinian, had roughly the same effect on the mood of 1969 Senate Democrats as Charles Evans Hughes had on their 1930 forebears. There was no question about Haynsworth's distinction and merit—a Harvard Law graduate, appointee of Dwight D. Eisenhower, desegregating Southern jurist, and “one of the truly great federal judges” in the recollection of Justice Lewis F. Powell—it was Haynsworth's misfortune to personify the threat Nixon's triumph posed to Democratic premi-

nence. Worse still, his appointment had been made possible by the resignation of Justice Abe Fortas, Lyndon Johnson's longtime comrade-in-arms and liberal favorite, in an ethics scandal.

In short, Democrats were furious and, in naval parlance, determined to fire a warning shot across Nixon's bow. At that time and in that place, they had the power to do so: In a process now sadly familiar, the unfailingly courteous and well-tempered Haynsworth—whose courtly demeanor was rendered more poignant by a mild stutter—was caught in a crossfire he

neither expected nor deserved, and the Senate's adverse judgment was close (55-45) but absolute.

To be sure, the gothic quality of Robert Bork's subsequent ordeal—Chairman Biden's constitutional incoherence, Sen. Edward Kennedy's rancid oratory, Sen. Howell Heflin's question about why Bork sported a beard—is firmly lodged in conservative memory and recalled as the ghastly dividing line it seemed at the time. But the Clement Haynsworth precedent is equally instructive. Will it be overturned? ♦

COMMENT ♦ BARTON SWAIM

The virtues of concentrating the mind

The news that Pope Francis has revised the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to designate the death penalty “inadmissible” was greeted in the American media as evidence that the church is at last catching up with the times. That assessment, superficial though many Catholics will consider it, isn't altogether wrong.

The *Catechism*, published in Latin and an English translation in 1992 and largely the product of Pope John Paul II and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), had already been altered in various ways on the question of capital punishment. In this instance the pope altered note 2267, heretofore a sentence affirming that “the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty *if* this is the only possible way of defending human lives against the unjust aggressor” (my italics). Now it reads,

Recourse to the death penalty on the part of legitimate authority, following a fair trial, was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and an acceptable, albeit extreme, means of safeguarding the common good. Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new

understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state. Lastly, more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption. Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that “the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person” [a statement by Pope Francis from 2017], and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.

John Paul II accepted the validity of the death penalty but wished to minimize its application; indeed the previous note in the *Catechism*, 2266, had been altered by him in 1997 in a way that sidestepped the death penalty completely. The original text had acknowledged the propriety of the death penalty “in cases of extreme gravity,” but the updated text excluded that statement.

A hint of John Paul II's deference to tradition and scripture still remains—why the word “inadmissible” rather than *wrong* or *sinful*?—but the *Catechism*'s new position seems unambiguous: It's hard to see how the church can work with determination for the

worldwide abolition of a practice without considering that practice morally reprehensible. Francis's explanatory letter calls the change an "authentic development of doctrine."

The pope, if a hidebound Protestant may be permitted to say so, hasn't done his church any favors. The death penalty is warranted in the Bible. Nearly all the church fathers (Tertullian, typically, is an exception) accepted its validity. So did the doctors of the church, including Thomas Aquinas. Clement of Alexandria (150-215), who lived at a time when Christians had little or no influence on the laws of nations, argued in *The Stromata* that "when one falls into any incurable evil—when taken possession of, for example, by wrong or covetousness—it will be for his good if he is put to death. For the law is beneficent, being able to make some righteous from unrighteous, if they will only give ear to it."

By taking such an overt stance on a position held by church authorities for centuries, and by alluding vaguely to an "increasing awareness" of human dignity, Francis makes it sound as though the secularist philosophies of postwar Europe and North America were right all along, and that Christianity, after 2,000 years of callous unconcern, has only just caught up. In that way, at least, Francis sounds a little like the young liberal-minded clergy of mainline Protestant denominations in America who declare their support for same-sex marriage and thus concede that they and their entire religious tradition have embraced a bigoted and unjust proscription for centuries. Maybe the updated view is the right one, but it's no great excitement for the heathen to consider the benefits of Christianity.

I wonder, though, if the newer Catholic attitude to the death penalty doesn't overlook something important. I don't know why atheist or nonreligious people oppose the death penalty (though many do), but Christian opposition seems motivated mainly by two thoughts: first, that

taking life is morally risky (e.g., what if you execute the wrong person?); and second, that no one is beyond redemption (consider Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*).

Neither apprehension is unreasonable. Both are in separate ways responses to the modern state's inability to acknowledge metaphysical claims about intrinsic right and wrong. The older view held that the man who committed deliberate and malicious murder forfeited his right to life. That's a claim about justice, whereas citizens of modern liberal democracies are in most cases prepared to talk only



The older view held that the man who committed deliberate and malicious murder forfeited his right to life.

about utility—what works, what discourages criminality, what contributes to safety and public order. The *Catholic Catechism*, even from its first iteration in 1992, seems to accept that more utilitarian logic.

But the newer attitude brings its own very practical problems. One is the victim's—and sometimes the general population's—*sense* of injustice when a vicious killer gets to spend the rest of his days fed and housed at public expense. I'll use an extreme instance, but a real one. From July 1963 to October 1965 Ian Brady and Myra Hindley murdered five children near Manchester, England, and murdered them in ways so unspeakably vile as to make it difficult for me even to write their names. The Moors murders, as they became known, were carried out while Britain still practiced the death penalty, but the trial occurred after its abolition in 1965. Brady and Hindley lived the rest of their lives in relative comfort. Hindley died in 2002, aged 60, of bronchial

pneumonia. Brady died last year, aged 79, of heart disease. Neither expressed anything like genuine sorrow for their crimes, and the parents of the victims lived out their days in the knowledge that their government kept the pair alive and tended to their health. The sense of injustice rankled many.

Those sentenced to capital punishment, by contrast, do often die penitently. "Depend upon it, sir," Samuel Johnson famously remarks in James Boswell's *Life*, "when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." Those who die by execution under lawful governments are almost the only people on earth who are permitted to know the exact moment of their deaths before they die. The terminally ill have an idea, but usually an imprecise one. Everyone else—including those imprisoned for capital crimes where the death penalty is inoperative—has to guess. For us, the incentive to consider death's reality and meaning is significantly diminished.

Jon Ozmint, head of the South Carolina prison system from 2003 to 2011, confirms Dr. Johnson's observation. Of the 15 inmates whose executions took place during Ozmint's time in office, 12 had confessed their crimes, embraced some form of Christianity, and faced their end with poise. "Most of the guys who show up on capital convictions are full of piss and vinegar, full of anger," he says. "Once their appeals are exhausted, they grow up very fast. The reality of the death penalty forces most guys to examine themselves, forces them to think about what they've done and what comes after." Ozmint seems to have genuine affection for the 12 who died at peace. "I saw them grow up. By the time they died, they were good men."

That consideration won't change the minds of most of those who oppose the death penalty on principled grounds, but one would think it might give Catholic authorities some pause. Surely they wish for the condemned what the psalmist asked for himself: "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am." ♦

Sow Tariffs, Reap Retaliation

Farmers are the first to feel the squeeze.

BY ANDREW EGGER



Better sell now: Illinois farmers emptying a bin of soybeans on June 13—just before China’s retaliatory tariffs were announced.

Denny Mertz of Chesterfield, Mo., knows a thing or two about farm crises. He’d only been in the ag business a few years when the last big one hit. That was after President Jimmy Carter slapped a grain embargo on the Soviet Union to punish it for invading Afghanistan. The embargo hurt the Soviets, but it hurt U.S. farmers more. Grain prices cratered, and farmers who had bought up land to capitalize on booming exports suddenly found themselves struggling beneath crushing debt. Foreclosures spiked. Farm kids fled to the cities.

Mertz was one of the lucky ones—he had a second job to fall back on, working as an engineer at Emerson Electric. But he, too, eventually felt the crunch: He was priced off his land, forced to

move his operation out of the St. Louis area where he had grown up. So this year, when he heard President Donald Trump was picking a trade fight with China, the world’s largest importer of American produce, Mertz’s reaction was straightforward: “Oops.”

Farmers are already feeling the squeeze this year from the Trump administration’s tit-for-tat tariff war with China, the biggest step yet in President Trump’s campaign to renegotiate America’s “terrible trade deals.” The stated aim is to punish China for its unfair trade practices, including intellectual property theft and counterfeit goods, and to act on Trump’s personal hobbyhorse of tightening U.S. trade deficits. A month in, the president has already adopted a triumphant tone: Tariffs are “the greatest,” “working big time,” “far better than anyone ever anticipated.”

Tariffs “will make our country much richer than it is today,” and “only fools would disagree.”

Mertz, a Trump supporter and no fool himself, says he hopes such hard-nosed trade policies will help the economy in the long run and, just as important, compel China to straighten out its trade-crookery. Mertz says he’s experienced China’s brazen price manipulation and intellectual property theft firsthand, both as a farmer and as an engineer at Emerson. For him, it’s a moral matter: Who wants to do business with a cheat?

“I spent probably 10 years training the Chinese engineers how to do things. And then, all of a sudden, we find product on the market which was not ours but was built exactly the same way,” Mertz says. “I think many people, they understand the unfairness if you do things which aren’t right, the pirating of the high-tech industry and all that stuff. If you’re going to deal with a trading partner, there has to be sort of an ethicalness and an honesty in your trading and your dealings. Whether it hurts us more than it hurts them—I don’t know where that goes.”

So far, it has hurt farmers plenty. As a matter of economics, the problem is simple. China imports enormous amounts of U.S. agricultural goods—particularly Midwestern crops like soybeans, which are used as feed for livestock. According to the American Soybean Association, China imported 31 percent of total U.S. soybean production in 2017, to the tune of \$14 billion. So when Beijing retaliated against America with tariffs of its own, agriculture was the obvious target—not to mention a political pressure point, given President Trump’s relative popularity among the ag crowd. On July 6, China slapped duties on \$43 billion worth of U.S. goods, nearly \$17 billion of it in agricultural products, including soybeans, sorghum, and pork. The move hit markets like a lightning bolt out of a clear sky: Soybean prices dropped a dollar a bushel when the tariffs were announced and another dollar when they were implemented, plummeting to a near-decade low below \$9 a bushel.

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SCOTT OLSON / GETTY

Other farm commodities—corn, cotton, pork, and dairy—have suffered collateral damage from tariffs as well. And then there are the ripple effects through the farm production chain: suppliers, processors, packers, distributors. Nobody along the line is equipped to absorb the costs of the new tariffs.

On their face, the numbers are devastating for farmers, who operate with high overhead and slim profit margins in the best of times. It gets worse when you consider that tanking prices don't just affect this year's harvest: They retroactively damage income from last year, too.

"For all the folks, including me, that were storing some of their grain from last year—typically during the summer, if there's any kind of drought scare or something like that, you'll get a market bump, and so you hold some of your grain for that. Well, this year, we're talking thousands and thousands of dollars farmers have lost because of that," Mertz says. "It's the kind of thing in hindsight where you say, well, I should have sold it. But nobody really foresaw what was going to happen with China."

All of this has been bad news for the Trump administration, which had repeatedly assured farmers it would not allow them to bear the brunt of the trade dispute. After weeks of farm outcry, the White House announced on July 24 that it would issue \$12 billion in emergency aid, in the form of direct payments and crop buybacks, to help farmers weather the unexpectedly difficult year. How much of the financial pressure that will alleviate is unclear.

"I'm not a big guy on government aid. I prefer the free market. But I do think that they depressed the market in a significant way," says Illinois farmer James McCune.

But serious questions remain about whether the administration will be able to get that aid to the farmers who have been hardest hit and whether it will arrive soon enough to make a difference. The Department of Agriculture has promised to have money in the hands of farmers by September. But farm economist Dan Basse says that the crop yield data needed

to determine how the payouts will be distributed won't be available for months after that. Meanwhile, commodity lobbies are jockeying for position, each trying to ensure its own farmers can recoup their losses.

"Everybody's arm wrestling," Basse says. "Arm wrestling for what money's there, trying to get their sliver of gold. We just don't know at this point—the administration's not been clear in terms of who gets what, and how much, and all of that."

Meanwhile, agriculture experts warn that this short-term pain may pale in comparison to a greater danger: the permanent loss of U.S. farm superiority in global markets. Over the past few decades, American farmers who grow feed crops like corn and soybeans have enjoyed a boom as countries around the world have increased their living standards. As people in China and India started to make more money, they wanted to eat richer, higher-protein diets. That meant raising more livestock. And that, in turn, meant an insatiable demand for livestock feed. The United States, with its vast swaths of arable land and unsurpassed infrastructure, was in prime position to capitalize. Farmers pumped out record crop after record crop, but demand was such that prices were good as well.

This competitive advantage has been a source of comfort to farmers like Mertz. In their reasoning, even if China develops new trade relationships with other suppliers, they will be able to recoup their market share once the trade dispute is over.

"We over here in the United States, because of our infrastructure over the years, have been able to supply product to the world in a very efficient manner that most countries aren't able to do. . . . Places like Brazil, the reason that they haven't taken over many of the markets is they can't get their products from the inland areas out to the ports," Mertz says. "Because there aren't any roads, and it takes a truck six or eight weeks to go from the farm to the port. If they ever fix their infrastructure, they would be a formidable competitor. But you know, they haven't yet."

Brazilian farmers, though, have

been doing their best to catch up, buoyed in recent years by investment from multinational agribusiness giants such as Cargill. It is to Brazil that China is turning now as they attempt to wean themselves from U.S. produce. With Brazilian farmers reaping sky-high profits, some experts fear the trade war has handed them a golden opportunity to close the gap further.

"Brazil, when you talk about logistics, has really made tremendous progress in the last 10 years, particularly with the building of what's called the Northern Arc, which is a bunch of ports either in the Amazon or along those northern areas of Brazil that can export tremendous amounts of corn and soybeans in a short period of time," Basse says. "The American farmer no longer has the logistical advantage that he thought."

It's little wonder farm country lawmakers are beginning to sound the alarm. Republican senators Rob Portman of Ohio and Joni Ernst of Iowa have teamed up with Alabama Democrat Doug Jones to introduce legislation that would clip the wings of the president's unilateral tariff powers. The bill, called the Trade Security Act, would require the Department of Justice to provide a legitimate national security rationale for a trade action before the White House could put it into place—a clear broadside against Trump, who has consistently used national security concerns as a barely disguising fig leaf to justify trade actions.

Other Republicans remain understandably skittish about undercutting one of the president's signature policies. Missouri's Republican attorney general Josh Hawley, who is backed by farm groups in his challenge to Democratic incumbent senator Claire McCaskill this November, declines to object to Trump's trade policies on either legal or practical grounds. "I continue to support the goal here of trying to get trade deals for workers and especially for farmers," Hawley says. "I'm sure when you're talking to Missouri farmers, what they're telling you, what they're telling me, is that

they feel like they've gotten the short end of the stick for years when it comes to trade. And they're right about that. And so I think the president going out there and wanting to shake up things, to say we've got to get better trade deals, he's right to do that. So I support the goal, and I keep saying let's see what kind of a deal he gets."

That last statement is a common refrain: Even the most pessimistic farmers continue to hold out hope that China will blink and Trump will pull off a dazzling success that will lower longtime trade barriers

and help farm income expand further. But farmers and economists alike acknowledge that it's difficult for Trump to threaten China with short-term political pain, given the fact that President Xi Jinping can't be voted out of office. Either way, they're counting on it being over soon.

In the meantime, they'd settle for getting China to the table.

"The U.S. is waiting for the Chinese to call and apologize and say that we somehow want to negotiate," Basse says. "The Chinese aren't going to call." ♦

Trump Tower Tales and Tweets

The meeting that launched a thousand controversies. BY ERIC FELTEN

On the first Sunday in August, President Donald Trump was up early and tweeting.

"Fake News reporting, a complete fabrication, that I am concerned about the meeting my wonderful son, Donald, had in Trump Tower," the president said. "This was a meeting to get information on an opponent, totally legal and done all the time in politics—and it went nowhere. I did not know about it!"

The tweet was an "admission that the Trump team had not been forthcoming," judged the *New York Times*, "when Donald Trump Jr. issued a statement in July 2017." By that the *Times* meant Don Jr.'s initial response to questions about his June 9, 2016, meeting with a Russian lawyer in Trump Tower, a response that failed to mention his hope to acquire opposition research on Hillary Clinton from the meeting.

The *Times* described the president's

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Natalia Vladimirovna Veselnitskaya on a Moscow TV broadcast in November 2016

new tweet as "the starkest acknowledgment yet that a statement he dictated last year about the encounter was misleading." The *Washington Post's* take was similar: "Sunday's tweet appears to acknowledge more explicitly than before that the meeting was indeed predicated on opposition research."

Is that true? Let's go back to July 17,

2017—a little over a week after the story broke that Don Jr., having been promised dirt on Hillary, met with a Kremlin-connected attorney. That morning, President Trump tweeted: "Most politicians would have gone to a meeting like the one Don jr attended in order to get info on an opponent. That's politics!" Which seems like a pretty explicit acknowledgment that Don Jr. was there for oppo. But putting aside the question of whether this week's tweet was *more* stark and explicit, what is remarkable is that there are still questions to be answered about the 2016 meeting at Trump Tower given how thoroughly it has been scrutinized and documented, primarily by the Senate Judiciary Committee. Let's go over what we know.

We know the idea for the meeting was floated to Donald Trump Jr. by music promoter Rob Goldstone, the manager for a Russian pop singer, Emin Agalarov. We know that the idea for the meeting was suggested by Emin's plutocrat father, Araz Agalarov, whose businesses include the event-production company that put on the 2013 Miss Universe pageant (then owned in part by Donald Trump) in Moscow. Araz had met "a well-connected Russian attorney" who "told him that they had some interesting information that could potentially be damaging regarding funding by Russians to the Democrats and to its candidate, Hillary Clinton." Emin relayed this to Goldstone, telling him the information "could be of interest to the Trumps."

It was clearly of interest to Don Jr. Goldstone thought it would be easier to reach the son than the candidate himself. "I would run this past [Donald Jr.] first," the publicist later recounted, because he "was the lesser level."

We know precisely when Goldstone made his pitch—in an email at 10:36 A.M. on Friday, June 3, 2016. We know that Don Jr. responded positively to the proposal 17 minutes later.

We know what Goldstone proposed to spur Don Jr.'s enthusiasm: "The Crown prosecutor of Russia met with [Emin's] father Araz this morning and in their meeting offered to provide the Trump campaign with some

YURY MARTYANOV / AFP / GETTY

official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father.”

We know how Don Jr. responded: “if it is what you say I love it especially later in the summer.” By Monday and Tuesday, Trump Jr. and Goldstone were exchanging emails arranging the meeting for Thursday afternoon, June 9, with the lawyer whom Goldstone described as a “Russian government attorney.”

We know a lot about the Russian lawyer, too. Natalia Vladimirovna Veselnitskaya had lunch beforehand with the translator she would use that afternoon, Anatoli Samochornov, and with Ike Kaveladze, who worked for Araz Agalarov. Eventually joining the party was Russian-American lobbyist Rinat Akhmetshin, who like Veselnitskaya had been working with Glenn Simpson of Fusion GPS to push for the repeal of the Magnitsky Act, under which 18 Russian officials had been placed under U.S. sanctions in early 2013.

Veselnitskaya reportedly asked Akhmetshin, “What do you think I should tell this Trump’s son?” He gave her advice on how to talk to busy Americans: “I told her like how to present and how not to,” Akhmetshin later testified. “I actually cautioned her, you know, the Russians are—they kind of attack you first thing, there’s no like small talk, so I told her, ‘Don’t do that.’” Other suggestions: Don’t “speak too long, because she kind of tends to speak long. I said like keep your sentences short and kind of don’t waste people’s time.”

She apparently didn’t follow his advice.

Veselnitskaya opened the meeting with a broad assertion that Russians were pouring money into the DNC, but she didn’t back up her allegations with anything specific. “Her statements were vague, ambiguous, and made no sense,” Don Jr. would later state. “No details or supporting information was provided or even offered.” And before he knew it, Veselnitskaya

had rambled off into talking about the adoption of Russian children, which had been forbidden to Americans by the Russian government in retaliation for the Magnitsky Act. “It became clear to me that this was the true agenda all along and that the claims of potentially helpful information were a pretext for the meeting.”

That’s when Jared Kushner, who was running late, arrived. “When I



An anti-Trump protester in Chicago, June 3

got there,” Donald Trump’s son-in-law stated to Senate investigators, a woman, with the aid of a translator, was “talking about the issue of a ban on U.S. adoptions of Russian children.” This was not what he expected. “I actually emailed an assistant from the meeting after I had been there for 10 or so minutes,” Kushner recounted. What did the email say? “Can u pls call me on my cell? Need excuse to get out of meeting.”

Paul Manafort didn’t leave the meeting. The campaign chairman at the time, he took some perfunctory notes and dozed off.

Goldstone, the music promoter, was mortified at how the meeting had gone: “On the way out, Don Jr. kind of thanked me. And I said to him, I’m sorry. I’m really embarrassed by this meeting. I don’t know what that was about.” More than two years later people are still asking what it was about.

There are two controversies intertwined. The first is the fact of the meeting itself; the second is how the Trumps responded once knowledge of it became public.

It was a year later that reporters started asking questions. The White House legal and communications teams recommended full disclosure and transparency. Flying back from Europe, the president took a different tack. On July 8, 2017, he crafted a brief—dishonest—response to be put out under Don Jr.’s name. The dishonesty was not in what was said but in what was omitted. The statement President Trump dictated for his son read, “We primarily discussed a program about the adoption of Russian children that was active and popular with American families years ago and was since ended by the Russian government.” True enough. What he left out was that Don Jr. had taken the meeting because he had been promised proof of Clinton criminality from a Russian source.

The we-were-just-talking-adoption line lasted all of one day. The next day, a new, more complete statement was issued: “After pleasantries were exchanged, the woman stated that she had information that individuals connected to Russia were funding the Democratic National Committee and supporting Ms. Clinton,” Trump Jr.’s new account read.

Donald Trump Jr. has stuck to that second statement ever since, including when he was interviewed by Senate investigators. Along the way some self-serving filigree was added to make it all appear less crass: “To the extent that they had information concerning the fitness, character, or qualifications of any presidential candidate, I believed that I should at least hear them out,” he told the Judiciary Committee last September. “Depending on what, if any, information that they had, I could then consult with counsel to make an informed decision as to whether to give it any further consideration.” It almost sounds like a public service.

BILGIN SASMAZ / ANADOLU AGENCY / GETTY

But why, if the story has remained the same for a year, is there such breathless reporting on the president's tweets? Perhaps because special counsel Robert Mueller's office is investigating whether false or misleading statements by the president amount to obstruction of justice.

It's the position of the president's lawyers that, when it comes to the question of Don Jr.'s ill-advised meeting, Trump Sr. has told the truth. On January 29, 2018, they responded to queries from the special counsel about "Alleged Obstruction of Justice." The last item dealt with Trump's botched effort at damage control in the initial response to questions about the meeting. The lawyers stated, "the President dictated a short but accurate response to the *New York Times* article on behalf of his son, Donald Trump, Jr."

But that short statement brought to light another layer of dishonesty. Built into the lawyers' response was the admission that the president had "dictated" the original statement. The president's spokesmen and lawyers had long been insisting, falsely, that he'd had no hand in it.

Aside from obvious questions of character, is a president legally obliged to tell the truth to the *New York Times*?

Unsurprisingly, the *Times*, in a June 2 explainer, argued that he is: A "Watergate-era precedent exists for Congress to consider lies to the public to be obstruction of justice in the looser context of impeachment proceedings. An article of impeachment that lawmakers approved against Nixon before he resigned included 'making or causing to be made false or misleading public statements for the purpose of deceiving the people of the United States into believing' there had been no misconduct."

The *Times*'s proposed impeachment trigger may be silly and self-aggrandizing, but there's no doubt that by making assertions in the glib, unlawyerly (and sometimes truth-optional) context of Twitter, the president puts himself and his family at legal risk. Take another of his recent tweets, the July 31 declaration, "Collusion is not a crime." A fair reporter would be sure to note

that the tweet goes on with the caveat, "but that doesn't matter because there was No Collusion (except by Crooked Hillary and the Democrats)!" Even so, the attention-getting assertion is that collusion is not prohibited by law—attention-getting because it suggests the president is preparing to abandon his caveat and admit some sort of collusion. And what if he did?

While it may prove to be true that there is nothing criminal about "colluding" with foreigners, a suggestion by the president or his advisers of some sort of collusion in Trump Tower could put Don Jr. legally sideways. That's because Trump Jr., in his interview with the Senate Judiciary Committee, declared: "I did not collude with any foreign government and do not know of anyone who did."

Don Jr. cannot now claim to have engaged in some sort of everybody-does-it noncriminal "collusion" without running afoul of 18 USC Section

1001, which, as Trump Jr. was warned, "makes it a crime to make any materially false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements or representations in the course of a congressional investigation."

Similarly, President Trump has clung to his assertion that when it came to the Trump Tower meeting, "I did not know about it!" That is a snug fit with what Don Jr. said when asked by Senate investigators, "Did you inform your father about the meeting or the underlying offer prior to the meeting?" Trump Jr.'s response left no wiggle room: "No, I did not." If Trump Sr. abandons his assertion he was out of the loop, Don Jr. is the one left holding the bag.

If the Trump team had been fully truthful from the start about Don Jr.'s meeting with Natalia Veselnitskaya, President Trump would have made it harder for the special counsel—let alone the *New York Times*—to try to cut his tenure short. ♦

Labour's Jewish Problem

Jeremy Corbyn and the uses of idiocy.

BY DOMINIC GREEN

Jeremy Corbyn, leader of Britain's Labour party, is a man of principle. Unfortunately, all his principles are noxious. He is an anti-Semite, a useful idiot in a Lenin cap, and an unreconstructed, impenitent Trotskyite-Maoist of the vintage that enlivened the student unions of the 1970s, tried and failed to take over Labour in the 1980s, and then tried again and succeeded in the aftermath of the crash of 2008. He remains convinced of the rectitude of his principles even when they secure the endorsement of

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David Duke, the demented ex-grand wizard of the KKK, and Nick Griffin, the thuggish ex-leader of the neofascist British National party.

"You're a f—ing anti-Semite and a racist," the ex-minister Dame Margaret Hodge suggested to Corbyn in the House of Commons in mid-July. "You have proved you don't want people like me in the party." Hodge is Jewish and members of her family were killed in the Holocaust. A Labour moderate, she has routed the British National party in her Barking, Essex, constituency. The Labour leadership, which has proven serially incapable of taking action regarding dozens of cases of anti-Semitism in its ranks,

immediately announced an inquiry into Hodge and Ian Austin, a second MP who had protested.

Hodge was infuriated by the refusal of Labour's national executive committee to endorse the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism. The IHRA's legal definition has been endorsed by the Conservative government, the Crown Prosecution Service, the College of Policing, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, and 124 local councils,

many of them Labour-ruled, as well as dozens of international bodies. Labour leaders, however, proposed to rewrite or water down 4 of the 11 clauses, and thus to broaden the field of what would be tolerated within party fora. For reasons that Labour's leadership have not satisfactorily explained, they wish to preserve for their members two of the anti-Zionist's sordid pleasures, the assertion that the founding of the Israeli state was racist and that Israel is "like" Nazi Germany.

Corbyn has led Labour as it has mutated into Europe's most successful anti-Semitic party, while continually insisting that none of its anti-Semitism is in his name. His cultish supporters, sharing in the folly of his principles and slaving at the prospect of power, believe in the purity of his intentions. Not everyone in Labour has fallen in line: The foremost dissenters are Jewish Labourites and the Blairite centrists who are being purged as enemies of the people.

That Labour has to define anti-Semitism at all indicates the extent of what earlier and more candid socialists would have called its Jewish Problem. In 2016, Corbyn tried to shut down the issue with an internal inquiry, led by the human rights lawyer Shami Chakrabarti. After absolving Labour of all charges, Chakrabarti received Corbyn's nomination to the House of Lords and is now a minister in



Jewish community groups and their supporters protest Labour party tolerance of anti-Semitism, in London's Parliament Square.

Labour's shadow cabinet. Since then, evidence of endemic anti-Semitism has continued to accumulate. The events of the last two weeks confirm that the rot runs from the head of the party to the bottom. We shall start with Labour's purulent bottom and then examine its cracked head.

Like all racists, anti-Semites fantasize that their enemy is monolithic. A chilling fact of political power is that it can homogenize its enemies into a single group. The old saying goes that if you ask two Jews, you'll get three opinions. Not in Corbyn's Britain you don't. On July 16, 68 rabbis from across the Jewish spectrum signed a letter protesting the "severe and widespread" anti-Semitism within Labour and objecting to the "most insulting and arrogant way" in which Corbyn and the Labour leadership have denied the existence of a mountain of evidence. Then, on July 25, the three leading Anglo-Jewish newspapers, in an unprecedented display of consensus, published the same editorial on their front pages.

"We do so because of the existential threat to Jewish life in this country that would be posed by a Jeremy Corbyn-led government," they wrote. Labour's refusal to adopt, and its leadership's insistence on diluting and rewriting, the IHRA definition was "sinister," a new low in "Corbynite contempt" for Jews and Israel.

"Under its adapted guidelines," the editorial explained, "a Labour Party member is free to claim Israel's existence is a racist endeavour and compare Israeli policies to those of Nazi Germany, unless 'intent'—whatever that means—can be proved. 'Dirty Jew' is wrong, 'Zionist bitch' fair game?"

In so doing, Labour makes a distinction between racial antisemitism targeting Jews (unacceptable) and political antisemitism targeting Israel (acceptable). The reason for this move? Had the full IHRA definition with examples relating to Israel been approved, hundreds, if not thousands, of Labour . . . members would need to be expelled.

Corbyn would be among them. A few days later, footage emerged of Corbyn, on the Iranian propaganda channel Press TV, detecting "the hand of Israel" in an ISIS attack on Egyptian soldiers in the Sinai. In the same interview, Corbyn described a Hamas terrorist, convicted of the murder of seven Israeli civilians in a café bombing, as his "brother."

It also emerged last week that on Holocaust Memorial Day in 2010, Corbyn opened and addressed an event at the House of Commons called "Never Again for Anyone—From Auschwitz to Gaza." Corbyn, it is alleged, ordered the expulsion of a Holocaust survivor who objected to the comparison of Israel to Nazi Germany. He also found himself apologizing for his presence in the 1990s on the international advisory board of an NGO called the Just World Trust. In 1996, when Corbyn led Just World Trust's British chapter, Just World defended Roger Garaudy, the French philosopher convicted of Holocaust denial.

After the rabbis' letter, Peter Willman, a longtime Corbyn ally and a member of the party's National Executive Committee (NEC), was caught on tape telling an NEC meeting that Labour's anti-Semitism problem

VICKIE FLORES / IN PICTURES / GETTY

was the invention of Jewish “Trump fanatics.” He then asked if anyone had ever heard anti-Semitic sentiments in the party and pronounced himself “amazed” at the show of hands. Meanwhile at the bottom of the party, a Labour councilor in the seaside town of Bognor Regis, Sussex, got into trouble over some indelicate Facebook postings.

“Talmud Jews are parasites,” said councilor Damien Enticott. “They drink blood and suck baby’s dick.” Jews, Enticott said, they “need executing,” and Hitler had the “cure” for Israel. Enticott at first insisted that someone else had been using his computer: “I don’t share anti-Semitic views at all.” Then, confronted with the evidence, he characterized himself as “anti-Zionist, not anti semantic [sic]” and as a fearless man of principle: “I will continue to speak my mind on subjects that I believe are completely insidious.”

This, crudely, is Corbyn’s attitude. He seeks a just world. He is an anti-Zionist in a world where perceptions are distorted by the insidious power of capital. He is a freedom fighter in a world where the hidden hand of America controls the market and the hidden hand of Israel tips the scales in favor of its American master. For Corbyn, socialism is not a dialectical system for the decoding of capitalism and its conversion into collective ownership. Nor is it a historical tragedy that brought hunger, war, and massacre to every society that it touched. Socialism is a perennially renewable good intention, a library card of the soul, a virtuous spending of a bottomless fund of other people’s money.

These are his principles. As a socialist and a fool, it is to be expected that Corbyn might be susceptible to anti-Semitism, the socialism of fools. The worst of his principles is his cynical refusal to accept the implications of his other principles. Each time his trafficking with Jew-haters is exposed, he apologizes not for a shameful moral failing but for the “hurt” and “pain” that he has inadvertently caused the touchy Jews.

“It’s not what you say, but what

you do,” Margaret Hodge is reported as having said, “and by your actions you have shown that you are an anti-Semitic racist.”

Last week, Corbyn finally acknowledged Labour’s Jewish problem in a *Guardian* op-ed intended to assure Jews that a Labour government would be no threat to Jewish life in Britain. The op-ed ended with criticism of Israel, praise of anti-Zionist Jews, and a veiled warning that as the “far right is on the rise across Europe and America,” British Jews should shut up and stick with Labour.

Corbyn now leads a party as familiar to historians of the 19th century as it is alarming to survivors of the 20th. For the first time in British history, the parliamentary opposition is a socialist party in which the delusions of anti-Semitism and its foreign policy corollary, the delusions of anti-Zionism, are articles of faith and a loyalty test. The difference is that in the

1930s, Oswald Mosley, whose ideas about tariffs, welfare, and the Jews are curiously similar to Corbyn’s, failed to win a seat. Last week, a poll put Labour neck and neck with the Conservatives, with 40 percent support.

On August 6, the party announced that it would be abandoning its investigation of Margaret Hodge; Ian Austin, however, remained under investigation in a process that he described as “Kafkaesque.” The decision not to punish Hodge followed an appeal in Sunday’s *Observer* by Corbyn’s deputy, Tom Watson, calling for Labour to halt its arguments over anti-Semitism before it disappears “into a vortex of eternal shame and embarrassment.” Watson also called for Labour to adopt the IHRA recommendation without delay. While Corbyn is a useful idiot, it remains to be seen who among his close allies will make the best use of his idiocy in the long run. ♦

Wrestling with the Speakership

Jim Jordan’s bid to succeed Paul Ryan.

BY HALEY BYRD

During an August 4 rally in central Ohio to support a beleaguered special election congressional candidate, President Donald Trump took a moment to praise another Ohio Republican.

“What a great defender he’s been, what courage,” Trump said of Rep. Jim Jordan, a man with a penchant for burning bridges who has been particularly vocal in his efforts to protect Trump throughout various investigations of Russian interference in the 2016 election. “He’s a brave, tough cookie,” added Trump.

Haley Byrd is a reporter at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

The crowd started to chant: “Speaker of the House. Speaker of the House. Speaker of the House.”

Jordan announced on July 26 that he would launch an improbable campaign to replace retiring House speaker Paul Ryan when the Wisconsin Republican steps down next year—if, of course, the party is able to maintain control of the chamber in November’s midterm elections. Jordan’s candidacy is the latest wrench to be thrown into the contested speaker’s race, yet it is evident he does not yet enjoy enough goodwill within the GOP conference to become speaker. Rank-and-file Republicans argue that Jordan has tossed too many grenades

at the GOP leadership during his decade-plus in Congress to be viewed as a unifying candidate. If anything, his bid for the position may serve as a useful negotiating tool for other conservative members seeking greater influence and more ambitious policies.

The House Freedom Caucus, founded by Jordan and his closest allies in 2015 and made up of about three dozen members, is well-known for its ideological solidarity and guerrilla negotiating tactics. Its members have long desired a greater say in the legislative process, and close leadership races offer a rare opportunity to extract concessions. While the precise list of Freedom Caucus demands is unclear, caucus members would be happy with offers such as committee chairmanships.

And the top contenders to replace Ryan are well aware that they must curry favor with the Freedom Caucus if they want to claim the speakership. Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy has made clear that he wants the job, and Ryan has personally endorsed him as his successor. But McCarthy does not yet have sufficient support to clinch the vote. His previous attempt to win the post in 2015 fell short for a number of reasons, including his widely criticized remarks suggesting the House GOP's Benghazi investigation had been politically motivated, as well as unsubstantiated allegations of an extramarital affair, which McCarthy denies. Ryan argues that the California Republican has matured since then and that "Kevin is the right person" to replace him in January.

But that will be more easily said than done. Jordan's candidacy indicates McCarthy may once again struggle to secure sufficient support from the most hard-line wing of the party. In preparation for that scenario, majority whip Steve Scalise is quietly weighing his prospects as a backup option.

Jordan's candidacy places more pressure on both McCarthy and Scalise to offer appealing promises to conservatives in exchange for their support.

Jordan's candidacy places more pressure on both Kevin McCarthy and Steve Scalise to offer appealing promises to conservatives in exchange for their support. Still, House Freedom Caucus spokesman Darin Miller says, 'Congressman Jordan is not running as a placeholder candidate.'



Jim Jordan speaks with reporters in the Capitol, July 11.

Still, House Freedom Caucus spokesman Darin Miller assures *TWS*, "Congressman Jordan is running to become speaker. He's not running as a placeholder candidate."

The 54-year-old has recently been mired in controversy amid accusations that he knew about alleged sexual abuse at Ohio State University and failed to take action to stop it when he was an assistant coach for the wrestling team from 1986 until 1994. Several former wrestlers have claimed that Jordan had to have been aware that the school's former athletic

doctor, Richard Strauss, who died in 2005, preyed on members of the team during medical examinations, because it was an open secret in the locker room. Jordan vehemently denies that he had knowledge of the situation. "I never saw, never heard of, never was told about any type of abuse," Jordan told Fox News's Bret Baier on July 6. "If I had been, I would have dealt with it." Some of Jordan's colleagues quickly came out with statements of support for him—including Scalise.

Jordan timed his announcement for the speaker's race for the very beginning of the August recess, when members returned to their districts for five weeks to campaign and meet with constituents. A source close to Jordan tells me that the congressman anticipates

conservative grassroots voters will urge Republican members of Congress to support his longshot bid for the speakership during their time at home. In a July 26 letter filled with effusive praise for Trump, Jordan asked his colleagues to back his candidacy, decrying the current state of Congress and pointing specifically to big spending under a two-year bipartisan agreement reached by congressional leaders in February.

Jordan's letter also contained a laundry list of policy priorities, noting his desire to fully repeal Obamacare, institute

work requirements for welfare programs, fund Trump's wall along the southern border, defund Planned Parenthood, and reduce the federal deficit through substantive spending cuts. He also indicated that he would support a more decentralized legislative process that would place power in the hands of committee chairmen rather than a select few in leadership. "President Trump has taken bold action on behalf of the American people. Congress has not held up its end of the deal, but we can change that," Jordan wrote. "It's time to do what we said." ♦

AARON P. BERNSTEIN / GETTY

Footsoldiers in a Trade War

*In an Iowa metal shop, the booming economy
is hiding the effects of Trump's tariffs*

BY TONY MECIA

Rock Valley, Iowa

The flatbed trucks come from as far away as Chicago and Minneapolis. They roll past the cornfields and grain silos of northwest Iowa and pull into Kooima Company's sprawling plant every day. They are loaded with sheets of steel.

Kooima's workers use lasers and a variety of other machines to cut the steel, bend it, punch holes in it, and weld it to other pieces. The company then sends the intricate parts to makers of agricultural and construction equipment. They head to assembly lines and wind up in trucks, balers, tractors, and other machinery.

The location of Kooima's plant—four hours northwest of Iowa's largest city, Des Moines—seems remote. Yet its business is planted firmly in the middle of the two industries, steel and agriculture, that have felt the biggest effects of the Trump administration's tariffs. The 25 percent tariff on foreign steel imposed in March has dramatically raised Kooima's costs. Retaliatory tariffs by China and other countries have hurt U.S. farmers, who buy much of the equipment produced by Kooima's customers.

Kooima, which has grown to 170 workers since its founding 30 years ago, has felt the effects, too. But on a July walk through the plant with owner Phil Kooima, a third-generation metal fabricator, the high-pitched whirs of cutting steel and repeated clangs of metal against metal

indicate business is strong. Kooima acknowledges that Trump's tariffs and foreign responses to them are making steel more expensive, cutting into profits, and endangering some of his product lines. But surprisingly, he's not too distressed or worried. He says he's sympathetic to Trump's goals and sees tariffs as just one part of new federal policies that have led to a surge of orders since the 2016 election.

"It's going to be a little painful in the short term, but in the long term, there could be a good outcome," Kooima says. "The little bit of cost is being outweighed by all the positive stuff that is happening."

Trump's tariffs are rippling through the U.S. economy, sometimes in unexpected ways. They have made the price of steel more volatile, aggravated people who deal in it, and introduced uncertainty into markets that depend on predictability. But so far, as Kooima's experience shows, many businesses are weathering the tariffs because of the wider strength of the U.S. economy. That outlook helps explain why Trump remains popular in rural areas even as

the fallout of his trade policy seems to land disproportionately on key elements of his base such as blue-collar workers and farmers.

A NEW TRADE POLICY

In the 2016 election campaign, one of the many ways Trump broke from tradition was in making trade policy one of his top issues. For many years, leaders from both parties had backed free trade—signing deals such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (Bill Clinton, 1993) and approving China's entry into the World Trade Organization (George W. Bush, 2001). Trump, though,



Kooima workers unloading sheets of steel

Tony Mecia is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Timeline of a Trade War

◀ **April 19, 2017:**

Commerce Department opens investigation into steel imports.

February 17, 2018:

Commerce Department concludes cheap steel imports damage national security.

2018

FEB.

MAR.

APR.

MAY

March 1: Trump orders 25 percent duty on imports of foreign steel and 10 percent on aluminum; Canada, Mexico, and the E.U. temporarily excluded as negotiations with foreign countries commence.

April 1: China imposes retaliatory tariffs on about \$3 billion of U.S. agricultural products.

June 6: Mexico announces \$3 billion in retaliatory tariffs on U.S. agricultural goods, including pork and cheese.

May 31: Trump announces steel and aluminum tariffs will apply to Canada, Mexico, and the E.U. Canada retaliates with \$13 billion in tariffs on U.S.-made steel and aluminum and trade goods ranging from bourbon to toilet paper.

tapped into public anxieties about the effects of free trade, helping propel him to crucial victories in industry-heavy states such as Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania.

On the campaign trail, he promised to renegotiate NAFTA and exit the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a 12-nation trade deal negotiated under President Barack Obama that even most of his Republican opponents backed. Trump proposed adding a 45 percent tariff to Chinese imports and a 35 percent tariff on imports from Mexico. He was vague about plans for steel specifically, other than saying he would fight to protect steel jobs and stick up for U.S. industry against trade cheats.

Economists said the Trump trade plans would devastate the stock market and plunge the country into recession—a theme echoed by many of his GOP rivals. In denouncing Trump’s candidacy, Mitt Romney in March 2016 said Trump’s tariff plan would “instigate a trade war that would raise prices for consumers, kill export jobs, and lead entrepreneurs and businesses of all stripes to flee America.”

At the time of the election, hot-rolled steel coil, one of the most common U.S. steel products, sold for around \$500 a ton.

Three months after Trump took office, the Commerce Department launched an investigation to determine if U.S. national security was being imperiled by foreign-made steel. If so, Trump could order widespread tariffs or quotas on foreign steel, as opposed to the piecemeal approach of targeting particular countries or products through



Phil Kooima on his factory floor

anti-dumping cases, as had been the usual Washington practice. By then, steel had risen to about \$610 a ton.

In May 2017, inside an auditorium at the Department of Commerce, officials held a hearing on steel. More than three dozen witnesses shared their perspectives, including steel-company executives, union bosses, pipe-makers, and heads of trade groups. CEOs testified that their industry was vital to national defense but that it was having to close plants and lay off workers because foreign companies, sometimes backed financially by their countries’ governments, produced a glut of steel that was driving down prices. Nucor CEO John Ferriola, for instance, said that his company’s product winds up in Humvees, Abrams tanks, Bradley Fighting Vehicles, and the Patriot missile system. While acknowledging that military applications constitute “a relatively small share of our overall sales,” he added, “in a time of national crisis, the U.S. cannot afford to rely on imported steel slabs from foreign suppliers like China and Russia.”

The governments of China, Russia, South Korea, Brazil, and Turkey prop up their steel companies, he claimed, and such subsidies harm U.S. production. “When we’re not making money, it’s very difficult to continue to invest in new machines and invest in our teammates in order to help them be ready when we have a need for national defense,” Ferriola said.

Not all those testifying favored tariffs. Some consumers of steel, such as tin-can makers, warned of higher food

TIMELINE: THE WEEKLY STANDARD; ALL IMAGES: TONY MEGIA / THE WEEKLY STANDARD

June 20: The E.U. announces retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods ranging from steel and aluminum products to corn, peanuts, jeans, and motorcycles.

July 6: Citing unfair trade, Trump hits China with \$34 billion in new tariffs on industrial products. China says United States is launching “the biggest trade war in economic history” and responds with \$34 billion in further tariffs on U.S. agricultural products, including soybeans and meat.

August 1: Trump says he is considering 25 percent tariffs on \$200 billion more of Chinese goods.

JUNE

JULY

AUG.

June 22: India announces \$241 million in retaliatory tariffs against U.S. agricultural goods, including almonds, apples, walnuts, chickpeas, and lentils.

July 25: Trump and the E.U. announce intent to negotiate lower tariffs, increase trade, and eliminate the new tariffs on metals and associated retaliatory tariffs.

August 7-8: U.S. announces intent to impose \$16 billion in new tariffs on Chinese goods. China responds in kind.

costs. And representatives from the Chinese and Russian embassies assured the panel that their countries’ steel industries caused no harm to U.S. national security. The United States produces more than enough steel to supply its military, they pointed out.

When the Commerce Department released the results of its investigation in February 2018, it sided, unsurprisingly, with the president’s policy preference. Foreign steel, it found, accounted for about one-third of the 107 million metric tons of steel the U.S. economy used in 2017. Although U.S. producers still have a commanding market share, the report concluded that inexpensive foreign imports were causing domestic steelmakers to lose money, lay off workers, and close plants. U.S. steel plants in 2017 ran at just 72 percent of capacity—below the 80 percent level they needed to be profitable—the report said, and “excessive imports of steel in the present circumstances do threaten to impair national security.” By then, steel had risen to \$750 a ton.

In March, Trump imposed a 25 percent tariff on products made by foreign steel mills. He initially excluded some U.S. allies but later applied the tariffs to them, too. By then, U.S. hot-rolled steel coil had shot up to more than \$850 a ton. U.S. steelmakers had been able to aggressively raise their prices because demand was improving and the prospect of tariffs on foreign steel meant they didn’t have to worry as much about being undercut by overseas competitors.

TARIFFS AT EYE LEVEL

There’s little disagreement that the tariffs have been good for U.S. steel companies, which are investing in new plants or expanding old ones in Illinois, Ohio, South Carolina, Arkansas, and Florida. Sales are up. Profits are strong. New workers are being

brought into mills by the hundreds, adding to the estimated 140,000 U.S. steel-company employees.

Of course, that’s not the end of the story. China, Canada, Mexico, Turkey, the E.U., and others retaliated with tariffs on all sorts of U.S. products—including soybeans, pork, motorcycles, whiskey, and steel. Economists say this is what the start of a trade war looks like, with countries taking turns piling up the levies, inhibiting trade, driving up prices for consumers, and slowing economic growth.

Then there’s the matter of the U.S. industries that depend on steel. There are far more workers engaged in shaping steel than in making it: Federal data says there are 1.5 million metal-fabrication jobs, a figure that doesn’t include work such as auto assembly that is closely tied to steel. This summer, the price of hot-rolled coil hit about \$900 a ton—80 percent higher than when Trump was elected. Metal-fabrication companies are now engaged in a high-stakes guessing game in which Washington largely holds all the cards: Where will steel prices be in a month? In three months? Will the tariffs come off Canadian steel and when? The answers determine how much steel to buy and how much to stockpile.

To comprehend the complex effects of the tariffs, it helps to understand the typical path that steel takes from its origins into something most consumers would recognize. An alloy of mined iron ore (or scrap metal) and carbon, steel is forged in a mill. The vast majority of U.S. steelmaking capacity is controlled by six companies: Nucor, U.S. Steel, ArcelorMittal (based in Luxembourg), Gerdau (based in Brazil), AK Steel, and Steel Dynamics. Most of the steel Kooima uses in his Iowa plant originates from U.S. Steel, Nucor, and Steel Dynamics. Until tariffs made its steel too expensive, Algoma, a smaller company

in Ontario, Canada, was a fourth supplier for Kooima.

From the mills, the steel typically goes to a distributor, also known as a “service center.” Distributors process the steel and prepare it for the next step. In Kooima’s case, a distributor receives hot-rolled steel coil from the mill, which is spooled like a roll of paper towels, and flattens it into slabs or sheets. These are what are trucked to Kooima’s plant in Rock Valley.

Distributors depend on strong relationships with the mills. They jockey for favorable prices, of course, but also to ensure they are at the front of the line to receive steel when supplies grow tight. The relationships are friendly but not always harmonious. At a Chicago meeting of steel distributors in June, some suggested that the financial success the mills are reaping has failed to trickle down.

Inside a packed meeting room at the historic Union League Club in downtown Chicago, about 60 people turned out to hear Jean Carroll Kemp, a senior vice president with the Steel Manufacturers Association, which represents mills, talk about the tariffs. Most of the audience were from steel-distribution firms. But at a back table sat Jack Biegalski, a sales director with ArcelorMittal, who stood up and introduced himself. He added, to laughs: “There’s a lot of people smiling in here, so it must be a good time to be in the steel business!”

Andy Gross, president of the Association of Steel Distributors as well as head of the Chicago-based Alliance Steel, deadpanned in response, “I know ArcelorMittal is happy to be in the steel business.” The crowd roared with laughter.

In a 30-minute talk, Kemp showed a slide presentation defending the steel tariffs to a skeptical crowd. She said the root of the problem is global “excess supply,” driven mainly by China, which makes half of the world’s steel and 10 times as much as the United States. China has increased production faster than the worldwide demand for steel has grown, she said, resulting in “excess capacity” at U.S. mills that has not been relieved through negotiations. Tariffs were a sensible tactic, she said: “Sometimes, you have to break a few eggs in order to make your perfect French omelet.”

The distributors pressed Kemp in the question-and-answer session. One said the tariffs created “significant pain in the distribution world.” Another said the situation is “very stressful for everybody in this room—except for Jack.” Kemp replied that the goal of the tariffs is not to harm steel users but to ensure that the steel industry and those who depend on it are around in the future: “Consuming industries do not benefit if large portions of the U.S.

steel industry close.” And, she added: “It is not our intent to see our customers disappear.”

In an interview after the event, Gross, the distributor-association president, said the effect of the tariffs has been complex and unpredictable. While the steel mills are “coining money,” among his folks, “I don’t think anybody feels they are on solid ground right now.” He says distributors are filled with “angst and uncertainty.”

Gross figures he lost a couple hundred thousand dollars because he had a deal to buy Canadian steel when the Trump administration unexpectedly included our northern neighbor in the list of countries subject to the tariffs. But overall, he says, business has been solid while the price of steel has risen: His costs are higher, but so are his revenues because he’s selling at higher prices, and his customers are still demanding lots of steel. “It has helped us, though I don’t want to admit that, because you are going to pay 10 to 20 percent more for that barbecue when you go to Home Depot,” he says. “For the country, maybe it’s not so great. For us as a service center, it has helped us in certain ways.”



Mike Kooima, left, with Peter Zagskhi

FROM DISTRIBUTOR TO FABRICATOR

As workers in Kooima’s Iowa plant unload the sheets of steel coming from a distributor, Phil Kooima, 54, reminisces about his family’s history in this business. During World War II, his grandfather, Charles Kooima, moved to Michigan to make armaments. When hostilities concluded, he moved back to Rock Valley and started his own small metalworking plant, what’s known in the industry as a “job shop.” It became the family business.

In 1988, Kooima’s father suggested his son become an entrepreneur and start his own business. When he launched Kooima Company, it wasn’t an acrimonious split, just the chance to start something new. Kooima’s business wasn’t a competitor: The family business was a machine shop that made round metal parts, while Kooima Company is a fabrication shop that works with flat metal.

Around the country, there are thousands of job shops like Kooima’s. Some are mom-and-pop operations with a handful of workers, while others have hundreds of employees. Most occupy niches and don’t compete with each other. Kooima is strong in agricultural and construction equipment. Another job shop might specialize in pieces for residential housing or commercial construction. Some places might have employees work on the metal by hand, while bigger

operations such as Kooima rely more heavily on automation.

In a town of 3,800 residents, Kooima and his plant stand out. “He’s a big fish, let’s put it that way,” says David Miller, Rock Valley’s economic development director. Outside the town, in Sioux County, farming is dominant, but closer in, there are around two dozen shops that specialize in steel fabrication and related specialties such as metal plating and heat treating. With 740 workers in 2016, manufacturing is the town’s biggest industry. The average salary for these workers is \$64,200, more than double the average U.S. individual income. “It’s a one-stop shop, where if you’ve got a part you need to have made and finished, we can do it all in-house within a mile of each other,” Miller says of the town.

Like most of rural America, the area is solidly pro-Trump. Of Iowa’s 99 counties, Sioux County gave the president his most lopsided win in the state in 2016—a 69-point victory, 82-13, over Clinton.

Within days of the election, Kooima says, new orders started pouring in, especially from his customers in the construction-equipment business. He won’t name his customers but says they include all the household names. Business confidence surged in late 2016, largely on the expectation that a Republican-controlled White House and Congress would cut regulations and taxes.

Even with growing concerns about trade, that favorable outlook continues. In June, the National Association of Manufacturers reported that 95 percent of companies surveyed in the second quarter had a somewhat or very positive business outlook—an all-time high. The U.S. economy has added manufacturing jobs each of the last 12 months. Fabricated-metal jobs are up about 4 percent over a year ago and kept increasing even after the steel tariffs took effect.

With Trump talking up U.S. manufacturing, Kooima says some big companies are “getting nervous and saying, ‘Do we really need to buy this in China and is it worth the risk if something goes wrong? Let’s buy this in North America, where we can control it.’” That translates to more orders for his Iowa firm.

Kooima has been forced to make some adjustments. Sioux County’s unemployment rate is half the national average, and qualified workers are scarce. So he gave his employees the option to work an hour of overtime a day and a half-day on Saturdays, which could boost their pay by more than one-quarter. The offer stands as there is so much work to do.

But the tariffs are eating into Kooima’s profits. Steel prices rose so fast this spring and summer that his quotes to customers didn’t fully reflect his costs. Only now is he

The Right Judge for the Job

THOMAS J. DONOHUE
PRESIDENT AND CEO
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Earlier this summer, President Trump was called upon to exercise one of the most important responsibilities of the American presidency: nominating a justice to the U.S. Supreme Court. His decision would have implications for virtually every institution and aspect of our society, including the future of our free enterprise system. Facing this monumental task, the president hit a home run by nominating Circuit Judge Brett Kavanaugh. With senators returning to work this week, it’s now up to them to finish the job and confirm this outstanding nominee so that he can get to work.

The American business community has always had a major stake in the affairs of our nation’s highest court. Multiple times per year, matters of critical, precedent-setting importance

to our nation’s job creators come before the Supreme Court, and the outcomes of those decisions have a lasting impact on the way businesses operate, invest, hire, provide benefits to employees, and much more.

For this reason, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s Litigation Center regularly advocates cases in front of the Supreme Court. This includes fighting frivolous lawsuits, bad regulations, and faulty lower court rulings. It also includes defending free enterprise, free speech, and the rights of business owners. Through our decades of experience before the Court, we’ve found that the most important qualities in a justice are his or her fairness and consideration of the principles of limited government enshrined in our Constitution.

Legal professionals of all political persuasions who have worked with Judge Kavanaugh over the years have described him as an accomplished, fair, and thoughtful jurist who

will make an excellent addition to our nation’s highest court. In the Chamber’s view, he takes seriously the interests and legal arguments on all sides of a case. Judge Kavanaugh has repeatedly demonstrated that he treats all who come before him seeking justice with the utmost dignity and respect that every party in our legal system deserves.

This is why the Chamber fully supports Judge Kavanaugh and has deemed his confirmation a “key vote” that will be factored into our grading of lawmakers this year. Rather than play political games with such a critical matter, senators should give him a fair hearing and then swiftly move to confirm him as an associate justice on the Supreme Court. Once they do, Judge Kavanaugh can get to work on the many pressing legal issues that will come before the Court.



Learn more at
uschamber.com/abovethefold.

regaining the ability to estimate more accurately. He says he's happy to pay overtime as long as there is work to support it, and for now, he's seeing no slowdown and feels confident in managing the company's risks. His biggest fear, he says, is a "black swan" event—something terrible that nobody can anticipate.

As his prices rise, he anticipates losing some work, ironically, to foreign competition. Walking into the plant's welding shop, he picks up a piece of metal resembling an empty cube with the top missing and holes in its sides. Welded from four different pieces, it is designed to hold a truck battery in place. With the price of U.S. steel surging, his cost to make the battery tray has risen dramatically. But a competitor in China can buy steel there at around \$550 a ton (40 percent less than the U.S. price), weld the pieces together, and ship it to the United States for cheaper than Kooima can make it. While there's a 25 percent tariff on Chinese hot-rolled steel coil, there's no tariff on battery trays made of Chinese steel. One Kooima customer has already told him he'll be switching to a Chinese supplier in the fall.

"Why wouldn't there be a tariff on this?" he says. "Trump needs to figure that out." Kooima says he gave his congressman, Republican Steve King, a tour of the plant in May to make the same point.

Another issue he would like to see addressed is intellectual property. Kooima holds about 25 patents for such products as a "bar with enhanced rigidity," a "segmented knife assembly with replaceable wear segments," and a "composite harvester spout." He says a version of the knife his company developed showed up in the States with a "Made in China" stamp on it less than a year after he introduced it. He's uncertain whether a Chinese firm copied his knife or found the design by hacking into company computers. Trump has cited China's theft of U.S. intellectual property as justification for many of the non-steel tariffs imposed on China in July. It's one more reason Kooima seems comfortable with the steel tariffs.

A MANUFACTURING BOOM

A lot of the plant's work is performed with 35 high-tech lasers. These are programmed to cut shapes from a sheet of steel with great precision—similar to using a cookie cutter, though slicing into quarter-inch-thick steel instead of dough. But some areas require more human attention, like making the



For Kooima Co., tariffs mean both higher costs and tougher competition. Sheet steel, at left, is subject to tariffs, but many products made of steel, as the one at right, are not, giving a pricing edge to Chinese companies.

180 different kinds of knives needed for harvesting machines. Workers in that area have had to hustle to process the steel they need to keep up with a rash of new orders.

"With the dollar going down, our overseas orders have gone crazy," says Mike Kooima, 43, who has worked at the plant for 21 years. (He is not related to Phil Kooima—around here the name is "like Smith," Mike jokes.) "Germany and France are buying a lot of products." The dollar is down more than 6 percent against the euro since Trump's tariff decision, which makes U.S. products more attractive to foreign buyers. As for the tariffs, he says: "It is what it is. I don't think we can do anything about it. We can complain,

but that doesn't do nothing."

Phil Kooima figures the tariffs will be "short term." While there have been stories in the news of steel users blaming the tariffs for drops in business—such as Harley-Davidson's announcement that it would shift some motorcycle production abroad and the nail plant in Missouri that laid off more than 100 workers and blamed rising steel costs—Kooima knows of nothing similar in his industry. The economy is booming, and nobody is suffering.

"Eventually, Trump will get what he wants, and that is China and the other countries to drop any tariffs on the American stuff, then we'll go back to level pricing," he predicts.

For now, the tariffs might not be helpful for his business. But Kooima is buoyed by what he says is an overdue discussion Trump is leading of the merits of U.S. manufacturing.

Free-market economists say the negative effects of tariffs can be hard to detect in the short term. It's tough to see orders that are not placed, investments that are not made, innovations that are not designed, and jobs that are not created. But on the factory floor in Rock Valley, it's like the old Marx Brothers line: Who are you going to believe, me or your own eyes? From Phil Kooima's vantage point, things are heading in the right direction for his company, his community, his industry, his country.

"It's just good to have somebody support manufacturing," Kooima says. "If the president says it's good, it's really easy for me to come out here and say, 'Hey, guys, we're making the stuff America needs. They need us.' That's really uplifting. For a guy like Mike, slogging away at the machine all day long, I can say, 'America needs harvesting knives.' It feels good for him. It's positive. The national conversation has changed." ♦

Rubio Goes Nationalist

Meet the new Marco . . .

By JOHN McCORMACK

In June 2016, Marco Rubio changed his mind and announced that he would not be retiring from the Senate as he had planned. A major reason he was seeking a second term, Rubio said, was to help the Senate exercise what “could end up being its most important [role] in the years to come: the constitutional power to act as a check and balance on the excesses of a president”—whether that would be President Clinton or President Trump.

After rattling off his concerns about Hillary Clinton, Rubio said: “The prospect of a Trump presidency is also worrisome to me. It is no secret that I have significant disagreements with Donald Trump. His positions on many key issues are still unknown. And some of his statements, especially about women and minorities, I find not just offensive but unacceptable. If he is elected, we will need senators willing to encourage him in the right direction, and if necessary, stand up to him. I’ve proven a willingness to do both.”

Rubio then defeated a populist, Trumpian primary challenger that August by 54 percentage points. He went on to win by 8 points in the general election that November, while Donald Trump defeated Hillary Clinton in Florida by 1 point. Other conservative GOP senators outperformed Trump in the key battleground states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. And Trump’s approval rating today is mired in the 40s despite a roaring economy. Yet the lesson of 2016 for many Republicans is that they need to be more like Trump.

One of those Republicans appears to be Marco Rubio. The Florida senator fully backs Trump’s trade war with

China. “The most catastrophic thing that could happen is not a trade war, but that we lose one, or that we back down from one,” Rubio tells me in an interview.

Earlier this summer, Rubio delivered a speech in Washington calling for a “new nationalism” in which he decried an “economic elitism that has replaced a commitment to the dignity of work with a blind faith in financial markets and that views America simply as an economy instead of a nation.”

“I saw the devastating impact of this kind of thinking firsthand during my campaign for president,” Rubio told the Faith and Freedom Conference. “I saw it in the factory towns hollowed out by the companies who shipped those jobs overseas to turn a bigger profit—and where the dignity of work has been replaced by food stamps and disability checks and opioids.” You just might say that Rubio painted a picture of “American carnage,” to borrow a phrase from the Trump inaugural address.

Whereas big tech companies were once featured in his speeches as examples of American innovation, Rubio now warns of a lack of corporate morality and patriotism: “When right and wrong is based entirely and solely on profitability, then there is nothing immoral about shipping jobs overseas or surrendering key American technology and innovation to China.” He singled out Google for refusing to work with the Department of Defense but contemplating a return to China.

Even when dissenting from Trump administration policy, some of Rubio’s tweets have a more Trumpian flair these days. “I know for a FACT that @FLOTUS has been a strong voice of compassion for migrant children. The vicious treatment of her over the last day is a reminder of how Trump Derangement Syndrome, where hatred for him justifies everything, has become an



JASON SEILER

John McCormack is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

epidemic. Totally lunacy everywhere!!!” Rubio tweeted in June, when the issue of separating children from parents who had unlawfully crossed the border was dominating headlines. “Sadly #China is out-negotiating the administration & winning the trade talks right now. They have avoided tariffs & got a #ZTE deal without giving up anything meaningful in return by using N.Korea talks & agriculture issues as leverage. This is #NotWinning,” Rubio also tweeted that month.

What Rubio is trying to achieve appears to be a synthesis of his own “reform conservatism” and Trumpism. It is, for the most part, not an ideological reinvention. It’s more of a rethinking or a rebranding, as the *Economist* (“Marco’s Makeover”) and the *New Yorker* (“Rubio’s Reboot for the Trump Era”) have observed. And that makes a certain amount of sense as a matter of politics and policy. Trump is after all the Republican president, and the Republican party may increasingly become the home of working-class voters in the years to come.

Asked how Trump has changed the Republican party, for good or ill, Rubio has only positive things to say. “One of the things the president was able to do through his election is reconnect the Republican party to working Americans. It was probably a needed correction. It was the party that was heavily focused on the employer’s side, which is still very important, but not enough on the employee’s side,” Rubio tells me. “The early inklings of that were the Huckabee campaign and Santorum in 2012. All of them sort of nibbled at the edges of it. The president was able to truly embrace it, and I think that’s a very positive thing.”

Rubio now speaks with President Trump “I would say twice, three times a month.” He worked closely with Ivanka Trump on developing a paid-family-leave bill that would give Americans the option of taking some of their Social Security for family leave in exchange for delaying retirement by three to six months. “Ivanka views her role as sort of the host of a competition of ideas,” Rubio says. “She’s trying to encourage people to come forward, so we’re going to be the first entrant into this competition on the Republican side.” After Rubio unveiled his bill, Utah senator Mike Lee announced he intends to introduce his own paid-family-leave bill soon with Iowa senator Joni Ernst. Welcome to “Celebrity Apprentice: Paid Family Leave Edition.”

While Rubio called for a “new nationalism” in June, the speech focused heavily on the need to strengthen families and civil society. It was the kind of nationalism admired more by David Brooks than Steve Bannon. (“This is one of the best and most unifying Republican speeches in years,” the *New York Times* columnist tweeted.) Rubio steeped his new nationalism in the language of the Declaration of Independence. “Nothing is more American than the belief that all men are created equal. Nothing is more American than the belief that every human being is endowed by God with

the inalienable right to life and liberty and to pursue happiness,” Rubio said. “This is the kind of new nationalism we need. And this is the kind of new nationalism we should insist new immigrants embrace.” After the speech, Rubio told me he doesn’t see a distinction between the kind of nationalism he was calling for and patriotism. He acknowledged the nationalist label is “often used to describe people who believe that they should only do things that are good for their country and at the expense of other countries” but said he rejects that view.

To the “old nationalists” like Bannon and Trump adviser Stephen Miller, of course, Rubio is the poster boy for economic elitism and globalism for his membership in the bipartisan Gang of Eight that wrote the 2013 comprehensive immigration reform bill. Asked if the backlash to the Gang of Eight bill, which passed the Senate but never got a vote in the House, led to Trump’s nomination, Rubio sidesteps the question and instead talks about how voters are frustrated with illegal immigrants breaking the law and competing with them for jobs. Asked about Arkansas GOP senator Tom Cotton’s argument that we need to cut legal immigration numbers because new immigrants are putting downward pressure on wages, Rubio says there are “elements of truth” to the argument. “What those numbers are is to be debated and should be able to adjust given changes in conditions in the economy,” Rubio says. “What I don’t know is if we can just set an arbitrary cap.”

Some of Rubio’s rhetoric on economics, including his condemnation of a “radical you’re-on-your-own individualism promoted by our government and by our society over the last 30 years,” seems new for him. But most of the actual economic policies Rubio has been prominently fighting for in Congress—an expanded child tax credit to benefit the working class and the paid-family leave bill—are of the same type he has long promoted with Utah senator Mike Lee.

In the tax reform bill last year, Rubio and Lee worked to deliver for working-class voters—the “47 percent” Mitt Romney insulted for not paying income tax in 2012 and who swung dramatically toward Trump in 2016. Rubio and Lee pushed for a bigger child tax credit and wanted the \$2,000 per child credit to apply against Social Security and Medicare taxes as well, in order to benefit the vast majority of working-class voters who don’t pay income taxes. They successfully got Senate negotiators to make \$1,400 of tax credit refundable instead of \$1,100. But their amendment to make the entire \$2,000 refundable failed on a 29-71 vote, after the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page lashed out, arguing it would be “destructive” to increase the corporate tax rate by a percentage point or two in order to pay for more working-class tax cuts.

While Rubio's support for paid family leave and a big child tax credit are consistent with his pre-Trump agenda, he acknowledges that his hawkishness on China has evolved in the Trump era. Asked if he's trying to be more like Trump with his tweets and his rhetoric on China, Rubio says, "Obviously when I was on the campaign trail I tweeted a lot less, because I was busy campaigning, but I've always handled my own tweets. I don't know if anything has changed in terms of the style."

"I've always focused on China," he adds. "The difference is my main focus in China for a long time was geopolitical and human rights. It remains that way, but . . . my geopolitics and human rights [concerns] . . . led me to economics." Rubio says it was a mistake to grant China permanent normal trade relations, which the Senate did by an 83-15 vote in 2000, and admit the Communist country to the World Trade Organization. Beijing "assumed all of the benefits of the world international trading order but rejected all the responsibilities, and they did not become more democratic."

At times, Rubio seems to echo the warnings that China hawks like Robert Kagan and William Kristol made in the pages of this magazine before China was admitted to the WTO. At others, he sounds more like paleoconservative populist Pat Buchanan.

How exactly does he plan to stop American companies from shipping jobs overseas? "Ultimately when it comes to China, there needs to be a cost, a penalty for doing it because China's not just an economic competitor," Rubio says. "They seek to supplant us, and they use their economy as a way to supplant us—not just economically, but militarily, technologically, and geopolitically. But as far as the rest of the world is concerned, I think what it means is that when a large multinational corporation is doing something that's good for American workers, we help them, and when they're not, we're under no special obligation to bend over backwards because their mailing address has a U.S. zip code."

It's not quite clear how protectionist Rubio has become. Rubio still thinks the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which excluded China, would have been good as a matter of foreign policy and economics. "It was the economic equivalent of our military pivot to Asia" and would've opened up non-Chinese markets for American agriculture and industry, he says. "Unfortunately, both of the presidential nominees were against TPP, and therefore that deal was dead." As for Trump's trade moves against European allies, Rubio simply objects to the timing: "I would have dealt with China first, together with the European Union in particular, and then

I would have focused on the imbalance in that relationship [with European allies]."

At the beginning of the Trump administration, Utah's Lee introduced a bill requiring congressional approval of any tariff increase, and in early June of this year Tennessee Republican Bob Corker introduced a narrower bill requiring congressional approval for raising tariffs on the basis of national security, as Trump did when he increased steel and aluminum tariffs on Canada, Mexico, and the European Union.

Following Rubio's "new nationalism" speech on June 6, he said he hadn't had a chance to look at the Corker bill, which had been introduced that day and was becoming the subject of much debate. On July 31 in his office, Rubio remained undecided on the measure. "I haven't made up my mind on it. I have to think through what it means. I'm generally in favor of having the Congress having more authority," he said, before expressing concern that "it weakens the nation's hand in [trade] negotiations, because it sends a signal to these countries that they don't have

to compromise, because back home, we're divided on it."



Rubio with Trump in Miami's Little Havana, June 16, 2017

What happened to the senator who promised in 2016 to stand up to Trump when necessary? Rubio contends he's lived up to that promise. While he focuses on areas where he agrees with Trump, he has expressed disagreement with the president on a number of issues. Rubio says Trump should be "commended" for his efforts to achieve North Korean denuclearization, but he remains "very skeptical" Trump's diplomacy will accomplish anything.

Rubio has been an outspoken defender of human rights, and when I ask him about Trump's comments sanitizing North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un as a leader who "loves his people" and whose people love him with "great fervor," he expresses polite disagreement: "I don't agree with that assessment of him. My guess is that the president is not someone who has lived his entire life attending Council on Foreign Relations meetings and as a member of Congress, sitting through hearing after hearing, and taking [trips with congressional delegations] and meeting these folks. I think he expresses himself as someone who's new to politics, which he is. It's one of the reasons why he won. From the world of business, he probably feels that in order to reach a deal with someone, you've got to be nice to them. That opens them up. The reason I wouldn't say those things is because I actually think it would demoralize those who are standing up to that regime."

It's not the fiery response you'd imagine from Rubio if a Democratic president had said the same words about Kim. But Rubio hasn't become a total Trump sycophant. A member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Rubio says that Robert Mueller should be allowed to finish his job, and he rejects some of the right-wing attacks on the FBI. "I don't think [the FBI] did anything wrong" in surveilling Carter Page, Rubio said on CNN on June 22. "There [were] a lot of reasons unrelated to the [Steele] dossier for why they wanted to look at Carter Page. And Carter Page was not a key member of the Trump campaign, and the Trump campaign has said that." Rubio has introduced a bill to automatically impose new sanctions on Russia if the director of national intelligence determines Russia is interfering in an American election.

But none of his current criticism of the president comes close to what Rubio was saying when he ran for president in 2016. He repeatedly said during that year's primaries that Trump was so mentally unstable he couldn't be trusted with the nuclear launch codes, and he stood by that assessment throughout the general election. Does he still view Trump that way? "Well, he's had the nuclear codes for a year and a half, and we've been all right," Rubio replies.

"So, look," he continues, "elections are a competition for power through peaceful means. It's better than war. In an election, you're in a competitive environment. You are running against another person, and you're going to do whatever you think it takes to win, and so is the other person. When it's all said and done, the president has on his cabinet Ben Carson, who was a competitor of his. He's appointed people that endorsed me, like Mike Pompeo and Nikki Haley. Elections end. What I always find funny about that question—not with you in particular, but when others ask it—is if he had been my opponent in a general election as a Democrat, everyone would be insisting that I leave the election behind and work with him. But somehow, a year and a half later, at least some, mostly on the left, insist that I continue to hold onto whatever happened in that campaign. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama said terrible things about each other in 2008. She ended up serving as his secretary of state for four years.

"So as far as my views of the president—he deserves credit for a lot. If you for a moment just erase the name Trump, take out all the Twitter and the daily noise, and just focus on what's happened over the last 18 months: ISIS has lost all its territory in the Middle East. All of our partners in the NATO alliance are looking for ways to contribute more. The U.S. is recommitted to NATO; in fact, continues to pour money—has given lethal military capacity to Ukraine the previous administration would not give. [We] ended the Iran deal. Moved the embassy to Jerusalem. Got a historic tax cut passed that has led to robust

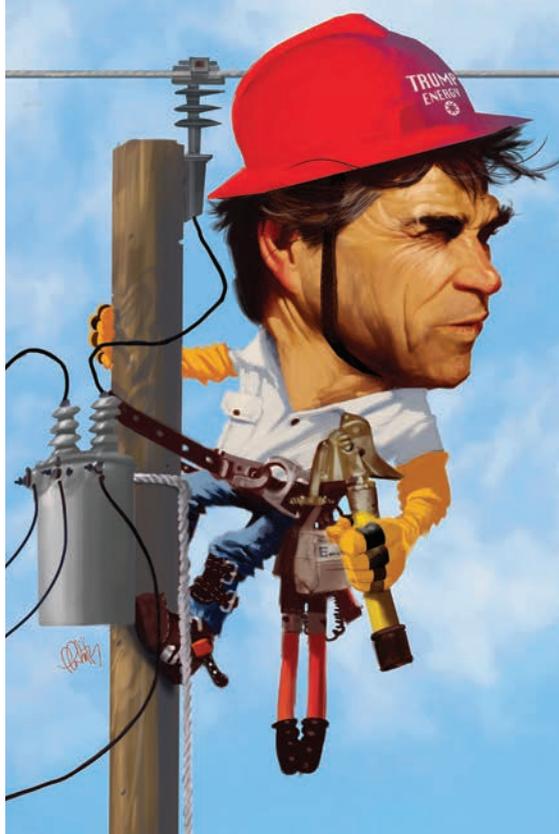
economic growth—one of the best quarters we've ever had, full employment on top of it. [Trump] has appointed one—soon two—conservatives to the U.S. Supreme Court and has slowly but surely, in 18 months, helped to remake the circuit courts, with 24 nominees today—close to one-eighth of all circuit court judges have been appointed by this president in a year and a half. If I told you a Republican president had done that, you would say, "That's a pretty successful year and a half." Unfortunately, it's overshadowed by the noise and stuff he puts out there."

Rubio's 2016 critique of Trump clearly indicated that, although a Clinton presidency would be even worse, he thought Trump lacked a basic mental and moral fitness to be president. We are now closer to the 2020 primaries than the 2016 election, and Republicans who still view Trump that way, like Arizona senator Jeff Flake, think Trump should face a primary challenger.

"Everyone has a right to do whatever they want," Rubio says of Flake's call for a primary challenge. "I could just say to you that in the modern era, every president that's been primaried has ended up losing the general election. George H.W. Bush. Johnson chose not to run. . . . Jimmy Carter. So I would say given that history, if you primaried the president, you are doing a great service to whoever the Democratic nominee is, and many of these things that we've just spoken about would be unraveled and undone."

Absent from Rubio's list of presidents was Gerald Ford, who was primaried by Ronald Reagan and lost a close race in 1976. Reagan believed there were important principles at stake that justified challenging Ford for the nomination, and it paid off for him in 1980. Eighteen months into the administration, Rubio plainly does not feel the same way about Donald Trump.

Where Rubio's rebranding will take him is unclear. At age 47, he's young enough that he could conceivably run for president again any time between 2024 and 2040. The political risk of cozying up to an unpopular president is that he could alienate a significant number of voters who backed him but not Trump in Florida. And too many rebrandings can kill a politician's brand. In 2008, Rubio endorsed evangelical favorite Mike Huckabee for president at the end of compassionate conservative George W. Bush's administration; he then rode a Tea Party wave to the Senate in 2010 and subsequently became the nation's leading advocate of comprehensive immigration reform after the Republican National Committee and the Republican donor class blamed the 2012 loss on Mitt Romney's hard-line immigration stance. As the past shows, Rubio's embrace of the nationalist label in 2018 tells us a lot about where the Republican party is at the moment but not necessarily where it, or he, will be a few years from now. ♦



Rick Perry's Unlikely Third Act

Can a high-profile former governor and presidential hopeful find happiness as a hardworking energy secretary?

BY MICHAEL WARREN

On November 21, 2016, Rick Perry stepped out of an elevator in Trump Tower and into the first proper job interview of his life. Perry had worked as a door-to-door Bible salesman, an officer in the United States Air Force, and a cotton farmer with his father before making his first run for the state legislature in 1984. For the next 30 years, he was hired by voters in the state of Texas to elected office again and again. But at age 66, Perry was applying for a new job—secretary of energy in the administration of President Donald J. Trump.

He remembers entering Trump's office, where Reince Priebus and Steve Bannon sat on either side of the president-elect. "It was like *The Apprentice*," Perry recalls. He must have been in a reality TV state of mind: Immediately following his New York meeting with Trump, the former Texas governor would hop on a plane to Los Angeles to appear in the finale of *Dancing With the Stars*. (As with his 2016 presidential bid, Perry and his dance partner lost early in the season, but he returned to do a rendition of "Ice Ice Baby" with Vanilla Ice. It's on YouTube.)

Twenty months later, Perry is less a star and more a supporting actor in Trump's Washington. For some pols, energy secretary would be a tough third act. After 15 years as the governor of one of the largest and most robust states in the country, and two national campaigns for president,

heading up one of the forgotten departments of the federal government might feel like a downgrade. But Perry seems to relish the job—traveling to international conferences, visiting the department's dozens of research labs, and promoting America's energy industry.

Perry was one of the draws at the World Gas Conference in Washington in June, where he gave the keynote address at the industry-sponsored confab. Sandwiched between performances by a marching band and the Harlem Globetrotters, Perry's speech was standard boilerplate about American natural gas production and market innovation. But it was a hit with conference attendees. "Great speech," said more than one person, as Perry surveyed the exhibit hall afterwards, and I think they meant it.

It's at conferences like this one that Perry is able to let his retail-politician flag fly. Before one meeting, his Canadian counterpart, natural resources minister Jim Carr, approached him like an old pal. Perry wrapped an arm around Carr and gave the minister a friendly shake. "This is a good man," Perry declared. Carr told me it's a "great honor" to work with the former Texas governor, adding that the two men have "common interests" on both the professional and personal levels. "We talk about kids, grandkids, hockey," Carr said.

Their mutual affinity looks and feels genuine, which is all the more remarkable given that their bosses—President Trump and Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau—had recently engaged in a public dispute over trade and protectionism following the G7 summit. Days after the gas conference, Canada would follow through on its threat to impose

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THOMAS FLUHARTY

retaliatory tariffs against the United States for its tariffs on Canadian goods. Back in May, Trump reportedly brought up Canada's involvement in the War of 1812 and the burning of the White House by British troops during a tense phone conversation with Trudeau.

Perry would rather slap backs in person than slap back at critics on Twitter. Those close to him call Perry a collaborator and a team player, someone who looks for ways to make connections with people. At the conference, in a meeting with the energy minister of Azerbaijan, Perry mentioned that his wife had been to the capital city of Baku. Earlier in the week, in an encounter with Russian energy minister Alexander Novak before a meeting of Pacific-region government and business leaders, Perry did his level best to spark a conversation. "I don't love cold weather, but I would like to come to St. Petersburg," said the lifelong Texan. Novak, listening through a translator, nodded sternly.

Perry thrives in this realm, connecting industry leaders and government ministers while promoting America's energy resources. It's the closest his job at the department gets to his previous role as chief salesman for Texas. When I interviewed him four years ago in the governor's office in Austin, he was almost frenetic, jumping up to take phone calls with corporate executives in an effort to bring them to Texas. "I still think I've got a passion for what I do," he told me then, as he looked ahead to his final year in office. "I've got 11 months left. I've got a deal that I'm working on. I've got lots of deals that we're going to be working on." In this sense, Perry was Trump before Trump—presenting himself as a consummate dealmaker.

But for a number of reasons, Republican primary voters weren't convinced, either in 2012 or 2016, that the governor of the largest and most economically vibrant red state ought to be their presidential nominee. Those campaigns were the only ones Perry ever lost. After dropping out in 2016, he told his wife, Anita, that he was retired from politics.

"My father gave me some really good advice," Perry says. Ray Perry, who had been a longtime commissioner and school board member in Haskell County in rural Texas, died in April 2017, shortly after his son was installed as energy secretary. "He said one of the great gifts of a person in public service is to know when to leave and to leave still feeling comfortable that you've got a little bit to give."

That's where Perry *files* aimed to be in the fall of 2016. He and Anita were on a trip to Napa Valley, enjoying retirement, on Election Day. "I didn't know the outcome of the election until the next morning. My phone had blown up," he says. "I went to sleep rather early."

Perry felt he still had more than a little bit to give and quickly reached out to Trump to offer his help. "I wanted to give the president the opportunity to have people like me," he says—people with some actual experience governing,

that is. At Trump Tower, Trump didn't have much to say about the responsibilities at the department he wanted Perry to run. "We probably spent less than five minutes talking about the Department of Energy and the portfolio there," Perry says. "He already knew I already knew that, by and large. He asked about other people." Who did Perry think might be a good fit for other cabinet-level agencies? What did he think of so-and-so for such-and-such job?

Perry wouldn't divulge who the president-elect discussed that day, but needless to say, some of those Trump appointees haven't turned out so well. Scandals, disputes with the White House, and incompetence have defined the Trump cabinet, which is why Perry sticks out as a rare exception. There have been no signs of impending revolt from career employees at the Energy Department, nor have left-wing groups successfully made much noise about Perry's policies. Unlike Rex Tillerson and Jeff Sessions, Perry has had no public tiffs with President Trump. Nor has he committed the sort of ethical lapses or boneheaded maneuvering that doomed Scott Pruitt, Tom Price, David Shulkin. Aides and friends of Perry say that's where his decades of experience in politics have benefited him most.

When I ask him what sets him apart from his scandal-ridden colleagues in the cabinet, Perry points out that the "easiest story for a journalist to write" is about improper flights by a politician. Perry would know—he used the issue of taxpayer-funded private flights against his 2010 primary opponent in the gubernatorial election, Kay Bailey Hutchison, and was dinged himself during his first presidential run, in late 2011, for taking some official flights paid for by industry lobbyists. As Perry jokes, he made all his mistakes long before the national spotlight was on him.

That's not to say he has avoided controversy entirely. But it's been controversy of the most boring kind, over policy, and he's gotten most of the heat from free-market conservatives. Last fall, the Energy Department released a report on power grid resiliency. Perry used the report to urge the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to approve a new price-setting regulation for electricity markets, one that would financially guarantee older coal and nuclear plants their baseload capacity as newer energy resources begin competing (often with government support) in the marketplace. Among the arguments Perry deployed was that national security would be threatened if underfunded power plants were forced to shut down.

But experts at conservative institutions like the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute blasted the proposed rule as a "massive subsidy" that was tantamount to "tipping the scale" toward coal and nuclear. Industry competitors also hated the plan, as did fossil fuel

opponents on the left. And the regulators at FERC weren't convinced; in January, they unanimously rejected the rule, a blow to the administration's efforts to support and revive coal power. Perry characterizes FERC's decision as part of a national conversation about energy resiliency, and his advisers make a fair point—there's no such thing as a truly competitive market when it comes to electricity, so government has a role to play whether it likes it or not.

The resilience rule failure, Perry's most high-profile to date, highlights a frustration the former governor says he has experienced with the way Washington works: Things happen too slowly and get mired in bureaucratic processes. It's a frustration he shares with Trump. But the president also has a tendency to get out in front of the rest of his administration, which sometimes touches on issues in Perry's wheelhouse. One Saturday in late June, Trump tweeted that he had spoken to King Salman of Saudi Arabia. Citing "turmoil and disfunction [sic] in Iran and Venezuela," Trump announced that he'd asked the Arab monarch to increase his oil-rich country's production by two million barrels. "He has agreed!" Trump said. A few hours later, the White House issued a statement clarifying that Saudi Arabia had two million barrels in spare oil capacity and would be "ready" to increase output if needed. It was a small but important mistake which, had it happened when markets were open, could have caused significant confusion.

Perry says he was not briefed on the conversation with the Saudis but dismissed concerns that Trump's mangling of what the Saudi king agreed to would have had any real consequences for energy markets. "It makes total sense to me for the president to try to influence, where he can, to keep gas prices down when Americans are traveling—if there's something we can do within reasonable limits," he says.

The genesis of Trump's conversation with King Salman was a meeting weeks earlier when Perry discussed with the president how international political events were threatening to raise oil prices. "He wanted to know why crude prices were at the level they were," Perry said. "And I shared with him that it's a really unique time in world history from the standpoint of oil production. You have Venezuela on the brink of collapse. You have issues in Angola." The problem for American output, Perry told the president, was a lack of

pipeline capacity to bring crude oil to market. "All of those together versus the demand in the world, which is going up, are putting pressure, and it's a straight-up supply and demand issue. And I think that helps him understand a little better why we got these pressures on," he said.

The benefit Perry brings to the Trump administration isn't just his experience in government—the president seems genuinely to value and listen to his advice, at least in a few areas. Trump considered replacing David Shulkin at Veterans Affairs with Perry before the secretary said publicly he wanted to stay at Energy. But Perry says the president asks him "on a regular basis" about veterans issues, since, as a former Air Force pilot, Perry has experience working with veterans' advocacy groups. Trump has also consulted Perry on some of the prison reform ideas pushed by White House adviser and presidential son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Perry has been careful not to exploit his closeness with the president nor any of the perks of power. Unlike Scott Pruitt, who before he resigned from the Environmental Protection Agency effectively had a permanent lunch reservation at the White House Mess, Perry says he's only eaten at the West Wing a handful of

times. He's all but absent from the Washington social scene as well. He and his wife took National Economic Council director Larry Kudlow out to dinner recently, and he made a notable appearance at this year's White House Easter Egg Roll. But Perry says he went to enough black-tie events as governor and he's not itching to do more. He maintains a low profile in Washington during the week, taking walks around Arlington National Cemetery in the evening before retiring to a nearby condominium. On weekends when he's not traveling internationally, he returns home to Texas.

As far as "retirement" jobs go, Perry's is pretty good. But does he have the desire to do anything else—perhaps fill a different cabinet post or run for office again? Last year, Perry publicly ruled out a primary challenge to Texas senator Ted Cruz, who is up for reelection. And there's little to suggest Republicans will be clamoring for Perry to run for president a third time in 2024, when he'll be 74.

"I'm pretty open that this is my last bite at the apple in terms of public service," Perry says when I ask him what might come next. "But I also will remind people that I said that before." ♦



Perry with Trump after announcing deregulation plans at the Department of Energy, June 29, 2017

Breaking the Climate Spell

Getting out of the Paris Agreement was just the first step on the road to a realist global energy policy

BY RUPERT DARWALL

Thirteen years ago, a Republican president who had pulled the United States out of an onerous climate treaty faced isolation at the annual gathering of Western leaders. “Tony Blair is contemplating an unprecedented rift with the U.S. over climate change at the G8 summit next week, which will lead to a final communiqué agreed by seven countries with President George Bush left out on a limb,” the *Guardian* reported of the meeting at Gleneagles, Scotland. France and Germany preferred an unprecedented split communiqué to a weak one, the article said.

George W. Bush, who had pulled the country out of the Kyoto Protocol in 2003, blinked and agreed to an official document that affirmed global warming was occurring and that “we know enough to act now.” The 2005 G8 put the United States back on the path that ultimately led through the Copenhagen climate summit—when China and India thwarted U.S.-led attempts at a global climate treaty—to the Paris Agreement 11 years later.

There was a very different American president this June at the Charlevoix G7 (as it has been since Russia’s suspension in 2014). Had it not been for the row with Justin Trudeau, when the Canadian prime minister responded to President Trump’s steel and aluminum tariffs with retaliatory tariffs of his own, the big story would have been the climate split. Where 15 years ago the mere possibility of isolation pushed Bush to compromise, Trump embraced the isolation and inserted an America-only paragraph into the summit communiqué outlining a position fundamentally contradicting the rest of the group’s.

“The United States believes sustainable economic

growth and development depends on universal access to affordable and reliable energy resources,” it reads, going on to offer a manifesto for global energy realism. That single paragraph is more definitive than the president’s announcement last August that the United States would be withdrawing from the Paris treaty. After all, George W. Bush nixed the Kyoto Protocol that Bill Clinton signed. And Trump, when announcing the Paris withdrawal, left the door open to U.S. participation in a renegotiated climate deal. At Charlevoix, he closed it. Unlike in 2005, it’s very hard now to see any way back.

This is about far more than process. Trump is breaking the spell of inevitability of the transition to renewable energy. The impression of irresistible momentum has been one of the most potent tools in enforcing compliance with the climate catechism. Like socialism, the clean-energy transition will fail because it doesn’t work. But it requires strong leadership to avoid the ruin that will

disprove the false promise of cost-free decarbonization.

That reality is already hurting those countries that are farther down the renewable-energy path of ruin than the United States—and, when offered the chance, voters are taking it out on politicians. In March, a fanatically pro-wind and solar energy Labor government in South Australia, one of the eight states and territories that make up the country, decided to make the state elections a referendum on renewable energy. With some of the world’s most expensive electricity and a serious blackout in 2016, South Australia voters kicked out Labor and voted in a government vowing to repeal the state’s renewable-energy target.

Days before Justin Trudeau took the center of the global stage as host of the G7 summit, his Liberal party was trounced in provincial elections in Ontario. The province’s party had won four consecutive terms in office and had pressed virtually every pro-renewable, anti-hydrocarbon

When it comes to the politics of energy, the interests of the United States and European green ideology are irreconcilable.

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Donald Trump with G7 leaders in Charlevoix, Canada, June 9

policy imaginable. In the June 7 elections, they took just seven seats in the 124-seat legislature. “I made a promise to the people that we would take immediate action to scrap the cap-and-trade carbon tax and bring their gas prices down,” newly elected premier Doug Ford announced.

Nowhere has confrontation with the physical and economic realities of renewable energy been more painful than Germany, the birthplace of renewable-energy ideology. As party leaders negotiated a new coalition agreement after the September 2017 elections, they acknowledged for the first time that Germany was going to miss the sacrosanct 2020 target to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent from 1990 levels. This had been set in 2007, and the first 20 percent had been easy. Thanks to German reunification, the former East Germany had seen its industries collapse, and there were plenty of inefficient power stations to close. It had always been clear, Angela Merkel declared three weeks after the September federal elections, that it was not going to be easy to cut the other 20 percent “at a time of relatively strong economic growth.” Note: Stronger growth equals higher emissions.

Launching the German renewables transition in 2004, energy minister Jürgen Trittin promised that it would

put no more than the cost of an ice cream on monthly electricity bills. Nine years later, his successor, Peter Altmaier, admitted that the costs could amount to \$1.34 trillion by the end of the 2030s. At a meeting in June of E.U. energy ministers, Germany ran up the white flag. Altmaier shocked fellow E.U. energy ministers by rejecting higher renewable-energy targets. “We’re not going to manage that,” he told them. “Nowhere in Europe is going to manage that. Even if we did manage to get enough electric cars, we wouldn’t have enough renewable energy to keep them on the road.”

No country has a greater abundance of hydrocarbon energy than the United States. The corollary is that no country was as big a loser from participating in the Paris Agreement and its intention to progressively decarbonize the world’s hydrocarbon superpower. On July 10, the Energy Information Administration forecast that next year, the United States will produce 12 million barrels of oil a day and overtake Saudi Arabia to be the world’s number-one producer. When it comes to the politics of energy, the interests of the United States and European green ideology are irreconcilable.

Donald Trump understands this. “Our country is blessed with extraordinary energy abundance, which we didn’t know of even 5 years ago and certainly 10 years ago,” the president said in 2017. Those remarks were not only a paean to America’s energy resources, they were a full-dress rejection of the policies of his predecessor and of the Democrats’ goal of Europeanizing American energy policy.

We have nearly 100 years’ worth of natural gas and more than 250 years’ worth of clean, beautiful coal. We are a top producer of petroleum and the number-one producer of natural gas. We have so much more than we ever thought possible. We are really in the driving seat. And you know what? We don’t want to let other countries take away our sovereignty and tell us what to do and how to do it. That’s not going to happen. With these incredible resources, my administration will seek not only American energy independence that we’ve been looking for for so long, but American energy dominance. And we’re going to be an exporter—exporter. We will be dominant. We will export American energy all over the world, all around the globe. These energy exports will create countless jobs for our people, and provide true energy security to our friends, partners, and allies all across the globe.

For the first time since 1992, when George H.W. Bush went to the Rio Earth Summit, an American president was outlining a global energy strategy diametrically opposed to the tenets underlying the U.N. climate process. Trump was establishing a rival pole based on energy realism and energy abundance.

The Rio Summit was the brainchild of Canadian Maurice Strong, and he understood that what most motivates political leaders, bureaucrats, and corporate CEOs is the fear of being left out. “The process is the policy,” Strong said, and the annual climate conferences that have been held since the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change was adopted in Rio created a sense of irresistible momentum. It’s that spell Trump is now breaking. Countries around the world are being damaged by the anti-hydrocarbon policies encouraged by the U.N., but leaving the Paris Agreement was a step only the United States was strong enough to take. Now it is up to the Trump administration to help other countries act in their economic interests.

Energy secretary Rick Perry has talked of U.S. willingness to lead a global alliance of countries wanting to make fossil fuels cleaner rather than abandoning them. Of the G7, Japan has traditionally been most leery of decarbonization, and after the 2011 Fukushima accident Japan decided to expand its coal-fired generating capacity by half, building 45 new coal power stations.

Poland is another coal-based economy that has no intention of phasing out coal. Of all energy-realist nations, Poland is the one that sees eye to eye with the Trump

administration. During the Brezhnev years, Poland—alone of the Eastern Bloc nations—refused to sign up to sulphur-emission cuts designed to isolate the U.K. and the United States at the height of the acid rain scare. As host of the next round of U.N. climate talks, at Katowice in December, Poland is more than usually important as a U.S. energy ally. Australia, the world’s largest coal exporter, is another obvious U.S. partner.

Where the United States can make the biggest difference, though, is with the developing nations who depend on overseas finance to build out their electrical grids and need the cheap, reliable energy only coal can supply. Last September, Southeast Asian energy ministers, noting the rising use of coal in the region, called for greater promotion of clean coal. In June, India struck a strategic energy partnership with the United States, described by Perry as an “amazing opportunity for U.S. energy” to sell clean coal, nuclear technology, oil, and gas.

In October 2016, Nigeria’s finance minister, Kemi Adeosun, railed against the West’s energy imperialism and the hypocrisy of using coal to industrialize and then denying it to Africans. “By telling us not to use coal they are pushing us into the destructive cycle of underdevelopment; while you have the competitive advantages, you tie our hands behind us,” she said.

Denying the world’s poor cheap electricity is the official policy of the World Bank. In 2012, Barack Obama agreed to the appointment of Jim Yong Kim as president of the World Bank, and the next year, the bank stopped the financing of coal-fired generation. Although the Trump administration publicly opposes the coal ban and the United States has the largest number of votes at the World Bank, the institution is doubling down on its anti-fossil-fuel agenda. At Emmanuel Macron’s climate summit in December 2017, Kim announced the bank was extending the financing ban to upstream oil and gas. Here is the first order of business for a global energy alliance—to pressure the World Bank to lift its hydrocarbon financing bans and serve the world’s poor rather than sacrifice them to a regressive climate agenda.

As it is, China is the biggest winner from the World Bank’s energy policies. A June 2017 World Bank report notes China’s “global dominance” in the supply of materials needed by renewable energy technologies. In addition to China’s control over the supply of base and rare-earth metals, last year 7 of the top 10 global suppliers of solar panels were headquartered in China. An eighth is in Hong Kong and a ninth in Canada, but with Chinese links. For as long as the World Bank’s hydrocarbon-financing bans remain, American taxpayers will be funding a war on American coal and subsidizing China’s solar industry. If this seems an unappealing prospect, the Trump

administration should move fast to assemble the necessary votes ahead of the World Bank meeting in October.

Domestically, the climate caravan keeps rolling. At the beginning of June, 13 Republican senators wrote to the president urging him to submit the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, described by the U.N. as “another global commitment to stop climate change,” for the Senate’s advice and consent. Two weeks later, the *New York Times* carried a report and associated op-ed by former senators Trent Lott and John Breaux on a new group, Americans for Carbon Dividends, which has hired the bipartisan pair to lobby for a carbon tax. “We must put a meaningful price on carbon,” they wrote, arguing for a \$40 per ton tax “high enough to encourage a turn to cleaner energy sources.”

Former Fed chair Janet Yellen, another member of the group, told the *Times* that taxing carbon emissions is “absolutely standard textbook economics.” The textbook actually teaches that a carbon tax would be efficient if it replaced *all* the tax credits, subsidies, portfolio standards, and regulations supporting the expansion of uneconomic wind and solar energy. Their inherent defect is that the amount of energy they produce depends on the weather, not on demand. Because of the way the electrical grid works, they dump their intermittency costs on other generators, particularly the reliable coal and nuclear plants. It is not surprising that the backers of Americans for Carbon Dividends and its seven-figure annual budget include First Solar, Inc. and the American Wind Energy Association.

Only a small portion of the putative climate benefits of a carbon tax would ever flow back to the United States in the form of avoided climate impacts. Insofar as cutting greenhouse gas emissions creates environmental benefits, it’s a vast foreign aid program in which costs are incurred domestically and most of the benefits go abroad. Worse still, federal government estimates of the social costs of carbon still rely on climate models using computer-simulated data. These produce higher values than estimates based on actual climate data. According to a 2017 paper by the economists Kevin Dayaratna, Ross McKittrick, and David Kreutzer, a \$37 per ton carbon tax using model-based estimates for the climate sensitivity of carbon dioxide would be halved if based on empirical data.

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Dayaratna, a fellow at the Heritage Foundation, has also noted that one of the impact assessment models used by the Obama administration even produces a negative estimate for the social cost of carbon under “very reasonable assumptions.” A negative carbon tax—subsidizing carbon emissions—is hardly what First Solar and the American Wind Energy Association are funding some of Washington’s most expensive lobbyists for.

For all the energy revolution so far, the Trump administration’s energy agenda remains incomplete. The Clean Power Plan is being rolled back, but the EPA’s 2009 greenhouse-gas endangerment finding on which it stood remains in place. There has been talk from the administration of creating red and blue opposing teams of climate scientists to give politicians and the public a more balanced view of our understanding of climate. On energy policy, Rick Perry’s grid-security study can be extended to examine how wind and solar subsidies distort the costs of electricity. That way, Americans will begin to see the true price of renewables and the extra they’ll have to pay to keep the lights on thanks to the intermittency problem of generating energy from the winds and the sun.

Exiting Paris was the first step. The president has also ended his predecessor’s war on coal. Globally, the administration’s continued advocacy for energy realism can win friends among the world’s poor and make allies of some of the world’s most dynamic economies. The geostrategic potential of American energy is already being felt. American gas is being shipped to Poland and American coal to Ukraine—reducing the region’s dependence on Russian gas. As the president pointed out at the NATO summit in early July, Germany’s pipeline will see it paying “billions of dollars” a year to Russia, although he subsequently undercut the strategic logic of his argument at the disastrous press conference with Vladimir Putin in Helsinki on July 16. The Trump administration should now formalize its ties with other energy-realistic nations and show the world the benefits of America’s energy exceptionalism—jobs at home, booming exports, and an escape from dismal energy policies predicated on bogus resource shortages. Having broken the spell, America and its friends around the world can reap the benefits. ♦



A vestment for the statue of Our Lady of Graces in Palagianello, Italy, created in 2015 by Riccardo Tisci from a 1950 design by the Benedictine nuns of Lecce. Wig by Shay Ashual.

The Fashion of This World

Godly garments and high couture at the Met. BY CATHERINE ADDINGTON

The marketing for *Heavenly Bodies*, the blockbuster show now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, would have you believe it centers on a certain male opulence. The aesthetic relationship between Catholic clerics and secular fashion designers certainly dominated the splashy Met Gala that celebrated the exhibition's opening in May; you may recall various A-list celebrities bedecked in jewels, halos, and miters. It is a

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Heavenly Bodies
Fashion and the Catholic Imagination
Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Cloisters
through October 8

hushed surprise, then, to find that the exhibition opens with a sly tribute to the hidden women of both the liturgical arts and the fashion world.

At the entrance to the Anna Wintour Costume Center, before encountering the luxurious items on loan from the Vatican, visitors are presented with a modest liturgical vestment. This green

and gold chasuble was designed by Henri Matisse in 1950 for his Vence Chapel project, but the accompanying plaque does not focus on the famed artist. Rather, it discusses the women who are credited with executing his design: the Dominican nuns at the Atelier d'Arts Appliqués in Cannes. They are compared with the artisans who carry out the sewing and needlework for the major fashion houses, known as *les petites mains* ("the little hands"). By crediting both (mainly male) designers and (mainly female) technicians, the curators question that division of labor while

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suggesting that the fashion world shares structural similarities with the ecclesial hierarchy it so often parodies.

For this show the costume center, located in the Met's basement, has been stripped bare—a cryptlike effect complemented by recorded chant. A relatively spare, spacious display allows museumgoers to examine the garments up close, as their craftsmanship requires. One of the most stunning pieces is a chasuble presented by the Franciscan friars to Pope Pius XI in 1926 in commemoration of the 700th anniversary of the death of St. Francis. It is covered in scenes from the saint's life, embroidered meticulously in gold by the Poor Clares of Mazamet, France. Similarly impressive needlework can be seen on a cope given to Benedict XV in 1918 by the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who depicted an elaborate Lamb of God. This is a surprising and fresh homage to anonymous, collective women's art.

Another unexpected feature of the exhibition is the underappreciated art of creating clothing for statues. The main hall includes two sumptuous ensembles made for statues of the Virgin Mary. One, from Paris, is a dress and mantle of gold silk brocade along with an intricate tiara of gold, crystals, and pearls. The other, from Palagianello, Italy, is a vestment of blue silk with gold trimming. The former was created in the 1980s by the French fashion designer Yves Saint

Laurent while the latter is based on a 1950 design by the Benedictine nuns of Lecce—so there is a kind of curatorial egalitarianism in their pairing.

Unfortunately, the show does not always explore its subject with subtlety and respect, and parts of it are little more than attempts to poke fun at religious ritual. This much is clear from the curators' explicit choice to emulate the "ecclesiastical fashion show" scene from Federico Fellini's satirical film *Roma* (1972), organizing the exhibition according to exaggerated Catholic stock characters. The most emblematic of these is a lavish, jewel-encrusted "papal" ensemble by John Galliano for Dior's fall 2000 collection, similar to the one he designed for Rihanna to wear at the Met Gala this year. The ensemble's exaggerated hips and accessorized thurible certainly achieve the "carnavalesque" aesthetic the curators say they were going for, but the overall effect is gimmicky.

More thought-provoking is the part of the exhibition housed in the Met's galleries of Byzantine art, which includes a series of mosaic-inspired dresses from

Dolce & Gabbana's fall 2013 line. The collection's Eastern influences are more likely to remind visitors of Orthodox aesthetics than Catholic ones, but they are inspired by a period in Italian history that predates such distinctions. Copies of Byzantine pendants from Coco Chanel's personal collection and a bejeweled cross by Christian Lacroix further expand the concept of the Catholic imagination beyond strictly Western visual references. Regrettably, that expansion stops short of exploring Catholic aesthetics outside of Europe and North America, other than one Galliano dress inspired by Peru's Cuzco School.

The show only realizes its full potential at the Cloisters, the Met's annex dedicated to medieval art. Any Catholic is bound to have a fraught relationship with the Cloisters—it is simultaneously an exaltation of Catholic visual culture and a tragic plundering of Catholic churches—but this exhibition works very well in that space. Here, the Catholic imagination is not merely a loose inspiration for the clothes on display but ingrained in the architecture and sensibility of the

Top left: ensembles based on nuns' habits, from designers Thom Browne, Carli Pearson, Dolce & Gabbana, and Rossella Jardini. Right: On the back of this papally inspired John Galliano ensemble is the inscription 'Dieu est mon Maître' ('God is my Master'). Left: chasuble designed by Henri Matisse. Middle: the "ecclesiastical fashion show."



Above: inside the Gothic chapel in the Cloisters, a 2006 ensemble created by John Galliano for Dior (foreground) and an evening dress designed by Olivier Theyskens in 1999. At right: a wedding dress designed by Thom Browne this year, with wig by Shay Ashual.



show. The result is celebratory without devolving into caricature.

The highlight is the beautiful use of two Romanesque chapels to present sacramental garments. In the Langon chapel, a wedding dress by Marc Bohan for Dior faces a 13th-century Catalan altar while *Ave Maria* plays softly in the background. A wedding dress by Cristóbal Balenciaga is positioned similarly in the Fuentidueña chapel, where it is trailed by a series of garments inspired by baptismal gowns and first-communion dresses. The language used by the curators to contextualize these works is remarkably free of hedging, describing the Eucharist as “a rite instituted by Jesus during the Last Supper.” The experience could not be further removed from the disdain of the “ecclesiastical fashion show.”

The exhibition makes the most of the setting. Liturgical vestments hang alongside glass cases enclosing chalices, reliquaries, and other liturgical items permanently housed in the museum in imitation of a sacristy. Monastic-inspired fashion lines the Cuxa cloister and Pontaut Chapter House, where curators trace the aesthetic heritage of contemporary sportswear back to the minimalism and functionalism of the habit. Mannequins are laid next to tomb reliefs, causing audible gasps among museumgoers. In one cheeky display, a Gal-

liano dress imprinted with the cover of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*—famously included on the Vatican’s index of banned books—is hidden away underneath a 15th-century staircase.

The curators have a brilliant partner in wigmaker and hairstylist Shay Ashual, who created quietly avant-garde hairpieces to complement the garments on display. Some mannequins are styled as demure brunettes, focusing the attention on the clothes themselves, while others are intended to stand out. In Ashual’s most stunning work, red-violet streaks matted to the face of the mannequin wearing a Thom Browne wedding dress conjure blood and beauty at once. Set against *The Unicorn in Captivity*, a tapestry that has often been interpreted as Passion symbolism, the hairpiece turns an otherwise enigmatic ensemble into the heavenly wedding garment of a martyr.

Although the Cloisters section of the exhibition is by far the most coherent and compelling, it does occasionally falter, presenting garments with an unclear connection to the Catholic imagination. Especially strange is the inclusion of items from Craig Green’s fall 2017 collection, which is unmistakably Orthodox in its references. Green’s take on the orarion, or Orthodox deacon’s stole, is at best misplaced and at worst offensive inside a room of medieval tapestries depicting the Cru-

sades (during one of which Catholic armies sacked the heart of Orthodoxy at Constantinople).

The exhibition ends with a triumph. In the last room, several pieces from Alexander McQueen’s stunning final collection—the designer died in 2010—are paired with the Flemish Gothic art that inspired them. One of these dresses has the architecture of an altarpiece, doors closed at the wearer’s breast, flanked by protective saints. The image conflates the body with the tabernacle in which the Eucharist is kept, an astonishing homage to the sacrament. It is a powerful piece in which an atheist artist reached for the drama of the religious imagination to express the heights to which his appreciation for the body soared. In this quiet finish, the exhibition lives up to its name. ♦

The Mom Crunch

In the sequel to I Don't Know How She Does It, teens and tech collide. BY NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY

I thought this parenting lark was supposed to get easier.” Thus gripes Kate Reddy to a friend after finding out that her daughter’s “belfie”—that’s a selfie of your behind, for those not up on the terminology—has gone viral. Kate, the protagonist of British novelist Allison Pearson’s new book *How Hard Can It Be?*, keenly feels the paradox of high-tech parenthood: “I want to murder the little idiot and I want to protect her so badly.”

Kate was also the protagonist of Pearson’s bestselling debut novel in 2002, *I Don’t Know How She Does It*. Like many working mothers, Kate expected that the hardest part of raising kids—and trying to find time to work in an office as well—would be when the kids were 2 or 3 years old. A lot of women (including yours truly) have made the same mistake. As the kids get older and more adaptable, they are supposed to need our presence less. We can leave them with a babysitter or send them off to school without worrying that they won’t remember us when we come home or that we will have missed some major developmental milestone. With older kids we needn’t be so concerned that they won’t understand why mommies go to offices or that each snuffle portends a medical emergency.

But in the years since the events of the first book, Kate has come to realize that raising teenagers brings with it a whole new set of demands on parents’ time. The teen years, formerly seen as a stage for kids to rebel and start to set off on their own, have

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How Hard Can It Be?

by Allison Pearson
St. Martin’s, 369 pp., \$27.99



Allison Pearson in 2011

now become a stage requiring even more intense parental monitoring and support. Kate is trying to go back to work full-time after taking off several years to raise her children while her husband supported the family. But between her 14-year-old son’s videogame addiction and lack of interest in studying—“Seriously, Mum,” he tells her, “no one works hard at my age. Except the Asian kids”—and her 16-year-old daughter Emily’s anxiety-inducing social-media problems, Kate feels she is needed at home more than ever. Still, as she and her mommy friends are starting to realize, more involvement at home doesn’t necessar-

ily mean they’ll be able to protect their kids from harm.

A party that the Reddys host for Emily so that she can be more popular backfires, but it is an occasion for Kate to witness what’s expected of girls these days. When Kate asks her husband why it is that girls are always bringing and drinking vodka, he answers: “Right now, Kate, their sole purpose in life, their only reason for being, is to get drunk, and vodka gets you there the quickest, with no taste or flavor to get in the way. Drowning their sorrows and all that.” This comes as a shock to Kate. She didn’t live the life of a nun growing up, so it’s not the risky behavior and promiscuity that shock Kate—it’s the deep unhappiness of these girls, the notion that 16-year-old girls get drunk to drown their sorrows.

In *I Don’t Know How She Does It*, Kate and her cohort worried about things like whether their cookies for the school bake sale looked homemade or whether their children would like the nanny better than them. Now she and her friends worry about whether their children will do well enough in school to get into a good university; at one point, she stays up half the night writing an English paper for Emily. Kate’s older friend and mentor, Sally, has a 31-year-old son who “is still wandering around thinking he has a future as a war reporter, or maybe a professional cricketer,” a 29-year-old son who is doing postgraduate work in international relations and “smoking far too much weed,” and a daughter who is on antidepressants and recently announced on Facebook that she is bisexual, “which Sally is fine about, except there’s no sign she’s having sex of any kind with anyone, male or female.” “Honestly, Kate,” Sally confesses, “I sometimes think I’ve produced a trio of wimps.”

There was a time when middle-aged women were mostly done with the hard work of raising children. Their kids were grown earlier, and once they were adults were expected to act like it. But modern norms have changed all that. As Sally explains to Kate, “Because we have careers, we

Vladimir Voinovich, 1932-2018

The remarkable life of Vladimir Voinovich, the Russian writer and dissident who died last month at 85, spanned five or six chapters in his country's turbulent history. Born at the start of Stalin's reign of terror in 1932, Voinovich as a child lost his father to the Gulag for five years. His literary career began in the 1950s during the Khrushchev "thaw," when Soviet culture was open to at least some independent thought and he could publish stories with fairly harsh depictions of Soviet realities. By the late 1960s, the liberalization had been reversed; Voinovich's first novel, *The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Private Ivan Chonkin*, could be published only abroad. Eventually his writings and his outspoken dissent got him expelled from the Writers' Union—and, in 1980, from the Soviet Union altogether. He and his family settled in West Germany.

The collapse of communism a decade later brought Voinovich back with a hero's welcome to a new Russia. Then, another decade, another authoritarian rollback: Soon he was a dissident again in Vladimir Putin's Russia. He could still publish and go on the radio but in his final years he was, as he put it with typical dry wit, a "persona half grata."

Voinovich, whom I interviewed for these pages (see "Prophet of Ukraine," April 28, 2014), found considerable success in the West. *Chonkin*, the alternately grim, hilarious, and moving tale of a goodhearted, bumbling Soviet recruit during World War II, was hailed as a "masterpiece" by the *New York Times Book Review*, while the *Times Literary Supplement* predicted it would "become one of the most popular Russian classics." He wrote two *Chonkin* sequels and several other acclaimed novels—the best known of which is *Moscow 2042*, a futuristic satire in which the time-

traveling narrator finds Russia under a regime that fuses communism, Orthodox Christianity, and a cult of the secret police.

When *Moscow 2042* was published in 1986, it caused a stir because of its caustic portrayal of a thinly



disguised Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn; more recently, it has been read as a startling prophecy of 21st-century Russia—both because of the story's merged church and state and because its supreme leader is an ex-KGB agent once stationed (like Putin) in Germany.

In a talk in New Jersey in 2015, Voinovich quipped, "People keep saying that all the bad things I write come true, so I'm going to write something good." But his last novel, published the following year, *The Crimson Pelican*, was a scathing surrealist satire of Putin's Russia in which reality blends with delirious dreams.

The Crimson Pelican showed Voinovich still in top intellectual and artistic form in his ninth decade. Like many of his admirers, I hoped he would outlive yet another authoritarian regime in his country. That was not to be. Still, he may yet, through his fiction, have the last word.

—Cathy Young

start our families later, so we find ourselves going through what they used to call The Change when we still have kids at home. And our parents are old and starting to get ill or need help. ... See, if we'd had our babies when Mother Nature intended ..."

The struggles Kate faces are those of the "sandwich generation." She is trying to manage the care of her aging in-laws, her own mother's demands on her time, home repairs, Christmas presents, the family budget, the various diets of her family members, her dog, and her marriage. She frets over all this in the same stream-of-consciousness way that was a hallmark of the previous book, as problems big and small keep her up at night even as her husband snores away.

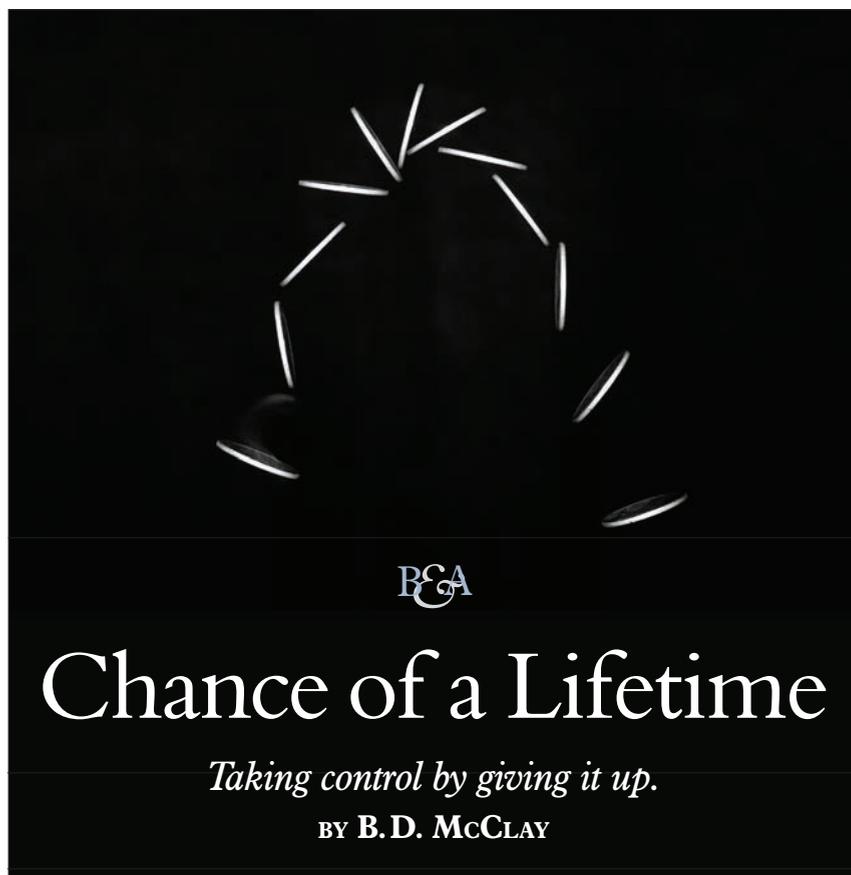
Since the publication of *I Don't Know How She Does It*, the character Kate Reddy has generally been taken to be a kind of feminist icon, a woman who could achieve victory in a male-dominated workplace while also being a loving mother. (This impression was reinforced when Sarah Jessica Parker—former star of the you-can-have-it-all show *Sex and the City*—was cast as Kate for the 2011 movie version, which flopped at the box office.) But Kate has some pretty conservative views about men and women. These are most obvious as they relate to her own marriage.

The decline of Kate's relationship with her husband Richard is both a cause and an effect of Kate's insane life. After a number of years of supporting his family through his work as an architect, Richard has a midlife crisis. But these days it's not enough for a fiftysomething man to buy an impractical car; instead Richard "morphed into one of those MAM-ILs you read about in the lifestyle section of the paper, a Middle-Aged Man in Lycra, who did a minimum of ten hours in the saddle every week." Richard's obsessive bicycle habit is only part of the problem. He has also quit his job to become a therapist and that has meant he has gone into therapy, costing the family a significant amount of money.

The problems with the Reddy marriage start to mount, but they ultimately arise from the fact that gender is not just a social construct but is rooted in biological reality. The role reversal as Kate goes back to work at an investment bank and her husband gets in touch with his feelings is not going to end well. When Kate learns that Richard has been using her razor to shave his legs so he can achieve faster times in his bike races—“my husband’s legs look like chicken drumsticks—deathly, almost bluish, pale skin with dark dots where the hairs used to be”—there’s no turning back.

Kate’s surprising conservatism isn’t confined to her own marriage. At one point, she delivers an extended lecture to her office assistant Alice about her noncommittal boyfriend. Alice ought to stick up for her (eventual) desire to have children: “I tell my young colleague that I’ve seen the pattern too often for comfort. Girl goes out with same guy till their late twenties, hangs in there waiting for him to take it to the next stage. The guy doesn’t bother because he’s getting regular sex and free food.” Eventually, the unmarried couple breaks up and the guy finds someone else. “The girl now needs to find a new guy to have a baby with”—but her biological clock is ticking. Better to force the matter with the noncommittal boyfriend than to keep waiting indefinitely.

American readers are unlikely to know that Pearson is a relatively conservative opinion writer for the *Daily Mail*—the author of such columns as “It’s Liberal Mothers Who Are the Real Dopes” and “Morality: The Real Victim of Our Text Message Age.” Her journalism has clearly helped her keep tabs on some of the most destructive trends of our society. With *How Hard Can It Be?*, she has found a way to explore pressing questions—the delaying of marriage and child-bearing, the dangers of social media, the growing anxiety of teenagers and their trouble gaining independence as young adults, the crushing pressures on people caring for both their kids and their parents—without sacrificing story for sermon. ♦



Sheila Heti’s novels turn on questions. In her first, *Ticknor*, the narrator sets out to attend a friend’s party and agonizes over the demise of the friendship and the failure of his own career; the question is What Did I Do to Deserve This? In her second, the question is right in the book’s title: *How Should a Person Be?* The people asking questions in Heti’s fiction know that they are somehow stupid. “I was a joke, and my life was a joke,” the narrator of one of her short stories says, posthumously. Heti’s characters can’t see the obvious truths everybody else seems to know, they can’t behave the way everybody else seems to know how to behave, and they can’t seem to learn.

What kind of story can be told by a person stupid in this way? One without clear direction, unclear about what

matters and what doesn’t, what’s a signal and what’s just noise. “I often beheld the world at a great distance, or I didn’t behold it at all,” the unnamed narrator of *Motherhood*, Heti’s decep-

Motherhood
by Sheila Heti
Henry Holt, 284 pp., \$27

tively pleasant new novel, says in the opening lines. “To transform the greyish and muddy landscape of my mind into a solid and concrete thing, utterly

apart from me, indeed not me at all, was my only hope.” These are high stakes for a story in which not much happens; as rapidly becomes clear, the book itself is the “solid and concrete thing” on which these hopes are pinned.

The first series of questions in *Motherhood* comes in an imitation of the *I Ching*. The woman flips three coins: heads yes, tails no, the majority carries the day. She asks the coins yes or no questions, some quite loaded, about her present, her past, her relationship with her lover, and the task that lies before her. These questions form the book’s story, such as it is: a woman

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BIGSTOCK

approaching the onset of middle age trying to figure out what the rest of her life should look like. There's still time to change course if she wants to, but, she feels, not much time.

Despite the title of the book, the woman's agitation isn't exactly about whether she should have a child. Motherhood doesn't figure into her initial rounds of coin tosses—the first question, in fact, is simply “Is this book a good idea?” (answer: yes). After some more questions, she asks the coins about something called “the soul of time”:

This will be my stated purpose, my design or agenda, in writing this—to understand what it means, *the soul of time*, or to explain it to myself. Is that a good premise for this book?

no

Is it too narrow?

yes

Can the soul of time be involved?

no

Am I allowed to betray you?

yes

Letting *Motherhood* be guided by a set of arbitrary answers to questions is an artistic sleight of hand. A similar purpose was served by the very different conceit of *How Should a Person Be?* In that “novel from life,” the narrator is named Sheila, her friends are based on Sheila Heti's own friends, and the dialogue is lifted from real life—conversations Heti recorded. The “realism” of that book disguised the ways in which it was not very realistic at all, its ambition, and its sense of humor. It was a book that was happy to change everything about itself from chapter to chapter except its subject matter—becoming a play, a monologue, a series of emails—and concerned above all with *greatness*, understood as something constructed out of the material of our lives rather than invented.

In *Motherhood*, the narrator's question-asking is in part authority-seeking; she feels, as she tells us, “helplessly wrong” and “desperate to live as a person beyond criticism”: “I am a blight on my own life. How can I stop being a blight on my life?” So she flips coins; she consults psychics and friends with and without children; she considers her dreams and has a tarot reading. And

she collaborates to varying degrees with these authorities. When the coin-flips tell her to find a knife and place it in front of a mirror, she does so. When the psychic has her undergo a ritual to expel suspected cancer, she plays along.

But the question-asking is also a way of trying to create some sort of path for her life to travel. The narrator faces the problem of how to live when you have divested yourself of the normal scripts people use to structure their lives. The early parts of life are climbing uphill; at some point you realize that your life is now what it's going to be. What happens then?

At one point, exasperated by the answers the coins are giving, she says:

You don't mean anything to me. You don't know the future, and you don't know my life, or what city I should be in, or what I should be doing, or if I should have a child with Miles or not. You are complete randomness, without meaning, and you are not showing me the way. That can only be determined by mining my own heart, and looking at the world around me; thinking deeper and more clearly, and not being so insecure that I should need you to tell me what's what. And yet, you have shown me some good things.

After this episode, she gives up on numismatomantry for a while. It's awkward to use an artificial authority when you've admitted to yourself its artificiality. Maybe all you want is for someone to tell you what to do, but an authority you bestow is one you can revoke just as easily. Eventually, though, she comes back, because she is still a blight on her life. “Weeks have passed, and the tears, once again, are back. What,” she asks, “am I supposed to do with my unhappiness?”

One answer: *Have a child*, which will truly help you to create something out of yourself, really detach you from yourself in some way. Or so the theory goes. But the woman at the center of *Motherhood* was herself raised by a mother who was full of tears, and she knows that whatever will happen, it won't be quite that simple. If she has been a blight on her own life, she can't escape the feeling that she is also a blight on her mother's. The book she's writing is meant some-

how to correct both ills; to heal her mother's tears and her own.

Another complication comes from just about the one real authority in her life: Miles, the narrator's overbearing lover, who responds to the statement “It might be nice to have a child” with “I'm sure it's also nice to get a lobotomy.” He is heavy with disapproval but good at strategically withholding his input. He is happy to tell her what to write (a book on Simone Weil) or that her friends are bad for her. It is clear he does not want a child (he has one already from a previous relationship) but he leaves it up to her whether she will have one. His only request is that she be *certain*, which, since he is involved with a woman who is never certain about anything, amounts to forbidding it without having to say so. Life isn't a problem for Miles—perhaps because he'll always have the option of having another child, perhaps because he's more secure, perhaps because he has a woman to feel all the problems for him.

Does *she* want a child? Though the answer is finally no, often it seems to be yes. Motherhood is its own story. If you don't know what to do with yourself, why not create another person? Children generate their own existential crises for themselves, but for their parents, at least for the time being, they crowd out everything else.

The *soul of time*, the narrator tells us, has something to do with the way we exist only as aspects of time, not as individuals. The idea that we are time's soul frees us to accept a kind of passivity; have a child or don't have a child, either way is fine. But this idealized passivity—the desire not to be anything at all—clashes with the images of struggle and sadness that mark the book. The narrator finds herself obsessed with the image of Jacob wrestling the angel (an image also discussed in *How Should a Person Be?*) and feels that if she can understand what's tormenting her, she can demand its blessing: By wrestling with her nightmares, she might “overcome my lack of trust and faith” and start “learning humility and asking to be blessed, just as my thoughts are humbled by the

random throw of the coins, and my understanding is dependent on their verdict.” She sees herself on a threshold, waiting to be transformed.

But this isn’t what happens. There is no breakthrough, no great moment of either accepting or rejecting motherhood. What happens is that the narrator goes on antidepressants and all of this ceases to matter; the sadness goes away, as do the struggles. She still flips coins, still looks into her dreams. But the tension is gone. “What kind of story is it,” she wonders, “when a person goes down, down, down and down—but instead of breaking through and seeing the truth and ascending, they go down, then they take drugs, and then they go up? I don’t know what kind of story it is.” She writes up the story, sends it to her mother, and realizes her mother has gone through much the same process herself.

In a novel more question-driven than any of her others, *Heti*’s final question seems to be *What If We Just Stopped Asking Questions?* If you’re walking into a wall and someone opens a door, shouldn’t you just walk through? In life, doors do open and close, but there’s no story but the ones we tell. What if the way to come out of existential troubles really can be as simple as not picking at wounds and expecting them to heal? You could accept that you are stupid and also that nothing requires you to be sad. In a novel obsessed with finding precisely the right question to ask and have answered, the ultimate answer comes in relinquishing control and giving up on narrative payoff.

Motherhood is many things—least of them, a metaphor. It requires submitting to an animal instinct in us without really wondering if the instinct is for the best or not, if the child will thank us or not, if this will wreck our lives or not. It accepts the unanswerability of these questions and trades them in for something real and flesh-and-blood. At the last, however, the narrator’s motherhood is her decision to write a book. Life might not have a narrative payoff, but books generally do, even if you have to squint to find it. Here the payoff might come in the following observation: Some kinds of control are easier to relinquish than others. ♦

BCA

Sunlit Second Acts

Three women remaking their lives in Tuscany.

BY AMY HENDERSON

Frances Mayes’s new novel is about three women “of a certain age” who first meet when their well-intentioned families try to usher them into a retirement home. None is ready to be stashed away and they figure out an escape: They will run off together and rent a villa in Tuscany.

Mayes’s love affair with Tuscany is well established, beginning with her bestselling 1996 memoir *Under the Tuscan Sun*—adapted as a 2003 movie starring Diane Lane—and continuing in such books as *Bella Tuscany* and *Every Day in Tuscany*. Mayes can make the landscape of Tuscany glow, and she does so in *Women in Sunlight*, offering the stories of three American women on a quest to create lives beyond 24/7 attention to husbands and children.

Mayes oddly casts as the narrator a younger American named Kit Raines, a writer who lives across the street from the villa where the three women will live for a year. Raines’s writing is not going well and she finds sunlight only when she becomes a wife and has a baby. Her narratorial voice is distracting, and readers may be inclined to speed past her presence to the real substance of the story—the three women enthusiastically bent on reinventing themselves.

One of the three women, Susan, was a successful realtor. Now widowed, she immerses herself in the wonders of Tuscan gardens, and designs the grounds of their villa. Landscaping becomes her new vocation.

Amy Henderson is historian emerita of the National Portrait Gallery.

Julia is escaping a cheating husband. Her career was as an editor of beautiful books about food and culture, and in Tuscany she revels in the arrays of perfect prosciuttos, olives, cheeses, and

wines. She learns how to cook Tuscan foods, and voyeuristic readers are treated to descriptions of semolina gnocchi with parmesan and duck breasts with balsamic reduction and orange peel. Julia’s epiphany comes when she decides to write a book on cooking in Tuscany; she’s calling it *Learning Italian*. (Mayes herself came out

with *The Tuscan Sun Cookbook* in 2012, cowritten with her husband.)

Camille is the most interesting of the trio. A recent widow, she decides to reclaim an artistic calling she sacrificed for marriage and children. In a book of sunlight, it is only in the dark of night that Camille reconnects with her artistic talent, in an exhilarating burst of creative activity that starts with a painting of a door.

On impulse, she glues a page on top of another, then another, fifteen, a stack. Now the door is thick. An object, not a painting. Light, though. Tears spill as she works. This is beyond where she thought she could go. She loves the look. She has made a strange artifact. A paper door, a mysterious new entity, not sculpture, not book, not painting. She recognizes that she has made something entirely her. *Flesh of my flesh*. New.

What a pleasure to meet these three women—and to enjoy again Mayes’s ability to conjure the sumptuous sunlight of Tuscany. ♦

Women in Sunlight
by Frances Mayes
Crown, 432 pp., \$27



Angry Kitsch

The sudden fame of Jon McNaughton, painter of populist rage. BY HANNAH YOEST

President Donald Trump grips the knot of Robert Mueller's necktie with a clenched left fist while his right hand shoves a magnifying glass into the special counsel's face. President Barack Obama fiddles while Washington burns. Jesus walks away from the lectern after addressing a joint session of Congress; the assembled senators and representatives jeer at him.

These are just a few of the fantastical scenes depicted in the works of artist Jon McNaughton. The 50-year-old Utah-based painter's latest work, *Crossing the Swamp*, re-creates Emanuel Leutze's famous *Washington Crossing the Delaware* with figures from today's politics: The president and various advisers and cabinet members, mostly wearing camouflage, row through waters McNaughton describes as "laced with dangerous vermin, perfectly willing to destroy American prosperity for their personal ideologies and financial gain." President Trump, in the George Washington position, carries a lantern; Nikki Haley is at the bow, clearing the way; John Bolton crouches with a shotgun.

After McNaughton made prints of his swamp scene available for purchase on his website, his whole oeuvre went viral: His apocalyptic Americana was widely shared on social media and discussed in major publications and TV. At a time when memes are a mainstay of so much of our political discourse—when photo-shopped templates and poorly drawn images, eminently adaptable and easy to grasp, are shared by people of all generations—part of the reason McNaughton's work has become a sen-



Jon McNaughton at work in his studio

sation is his clear investment of time. The painstaking nature of McNaughton's work sets him apart from the crowd of amateurs and the Russian meme-propagating social-media hacks; here is a man not churning out hastily created GIFs but taking time and care to express his convictions. Moreover, the paintings may be the butt of jokes but they are not themselves intended as jokes. There is no irony here; to their maker they are authentic works of art capturing the danger and despair of our political moment. His authentic yearning invites the cynical to lambaste the paintings.

Although McNaughton and his work have reached new and wider audiences in recent days, he was not a wholly unknown quantity. His grimly anti-Obama paintings—like one from 2012 depicting the then-president, with a demonic visage, holding a burning Constitution—brought him some praise from the right. McNaughton developed enough of an audience, in fact, to catch the eye of Sean Hannity in 2012. Most people know Hannity as a political commentator, provocateur, and unapologetic supporter of Donald Trump, but the Fox News host's true calling as an art connoisseur and critic has gone woefully underappre-

ciated. Hannity is an avid McNaughton admirer; not only has he had the painter on his show but he has purchased a number of McNaughton's original works.

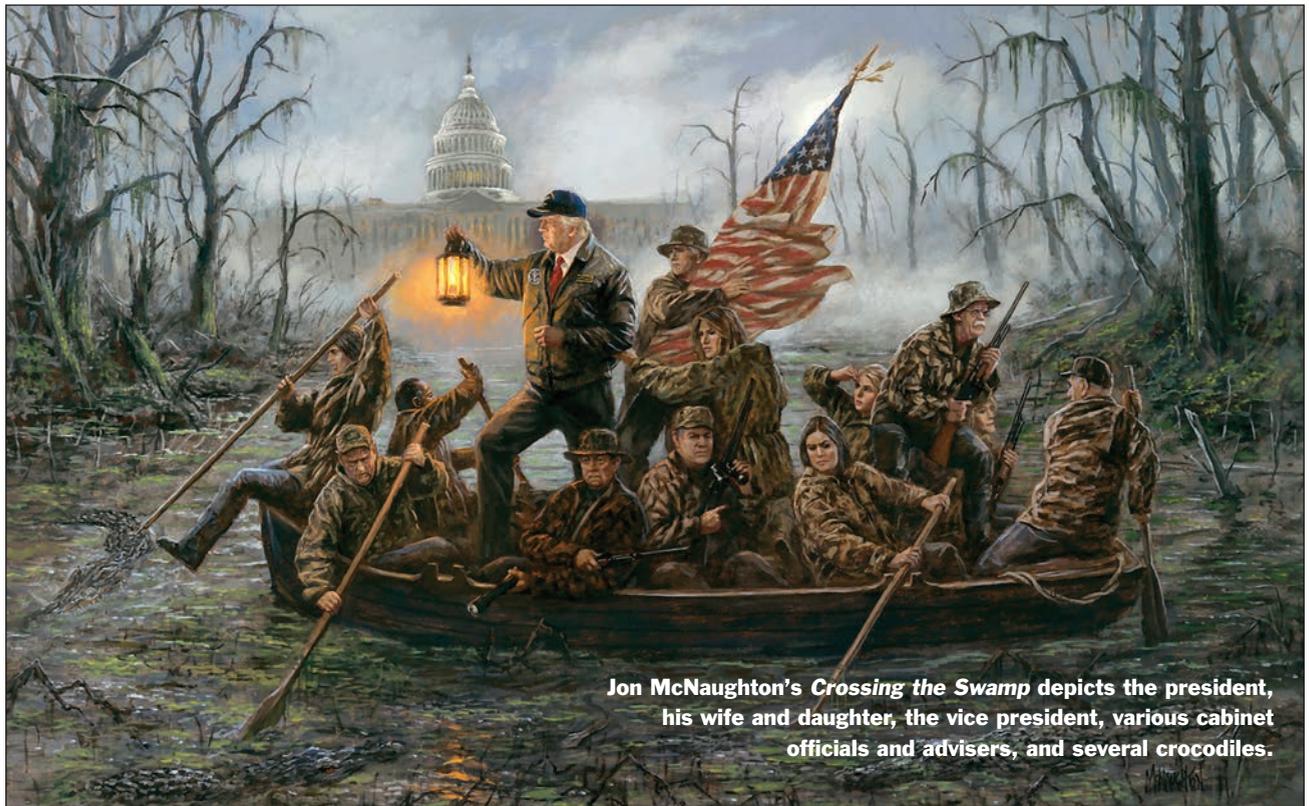
The painter uses YouTube and Twitter to promote his art with a showmanship reminiscent of the Hudson River School's excessively dramatic unveilings of paintings of the great American landscapes. McNaughton often releases videos to explain his art, accompanied by triumphal cinematic music. In the video for *Crossing the Swamp*, his voiceover rips into establishment Democrats, Never Trump Republicans, the deep state, and the "fake news media." The string of right-wing talk-radio buzzwords not only conveys McNaughton's conviction that these nefarious forces are doing all they can to harm America but signals to potential customers that his art is on the right side of history.

Not all of McNaughton's paintings are political; he sells prints of warm, kitschy scenes in the style of Thomas Kinkade, earnest depictions of biblical vignettes, and pictures of Mormon temples. (McNaughton is himself a Mormon.) But it's his political and patriotism-themed paintings that have brought him the most notoriety—and presumably income. They are occasionally likened, by both admirers and critics, to the paintings of Norman Rockwell, but the comparison demeans and mischaracterizes Rockwell, whose paintings capture a supple human expressiveness entirely absent from the stiff, flat, uninteresting faces McNaughton paints. Moreover, Rockwell's work—from his sentimental illustrations to his political paintings—reveals a deep affection for America, while McNaughton's reliance on heavy-handed symbolism reveals an grim determination to behold his country not as it is but as it is characterized in alarmist right-wing broadcasting.

From a sales perspective, it's a shame McNaughton didn't wait until Christmas to start promoting *Crossing the Swamp*, although he has said he has ideas for other art to sell for the holiday season. The timing is peculiar in

VIA YOUTUBE

Hannah Yoest is social media editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.



Jon McNaughton's *Crossing the Swamp* depicts the president, his wife and daughter, the vice president, various cabinet officials and advisers, and several crocodiles.

another way: Given the historical significance of the original painting celebrating George Washington's greatest military victory, what great victory is McNaughton's painting commemorating? It would seem to make more sense after some grand political victory, but given the investigations now looking into President Trump's campaign and the worrisome midterm outlook for his party, McNaughton's painting seems somewhat desperate in its symbolic register.

Crossing the Swamp is hagiographical in its depiction of Trump, a shift from McNaughton's blunter caricature-like portrayal in *Expose the Truth*, the painting in which the president is menacing Robert Mueller in the chamber of the House of Representatives. Back in May, when McNaughton released *Expose the Truth*, the *Washington Post's* Monica Hesse spent some time with him in Utah. Despite the painter's heavy use of #MAGA rhetoric on YouTube, Twitter, and elsewhere, he demurred when Hesse tried to pin down his motivations and political leanings. Still, Hesse nails why McNaughton matters: "It's

McNaughton's reliance on heavy-handed symbolism reveals a grim determination to behold his country not as it is but as it is characterized in alarmist right-wing broadcasting.

pure *id* art. Which means, in the sense that art can reveal truths about the undercarriage of the psyche, McNaughton is one of the most significant painters of the current era."

McNaughton maintained in the *Post* interview that his paintings are about the people who elected President Trump—sometimes symbolized in his works as a forlorn "forgotten man"—and not a declaration of fealty to Trump himself or his party. Hesse was left to ponder whether the paintings are just a way to capitalize on the Trump phenomenon. In our summer of grift, is

he just another savvy con artist out to make a buck?

This is not a convincing hypothesis; it is difficult to imagine that the painter of *Crossing the Swamp* and proprietor of McNaughton's Twitter account possesses any ironic detachment whatsoever from his work. He is no longer as ambivalent—or coy—about his regard for the president as he was with the *Washington Post* in May. "I paint what I feel needs to be said about the current state of our country," he says in his promotional video for *Crossing the Swamp*. "My hope is that Trump will be remembered as the president who restored American greatness. I want to be on that boat crossing the swamp." For all the own-the-libs postmodern irony of young conservatives today, McNaughton at least is sincere and can claim to capture the zeitgeist of populist rage.

Derided by critics for his work's propagandistic quality, McNaughton is unfazed. "I've become kind of the whipping boy of the art world," he said during a local news segment. Then he smiled and shook his head: "But I don't care." Do you? ♦



IN THE NEWS

August 20, 2018 — St. Elmo's College is proud to announce the launch of its latest academic innovation: the St. Elmo's Mediocre Books Program.

After a thorough examination of the proliferation of "Great Books" programs at colleges across the country, the St. Elmo's Committee for C-Plus Acceptance concluded there is a considerable demand from the general student populace for books with less rigor than *War and Peace*. St. Elmo's is now prepared to meet this demand by offering a less-intimidating but no-less-stellar exploration of literature designed to appeal to students who plan on spending their lives somewhere in the middle of the pack or possibly toward the back.

Students participating in the Mediocre Books Program begin with a solid foundation built on the classics, including *Fools Die* by Mario Puzo, Colleen McCullough's *The Thorn Birds*, and Danielle Steel's *Zoya*. The second semester will be entirely devoted to the works of Thomas L. Friedman.

Second-year students will examine in depth the human condition as reflected in a selection of emotionally moving novels by legendary author Nicholas Sparks. We guarantee a walk through this course will be a Walk to Remember!

Third-year students are given the opportunity to read and discuss outstanding works of nonfiction including *The Autobiography of Howard Hughes* by Clifford Irving and *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey, a truly unbelievable tale about the struggles of addiction.

Fourth-year students will be given the flexibility to pursue their reading interests with the aid of faculty advisers who will help them craft their senior theses. Perhaps it will be John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* or James Redfield's riveting *Celestine Prophecy* or the nationwide number-one bestseller *Love and Marriage* by Bill Cosby. "Thanks to the Mediocre Books Program," said St. Elmo's president William Hicks, "these students will be fully braced for a fair-to-middling existence filled with occasional letdowns and minor disappointments."

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