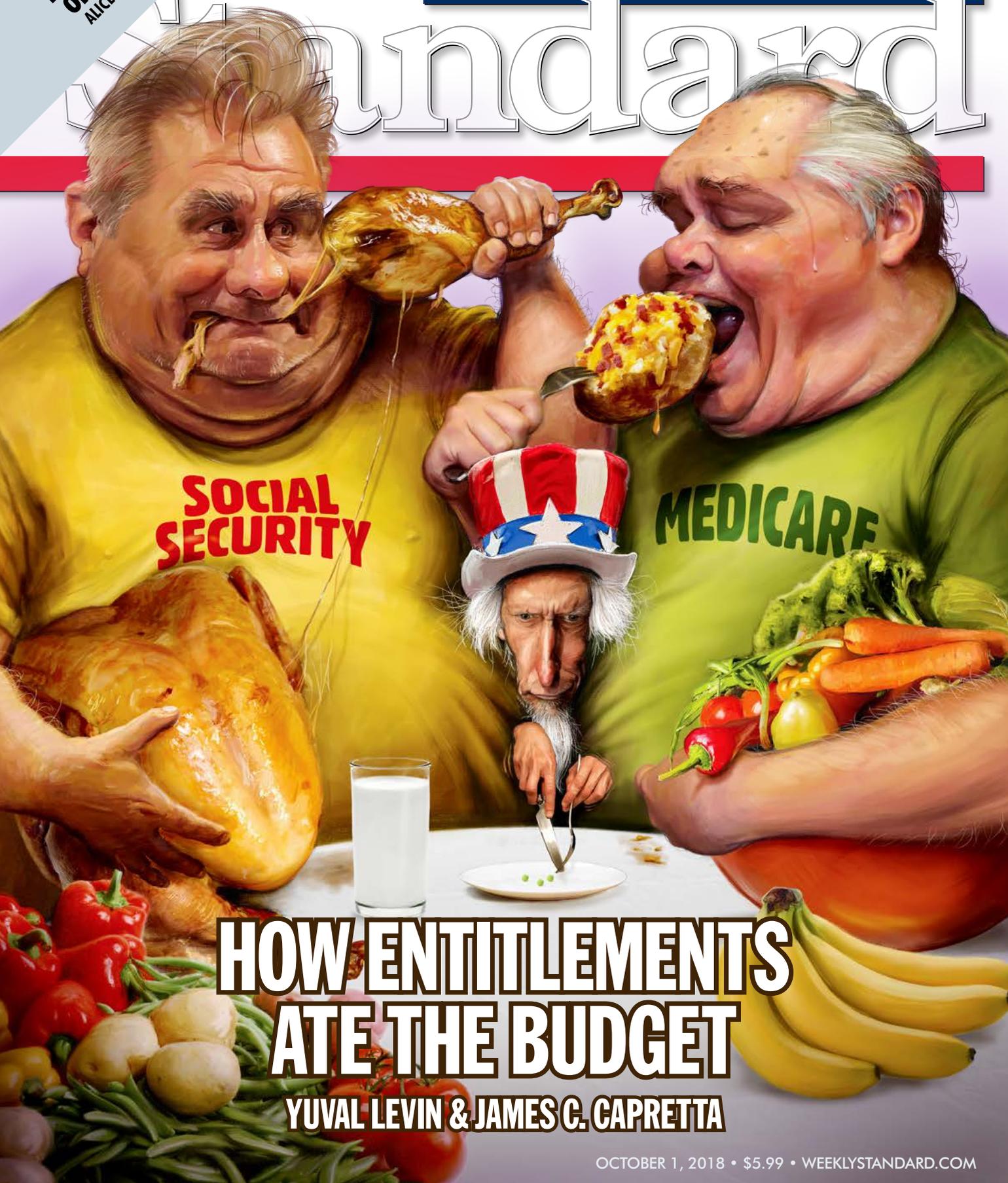


**THE DECLINE
OF DINESH**
ALICE B. LLOYD

the weekly

Standard



HOW ENTITLEMENTS ATE THE BUDGET

YUVAL LEVIN & JAMES G. CAPRETTA

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October 1, 2018 • Volume 24, Number 4



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COVER BY JASON SEILER

Category 5 Irrationality

On Tuesday, September 11, as Hurricane Florence lumbered through the Atlantic toward the Carolinas, we received a text from a WEEKLY STANDARD colleague asking how long it would take for the hurricane to become political. Somebody would blame Trump or the GOP for something—it was just a matter of when. THE SCRAPBOOK wagered that it would take at least till Monday before somebody in the media laid the blame for Florence at the White House door. Our colleague guessed it would be Saturday.

In fact we were both wrong—it had already happened. That very day, the *Washington Post* published an editorial titled “The Storms Keep Coming.” The online headline gets right to the point: “Another hurricane is about to batter our coast. Trump is complicit.”

“Last year Hurricane Harvey battered Houston,” the paper’s editors lamented. “Now, Hurricane Florence threatens to drench already waterlogged swaths of the East Coast, including the nation’s capital.” The



Post continued: “If the Category 4 hurricane does, indeed, hit the Carolinas this week” (Florence was a Cat 2 when it landed, but leave that aside), “it will be the strongest storm on record to land so far north.” Then the editors really let loose:

President Trump issued several warnings on his Twitter feed Monday, counseling those in Florence’s projected path to prepare and listen to local officials. That was good advice. Yet when it comes to extreme weather,

Mr. Trump is complicit. He plays down humans’ role in increasing the risks, and he continues to dismantle efforts to address those risks. It is hard to attribute any single weather event to climate change. But there is no reasonable doubt that humans are priming the Earth’s systems to produce disasters.

We have our doubts about claims that climate change (or global warming, as it used to be called) poses an imminent threat to civilization, and in any case, it’s never been clear to us that many of the policies environmentalists propose would do much besides ruin the industrialized economies and empower bureaucrats and transnational elites. But what struck us most about the *Post*’s editorial was just this: that if the editors wanted to give the impression that climate change alarmism is just another convenient stick with which to smack Donald Trump—or indeed any administration they happen to dislike—they did a terrific job. ♦

Beto Male

Robert Francis O’Rourke is running against Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas. You may know the challenger better by the name Beto O’Rourke. THE SCRAPBOOK is generally reluctant to bring up the names and nicknames of public figures (after what Idaho senator Mike Crapo must have endured in middle school, he’ll get no grief from us!), but the question whether “Beto” is a genuine family nickname or the result of a political makeover has dogged the Democratic challenger’s campaign.

Beto (pronounced *Beh-toe*, with a short *e*) is a Spanish-language nickname for Roberto.



What’s in a name?

O’Rourke has circulated a photograph of himself as a child wearing a shirt with the name Beto on it, but the *Washington Free Beacon* discovered an item in Columbia University’s student newspaper, the *Spectator*, dating back to O’Rourke’s college days there, that called him Rob O’Rourke.

The Cruz campaign has ridiculed O’Rourke for the name change, most recently with a country-music radio jingle: “If you’re gonna run in Texas, you can’t be a liberal man. / I remember reading stories, liberal Robert wanted to fit in. / So he changed his name to Beto and hid it with a grin.” (It sounds better—well, slightly—when it’s sung.)

Of course, ridiculing O’Rourke for his name is a bold move for a man christened Rafael and makes Cruz seem a touch mean. We would have advised the Cruz campaign to leave the nominative tomfoolery to respectable outfits like the *Free Beacon* and, well, THE SCRAPBOOK.

Is there more to the story of how Rob O’Rourke the Ivy Leaguer became Beto O’Rourke the aspiring politician? Will the real Rob, Robert, Beto, or Roberto please stand up? ♦

Jackpots and Crackpots

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, aka the richest guy alive, recently announced plans to donate \$2 billion to create a network of preschools. “The child will be the customer,” says

TOP: TRUMP; GAGE SKIDMORE; BOTTOM: LAURA BUCKMAN / AP / GETTY

Bezos. Maybe we're old-fashioned, but the idea of pupils as "customers" doesn't lead us to believe that Bezos has a firm understanding of the moral complexities of pedagogy or child care. The phrase sounds every bit like the tone-deaf hubris of our Silicon Valley overlords.

Maybe the effort will succeed, but we're not optimistic. Bezos is hardly the first zillionaire to decide he can fix education once and for all by dumping truckloads of cash on it. In 2010, Mark Zuckerberg went on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* with Chris Christie and Cory Booker—then governor of New Jersey and mayor of Newark, respectively—and promised to donate \$100 million to help Newark's abysmal schools become "a symbol of educational excellence for the whole nation." In 2015, *New Yorker* writer Dale Russakoff published *The Prize*, a painstaking investigation into how that money was spent. His conclusion? Zuckerberg's millions "enriched seemingly everyone, except for Newark's children."

The Gates Foundation has spent billions on all manner of education grants over the years, but in late 2014 Bill Gates flatly stated that his numerous failures here were proof he was "naïve."

A 526-page report from the RAND Corporation released this summer noted that a \$575 million project to improve teacher performance in just three school districts—nearly half the money came from the Gates Foundation—was a failure: "Overall, the initiative did not achieve its stated goals for students, particularly LIM [low-income minority] students. . . . [S]tudent outcomes were not dramatically better than outcomes in similar sites that did not participate."

Our favorite instance of education lottery flops, though, comes from M. Night Shyamalan. The filmmaker's personal foundation once tried to improve the schools in his hometown



FLOOD DAMAGE

of Philadelphia. Philly schools are still a mess, but in 2013 Shyamalan wrote a book about his experience: *I Got Schooled: The Unlikely Story of How a Moonlighting Movie Maker Learned the Five Keys to Closing America's Education Gap*. Lest you think Shyamalan is just another filthy rich dilettante, well, his book did get a glowing blurb from Newark's school superintendent. ♦

The Post vs. the Post

‘T he Trump administration is accusing hundreds, and possibly thousands, of Hispanics along the border of using fraudulent birth certificates since they were babies, and

it is undertaking a widespread crack-down.” So thundered a *Washington Post* report on August 29. There’s just one problem: It isn’t true.

The practices cited by the *Post* to substantiate its claim—increased scrutiny of birth certificates, higher numbers of passport denials—pre-date the Trump administration. The paper has now appended a lengthy correction to the report, but the correction sidesteps the main problem: The whole point of the story was that the uniquely dastardly Trump administration had come up with these policies. It had not.

One of the many outrageous mistakes in the *Post*’s piece had to do



TOILET: BIGSTOCK



Oopsie! Whatevs.

with the case of a doctor who, over the course of decades, had delivered hundreds of babies in the Rio Grande Valley. According to the paper, the State Department considered accusing the doctor of faking birth certificates. The doctor, Jorge Treviño, has since died, but his family says the *Post's* reporter, Kevin Sieff, never contacted them to ask about the State Department's inquiry. If he had, he might have learned that State only

wanted to verify some certificates signed by the doctor. Treviño's office used a typewriter to draw up the certificates with multiple carbon copies, and his signature wasn't legible on the bottom copies. It had nothing to do with faking certificates.

More importantly, reporter Sieff might have learned that the State Department's inquiries to Treviño's office began in 2015—under the Obama administration.

Whoopsie.

It gives us pleasure to note that the reporter who eviscerated the *Post's* incompetent journalism and forced the capital city's paper of record to issue a rambling, disingenuous retraction was Roque Planas of the *Huffington Post*. Lefty new-media organizations like *HuffPo* have committed excesses over the years, to be sure, but they are capable, too, of the kind of solid journalism that, in this case, makes the *Washington Post* look like a supermarket tabloid. ♦

It's TMQ Season Again

A friendly reminder from THE SCRAPBOOK that the return of the football season isn't just a boon for fans: Gregg Easterbrook's terrific "Tuesday Morning Quarterback" column returns as well, and that's a boon for readers, even those not heavily invested in the NFL. This week we

aperçus are Easterbrook's thought-provoking comments on a wide variety of current topics. For instance, why *do* former officials hang on to their security clearances?

Former CIA director John Brennan has protested loudly that Trump revoking his security clearance somehow impedes his freedom of speech. This is preposterous. Brennan continues to say whatever he pleases. Loss of his clearance may impact his income, by reducing what he can charge to corporate clients for speaking engagements. Loss of his clearance may reduce his billable hours at Kissinger Associates. But it does not alter his freedom of speech one iota. Why does any former official who is no longer a public employee retain access to national secrets? Trump could drain this particular swamp by writing an order that all former officials of his administration—including him—lose their clearance on the day their term ends.

You can read the TMQ column every, ahem, Tuesday at weeklstandard.com (or type TWS.IO/TMQ directly into your browser). ♦



learned of the misadventures in rule-writing that led a referee to flag Green Bay's Clay Matthews for "roughing" Minnesota quarterback Kirk Cousins when all Matthews did was tackle him—gently, too, by NFL standards—and so turn what should have been a Packers win into a 29-29 tie that soured fans of both teams.

And mixed in among the gridiron

the weekly Standard

www.weeklystandard.com

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The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013), a division of Clarity Media Group, is published weekly (except one week in March, one week in June, one week in August, and one week in December) at 1152 15th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 85409, Big Sandy, TX 75755-9612. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-274-7293. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders and changes of address to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 85409, Big Sandy, TX 75755-9612. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-386-597-4378 for subscription inquiries. American Express, Visa/MasterCard payments accepted. Cover price, \$5.99. Back issues, \$5.99 (includes postage and handling). Send letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005-4617. For a copy of The Weekly Standard Privacy Policy, visit www.weeklystandard.com or write to Customer Service, The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005. Copyright 2018, Clarity Media Group. All rights reserved. No material in The Weekly Standard may be reprinted without permission of the copyright owner. The Weekly Standard is a registered trademark of Clarity Media Group.



Not With a Bang, but a Tote Bag

I seem to recall an essay by Ralph Waldo Emerson in which he predicts that the world will be subsumed not by fire or flood, but by an overwhelming mound of common pins. It hasn't happened so far, but that may be because we have shifted the cultural weight, as it were, to a far more voluminous enemy: the tote bag.

My husband is on the festival circuit. He goes to exotic and beautiful places like Maui and Aspen, cavorting with celebrities and beautiful people, while I stay home with the dogs. It's not as bad as it sounds, really, and it has the advantage of enhancing spousal appreciation, but it does have a curious byproduct. Every time he returns, he presents me with a tote bag.

Tote bags are nothing new. They have been the mainstays of museum gift shops and the low-cost premium for subscriptions to magazines and public television for decades. Environmentalists made them important by urging us to pile our groceries into their bacteria-infested depths week after week, rather than wounding the earth with the clean, fresh, disposability of plastic or paper grocery bags.

I love the earth. But I have questions about tote bags.

I have never had a statement handbag, but then, I live in the Midwest where things like that are considered ostentatious. I do find, however, almost against my will, that I have begun to select the tote bag I want depending on where I'm going and who I will be seeing.

There is a hierarchy to tote bags that is more subtle than the kind of car you drive. Tote bags can brag without your ever having to say a word. They are signaling mechanisms to announce your affiliations.

The local grocery store gives out a flimsy, paper-thin canvas wine bag when you purchase more than one bottle. It's okay if you leave that



one behind at your friend's house. I have a beautiful well-made canvas bag with a painting of the Flatiron Building that I purchased in a museum gift shop. It is sturdy enough to carry books and signals my cultural sophistication. This may have slightly more cachet than the thin fabric WNYC tote that seems to suggest that I am a donor (I am not) or that I am part of the East Coast intelligentsia (I am most definitely not). I have a bag from the American Enterprise Institute, proving that I am "Fighting for Freedom, Opportunity, Enterprise." That sounds nice. The TaxPayers' Alliance signals my support for fiscal restraint,

and the Hoover Institution is a nice way of encouraging people to enquire whether I have met Milton Friedman or George Shultz (I have). I have bags from book conferences that suggest my writing bona fides. I have one that declares "We Can Change the World," a claim whose sincerity I don't doubt, but about whose particulars I am somewhat skeptical. Perhaps my favorite is my niece's gift, a utilitarian lightweight "Totes Ma Goats" bag in which I carry my own books (especially my 2016 novel *The Audacity of Goats*) for publicity events.

But of all the tote bags, the most exclusive are those presented as swag to attendees of various high-level conferences, like the Aspen Ideas Festival. We now have three or four Aspen tote bags. One is beautifully made from military grade canvas with leather handles and represents philanthropy to a veterans group. A bag from an exclusive corporate philanthropic retreat has a lovely insulated pocket underneath to carry your properly chilled bottle of New Zealand sauvignon blanc or possibly a can of bug spray that wouldn't mix well with the potato salad.

Does Davos have a tote bag, I wonder? Do Davos attendees ever do anything that requires the use of a tote bag? Or do they bring them home as a bonus gift to their nannies?

As my husband's spoils of conquest accumulate in the hall closet, and the door becomes harder to close, I have begun to feel the need for some form of triage. How many tote bags does one family require? I ought to sort through, choose the most exclusive, and chuck the rest, but I'll probably keep the nice plastic one from the now-defunct local bookstore. It's easy to disinfect.

J. F. RIORDAN

Nothing More Than Feelings

Rarely have we witnessed so many people pretend a controversy was about one thing when it was so obviously about another. Since September 16, when the name of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh's accuser became known—Christine Blasey Ford, a California psychologist, alleges that he sexually assaulted her in 1982—Democratic politicians and most of the mainstream news media suddenly seemed to care deeply whether Kavanaugh behaved reprehensibly when he was 17.

If that's what they are concerned about, we gladly join them. We hope Ford will accept Senate Judiciary Committee chairman Charles Grassley's invitation to testify, either publicly or privately. Her claim should be taken seriously. And although we have some apprehensions about the practice of probing an adult's youthful history in search of culpable behavior, Kavanaugh has now categorically denied the accusation—evidence corroborating her claim would mean he spoke falsely and so shouldn't be elevated to the Supreme Court.

But from the moment on September 14 that California senator Dianne Feinstein issued a statement that an unnamed person had made some allegation about Kavanaugh—she wouldn't say who or what—the truth of what did or didn't happen was irrelevant. Feinstein had had a letter conveying the charge for more than a month, but waited until after Kavanaugh's hearings were concluded. She claims she wanted to preserve Ford's request for anonymity and that "the media outed her." But how, we wonder, did the media "out" her if not by Democrats leaking her identity?

Since the Democrats don't control the Senate and, thanks to former senator Harry Reid, they can't filibuster judicial nominees, their strategy from the instant Justice Anthony Kennedy announced his retirement was to delay confirmation hearings until after the midterm elections: They would capture the Senate and block all Trump nominees. Democrats and their most enthusiastic supporters justified this strategy by equating it to the Senate GOP's refusal in 2016, at Mitch McConnell's behest, to hold hear-

ings on Barack Obama's third Supreme Court nominee, Merrick Garland. Yet in mid-2007, Democratic majority leader Chuck Schumer had vowed to hold no further hearings on George W. Bush's nominees. And in any case, McConnell's strategy didn't involve defamation.

The Democrats' original strategy for delay—requesting thousands of documents, then claiming they didn't have time to read them, then caviling about what could and couldn't be made public—failed badly. That's when Feinstein threw the process into confusion with the anonymous accusation, and someone leaked the accuser's name to the media. The behavior Ford then described to the *Washington Post* isn't just boorish or inappropriate but criminal—an attempt to rape her. If it is true, Kavanaugh



An anti-Kavanaugh sit-in in the Hart Senate Office Building

would have to withdraw his name from consideration for the Court. But the circumstances adduced are so distant and hazily recalled that conclusive proof or disproof of them is nearly impossible. There is no contemporaneous corroboration—Ford told no one at the time—and since she can't remember specifically when and where the incident took place, Kavanaugh can't produce an alibi.

In support of her claim Ford produced notes from a 2012 therapy session and a 2018 polygraph test—all 30 years or more after the alleged encounter. It's very plausible that she is mistaken. Three other people supposedly present—Mark Judge, Patrick Smyth, and Kavanaugh—have denied the allegations.

Cristina King Miranda, who attended the same school as Ford, set the media aflutter with a Facebook post claiming the incident was widely discussed at the time—contradicting Ford's claim she had told no one until 2012. Now King refuses to speak further about it on the grounds that "I do not have first hand knowledge of the incident." Virginia Hume responded on Twitter: "I also graduated from Holton-Arms in 1983. I have no recollection whatsoever of any discussion in or out of school of the alleged incident. As I've said previously, I knew Brett in high school and never heard anything untoward about him."

Ford's recollections to her therapist are inconsistent on

the matter of how many people she now says were involved in the alleged assault. The notes also do not name Kavanaugh, though her husband told the *Post* she did mention Kavanaugh at the time of the session and expressed concern he could become a Supreme Court nominee. “If a Republican, any Republican, wins in November, his most likely first nominee to the Supreme Court will be Brett Kavanaugh,” concluded a March 2012 *New Yorker* profile of Kavanaugh. Ford concedes that she had been drinking at the alleged party.

Perhaps the strongest evidence for taking Kavanaugh’s denial seriously, however, is that no other women have come forward to testify of similar treatment by him. Men who attack women in the manner in which Ford describes are almost always serial offenders. Others may still come forward, but a week after Ford’s explosive claim went public, none has, while many women have testified to his decent and honorable conduct.

Making Ford’s claims even more suspect is the way in which their revelation happens to align with the strategy of Senate Democrats. They don’t so much want to persuade moderate Republicans to vote No as to delay the vote—and so, it would appear, does his accuser. At first she expressed, through her attorney, a desire to testify. Then a reluctance to do so. Then an insistence that an FBI investigation be carried out first—this despite the fact that the FBI has carried out no fewer than six comprehensive background checks of Kavanaugh and found nothing akin to the conduct alleged by Ford. On September 20, as we write, Ford’s attorney sent an email to Judiciary staffers requesting a conference call to discuss the terms under which Ford might agree to testify. More delay. More diversion.

The demand for a time-consuming investigation quickly generated arguments about whether the FBI investigates allegations of long-ago local crimes. Democrats argue that the bureau investigated Anita Hill’s charges; Republicans argue that was because they had to do with a federal employee’s conduct in a federal building, not a 36-year-old act by a teenager in a private home.

What Republicans making such arguments fail to grasp is that for most Democrats, what matters isn’t evidence or truth. For them, what matters is the defeat of Kavanaugh’s nomination and their further self-identification with victims of harassment and assault. Hence the mind-numbingly idiotic statements by Senate Democrats. “Guess who is perpetrating all of these kinds of actions?” asked Mazie Hirono of Hawaii. “It’s the men in this country. I just want to say to the men in this country: Just shut up and step up.” New York’s Kirsten Gillibrand asked (via Twitter), “The fundamental questions we must answer right now: Do we value women? Do we believe women? Do we give them the opportunity to tell their story? To be heard? Will we ensure they get the justice they deserve?” How about: Is it true?

Across the media, Democrats pretending to care about

Ford’s treatment 36 years ago insisted that Kavanaugh’s nomination to the High Court must be either slowed or blocked because—well—men do bad things to women. A classmate of Ford’s told a sympathetic Jim Acosta on CNN that she backs Ford because many women in her class had “similar experiences. ... Not with Brett Kavanaugh, but with other boys in our community.” Philip Rucker, the *Washington Post*’s White House bureau chief, remarked on Twitter that “During Brett Kavanaugh’s time as an undergrad at Yale, his fraternity, DKE, marched across campus waving a flag woven from women’s underwear.” Kavanaugh was in no way connected with the story, but no matter.

We’re put in mind of James Nolan’s 1998 book *The Therapeutic State*. Nolan chronicled the way in which, over the course of the 20th century, justifications for public-policy decisions drew increasingly on the subjective language of therapy. A hundred years ago, a public official might base an important decision on what was true or patriotic or in line with public virtue. By the end of the century, the official would base the decision on what “feels right” or what will “bring healing” or because he or she “cares” so deeply.

We’ve arrived at the ludicrous conclusion of the transition Nolan described. A good man with an impeccable reputation and a stellar record may be denied a seat on the nation’s highest court and defamed as a sexual aggressor. Why? Because important people feel he probably did something terrible. They just feel he did it. ♦

Run, Mike, Run

Michael Bloomberg, the former mayor of New York City, is yet again considering a run for the presidency. In other words, 2020 is just two years away. He has openly toyed with presidential runs in each of the last three cycles. But these quadrennial flirtations can’t go on forever. He is 76.

This time, he wants to run as a Democrat on the grounds that “I don’t see how [I] could possibly run as a Republican.” A fair point. Bloomberg is a solid liberal, but he is famously noncommittal on partisan affiliation. He was a Democrat in the 1990s, ran and won as a liberal Republican for mayor of New York in 2001, then switched to independent in 2007, during the second of his three terms. In the early 2000s he gave hundreds of thousands of dollars to the New York GOP. This year he pledged \$80 million to help Democrats take control of Congress in the midterm elections. When he’s talked about presidential runs in the past, he’s variously said he would run

as a Republican, as a Democrat, and as an independent.

We have unbridgeable differences with Bloomberg on policy, but we hope he'll run all the same.

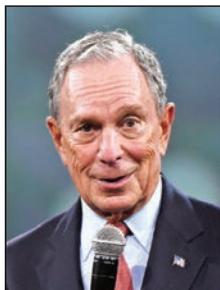
He has liabilities, to be sure, and not just owing to his ideological incongruities. Bloomberg's record as mayor was not a stellar one. He ran as an education reformer, but overall student performance in New York City did not improve much during or after his three terms. Property taxes skyrocketed during his mayoralty, and other taxes went up, too. He was famous for pursuing idiotic economic-development boondoggles, like the mercifully failed West Side Stadium project, which would have given the New York Jets a \$2 billion facility in Manhattan. Bloomberg also increasingly gave in to a kind of fundamentalist nanny-state lunacy:

banning flavored tobacco products, trans-fatty foods in restaurants, loud music, sodas larger than 16 ounces, and many other innocent enjoyments.

Still, no three-term mayor of New York City can be easily dismissed.

Bloomberg managed to keep in place the crime policies of his predecessor, Rudy Giuliani, and so kept the city from returning to the chaos to which left-liberal shibboleths had

consigned it for decades. He was not afraid to risk the ire of the city's powerful and easily provoked race-grievance industry. We regard his fixation on gun control as deeply misguided, but it's popular with the Democratic base he must now pursue.



Michael Bloomberg

Consider, too, the state of the Democratic bench. A recent poll of registered Democrats on who the party should nominate in 2020 had Joe Biden in first place with 32 percent, Hillary Clinton in second with 18 percent, and Bernie Sanders running third with 16 percent. Joe Biden, 75, is almost as old as Bloomberg but more familiar and less interesting. The thought of the candidate who couldn't beat Donald Trump running again in 2020 fills us with horror *and* delight. Bernie Sanders is unelectable because, unlike Barack Obama, he

is honest about what he believes.

Nor are the younger 2020 contenders any more impressive: California senator Kamala Harris is as offputting as she is extreme, and New Jersey senator Cory Booker, aka Spartacus, can't stop talking long enough to hear sensible advice.

Maybe an unpredictable liberal could find the middle way between aged-out establishmentarians and ambitious hucksters in 2020. Run, Mike, run. ♦

Better Policies, Better Economy

THOMAS J. DONOHUE

PRESIDENT AND CEO
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Not long ago some of the nation's most prominent economists and politicians were telling us that anemic 2% growth was the "new normal," that manufacturing and blue collar jobs were never coming back, and that increasing wages was a nearly impossible task.

Turns out that the weakest recovery in American history that followed the financial crash 10 years ago had more to do with anti-growth policies like distortive taxes and stifling regulations—as well as a "you didn't build that" mentality—than alleged new economic fundamentals.

The economy is firing on all cylinders thanks to better public policies, including a dramatic reduction in regulations—which removed substantial burdens and uncertainty for American businesses—and powerful pro-growth tax reform.

Second-quarter growth hit the elusive

4% mark, a 100% increase from the 2% rate we muddled through for so long. Unemployment is at a remarkable 3.9%, layoffs are at a 50-year low, investment is climbing, wages are finally showing signs of rising, manufacturing employment is up, and small business confidence is at an all-time high. In fact, the Q3 *MetLife & U.S. Chamber of Commerce Small Business Index* indicates that 70% of small business owners have a positive outlook about their companies and the small business environment in the U.S.

Income gains are strongest among Hispanic households (3.7%), while poverty rates for blacks and Hispanics have fallen to 21.2% and 18.3%, respectively, the lowest rates since at least 1972. In fact, employers are scrounging for workers, with job openings hitting a record high of 6.9 million in July.

The economy is going gangbusters right now, but like all those prospectuses warn, "Past performance is no guarantee of future results." We need to maximize pro-growth policies and oppose those

that would undermine our economy, our businesses, and investor confidence. For example, we need to build a competitive workforce. We need people to keep the growth going. That means improving workforce training and retraining, strengthening our education system, and adopting a commonsense immigration system that attracts and welcomes talent at all skill levels.

We also need to fight back against dangerous trade policies. The single biggest threat facing our economy right now is the trade war escalating to the point that it saps business confidence. If businesses feel forced to pull back on their capital expansion, it will erode much of the benefits from tax reform and regulatory relief.

The lesson of the last two years is that good policy makes a difference—in jobs, growth, opportunity, confidence, and the lives of everyday Americans. Let's keep it up.



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FRED BARNES

Trump tries something surprising: self-control

Eyebrows were raised in Washington when President Trump responded to an allegation of sexual assault against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh. The president didn't mention the accuser. He said the Senate Judiciary Committee would go through "a process and hear everybody out [and] I'd like everybody to be very happy."

Trump's remarks were "unusually sober," the *Washington Post* declared in a page-one headline. That was high praise from an archenemy. White House aides got credit for recommending the mild response, if only because the press doubts Trump is capable of getting a grip on his emotions without help. Yet that's what he did.

When facing a political crisis—and the threat to the Kavanaugh confirmation is a crisis—Trump has often stayed cool and rational.

True, he seems to enjoy erupting more. It's more fun. But he's the one who decides whether to blow his stack. Believe it or not.

We saw this in the 2016 campaign. When his raunchy comments on the *Access Hollywood* video put his chance of winning the election in jeopardy, he became a paragon of self-discipline. He read speeches from a text. He minimized the ad libs.

Now, with the midterm election six weeks away, it's time for Trump to tighten his grip on his emotions again, limit any distractions, and act like a gentleman. He has a big incentive to do so. If Democrats win the House by a big margin—40 or more seats is possible—he will face impeachment.

Trump is the main man in the overall election. GOP senators and House members are at his mercy. In 2017, Republicans had a fine candidate for

Virginia governor, Ed Gillespie. Hard as he tried, he couldn't escape being identified with Trump, which was the kiss of death in the Old Dominion.

Trump draws large crowds. His political base appears to get as big a kick out of his appearances as they did two years ago. They're not jumping off the Trump Train. But millions of soft Republicans and indepen-



Millions of soft Republicans and independents who backed Trump in 2016 have drifted away. This year, Trump needs to woo them personally.

dents who backed him in 2016 have drifted away. The promise of conservative judges attracted them before. But this year, Trump needs to woo them personally.

He can't do it by being vulgar or mean. He needs to be likable. Folks who spend time with Trump love to talk about how likable he is. In 2015, Rick Perry, the former Texas governor, and I visited with him in his Trump Tower office. Trump was a genial host. He showed us his collection of sports memorabilia, including Mike Tyson's heavyweight-champion belt. I asked how he got it. "Tyson owed me money," Trump replied.

Our country is hardly overrun with likable politicians. Ronald Reagan stands out. Trump is a pale copy. Reagan's conservatism appealed to millions of voters, his likability to millions more. He explained that having been

an actor really came in handy in politics. It made him a natural politician.

Trump's populism is different. He was a bit of an actor as the host of a TV show, *The Apprentice*. But it hasn't made him a natural politician. He'll have to work at that.

Trump has three rules of the political road. When you're right, you fight. Controversy elevates message. Never apologize. The president is going to have to reverse all three of those to build his influence in the midterm.

Fighting is what he needs less of in 2018. Everyone knows he's a counter-puncher. It's what a populist does. The rule should become: When you fight, make sure you win. Being right doesn't matter. Political leaders win. It keeps them out of jail.

These days message elevates controversy. Trump is a better politician when he focuses on his message. For one thing, it's easy to understand. Proposing to build a wall to keep illegal immigrants out will keep the issue alive and controversial. Trump has already put this into practice.

The hardest change for Trump to make is to begin apologizing. He has long felt that apologizing shows weakness. He loathes saying he's sorry. It doesn't come naturally. I assume that's because he's seldom sorry in real life. But it's one of the keys to likability.

Trump can't help Republican candidates unless he starts apologizing. He'll have plenty of material to work with. There are all those humiliating nicknames he's given to political rivals. Sorry! The actors he's called overrated or worse. Sorry! The media types he lumped together as enemies of the people. Sorry! The list of eligibles for apologies is endless in Trump's case.

The president won't like saying he's sorry to people he dislikes. But there's a dividend. Winners apologize. Losers refuse to. ♦

The (ever slower) march of *Time*

On a bookcase in my office here at THE WEEKLY STANDARD may be found a well-thumbed copy of a volume entitled *Time Inc.: The Intimate History of a Publishing Enterprise, 1923-1941* (1968) by Robert T. Elson.

It is the authorized account of the world's first (and by far most successful) "weekly newsmagazine" and was commissioned by *Time*'s surviving co-founder, Henry R. Luce. As it happens, Luce didn't live to hold a copy of *Time Inc.* in his hands since he died the year before it came out. But it was published in the year I graduated from high school and, saving my pennies, I purchased a copy (\$10) as soon as I could afford one.

I concede that in the *annus horribilis* 1968 the notion of an adolescent eagerly scooping up the corporate history of what was then regarded as a Republican press empire—and very much anathema in my parents' household—must seem unconventional. But I had already settled on journalism as a livelihood, and while I had no aspiration ever to work at *Time*—indeed, at a distance, it seemed a little unpleasant—my scientific interest in the tribal rites of the East Coast/Ivy League/WASP world personified by Luce and his enterprise made it a must-read.

I should pause, at this juncture, to explain that *Time*—a weekly digest/compendium of news and middle-brow culture—was the bright idea of two well-heeled Yale graduates (Luce and Briton Hadden) who managed to raise enough capital among friends and family to commence publication in 1923. Few anticipated that a rewrite of the previous week's events in a breathless, singularly wiseacre style—

later brilliantly parodied by the *New Yorker*'s Wolcott Gibbs—would find an audience. But *Time* was a huge and unexpected hit and, after Hadden's premature death in 1929, Luce proved to be an entrepreneur of genius.

Among many successful offshoots



Journalists at *Time* have sought to adapt to changing times by publishing a magazine congenial to the editorial staff. It's a slow-motion journey on the road to obsolescence.

and enterprises, Luce invented a monthly magazine featuring business (*Fortune*, 1930), an oversized revue largely dependent on photographs (*Life*, 1936), and a weekly journal about sports (*Sports Illustrated*, 1954).

Partly because he has no contemporary equivalent, it's difficult to describe in 2018 the ubiquity and influence of Henry Luce at midcentury. Of course, in those days, publisher-proprietors considered it a right and privilege to influence the editorial tone and decisions of their properties; and while some (William Randolph Hearst) were more prone to intervention than others (Arthur Hays Sulzberger), Luce's hand was comparatively light but unmistakable.

Luce was very much a Republican of the pre-Goldwater school and, as the son of Presbyterian missionaries in China, a partisan of Chiang Kai-shek long after Mao Zedong had chased him to Taiwan. Still, in the 1930s and '40s he was an ardent internationalist when the GOP was not—his essay on

"The American Century" (1941) still makes for useful reading—and in the 1950s his magazines were politely hostile to Sen. Joseph McCarthy.

As often happens, however, at precisely the moment when the empire seemed most formidable—signified by Elson's comprehensive history—cracks had begun to appear in the façade. This might have had something to do with Luce's own gradual withdrawal from the field but was largely a reflection of changing times and markets. Television essentially put *Life* out of business—it "suspended" weekly publication in 1972—and *Newsweek* had long been nipping at *Time*'s heels.

Something of the old Luce touch was reflected in the Time-Life corporation's debut of the celebrity chronicle *People* in 1974, but the advent of cable TV, digital technology, and the Internet hastened *Time*'s "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar."

These reflections are prompted by the news last week that *Time* has been purchased from its latest owner, Meredith Corp., by a software executive named Marc Benioff, co-founder of Salesforce, and his wife, Lynne. Meredith, a media conglomerate that bought Time Inc. last November, has been trying in the intervening months to sell off such individual properties as *Fortune*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Time*—but with little success. The sale price of *Time* to the Benioffs (\$190 million) puts it beyond the reach of the casual buyer, but it's surely a bargain compared with the likely cost in *Time*'s heyday.

It is worth noting as well that Mr. and Mrs. Benioff purchased *Time* for themselves, not as a Salesforce acquisition. This is the same financial arrangement under which Amazon's Jeff Bezos bought the *Washington Post* in 2013 with his personal funds and Steve Jobs's widow, Laurene Powell Jobs, acquired a majority stake in the *Atlantic* last year. As of this past February my own onetime employer, the *Los Angeles Times*, is now the property of a wealthy South African-born transplant surgeon, Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong.

To be sure, as a lifelong member of the guild, I am thankful for these

various philanthropic gestures. The survival of publications is preferable to the alternative, and both the *Times* and *Post* have lately been spending money and hiring staff. But the operative word here is “philanthropic.” In the midst of the digital/cable revolution, it’s difficult to avoid the impression that these are charitable, not business, investments. The long-term prospects of print publications remain unclear, and who knows what the Benioff and Soon-Shiong heirs will think of weekly newsmagazines and venerable daily newspapers?

In that sense *Time*—and for that matter, its moribund competitor *Newsweek*—is a case in point. My own view is that, especially since the eclipse of the Luce tradition, the journalists at *Time*, like their brethren in the newspaper business, have sought to adapt to changing times not by appealing to the people who purchase their product but by publishing a magazine congenial to the editorial staff. It’s a slow-motion journey on the road to obsolescence.

Nowadays, reading *Time* is a little like picking up an issue of the *Nation* with corporate advertising. For a long time the enormous circulation and diversified wealth of Time Inc. made this possible and certainly insulated *Time* from the vagaries of the market. But the sands are running out of that particular hourglass, and the market forces currently throttling daily newspapers are, like market forces generally, inexorable—and distinctly unsentimental. ♦

Worth Repeating

from **WeeklyStandard.com**:

Earlier, I estimated that if the Democrats won the House popular vote by seven points, they’d be even-money favorites to take the House. Right now, they lead by nine points.

—David Byler, *‘What Would a House GOP Win Look Like?’*

Wurst case scenario: Merkel’s coalition calamity

Every so often, one of the Middle Eastern migrants Chancellor Angela Merkel invited to Germany in the autumn of 2015 commits a horrible crime, and headaches for her coalition government ensue. There ought to be nothing surprising about this: About a million and a half people, most of them young men, drifted into Germany after Merkel’s appeal. Even if they committed crime at German rates, you could expect a murder a month and several sexual assaults. But when a 35-year-old local carpenter was stabbed to death at the end of August, allegedly by a pair of Middle Eastern migrants, in the city of Chemnitz, Germans suddenly lost their inclination to take such things in stride. Chemnitz, formerly Karl-Marx-Stadt, filled up with thousands of anti-immigration marchers, some of them making Hitler salutes and harassing foreign-looking people. These incidents were captured on video, and the fallout brought Merkel’s government to the verge of collapse.

Germany has a basic problem. As the columnist Berthold Kohler put it, the country cannot decide whether it has more to fear from *Ausländer* (foreigners) or *Ausländerfeinde* (xenophobes). The public is firmly of the former view. The government is invested in the latter. Eventually the public will win, because it has an internal logic and Merkel’s coalition does not. In three out of the four most recent elections, neither of the traditional establishment parties has been able to muster a governing majority. So the two have formed a “grand coalition,” which Merkel has held together by pursuing the agenda of the (once-socialistic) Social Democrats in the

name of her own (once-conservative) Christian Democrats. People gave both parties historic drubbings at the polls last fall, with the Social Democrats falling to barely a fifth of the vote. The result was a narrower majority for Merkel, a much bigger role for the Social Democrats (who then had to be bribed with cabinet posts to agree



Germany has a basic problem. As one columnist put it, the country cannot decide whether it has more to fear from *Ausländer* (foreigners) or *Ausländerfeinde* (xenophobes).

to renew an arrangement that had so damaged them), and a veto on almost all policy for one of the rare conservatives in Merkel’s cabinet, interior minister Horst Seehofer of Bavaria’s Christian Social Union.

Seehofer has powerful allies in the government, and that is what brought about Merkel’s latest crisis.

Native Germans have often felt like an afterthought in the years since Merkel threw open their country’s gates. The post-Chemnitz declaration by her spokesman, Steffen Seibert, did not reassure them. “We don’t tolerate such unlawful assemblies,” Seibert said, “and the hounding of people who look different or have different origins, and attempts to spread hatred on the streets.”

That was a reasonable point, as long as the murder, too, was being

kept in mind. Early this month one of Seehofer's most powerful allies stepped forward to say that it was not. Hans-Georg Maassen had a bone to pick with one viral video that seemed to show non-Germans being hounded. "There is no proof," he said, "that the video about this alleged incident that's getting forwarded around the Internet is authentic. There is good reason to think that it is piece of misinformation that aims to distract the public from the murder in Chemnitz."

Maassen is a gifted investigator on security matters who in the 1990s wrote an impressive, if hardline, dissertation on asylum law. Two years ago he arrested a Syrian refugee named Jaber al-Bakr—in Chemnitz, as it happens—who allegedly plotted to blow up an unnamed transport hub with triacetone triperoxide, or TATP, the same explosive used in the killings in Paris in the autumn of 2015. People well informed about the workings of the interior ministry describe three men there as so out of sympathy with Merkel's refugee policy that they constitute something like a "resistance," to use the term beloved of Trump opponents. According to press reports, these are Dieter Romann, chief of the federal police; Gerhard Schindler, former chief of the Bundesnachrichtendienst (Germany's equivalent of the FBI); and Maassen himself, who since 2012 has been head of the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV).

That was the problem. *Verfassungsschutz* means "defense of the constitution." The BfV is the main law enforcement body responsible for keeping Germany from ever turning fascist again. It has authority to monitor demonstrations, surveil political parties, and infiltrate radical groups. And yet here Maassen was, repeating what sounded like the boilerplate of conspiracy theorists: that outside actors were somehow responsible for the excesses witnessed at right-wing gatherings. It emerged that Maassen had met earlier in the summer with members of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the new anti-immigrant party that, in large parts of the country, is now more popular than the Social

Democrats. Whether out of principle, pride, or panic, the new Social Democrat leader Andrea Nahles told Merkel that Maassen would have to go.

Nahles's means were not adequate to her ambitions. Maassen could not be forced to go. Seehofer's Christian Social Union, a strictly Bavarian party, is set to fall well short of a legislative majority in state elections next month. The CSU has always been a right-wing regional pillar of Merkel's coalition, but the CSU's voters no longer trust that the party is right-wing enough to defend them against a wave of migrants. They are defecting in droves to the AfD, which now draws 14 percent of the vote in Bavaria to the CSU's 36. This could present the CSU with a choice between making common cause with the AfD or surrendering power for the first time since the war.

Seehofer's successor as minister president of Bavaria, Markus Söder, has been trying to win back the Bavarian right with the *Kreuzpflicht*—a requirement that crucifixes be placed at the entrance of every public building in the traditionally Catholic land, which has been filling up, like the rest of Germany, with Muslim migrants. It doesn't seem to be working. Söder has also warned that he would put certain members of the AfD under surveillance for extremism. That hasn't worked, either. Under the circumstances, Seehofer could hardly turn his back on Maassen, one of the few conservatives in the Merkel cabinet.

What a predicament! If Maassen stayed, Nahles would leave the coalition and the government would fall. If Maassen left, Seehofer would leave the coalition and the government would fall. Merkel came up with an extraordinary compromise. Maassen would lose his post at the head of the BfV, but he would receive a new one as a so-called *Staatssekretär* under Seehofer. This looked like a very clever arrangement, albeit one that gave real concessions to Nahles and only face-saving ones to Seehofer.

That was not how Germans saw it. Really, you'd think it wouldn't matter much whether people called you *Kabinettsangelegenheitenabteilungsleiter*

or *Kabinettsangelegenheitenabteilungsleiter*, but Germans care passionately about the protocol of the organizational pyramid. *Staatssekretär* turns out to be a plum title. In article after article, you could read that Maassen's bureaucratic status would be upgraded from B9 to B11, entitling him to a monthly raise from 11,577.13 to 14,157.33 euros.

This fit neither Germans' expectation of their bureaucracy nor progressives' expectation that winning a political battle means humiliating and destroying your adversary. *B9 to B11!* The Social Democrats thought the deal Nahles had negotiated was too clever by half. On September 19, the day after the change was made, the deputy party leader and the leader of the party's youth wing denounced it. By the next day, even Nahles was attacking the deal made at her insistence. This probably won't be the last such intracoalition battle.

What most unites the Merkel forces now is their worry that the more radical the AfD gets, the better it seems to do in the polls. This view, which is widely held, is creating a cascade of radicalization across other parties. The less popular the CSU becomes with its voters, the more it must tack away from those who are loyal and towards those who have abandoned it. The less popular the Social Democrats get, the more they feel entitled to make demands in exchange for keeping the Merkel coalition alive. Those who declared in 2015 that Merkel's welcome to migrants would shape her legacy were correct. It is not looking like the legacy she anticipated. ♦

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Astroturfing on Capitol Hill

A lot of those spontaneous calls from constituents are the work of lobbyists. **BY TONY MECIA & HALEY BYRD**

Every day on Capitol Hill, the phones ring inside legislators' offices. Young staffers answer, and there's usually a constituent on the other end expressing an opinion on the news of the day: the Kavanaugh confirmation, border security, government spending.

Phone calls to Congress are one of the main ways individual citizens can influence federal policy. Congressional offices keep tallies of support and opposition to pieces of legislation. Representatives use that information to gauge the sentiments of the folks back home.

By nearly all accounts, calls to Congress have risen since the 2016 election, as they often do in the initial years of a new presidency. Yet many of those calls are not merely organic expressions of a newly energized electorate. Rather, they are being engineered by interest groups. The practice, little-known outside of the Capitol, is known as "transfer calling" or "patch-through calling." It involves specialized firms placing telemarketing calls in search of people who agree with their clients' causes. When they find one, they connect that person to his or her representative to express what is meant to sound like an authentic and firmly held opinion.

The strategy has been around for years, and it is impossible to know how many calls to Congress are manufactured in this manner. What's clear, though, is that interest groups are becoming increasingly sophisticated

at making organized lobbying efforts appear to be spontaneous. It is an example of what is known as "astroturfing," the practice of making an advocacy campaign look like a grassroots reaction (and so hiding the sponsor).



What's that? You agree that communications should be private? I'll put you through to your senator right now.

On February 8, just before 1 P.M., the phone rang at Douglas Carroll's home in Mount Pleasant, N.C. On the line was a telemarketer. But she wasn't selling anything. Instead she wanted to talk to Carroll, a 53-year-old executive at a medical device startup, about Internet privacy. "Deborah" said she was calling on behalf of the Center for Individual Freedom, and she wanted to know if she could connect Carroll to the office of his congressman, Richard Hudson.

"Are you willing to call Rep. Hudson and urge him to support a law to protect consumers online?" she asks on a recording of the phone call. "If you are, I can patch this call through, and you can leave a message with his office and let them know you support a consumer bill of rights to protect your online usage."

The Center for Individual Freedom is based in Alexandria, Va., and identifies itself as a free-market advocacy organization. Early this year, as an alternative to net-neutrality legislation, telecom companies were pushing for a bill that would also place consumer restrictions on search engines and social-media companies. Hudson, a three-term Republican, sits on the House Energy and Commerce Committee. No bill ever emerged.

Carroll was appalled to learn that special-interest groups call people and then connect them to Congress. It creates a biased sample, he thinks, and distorts the public's actual opinion. "It's dangerous in my book," he says.

"It's someone with an agenda that selects who they are going to connect to their congressman, and only the people who agree with their agenda get connected. It's a scary thing if you think about how it could be used." Hudson's office and the Center for Individual Freedom did not reply to requests to comment for this article.

The recording of "Deborah" trying to connect Carroll to his congressman was made by the Jolly Roger Telephone Co., a paid service that deploys artificial intelligence to thwart telemarketers by wasting their time (bots give vague, preprogrammed responses to queries and so keep the calls going and going). The company was part of a January article in these pages about technological startups fighting telemarketing. Jolly Roger's owner, Roger Anderson, says he identified 11 other calls to his customers originating from a Washington D.C. area code that wound up connected to congressional offices. The recordings document telemarketers' conversations with the Jolly Roger voice bot and the subsequent confused conversations between the bot and a congressional staffer.

The advocacy groups in the recordings represent issues across the political spectrum. Callers identified themselves as affiliated with groups including the Environmental Defense

Tony Mecia is a senior writer and Haley Byrd a reporter at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Fund, which was seeking support for an Obama-era rule by the Bureau of Land Management regarding methane leaks; the Wilderness Society, which was opposing the Interior Department's appropriations bill; New American Economy and the ACLU, supporting the so-called "dreamers" who came to the country illegally as children; Free Our Internet, which favors Internet privacy protections; and Fair Courts Now, opposing efforts by North Carolina Republican legislators to change how judges are selected in the state.

A spokesman for the Wilderness Society says, "Nothing we do is rocket science. But I confess that we do use the telephone as well as email, Twitter, Facebook, [and] the U.S. mail to inspire Americans to care for their public lands and protect them for future generations." An ACLU spokeswoman says, "Our followers asked for ways to fight for immigrant youth, and calls to members of Congress is one of the tools we deploy to make it easier for activists to engage in our democracy." The other groups did not respond to attempts to contact them.

Transfer calling is just one tactic groups use to apply pressure to legislators. Other strategies include forming issue-oriented front groups to drum up citizen interest, commissioning public-opinion polls, scripting op-eds or letters to the editor of local papers, and encouraging followers to weigh in on social media and with texts and emails. Phone calls can be more effective at influencing legislators, though, because it is harder to judge the authenticity of messages originating from newer technological platforms. In one well-publicized example, when the Federal Communications Commission last year solicited comments on its proposal to

undo net-neutrality rules, it received millions of comments that were later determined to be either form letters or bot-written messages.

"There has been a long-term increase in efforts to gin up political mobilization," says Matt Grossmann, a political science professor at Michigan State University who studies interest groups and influence. "The firms that do it are a little bit secretive, but there is enough in the public

persuading a particular member of Congress to cosponsor a bill.

John Jameson offers a wide range of such services to clients. The president of the D.C. political-advocacy firm Winning Connections, he puts together campaigns of get-out-the-vote phone calls, digital ads, and social-media posts. If the client is trying to influence legislation, though, one of the most powerful tools Jameson pushes is patch-through calling.

"The phones are particularly effective because it's difficult for people to do," he says. "For 95 percent of voters, calling their legislator is an unnatural act. Elected officials pay attention if it's a constituent who knows what she's talking about."

Winning Connections works primarily with progressive organizations and nonprofits to influence legislation. It also has an elections arm that focuses on Democratic politicians and ballot initiatives. The value of using phones to connect constituents to lawmakers,

Jameson says, is "you can scale them. You can have dozens or hundreds or thousands of them calling in support." Political calls are largely exempt from federal rules restricting telemarketing. His firm uses publicly available information, such as voter lists, to target people who might be sympathetic to a cause and willing to take action. But finding the right person can be a slog, sometimes requiring 25 or 30 calls to find someone who answers the phone, agrees with the message, and is comfortable articulating it to a congressional office.

Jameson says the calls provide "air cover" for clients whose lobbyists are conveying similar messages directly. He argues that while the call centers his company uses help guide constituents in what to say, there's nothing fake about this means of communication with lawmakers: "We



At lower left, a staff member for Republican senator Rob Portman of Ohio answers the telephone as protesters occupy the senator's office in Washington, D.C., July 17, 2017.

domain to show that there are firms that do this full-time that you can hire to try to stimulate grassroots support for your cause."

Those efforts aren't certain to succeed. A representative's party and ideology tend to be far better predictors of voting patterns than public opinion, whether real or perceived. No amount of phone calls, for instance, would have flipped Republican support for tax cuts or persuaded Democrats who have supported abortion rights for decades to abandon that position. But deployed strategically, grassroots appeal on a position can have an effect, Grossmann says. It can make more of a difference if the support is overwhelmingly one-sided, if it is on an obscure issue, and if it connects with the interests of constituents. Often, those efforts are aimed at lower-profile committee votes or

are mobilizing citizens to take more action.” He says his firm has done “some Kavanaugh work” and has helped increase federal funding for the National Institutes of Health, but most of the action nowadays is at the state level. The company’s website notes it used patch-through calling to beat back a West Virginia effort that would have required prescriptions for medicines that contain key ingredients used in making methamphetamines. It also credited patch-through calls for the success of an effort to expand Medicaid in Montana.

Other D.C.-based firms point to their state-level triumphs, too. Stones’ Phones touts its work helping to defeat a Texas bill that would have required people to use the restroom that aligns with the sex listed on their birth certificates—a measure opposed by transgender advocates. “Stones’ worked with our partners in Texas to deploy patch-through calls to successfully stop the bigoted and dangerous ‘bathroom bill,’” its website says. It claims the campaign reached nearly 300,000 Texans and transferred more than 21,000 calls to Texas lawmakers. The bill died in the state legislature last year.

The Stones’ Phones website also describes successful patch-through calling efforts to persuade Maryland legislators to approve a casino, prevent pension reform in Michigan, and kill right-to-work legislation in Ohio. The company did not return calls asking for comment.

American Directions Group bills itself on the website of the American Association of Political Consultants as “one of the largest and most experienced research and advocacy firms in the country” in large part because of its network of U.S.-based call centers. “If a legislator gets a call,” the company claims, “chances are ADG patched it through.” ADG’s chief marketing officer said in an email that the company does not speak to the media.

Lawmakers and their staffs tend to be receptive to hearing what constituents think, and patch-through calls exploit that openness. In a 2017 survey of congressional staff members,

94 percent said in-person visits from constituents could be influential in persuading a lawmaker on issues where no firm decision had been reached. Other effective strategies were individualized email messages (92 percent said they were influential), individualized postal letters (88 percent), and phone calls (84 percent).

The interns and young staffers who answer the phones on Capitol Hill are often aware when they are targeted in patch-through campaigns. Sometimes they can hear the telemarketer on the line connecting the call. Or they notice the volume of calls spiking on certain issues and hear the same talking points over and over. Occasionally, the constituent on the line will admit that an interest group told him or her what to say. One staffer remembered a constituent saying, “Somebody called me and told me to tell you not to pass tax cuts, but I actually like tax cuts.”

In other cases, staffers recall callers who seemed baffled about why they were talking to a congressional office. “It’s pretty comical sometimes,” says Scott Blakeman, who worked as a legislative assistant for Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.) for four years. “You’d just be polite, courteous: ‘Oh, I’m sorry. I think you may have the wrong number, maybe? This is the congressman’s office. Did you have a question?’ And they’d be like, ‘I’m sorry, no.’ And we’re like, ‘Okay, have a nice day.’ So you kind of figure it out after a little bit.”

Many legislators and citizens believe the existing system of interactions between constituents and lawmakers is broken. Communications have turned uncivil and even ugly. “When I have a caller who tells a young staffer in my office who does case work that he hopes she is raped and impregnated, we have really reached a new low,” Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine), a key vote on the Kavanaugh confirmation, told the *Bangor Daily News* in September month. Her office has received threatening letters about the nomination and more than 3,000 wire coat hangers, a reference to illegal abortions.

Bradford Fitch, president of the Congressional Management

Foundation, which works with advocacy groups on civic engagement, says controlled forums such as call-in town halls are more likely to produce positive interactions between legislators and their constituents. “The current situation of bombarding Capitol Hill with hundreds of calls and emails is not conducive to a healthy democracy,” he says. “Members of Congress can’t separate the signal from the noise. Constituents don’t feel their voices are being heard. The members are not communicating effectively with constituents. There’s fault on both sides.”

But in Washington the debates remain fierce, and interest groups and constituents want to weigh in. The phones will keep ringing. ♦

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP,
MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION
(Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

Publication Title: The Weekly Standard		
Publication No.: 13911		
Filing Date: 09/20/18		
Issue Frequency: Weekly except one week in March, one week in June, one week in August, one week in December.		
Number of Issues Published Annually: 48		
Annual Subscription Price: \$119.00		
Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005		
Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005		
Full Name and Complete Mailing Addresses of Editor, and Managing Editor: Editor: Stephen F. Hayes, The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005; Managing Editor: Richard Starr, The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005		
Owner: Clarity Media Group, LLC, 555 17th St., Suite 700, Denver, CO 80202		
Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: none		
Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
TOTAL NO. COPIES	66,398	59,384
PAID AND/OR REQUESTED CIRCULATION		
Paid/requested outside-county mail subscriptions stated on form 3541	50,255	43,686
Paid/requested in-county subscriptions stated on form 3541	0	0
Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales and other non-USPS paid distribution	1,925	1,460
Other classes mailed through the USPS	0	0
TOTAL PAID AND/OR REQUESTED CIRCULATION	52,180	45,146
FREE DISTRIBUTION BY MAIL (Samples, complimentary, and other free)		
Outside-county as stated on form 3541	0	0
In-county as stated on form 3541	636	577
Other classes mailed through the USPS	0	0
FREE DISTRIBUTION OUTSIDE THE MAIL (Carriers or other means)		
TOTAL FREE DISTRIBUTION	13,132	13,211
TOTAL DISTRIBUTION	13,768	13,788
TOTAL DISTRIBUTION	65,948	58,934
COPIES NOT DISTRIBUTED	450	450
TOTAL	66,398	59,384
PERCENT PAID AND/OR REQUESTED CIRCULATION	79.1%	76.6%
I certify that all information furnished above is true and complete. Richard Trocchia, Circulation Director		

See Anything, Say Something?

The pros and cons of ‘mandated reporting.’

BY NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY



A protest of clerical sex abuse outside the Roman Cathedral in Los Angeles, June 2003

In Catholic parishes around the world, at elite private schools such as Phillips Exeter Academy and St. George’s School, and in institutions such as the U.S. Olympic Committee, people who knew about longstanding sexual abuse of children and teenagers ignored it or covered it up. A rash of “good people” did nothing, and evil prevailed.

One way to try to prevent this from happening in the future is to legally require that employees of any child-serving organization report their suspicions about abuse to authorities. Most states already mandate that people in certain professions—doctors, members of law enforcement, public school teachers, and social workers, for instance—report suspected abuse or neglect. But everyone else, while

encouraged to tell the authorities if they believe a child is being harmed, is not required on pain of punishment to do so.

But these recent cases suggest we can no longer rely on people’s consciences to protect children. Marci Hamilton, chief executive of CHILD USA and one of the attorneys leading the charge on behalf of sex abuse survivors in the Catholic church and elsewhere, tells me every organization that deals with young people should adopt two rules. The first, she says, is that “if anyone has suspicions it is their obligation not just to tell their superiors but to call the authorities.” The second: Protect these whistleblowers from recrimination.

Hamilton’s reasoning is that coverups would be far less likely if the law required clergy, private school employees, and sports officials to serve as mandated reporters. Would we still be unearthing decades-old horror

stories about bad priests, teachers, and coaches if such laws had been in place in the past?

And yet the law is a blunt instrument. Our desire for a fail-safe mechanism to prevent abuse and coverups will be incompatible with a host of other goods. When we devise new laws or expand old ones, we can expect a clash of values as well as unintended consequences.

There are valid reasons some groups are exempt from reporting their suspicions about abuse and neglect. Requiring clergy to act as mandated reporters, for example, might discourage victims from seeking counseling, or violate the sacredness and privacy of confession. And more legal requirements for mandated reporting means putting more people into potential legal jeopardy, both those accused of abuse and those who fail to report their suspicions. Penalties vary by state but in Massachusetts, failure to report by a mandated reporter can result in a fine of up to \$5,000 and imprisonment of up to two and a half years.

As Walter Olson of the Cato Institute notes, increasing the number of mandated reporters could “incentivize” people “to resolve uncertain, gray areas in favor of reporting.” It will multiply “investigations based on hunches or ambiguous evidence which can harm the innocent, traumatize families, result in CPS [child protective services] raids, and stimulate false allegations,” he says.

The concern isn’t unfounded. Just last month, parents across the country were outraged by news that a Chicago-area mother was reported to police and investigated by the state for letting her 8-year-old walk a dog around the block by herself. Lenore Skenazy, founder of the “free-range” parenting movement, who happens to have grown up in the same well-to-do suburb, wrote, “This was all because of the ridiculous assumption that one must leave no stone unturned when it comes to children’s safety.”

Skenazy and the free-rangers are not wrong to see hysteria and nosiness behind some abuse and neglect

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ANNE CUSACK / LOS ANGELES TIMES / GETTY

reports. After all, crime rates in most of the country are lower than they have been in decades, and the likelihood that a child would be in danger walking a dog around a suburban block is minuscule. According to the University of New Hampshire Crimes Against Children Research Center, physical assaults against children ages 2 to 17 was down 33 percent between 2003 and 2011, and rape (attempted or completed) of children was down 43 percent in the same time period.

Of course, these statistics are not incompatible with the kind of long-term, secret sexual abuse that has gone on in many religious and educational institutions. And increasing the number of mandated reporters will certainly result in unwarranted charges that upend the worlds and violate the rights of some adults. Whenever any teacher or pastor sees an odd picture drawn by a first-grader or overhears an inappropriate-sounding snippet of conversation between 12-year-olds, he or she will feel obligated to call the police or child protective services or both.

One need only recall the McMartin preschool cases of the 1980s in Los Angeles, or the similar Amirault cases in Massachusetts—false and fantastic accusations of sexual abuse that resulted in unjust prison sentences—to realize just how serious the consequences of a wrongheaded report might be.

But a few states are moving in that direction. In the wake of the abuse scandal at Pennsylvania State University, the state expanded mandated reporter categories to include clergy as well as a long list of others (such as librarians) who regularly come into contact with children.

When the pope himself has been credibly accused of protecting sexual abusers, it's clear that society could be doing more to prod institutions into greater transparency and accountability regarding transgressions. The price is indeed high, but after a seemingly endless stream of scandals from our most trusted institutions it is one that devastated families across the country are probably willing to pay. ♦

The Battle of the Bobs

A surprisingly competitive Senate race in New Jersey. BY ETHAN EPSTEIN

Summit, N.J.

The Northeast's soggy late summer led to the last-minute postponement of the premier social event of the golden-ager calendar in this part of New Jersey: the Bergen County Senior Citizens Picnic. And so instead of shaking hands and scarfing hot dogs, Bob Hugin is holed up in the back of a sushi restaurant in this upmarket town 25 miles west of Manhattan.

Chesney concert at Met Life Stadium, the Labor Day parade in South Plainfield, and the St. Patrick's Day party at Murph's Tavern in Totowa (this was a few days after the pre-Saint Patrick's Day Parade Brunch in Wall Township, which he also attended). Even for shut-ins, there's been no escaping the candidate. Hugin, running a largely self-financed campaign, has been on television since February, blanketing this pricey state in advertising.

New Jersey is in the midst of an unexpected battle of the Bobs. Incumbent Bob Menendez, a senator since 2006, a member of the House of Representatives for 13 years before that, and a mayor and state representative before that, was badly weakened by legal travails over the past several years. Though he's running as a Democrat in a state that hasn't been kind to Republicans

running for national office for the last three decades, he finds himself in a tough spot.

Menendez, 64, was indicted in 2015 for corruption. The charges stemmed from the senator's relationship with a Florida doctor, Salomon Melgen, with whom he forged an unusually close friendship. Criminally close, the Department of Justice argued: Melgen lavished Menendez with gifts (trips on his private plane, free nights in swanky Paris hotels) and in turn, the senator allegedly did his bidding on a number of matters, including securing U.S. visas for Melgen's many girlfriends and



Bob Hugin after announcing his candidacy in February

Hugin, the Republican nominee for Senate here, is mounting what many cast as a quixotic battle in this heavily Democratic state. His strategy thus far has been to attend every gathering of, oh, three or more people. Not just the senior citizens' picnic: Since announcing his candidacy in February, the Summit resident has shown up at the Dominican parade in Paterson, the Puerto Rican heritage parade in Jersey City, the Ecuadorian Parade and Festival in Newark, a Kenny

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attempting to pressure the Health and Human Services Department to change its Medicare billing practices in a way that would help his friend.

Late last year, Menendez's trial ended in a hung jury—he was not exonerated—while Melgen was convicted of Medicare fraud and sentenced to 17 years in prison. (Melgen was found to have subjected his patients to unnecessary and often painful medical tests simply to bilk Medicare.) The Department of Justice later announced that it wouldn't be refiling charges against the senator.

After his indictment, Menendez stepped down from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but the party gave him the all-clear following the mistrial, and he continued in his reelection bid. Voters, however, seem less thrilled than the party bosses: In the June Democratic primary, Menendez took only 62 percent of the vote against a no-name challenger who barely campaigned. Perhaps conscious of his swooning popularity, he has now adopted the “barely campaign” strategy himself. Rarely making public appearances in New Jersey, he's stuck close to Washington this summer.

Hugin, also 64, sensed an opening after Menendez's mistrial. The New Jersey native, retired Marine, and chairman of Celgene, a NASDAQ-listed pharmaceutical company that he used to run as CEO, began to commission polls, he says. He only wanted to run if he had a real shot at winning, and the polls gave him that confidence, he recalls.

Hugin, gray-haired and gravel-voiced, announced his candidacy in February and has run a relentless, locally focused campaign ever since. Over lunch, he begins by bemoaning the limits on the state-and-local tax deduction included in last year's GOP tax bill. While that law represented a tax cut for most Americans, the SALT deduction limitation meant a tax hike for many wealthy filers in states with

high local taxes like New Jersey, New York, Maryland, and California. Filers used to be able to deduct the entirety of their local property and income taxes; now they can deduct only the first \$10,000. Hugin wants to raise the cap.

Indeed, in many ways, Hugin sounds more like a gubernatorial candidate than one running for national office. “I'm going to talk about every issue,” he says. “Whether it's a state issue, municipal issue, local issue.” He deplores the outmigration

I'm going to be very clear about those things,” he says.

Hugin's approach is working, if the polls are to be believed. In April, Menendez led 53 to 32, according to Monmouth. By late August, the incumbent's lead had shrunk to 43-37. Hugin's campaign spokesman tells me that their internal polls show a “dead heat.”

And Menendez acts worried: Rather than have the candidate press the flesh, his campaign has released a series of advertisements targeting Hugin's record at Celgene. He's also painted as too close to Trump. Hugin, for his part, says he will continue to be anywhere and everywhere—“I'm not afraid to answer questions,” he says. “I'm not running away from my past, I'm running towards everything I've done in my life.” Menendez has agreed to meet Hugin for one debate, scheduled for October 24.

Even if Hugin comes up short, one New Jersey political observer points out that a weak showing from Menendez could have knock-on effects for Democrats' hopes of taking the House of Representatives. Democrats are aiming to take up to five GOP-held New Jersey House seats this November, including Leonard Lance's and Tom MacArthur's. But depressed Democratic turnout, with Menendez at the top of the ticket, would make that more difficult.

Should he win, on the other hand, Hugin seems likely to join the list of once-optimistic citizen-legislators who end up stymied by the gridlock, partisanship, and emphasis on arcane procedure that define the contemporary Senate. The upper chamber, after all, has demoralized many a would-be hard-charging “doer.” And being 1 of 100 senators is far different from being one CEO. But for now that seems like a problem Hugin is eager to confront. On September 25, he plans to attend the rescheduled Bergen County Senior Citizens Picnic. ♦



Bob Menendez speaking in Brick, New Jersey, August 6

from New Jersey, which he blames on high living costs. He laments the massive fiscal problems that have piled up in Trenton, especially the pension debts. “In Trenton, higher taxes and higher spending have been [seen] as the solution, as opposed to the problem,” he says.

While he's never been a politician before, years in the public eye as the CEO of a publicly traded company have trained Hugin to stay on message. He declines to comment on the performance of New Jersey's other senator, Cory Booker, for example. (“My race is Bob Hugin versus Bob Menendez,” he says.) And he's careful on the subject of the president, who remains unpopular here. “The American people had a choice in 2016, and they elected [Trump]. And in 2020, they're going to have another choice. And there are a number of people who do things in a way that I don't like. There are things that he does that I don't like. And

Great Books— 32 Percent Off

St. John's College lowers tuition, a lot.

BY PHILIP LUKE JEFFERY

On September 12, St. John's College, the Great Books school with campuses in Annapolis, Md., and Santa Fe, N.M., announced that it is slashing annual tuition from over \$52,000 to \$35,000. In an effort to make a great books education more accessible to more families, the college plans to accompany this 32 percent reduction in tuition with a massive capital campaign expected to raise \$300 million by 2023.

This announcement bucks the prevailing trend for college tuition across the country—average tuition has more than doubled for both private and public institutions over the past 30 years, thanks in large part to ever-expanding university administrations and “prestige pricing” practices that imply a relationship between high tuition costs and high-quality education. It's difficult to imagine anyone cutting tuition these days, much less by \$17,000 per year.

It's the kind of thing that could only happen at St. John's. The school's unique curriculum encourages institutional innovations unimaginable elsewhere.

Although St. John's is the third oldest college in the United States (founded in 1696), the curriculum for which it is best known wasn't launched until 1937. Struggling to get through the Depression, the college's

board of visitors and governors asked Scott Buchanan and Stringfellow Barr, veterans of newly created Great Books courses at the University of Chicago and the University of Virginia, for help reorganizing the college. The new program Buchanan and Barr pro-



Johnnies in seminar in 1940

posed required every student to take the same set of classes and made every course a great books course. The college survived, eventually opening a second campus just outside Santa Fe in 1964.

“The Program,” as it is called, continues all but unchanged to this day. Every student takes a seminar, science lab, math tutorial, language tutorial, and music class. Each course relies on a reading list of great works, and professors (or “tutors,” as they're known at St. John's, with the understanding that the real teachers are the authors of the books) teach every subject.

This extends beyond the humanities; science and mathematics classes at St. John's ask students to replicate many experiments and calculations

contained in the texts. Freshmen science students might sketch magnolias and sophomore math students parse Ptolemy's calculations of planetary motion. The purpose? Cultivating close attention. As Annapolis campus president Panayiotis Kanelos says, “Forcing students to slow down and to look, or to listen, or to pay attention to things that are sometimes micro-details” applies across every discipline at St. John's and is “one of the things that are top priorities of the college.”

As Bryan Luther, who came to St. John's in 2015 from Concordia, where he taught nuclear physics and chaired the physics department, observes, “The science and math curriculum at St. John's is quite rigorous.”

Intense focus on the books leaves little room for discussions of context. One alumnus told me a story (likely apocryphal, he admitted) about former St. John's dean Jacob Klein, who is said to have remarked, “If my students graduate thinking Dante wrote in Greek, I will have done my job.”

Historical and biographical background information about the texts and their authors might distract from the ideas and conversations they contain, the argument goes. Kanelos acknowledges that context can be important—“we live in context,” he says—but at St. John's, “We really try to remove the experience from thinking about it as contextualized in particular historical moments or cultures. So even though we read chronologically, we're really reading author-to-author, idea-to-idea.”

But of course the curriculum too “lives in context”—a context that it permeates in almost every way on campus. Intramural sports, student publications, and clubs all exist at St. John's, but the majority of students' social lives are bound up with the great books they read. As a tour guide who works with the admissions office told me, “The only students who struggle

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ALFRED EISENSTAEDT / THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION / GETTY

here socially are the ones who don't do the work." In the seminar-style classes at St. John's, students quickly notice who has bought in to the St. John's experience and who hasn't. One alumnus reminisces about the kinds of parties he regularly attended while a student at St. John's: "On Saturday nights we used to get together. . . . We would drink wine and try to translate Xenophon until 2, 3 A.M."

For good or for ill, "Johnnies," as students refer to themselves, aren't subject to some of the habits that define others in their age cohort. Kanelos says that when he walked from his office to the student coffee shop one day, he counted 37 students, most of whom were either reading or discussing that day's reading; only one was looking at a phone.

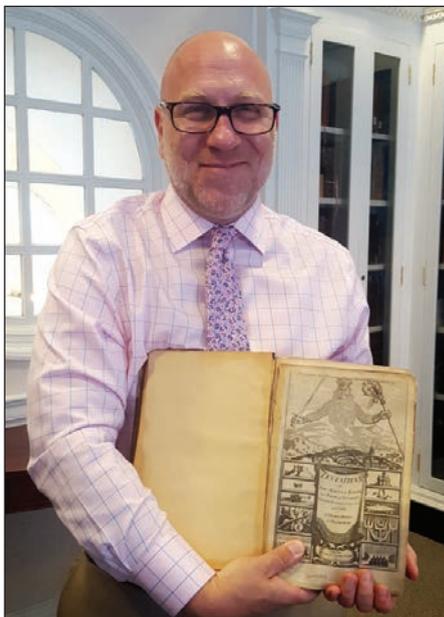
Another contemporary student habit conspicuously missing at St. John's? Protest. "There are no hostile activist groups at SJC of any stripe," says one recent graduate, explaining that the small community, the rigorous curriculum, and the ability to channel disagreement in seminar discussions left little room for political discontent. "I never saw a protest of any kind at SJC."

Also conspicuously absent at St. John's—and one reason it can afford to be nimble about tuition costs—is a monstrous bureaucracy. Whereas other institutions of higher learning support department-specific administrations, development offices, student life offices, multicultural affairs offices, and armies of provosts and deans, St. John's has fewer than a dozen administrators across both of its campuses.

"We do not even speak of having an administration as such, and a number of so-called administrators actually have faculty designation," says Robert Goldberg, a tutor at St. John's. Luther makes a similar observation: "St. John's has much more faculty and administration collaboration than anywhere else I have worked." "I wear about five different hats around here," says Joe MacFarland, dean of academic affairs and a tutor at the Annapolis

campus, before launching into an explanation of how the Greeks understood mathematics.

Though administration and teaching blend at St. John's, it's clear that the latter is the priority. As a result, faculty members have a uniquely important role on campus, as Gold-



Annapolis campus president Panayiotis Kanelos with a first-edition copy of Hobbes's *Leviathan*

berg explains: "Governance of the program and curriculum itself is strictly in the hands of the tutors."

The curriculum has a more complicated effect on the college's finances. Its near-exclusive reliance on seminar classes means that the college can't take advantage of the economies of scale that come with corralling students into regular lecture courses. The seminar structure also forces St. John's to maintain a low student-to-faculty ratio, which requires a relatively high number of full-time faculty, and unlike most colleges and universities, St. John's refuses to hire adjuncts to ease the teaching load.

This all adds up to a per-student cost to the college of about \$60,000 per year—which makes the recent announcement about tuition all the more remarkable. Starting in 2019, the college is committing to having students each pay no more than

60 percent of their own costs, with the college making up the difference through fundraising and alumni donations. The college's newly announced "Freeing Minds" campaign has already raised \$183 million.

But the school's recent history has also been somewhat turbulent. When Kanelos's predecessor, Christopher Nelson, who led the Annapolis campus for over 25 years, announced his retirement, the board considered significantly restructuring the college. One proposal involved merging the leadership of the two campuses under Mark Roosevelt, president of the Santa Fe campus, which prompted several commentators, including Roger Kimball in *Real Clear Politics*, to express doubts about Roosevelt's commitment to The Program.

Roosevelt also angered some Johnnie alumni when he appeared on Fox's *Tucker Carlson Tonight* program. "There was 'a huge backlash against [Roosevelt] among alums and students,' a former student tells me. 'Tears were shed, donations were canceled.'"

But a 2017 letter from the college's board of directors to alumni was optimistic. "We are well positioned to survive the convulsions in higher education," the board wrote, "but we will not do so by crossing our fingers and hoping for the best. We will thrive by questioning the status quo everywhere we see it."

For his part, Kanelos remains confident that alumni interest and vigorous fundraising efforts will carry the college to its goal and secure the future of this unique institution. If the students I talked to are any indication, Kanelos's confidence is justified.

St. John's is "the last real education in America," one alumnus tells me, adding, "No one is doing [education] as deeply and as truly as St. John's." There's an enduring bond Johnnies share that keeps them interested in the college's well-being even after they graduate. "You don't feel as if you can deeply communicate with anybody who doesn't have that same foundation," he says. "I think most people love St. John's as much as I do." ♦

COURTESY OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE

A Failure of Responsibility

Washington fiddles while the entitlement problem metastasizes

BY YUVAL LEVIN
& JAMES C. CAPRETTA

Who says there is no bipartisanship in the age of Trump? When it comes to federal deficits and debt, the parties have never been more aligned. For most of the last two decades, Republicans insisted they wanted to reform the federal entitlement programs to avert a painful fiscal crunch. In the George W. Bush years, they proposed Social Security reform. In the Obama years, they pushed for changes to Medicare. And all the while, Democrats insisted there was nothing to worry about except Republicans who wanted to deny seniors their benefits—or at least nothing that higher taxes on the wealthy couldn't solve. But Donald Trump has put an end to the fighting by simply refusing to face the problem altogether, in effect denying that any solution is needed at all. He has taken the Democrats' denial a step further, and Republicans have been all too willing to follow his lead.

President Trump didn't create the fiscal mess our country now confronts, of course. But together with Congress, he is well on his way to making it much worse. During the 2016 campaign, Trump paid lip service to cutting deficits by trimming wasteful spending, but he presented no plausible plans for actual restraint. Moreover, he promised voters big tax cuts, no changes to entitlement spending, and a significant reinvestment in the military. With that combination of commitments, he signaled that restraining deficits

and debt would not be a priority for his administration.

And sure enough, since his inauguration the government's fiscal outlook has eroded substantially, mainly due to new legislation championed by Trump and a Republican Congress. The administration has yet to present a realistic budget plan that could reduce future deficits and actually pass, and congressional Republicans have given up any pretense of wanting entitlement reform. The Democrats, of course, only propose to spend more—and increasingly even suggest that the nation's immense health-entitlement programs should serve as models for aggressive new spending.

The consequence of this bipartisan determination to borrow and spend is a fiscal outlook that has never been more dire. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects the federal government will begin running annual deficits exceeding \$1 trillion in 2020 and run a cumulative 10-year deficit of \$12.4 trillion from 2019 to 2028. These large deficits are on the order of those racked up immediately after the Great Recession, but they are now in the offing when the economy is strong, employment is high, inflation and interest rates are low, and the business cycle is likely near its peak. If we faced another recession today, we would be starting from a baseline of extremely high deficits and growing them further.

We also confront these projections just as the aging baby-boom generation begins to exert maximum pressure on entitlement spending. CBO projects that under plausible assumptions (such as permanent extension of the 2017 tax cuts), the government's cumulative debt will grow from 78 percent of GDP this year to 148 percent in 2038 and to 210 percent of GDP in 2048. Debt at such high levels would be unprecedented in the nation's history (let alone in peacetime), and if CBO's assumption that we will face no major wars or severe economic crises in this period

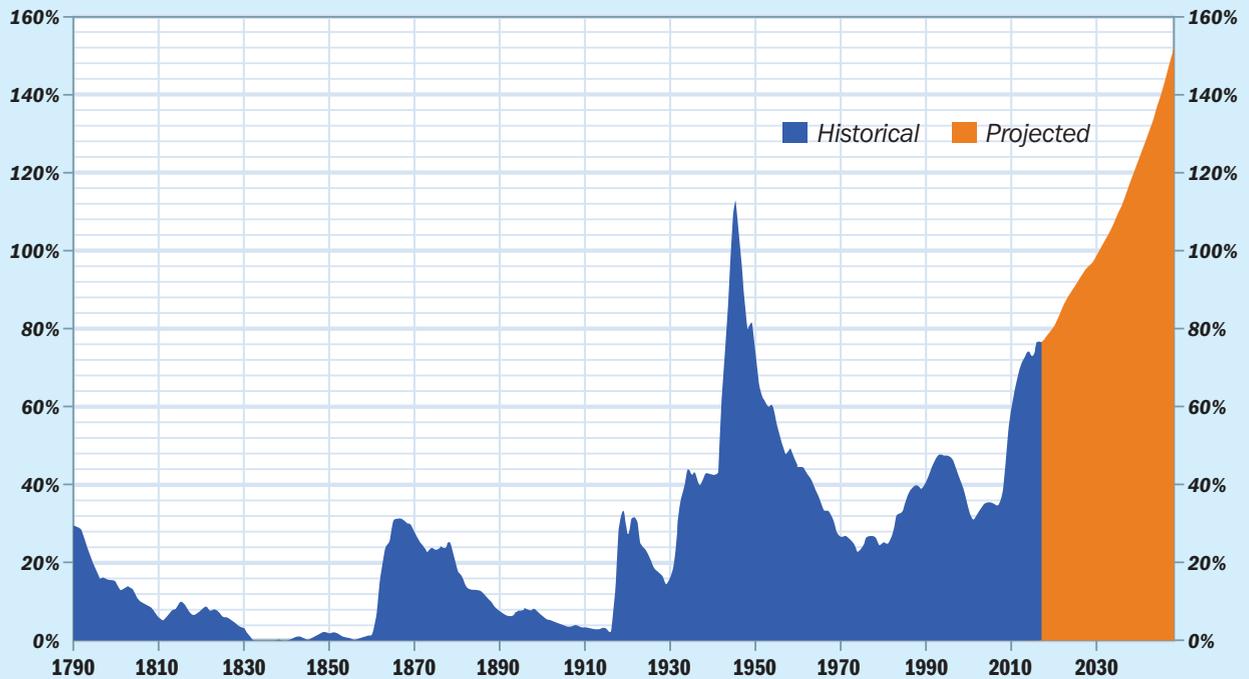


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JASON SEILER

An Untenable Future

Federal debt as a percentage of U.S. gross domestic product, 1790-2048



SOURCES: Historical data, Office of Management and Budget; projections, Congressional Budget Office

should prove too rosy, then the debt will only grow higher. In 2008, before the full effects of the financial crash had driven up federal spending and suppressed tax collection, federal debt stood at 39 percent of GDP.

There is a broad consensus among economists that large and persistent deficits slow economic growth by lowering savings and investment. Workers are less productive than they would be otherwise and have lower incomes. In fact, the recent run of stagnant wages is likely owed in part to inadequate investment in productivity growth due to high deficits, and thus low national savings rates, over many years.

Large and persistent deficits also raise somewhat the risk of a genuine economic crisis. It is easy to become complacent about this threat, given the size and strength of the U.S. economy. But there's no way to predict what would happen if America's public finances remain on their current course, which is far out of line with historical experience. Countries get into trouble when servicing their debts becomes near-impossible given the size of their governments' other commitments and the upper limit on revenue imposed by citizens unwilling to tolerate confiscatory tax rates. The United States is likely to have more room for borrowing without facing these most dire consequences, but no one can know for sure just when its luck will run

out. Once that invisible line is crossed, interest rates can spike, raising borrowing costs even more, which can quickly spark a serious crisis. It is one of the core responsibilities of public officials to avoid avoidable calamities and to refrain from creating risks of significant harm and disruption for citizens. Our leaders are failing miserably in this regard with respect to federal debt.

Even assuming the United States is fortunate enough to avert a rupture in its ability to readily borrow, the explosive growth of federal spending over the coming three decades will create enormous economic pressure that will lower growth and incomes. The usual justification for borrowing is that it enables investment in the future. But today's federal budget is heavily biased toward supporting the current consumption of the mostly elderly beneficiaries of government programs, which leaves less and less room for investments in infrastructure or commitments to new basic scientific endeavors that might increase the standard of living of future generations.

All of this is straightforward. Our elected officials all know it. They also know that taking steps to avert the danger will only get more difficult the nearer it is allowed to approach. But the very unpredictability of the consequences of such unprecedented peacetime deficits and debt, combined with a longstanding pattern of failure to think

clearly about medium-term risks, has meant that the danger has been permitted to grow.

Politicians have long been in the habit of describing these problems as somewhere off in the distance, so that worrying about them is a matter of not burdening our children and grandchildren. That used to be true, but it isn't anymore. The 2030s are as close to us now as the 2000s. It's no longer about our distant descendants. Today's younger and middle-aged workers will experience the fallout from the unprecedented deficits and debts the CBO projects. And some of the solutions that might have been adequate had we taken them up a decade or two ago will no longer suffice even if we suddenly find the will. Gradual, responsible, politically plausible solutions would need to be started soon. But Washington has proven less and less able to take the problem seriously.

ENTITLEMENTS ARE THE PROBLEM

To take the problem seriously would mean, first of all, understanding its causes. Democrats would like Americans to believe that the nation's fiscal problems stem entirely from a Republican obsession with tax cuts. They are right that reducing federal revenue certainly makes deficits bigger. But tax revenue could never keep up with federal spending on its current course. The real problem is the unrelenting growth of entitlement spending, which has been underway for more than four decades and will continue uninterrupted in the current century if reforms are not put in place.

Historical data and CBO's long-term projections tell the story. Over the 50-year period between 1968 and 2017, average annual federal tax collections equaled 17.4 percent of GDP. That hasn't changed. CBO projects that if the 2017 tax cuts are extended, revenue would still be 17.4 percent of GDP in 2028 and 17.9 percent of GDP in 2038. Meanwhile, entitlement spending grew from 5.5 percent of GDP in 1968 to 10.4 percent in 2008. Today, it exceeds 13 percent. CBO projects that federal spending on just Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and Obamacare subsidies will amount to an additional 4.6 percentage points of GDP in 2048, compared with today.

The Trump administration and some Republicans in Congress would like to implement deep cuts in appropriated spending to help ease the budget crunch, but that is as inadequate a plan for fiscal discipline as the Democrats' dream of balancing the budget by raising taxes on the wealthy. In 2017, discretionary federal spending (defense

and nondefense combined) was just 6.3 percent of GDP, down from 7.7 percent in 2008. President Trump's budget proposes to take that spending down to just 3.9 percent of GDP in 2028, including only 1.5 percent of GDP for non-defense discretionary spending. This is the category of the budget that funds everything from the National Institutes of Health to the FBI and the National Park Service. It is very unlikely that funding for these activities will fall anywhere near as low as the administration's proposals suggest. And given the many security risks facing the country, it would be irresponsible in the extreme to plan for deep cuts in the nation's military and national-security programs. But even

if such unrealistic proposals could be enacted, growing entitlement spending would still eat up the savings and then some.

The inescapable conclusion from the historical budget data and all plausible projections is that entitlement spending will continue to be the primary cause of the federal government's fiscal problems. Entitlement spending therefore needs to be the primary focus of any attempted solutions.

Entitlement spending growth is concentrated in three very large programs: Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. And all three

are heavily influenced by the nation's shifting demographic profile. In 1965, when Medicare was created, there were roughly five workers for each beneficiary of that program and of Social Security. Today there are about three, and as the baby boomers rapidly exit the workforce over the coming years the number will continue to decline. This aging of the population also affects Medicaid, as about a fifth of that program's money is spent on seniors, particularly on long-term care.

For Social Security, this demographic transformation is the essence of the problem. It means that the payroll tax intended to fund the program has proven increasingly insufficient over time. The cost of the program has exceeded its income every year since 2010, but the difference has been made up by income earned from interest on the reserves built up in Social Security's trust funds in better times. Last year's report of the Social Security trustees estimated that this interest income would prove insufficient starting in 2022, when the program would have to start drawing on its reserves. But that quickly turned out to be overly optimistic, and in this year's report the trustees note that the line has already been crossed, four years early. Social Security's total cost will exceed its total

Large and persistent deficits raise the risk of a genuine economic crisis. There's no way to predict what would happen if America's public finances remain on their current course, which is far out of line with historical experience.

income (including interest income) this year, and if the program is not reformed it will continue to do so every year from now on.

Social Security is living off its reserves, and the trustees expect those reserves to last until 2034. But even if they are right, this does not mean we have that long to address the problem. As former trustee Charles Blahous has noted, if we were to wait until 2034, even denying benefits entirely to newly retiring seniors at that point (which, needless to say, could never happen) would not be enough to enable the program to keep providing benefits to those already getting them. Some reforms must come well before that, and the longer we wait the harder they will be to enact. Social Security's core old-age and survivor benefit program will spend \$834 billion this year, according to CBO, and that number will rise to \$1.5 trillion per year by 2028. Reforms will have to take place against the backdrop of enormous fiscal pressures.

Medicare is also an old-age benefit program and so is similarly exposed to the aging of our society, but it has other troubles besides. Medicare has never been fully funded by a payroll tax and has not built up reserves anywhere near those of Social Security. The one portion of Medicare that resembles Social Security's structure is its hospital-insurance trust fund, which does draw its funding in part from a payroll tax. But that part of the program, just like Social Security, began to draw on its reserves this year, about five years sooner than the program's trustees expected even a year ago. Its reserves are projected to be depleted well before Social Security's, in 2026.

The other parts of Medicare (most notably its physician and outpatient services) are already funded largely by general tax revenue, so they don't face an insolvency date, but they are a massive draw on federal resources and becoming more so all the time. The scope of this spending is underappreciated. Federal taxpayers will be providing an astonishing \$4.4 trillion in subsidies for these parts of the program over the next 10 years. More than 15 percent of federal revenue is now spent on Medicare, and that figure is expected to balloon as more and more baby boomers retire—growing much faster than the economy, inflation, or any plausible increase in federal revenue.

This is not entirely because of demographics, of course. Social Security provides age-based cash benefits to a growing elderly population; Medicare provides health insurance, which means its costs are rising both because of a growing base of beneficiaries who live longer and because of health-care costs that have grown significantly faster than inflation for decades. CBO expects net federal spending on Medicare (after subtracting premiums paid by enrollees) to be \$590 billion this year and to rise to \$1.3 trillion per year over the coming decade.

The fiscal prospects of Medicaid, which provides health coverage to lower-income Americans, are similarly influenced by the rising cost of care and have been transformed over the past decade by a massive expansion of the program under the Affordable Care Act. The ACA increased Medicaid enrollment by nearly 30 percent, to roughly 70 million Americans. The federal portion of Medicaid will cost taxpayers \$383 billion this year, according to CBO, and over the coming decade that number is projected to rise to more than \$650 billion a year.

But Medicare and Medicaid are not simply victims of rapidly rising health-care costs. They contribute heavily to rising costs through their very design. Medicare in particular is a major reason why American health care is weighed down with rampant waste and inefficiency. It is the primary regulator of the American health-care system. Because it is the biggest payer in the system, its vast and arcane system of rules for paying hospitals, physicians, and other service providers heavily influences how care is delivered to all patients, not just the elderly. Above all, Medicare creates powerful incentives for excess service provision by paying providers on a fee-for-service basis while tightly capping prices per service. That means providers make more by providing more services rather than offering more value, which makes for a less efficient system. Medicare's administrators have long understood this problem, but attempts to address it have mostly proven counterproductive. Value-driven Medicare reform is therefore essential both to the fiscal health of our government and to keeping health-care costs under control more generally while providing seniors with the care they need and want.

Medicaid is a smaller player in the system but still a massive one, and it also includes incentives that drive up costs. A fundamental problem is the split financial responsibility for the program. The federal government pays for about 60 percent of all state Medicaid spending, with no upper limit. This means states can give their residents a dollar in benefits while spending only about 40 cents themselves, which creates incentives for some kinds of over-spending even as the overall benefit is often inadequate. A web of federal rules imposed on the states has not solved this problem but has made the system even more complex. The sad irony of Medicaid is that its costs are so high that many states are struggling to finance their programs, even as the beneficiaries who rely on the program are too often underserved and provided with an unacceptably low quality of care.

In both cases, we find the federal government worsening the problem of rising health-care costs and then paying a heavy price for it. Health-entitlement reform is therefore imperative both for fiscal reasons and to enable the American health-care system to provide more people with access to affordable coverage and care.

All three of our major federal entitlements cry out for reform. Without it, a painful fiscal crunch will grow increasingly unavoidable. That doesn't make the politics of improving these programs any more palatable. But it means there is no excuse for avoiding the problem or for exaggerating the difficulties involved in addressing it.

PATHS TOWARD REFORM

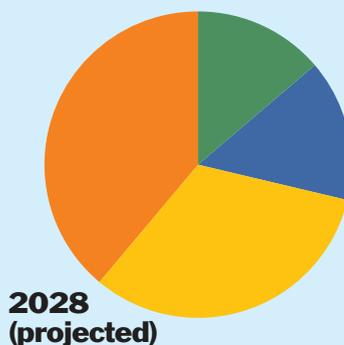
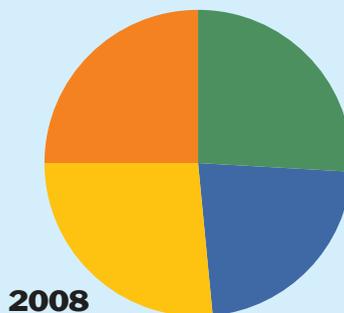
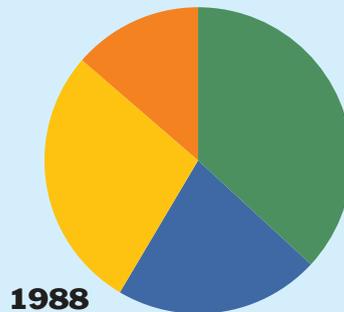
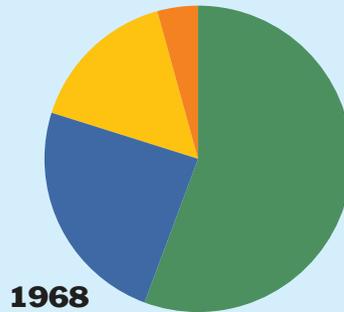
The debate over entitlement reform suffers from two kinds of hyperbole. Opponents of change, generally on the left, often charge that any modification to the benefit rules of the major entitlements would be the first step toward their elimination. But some proponents of reform, especially on the right, reinforce these scare tactics by claiming that their ideas will lead to a wholesale remaking of these programs (if not of American government more generally), when in fact realistic proposals would make gradual changes in incremental ways.

The truth is that the nation has built a vast and expensive social safety net supporting the income and health of retirees, and the goals of this safety net are deeply established on all sides of our political culture. They are not going anywhere. What is being debated is how to modify and adjust the entitlement system to ensure it continues to provide the protection taxpayers expect while being affordable and consistent with the economic dynamism and growth that pay for it. The challenge, which is a core challenge facing every liberal society, is how to balance dynamism, security, and social cohesion.

The focus of reform must necessarily be budgetary in part, to reduce the fiscal risks in the paths these programs are on today. But

How Entitlements Ate the Budget

Components of federal spending



SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office

reform should also make the programs work better for the beneficiaries who rely on them. In each case, reform would have to begin by distinguishing means from ends and thinking about how to achieve the purpose of the program rather than how to preserve its current design.

Social Security serves two primary purposes. First, the program requires all workers to set aside a portion of their pay during their working years in return for its partially meeting their retirement-income needs when they grow older. In a modern and wealthy country, citizens do not want the elderly to live without sufficient means when they are no longer able to provide for themselves through their own earnings. Many people will set aside sufficient reserves to finance their own retirements, but some won't, which means some workers will be asked to pay for the retirements of others as well as for themselves. To minimize this burden, Social Security compels all workers to participate in a system that provides a minimum level of retirement support. It's a pay-as-you-go system, so the money isn't actually invested and set aside until a worker retires. Instead it is used to pay for the benefits of current retirees, and the worker earns credits that he will draw on when he retires.

The second purpose of Social Security is to provide additional financial support in retirement to workers who earn low wages in their working years and are therefore unable to save enough for their retirements. The program's benefit rules are weighted to provide a greater replacement rate for low wages than for high wages, which has the effect of

boosting the retirement incomes of workers with low lifetime earnings.

Combining these two purposes with other social benefits (such as assistance for spouses, survivors, and dependent children) has made the current program impossibly opaque to workers. Very few Americans understand the rules sufficiently to know what to expect from the system when they retire.

Andrew Biggs of the American Enterprise Institute has developed a reform plan for Social Security that would better serve the two purposes of the current program, and in a way that is both more progressive and more supportive of work. He would address the two purposes by creating two distinct elements of Social Security. The first would provide a universal, flat retirement-income payment to all eligible retirees. This benefit would be tied to the poverty line and ensure that all retirees who contribute sufficiently into Social Security would be guaranteed an income that is at least equal to the poverty line. This provision would raise the benefits of approximately one-third of all Social Security beneficiaries who today get benefits that are below the measure of poverty—and by so doing it would put an end to poverty among retirees. In this way, the reform would be more progressive than current law.

The second part of Social Security would be a fully funded, earnings-related savings program, financed by the remainder of the payroll tax not needed to finance the universal flat benefit. All workers would set aside a portion of each paycheck in a personal savings account that would help finance their retirements. The more a worker earns, the more he would set aside in his retirement account.

Redesigning Social Security in this manner would allow for the elimination of several current rules that penalize work. The universal flat benefit would be available to all retirees above a certain eligibility age (based on the expected lifespans of beneficiaries). Past that age, workers would no longer be required to pay the payroll tax or be penalized with lower benefits if they continue to work. In fact, the more they work, the greater their benefit because they would continue to contribute to the second, earnings-related portion of the program.

This kind of reform, designed to take effect gradually and without creating major disruptions for older workers and retirees, would better align Social Security

with the needs and dynamics of the modern economy and result in a program better suited to meeting its original goals while avoiding fiscal ruin, helping the neediest most, and encouraging growth.

Medicare also has two basic purposes, so a sensible reform of Medicare would be analogous in some ways to the one proposed for Social Security, but for slightly different reasons.

Medicare's first goal is to provide a guaranteed insurance benefit for all retirees 65 and older at a premium that does not vary based on the health status of the beneficiary. This is a highly valued benefit of Medicare because in a

fully deregulated private market retirees in poor health would find it hard—maybe impossible—to get insurance at an affordable premium. Older people are in poorer health as a general matter, so Medicare serves an important purpose (and even makes possible a competitive insurance market for younger Americans) by giving the elderly access to guaranteed coverage.

The second purpose of Medicare is redistribution from current taxpayers to retirees. Medicare beneficiaries pay premiums for their enrollment into coverage for physician services and outpatient prescription drugs, but these premiums cover only a small part of overall program costs. The very large

balance is paid from the general fund of the Treasury, meaning it effectively comes out of income-tax payments from individuals and corporations.

Medicare reform should separate these purposes, to allow for better targeting of financial support to those beneficiaries who truly need the most assistance and to bring greater market discipline to the provision of medical services.

In a redesigned program, everyone who reaches the age of eligibility (also calibrated to reflect lifespans) would be eligible for enrollment in Medicare at the same premium. In addition, like Social Security, Medicare would provide a universal premium-support payment to all beneficiaries, financed from the payroll taxes individuals pay during their working years. This universal benefit would finance only a portion of the total premium. Workers who have sufficient lifetime earnings would be expected to pay the balance of the premiums out of their retirement incomes and savings. Workers with lower lifetime wages would get additional

Combining Social Security's two primary purposes with other social benefits (such as assistance for spouses, survivors, and dependent children) has made the current program impossibly opaque to workers. Very few Americans understand the rules sufficiently to know what to expect from the system when they retire.

subsidies beyond the base level of support. As with the Social Security reform described above, the idea would be to provide a base benefit to all and additional help for those with lower incomes in a way that aligns the means with the program's two distinct ends.

It is essential to the effectiveness of this reform that the premium support provided by Medicare be under the control of the beneficiaries. They would be given choices each year for enrolling in competing coverage options, including one administered by the federal government. Their premium-support payments would be calibrated based on a weighted average of the total premiums of the various competing options, including plans offered by private insurers and the traditional, government-administered fee-for-service program. Beneficiaries would have incentives to enroll in cost-effective plans because they would be required to pay added premiums for enrolling in the more expensive options. This design is crucial for bringing into Medicare a strong incentive for cost-cutting and value-seeking.

But this would not be an unprecedented innovation. It would work a lot like today's Medicare Advantage program, which a third of seniors already choose over the fee-for-service program, but would enable competition among insurance providers and the traditional program to more directly restrain program spending. This kind of premium-support reform might by itself have gone a long way to addressing Medicare's fiscal challenges if it had been enacted over the past decade. That window is likely behind us, but premium support must still be part of any effective reform of the program.

Reforms to Medicaid must be similarly geared to enabling a more competitive and consumer-driven health sector. The core structure of the program—in which states are reimbursed by the federal Treasury for the money they spend on behalf of beneficiaries—creates incentives for overspending and inefficiency. A more effective and sustainable Medicaid program would be divided into its two distinct beneficiary groups—able-bodied adults and their children on the one hand and the disabled and elderly on the other. The federal government would then make fixed, per-capita payments to the states based on historical spending patterns for the program's two population groups.

States would be given a lot of room to manage the program within those bounds. Ideally, able-bodied adults and children who are eligible for Medicaid would receive their benefits as a credit for buying health insurance in the private insurance market. And states would be allowed to implement major changes in the structure of the program to address their distinct needs and priorities without requiring cumbersome prior federal approval. In essence, the federal government would act as the provider of a set, defined

financial contribution while the states serve as program designers and regulators, and beneficiaries themselves are empowered to make more choices in coverage and care.

The common thread linking these approaches to the largest entitlement programs is a desire to distinguish means from ends so that the misguided designs of our entitlements today are not confused with their appropriate goals. By thinking through the goals while understanding the immense fiscal pressures these programs create, we might see our way to an entitlement system that could be made sustainable in 21st-century America, could particularly help those who need it most while providing a baseline of support for the elderly in general, and could avoid undermining the country's capacity for growth and prosperity. That combination of goals, rather than a commitment to ignore enormous and obvious oncoming problems, ought to serve as a basis for some bipartisan consensus.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

These are, to be sure, only the outlines of reforms to our major entitlement programs. But they draw upon many years of work and scholarship, especially by right-leaning experts, and are available to policymakers in various forms that can be adjusted to meet fiscal, practical, and political necessities.

Attempting any such changes would involve expending political capital. And Republicans should also be willing to trade some such changes for modest tax increases that Democrats might demand in return for their assent—especially if these are tailored to minimize the obstacles they pose to growth. The spending side of the ledger is where the real problems are, but revenue matters too, and no particular tax rate is sacred.

What should be nearly sacred to policymakers is their obligation to avoid avoidable disasters and to reduce the risk of crisis. Such basic responsibility is essential to leadership, and there is no excuse for shirking it year after year. That such recklessness is now thoroughly bipartisan only makes it more dangerous to the country. And the fact that similar irresponsibility abounds at the state and local levels (where many pension plans are one market crash away from catastrophe) makes it all the more so.

The Trump era has distracted many politicians and citizens from these problems, as it has from many other perennial challenges of governing. On the right in particular, many people who seemed genuinely concerned about deficits and debt 10 years ago now pretend these challenges don't exist. But ignoring them doesn't make them disappear. In fact, it makes them worse. Viable, politically tolerable solutions are still possible, but they only grow more difficult as the years pass. It's time to take deficits, debt, and entitlement reform seriously again. ♦

Same As He Ever Was

In the 1980s, Dinesh D'Souza made his bones with puerile antics at the 'Dartmouth Review'—American politics has finally caught up

BY ALICE B. LLOYD

It was the summer of Dinesh.

On the last day of May, the right-wing populist Dinesh D'Souza was pardoned by President Donald Trump, joining that most exclusive club of former felons. His latest book, *Death of a Nation*, came out in late July, and the tie-in documentary hit theaters in August. Both compare his emancipator to the emancipator, Abraham Lincoln. Critics found them unconvincing. But D'Souza, a grateful guest at the White House and on Trump's favorite cable-news programs, seems only to grow bolder with every rebuke of his work. When a history professor took to Twitter to parse the inaccuracies of *Death of a Nation*, D'Souza challenged him to a live debate and called him a "coward" when he declined. The strategy here, he says, is to undercut his ideological enemies with his ever-readiness to scrap. *When they go low, you go lower?*, I ask. "When they go low, I don't run away," he prefers.

D'Souza's rhetorical tactics may be perfectly suited to the Age of Trump, but he learned them long ago: at Dartmouth College in the early 1980s, where he led the *Dartmouth Review*, the country's best-known conservative campus paper. "American politics has caught up with Dartmouth," he tells me. The *Review's* undergraduate antics—outing the officers of the Gay-Straight Alliance, printing an affirmative action op-ed in *Ebonics*, hosting a lavish luncheon alongside a fast for world hunger—readied him for Trump: "For 20 years, I wasn't doing it. Because for 20 years, American politics

wasn't like this." D'Souza, 57, sees himself as a pioneer of the puerilizing of political discourse. Responding reciprocally, he says, to the "gangsterization of the left" by "treating them like gangsters," he helped pave the way for Trump. I'm surprised, therefore, when he tells me he doesn't know what "trolling" is.

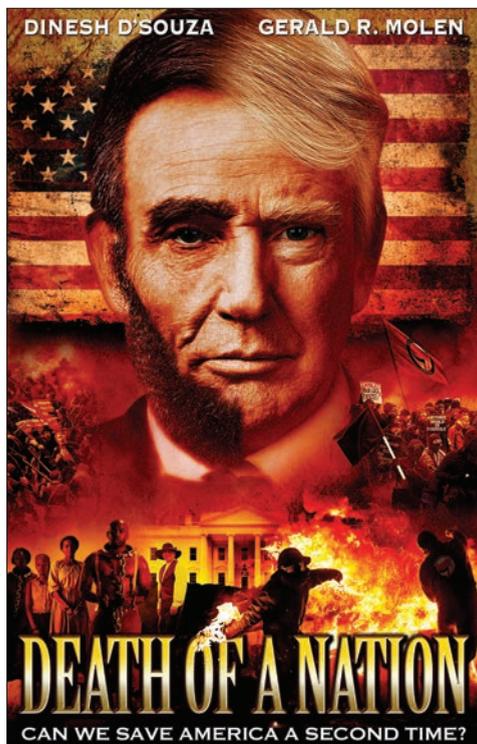
We meet on a Sunday morning in July at a hotel in Midtown Manhattan. Though we've spoken on the phone, this is our first meeting. After his pardon, he'd texted

me a picture of the cake served at an impromptu party. It bore a printed-on photo of D'Souza sitting on the Oval Office's Resolute Desk in an orange frog-suit, next to a picture of President Trump gazing fixedly into the middle distance and saying via cartoon talk-bubble, "You're Pardoned!" Surrounding the image, in icing, the triumphant words: "Dinesh Unchained." He appears in the lobby wearing a pastel polo shirt and a jovial smile. Over coffee and mineral water, he talks at a fast clip and tends to flit between defenses.

"My Twitter persona is different," he tells me, back on the subject of trolling, and emits a small self-conscious sigh. In the week leading up to our meeting, he'd retweeted a fan's use of the hashtag "burntheJews," later saying he hadn't noticed the hashtag and was simply trying to promote his own

movie trailer—which itself happens to be rife with images of Nazis. He retweeted "#bringbackslavery" too. And earlier this year, profoundly tasteless tweets about the Parkland shooting earned D'Souza a disinvitation from CPAC, an event not short on controversial speakers.

His early training at the impish and often outrageous *Review* may have equipped him for public life outside the confines of normal decency. But he was once, and not so



A portion of the 'Death of a Nation' poster

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long ago, widely regarded as one of the cleverest polemical journalists on the right. He graduated from Dartmouth in 1983 and the next year published a critical biography of Jerry Falwell, arguing that the Moral Majoritarian did religion no favors with his overtly political agenda. His next political salvo was no less portentous: Coauthored with *Dartmouth Review* founder Greg Fossedal, *My Dear Alex: Letters from the KGB* (1987) purports to be a series of lessons from a Soviet disinformation expert instructing a protégé in the art of manipulating the American media. D'Souza spent a year in the Reagan White House as a domestic-policy analyst and in 1989 joined the American Enterprise Institute as a fellow. He was one of conservatism's rising stars, and with 1991's *Illiberal Education*, D'Souza won broader fame. A deeply reported exploration of the excesses of campus culture wars, it was a hit with critics—touted by Andrew Sullivan's *New Republic*, serialized in the *Atlantic*, heralded by C. Vann Woodward in the *New York Review of Books*.

Our universities' commitment to diversity and multiculturalism, D'Souza argued, had proven a force for iniquity and disharmony. Through field interviews and convincingly drawn case studies, he showed the dangers many campus observers had helplessly witnessed and worried over for years—mostly quietly, lest their concerns offend anyone. The book liberated reason from oversensitivity. Tom Wolfe called D'Souza “one of the true fearlessly iconoclastic writers around, as opposed to the fake a.k.a. fashionable iconoclasts.” The success of *Illiberal Education*, of course, made D'Souza suddenly quite fashionable. His new fame even threatened to fix him firmly among the establishment, but with the follow-up, the *Dartmouth Review*-er reared his head.

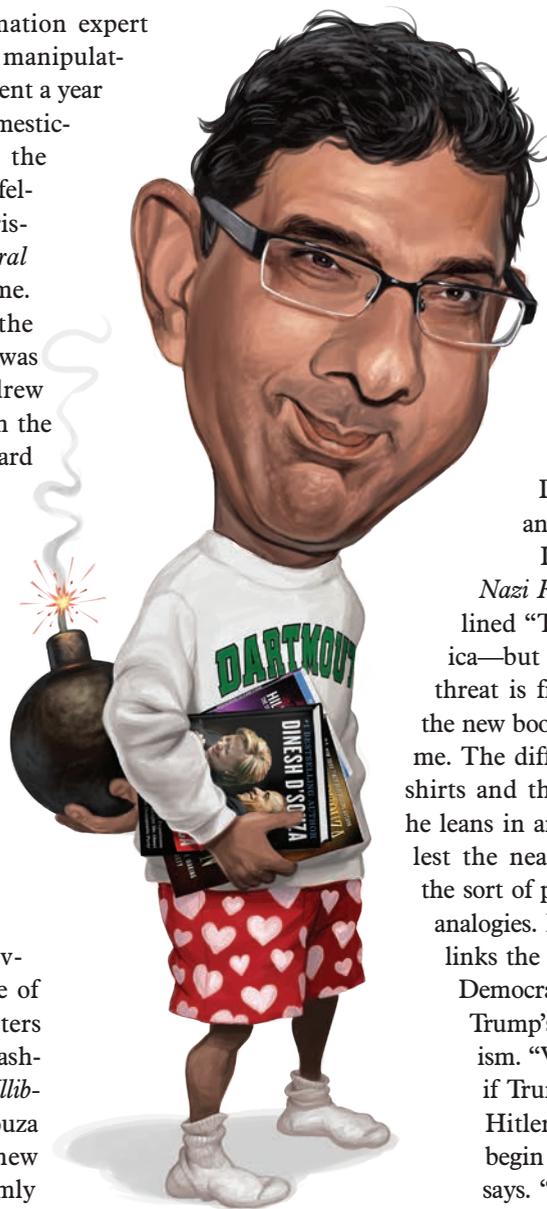
In *The End of Racism* (1995), D'Souza took the inferiority of the black race for granted in service to the thesis that “racism is not the main problem facing blacks in the U.S.—their own dysfunctional culture is.” What disturbed readers just as much was his knowingly provocative approach to a subject of profound complexity. He did not

conceal his disgust when describing, in gratuitous detail, conditions in the urban ghetto. In a chapter sneeringly titled “The Content of Our Chromosomes,” he flirted with a biological explanation of inferiority. Elsewhere, he considered an historical one and defended slavery: “In summary, the American slave was treated like property, which

is to say, pretty well,” he reasoned and further argued that “Africans were not uniquely unfortunate to be taken as slaves; their descendants were uniquely fortunate to be born in the only civilization in the world to abolish slavery on its own initiative.” It was a bestseller, but panned by critics and abhorred in polite circles. “I would not take back even a word from that book back then,” he tells me. In many ways, *Death of a Nation* picks up where *The End of Racism* left off, only now, D'Souza uses the plantation as an analogue for the Democratic party.

Last year, his *Big Lie: Exposing the Nazi Roots of the American Left* was tagged “There is a fascist threat in America—but it's not Donald Trump. The real threat is from the Democratic Party.” But the new book is “a little different,” he assures me. The difference? “I link the Nazi brown-shirts and the KKK, eerily similar groups,” he leans in and lowers his voice to a whisper, lest the nearby brunchers mistake him for the sort of person who casually proffers Nazi analogies. But, more important for sales, he links the KKK to the pre-Civil Rights-era Democrats as an answer to the problem of Trump's association with white nationalism. “Would you have written this book if Trump weren't so often compared to Hitler?” I ask. “No, my books always begin as a refutation of something,” he says. “And then in the process of refuting a narrative, I always think it's important to produce a reconstructed narrative in its place.”

He doesn't whisper when he cops to the mercenary nature of his support for Trump. Back during the 2016 primaries, he and his second wife, Debbie, a Republican activist, favored Ted Cruz, whose father married them that year. (They met on Twitter in 2014: She DM'd him clips of Bill Ayers, and he asked her for help getting his movies



DAVE CLEGG

screened in Texas public schools.) D'Souza prefers to avoid publicly backing any candidate and to keep his focus on antagonizing the other side. "I was making a movie on Hillary, right? And I thought, *I'm not going to get into an internecine Republican debate.*" But *Hillary's America* did only \$13.1 million at the box office where *2016: Obama's America* had managed \$33.4 million in 2012. D'Souza saw the writing on the wall. "I completely jumped on the Trump bandwagon after he was the nominee," he says. It was a solid business play: *The Big Lie* was a big bestseller.

There was reason to hope the pardon would bring an added bonus. (As it happened, *Death of a Nation* earned only a fraction of what all his other films had made.) D'Souza wasn't surprised by Trump's announcement. "I talked to him yesterday," he told me the morning of the president's fateful tweet, weighing at the time whether to unleash a tweet storm of his own. "I got the call midday yesterday. The operator put Trump on the phone." Trump, never one for under-embellishment, described D'Souza to reporters as being physically overwhelmed by gratitude when he called: "He almost had a heart attack when I told him."

DECLINE WAS A CHOICE

Before the pardon came the felony. D'Souza's started with anti-establishment antics and ended with characteristic hubris. In 2014, he pleaded guilty to having circumvented campaign-donation limits in the 2012 New York Senate race. He'd directed his mistress and his personal assistant to donate \$10,000 each to Wendy Long's longshot run against Kirsten Gillibrand and reimbursed them. Following an investigation and a heated hearing in New York's southern district, he received a sentence of eight months' "community confinement"—in which, free to spend the days at home, convicts return each night at eight to a lockup-like halfway house—plus a \$30,000 fine, community service teaching English as a second language, and court-mandated psychotherapy sessions, which D'Souza says he spent primarily on the subject of his recent divorce.

"I knew that causing a campaign contribution to be made in the name of another was wrong and something the law forbids," D'Souza told Judge Richard Berman. "I deeply regret my conduct." But his protestations in a televised interview earlier the same day—that he was the victim of a "witch hunt"—clashed with his attempts to telegraph compunction. During his sentencing, Berman played an interview D'Souza gave to Newsmax TV

about the unfairness of his case and rebuked him from the bench, "I'm not sure, Mr. D'Souza, that you get it."

D'Souza's defenses often reflect Trump's, and the pardon could be interpreted as a shot across Robert Mueller's bow. "I don't think there's any connection at all," he told me the morning of the pardon and paraphrased the president: "As Trump said, 'I knew from the beginning that you got'—his word was—'screwed.'" Trump thought the FBI treated him unfairly, D'Souza says, and the president wasn't alone in believing he deserved a pardon. "Senator Cruz pushed it to Trump," and this, D'Souza insists, proves the injustice of his conviction. "I think it's particularly commendable given Cruz and Trump were rivals for the nomination," he said. "They did it just because it was the right thing to do."

But why did D'Souza do it?

Predictably, Dartmouth played a part. Wendy Long worked at the *Dartmouth Review* with D'Souza, and Gillibrand is a Dartmouth alumna, too. Five years their junior, the Blue-Dog-Democrat-turned-progressive-feminist reminded these friends of the humorless liberals they'd razzed at the *Review*. "Wendy goes, *There's this Dartmouth woman—you know what I mean,*" D'Souza says. "This was a Dart-

So why'd he violate federal campaign-finance laws? 'This was a Dartmouth fight,' D'Souza says, 'and almost a surrogate for our old clashes.' There's little a Dartmouth Review-er relishes more.

mouth fight, and almost a surrogate for our old clashes." There's little a *Review-er* relishes more. Long, who ran again in 2016, readily accepted his apology for the awkward scandal, she tells me. "When you run you keep asking people for help," Long says. "Maybe he just took it to heart. He kept saying, *I'm really sorry, Wendy.*" She also doesn't mind my, and every other reporter's, calling her campaigns "quixotic." In New York, "Republicans don't really have a chance statewide," she admits. But Long ran anyway, against absurdly unbeatable odds, for the same reason D'Souza illegally donated over the limit: the love of the old fight. "I felt like I had to stick my head out and contribute to the movement as Dinesh and Laura had," she readily admits. "They motivated me, absolutely."

Laura is Fox News host Laura Ingraham, who both dated D'Souza at Dartmouth and followed him as *Review* editor. They are the embodiment of the paper's success. Four young conservatives, troubled by their inability to support Ronald Reagan in the campus daily, founded the *Dartmouth Review* in 1980: Gregory Fossedal, Gordon Haff, Benjamin Hart, and Keeney Jones. Haff, now a software consultant, is the only one still active on the *Review's* board. He sees D'Souza's and Ingraham's stardom as anomalous.

“Most people, they have a family, a job outside politics, and they stop engaging,” Haff says when I ask what sets these two apart from other alumni. What he means is that at some point most of them just grew up and moved on. Jones, who wrote the infamously tasteless Ebonics op-ed attacking affirmative action, is now a Catholic priest in a small town in Connecticut. Hart—whose Dartmouth professor father Jeffrey was a prominent conservative thinker and the *Review*’s early connection to national Republicans—is a marketing consultant and competitive breakdancer in Illinois. Haff hasn’t heard from Fossedal, who founded and ran a small think tank of his own for a time, since they quarreled over tech policy 10 years ago. “Of the old cohort, most of our thinking has evolved,” Haff says, particularly when it comes to those fraught areas of debate where the *Review*’s reporting earned them the most enemies. “If you work in the milieu of having strong, provocative opinions, it usually doesn’t behoove you to second-guess yours too much. George Will has been able to, but he’s more established.”

The author of *Illiberal Education* was, until he changed course, on track to be himself so established. For D’Souza, decline was a choice. He could still be writing serious books, he insists, and enjoying the friendship and favor of the conservative elite. “I miss that, I miss that,” he says when I ask whether his mind ever wanders back to the days of D.C. dinner party debates and chess matches against conservative luminaries. He’s lost in thought for a moment, but recovers. “I moved to California in the year 2000, and by doing that I took myself out of the D.C. camp, which I was very much a part of.” Living in San Diego, a long way from his new base at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, he found himself adrift. “I lost that social circle. That *was* my social circle.” But the way D’Souza sees it, he had to leave behind the world of Washington at some point.

“There’s no use talking to the whole country,” he’d realized. “There’s a pointlessness to expending a lot of energy to get a liberal to concede a point without conceding anything beyond it.” The catalyst was the tepid

reception of Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.’s *The Disuniting of America*, “a liberal restatement of *Illiberal Education*,” per D’Souza’s reading. Schlesinger presented a patriotic case against factious identity politics in 1991, the year of *Illiberal Education*’s publication. It was a case for American unity that liberal elites could get behind, and yet, “it barely made a ripple,” D’Souza says. “The futility of trying to do that hit me—the waste of time.” Why write for

that narrow cross-section of conscientious Americans? “I said to myself, *I could do that, and I could keep doing it*. Or I can realize that there is a large audience out there that wants to learn, but their only sources of knowledge right now are the liberals.”

He would indeed find a zealous audience for his “reconstructed” narratives. Books of sensationalism like *The Roots of Obama’s Rage* (2010), *2016: Obama’s America* (2012), *America: Imagine a World Without Her* (2014), and *Hillary’s America* (2016) topped bestseller lists despite near-universal disdain in serious circles. The movie versions did even better.

EX-FRIENDS

Glenn Loury, the black conservative economist, was probably the first to see through D’Souza—and resigned from the American Enterprise Institute over its support of *The End of Racism* in 1995. Loury says he still sees much to admire in *Illiberal Education* and agrees as much as ever with *The End of Racism*’s suggestion that the black community’s redemption

must come from within. But Loury condemns its broader argument and tone: D’Souza’s partial defense of slavery—it had little to do with race, he argued—and his demeaning descriptions of black culture were distasteful context for his less objectionable arguments. Apparently eager to offend the standards of decency, he elevated archaic profiles to persistent types: “The sullen ‘field nigger,’ the dependable Mammy, the sly and inscrutable trickster,” D’Souza wrote, could be found in today’s ghettos.

“What it’s lampooning is a cartoon,” Loury recalls. “It’s not serious.” In a devastating review of the book, published



D’Souza’s January 2014 mug shot, above, and a mocking photo with his wife that he tweeted out later

in one of the first issues of this magazine, he got D'Souza's number: "If one were to adopt the voice used by D'Souza throughout the book, one might speculate that he actually longs to hear those 'triumphant roars,' from black and white racists alike, because such vitriolic discussion sells books."

Decades later, Loury still lives rent-free in D'Souza's head. "Let me tell you something about Glenn Loury," he tells me over coffee in Manhattan, suddenly electrified. "This guy is in the same place that he was in 1991, and he's talking about the same things—if we literally took his old article and put a new date on it. To me this reflects a level of intellectual stagnation." Loury sees himself quite differently, saying he's evolved since his departure from AEI and finds himself far removed from the partisan frontlines. He attributes this widening distance in no small part to his conservative colleagues' intolerable tolerance of Dinesh D'Souza. In the ever-growing league of public denouncers, Loury's Cassandra status grants him unrivaled seniority.

"The streets are irrigated with alcohol, urine, and blood," Loury quotes a gallingly sensational piece of scene-setting from *The End of Racism*. It's the first line of a chapter that goes on to claim black ghettos as empirical proof of racial inferiority. The book was "snide, gratuitously provocative, arrogant," Loury says, serving up an assessment that fits D'Souza's later works as well. He wasn't surprised, he tells me, after *The End of Racism* to see D'Souza brazen his way onward to thinner treatments of broader subjects.

Peter Robinson, another *Dartmouth Review*-er, worked with D'Souza in the Reagan White House. Journalism, Robinson recalls, was a better match for D'Souza's talents than toiling away in near-anonymity as a West Wing policy wonk: "I can't remember anything he did in the administration," Robinson admits. But he remembers his articles and his fearless reporting, particularly a 1986 article for *Crisis* magazine. After a pastoral letter condemning the administration's defense and economics policies, D'Souza called around to various bishops asking elementary economic questions—which none of them could answer. "Dinesh as a journalist was extremely clever, devastatingly funny," Robinson says. In those days, "He was a polemicist and a true journalist."

The two men were close in Washington, less so later

at Hoover, where Robinson remains a fellow—although they'd meet for a meal on D'Souza's occasional visits to campus. "It pains me to remember the last time Dinesh crossed my mind," Robinson says. "It was a movie poster for a coming attraction, and there was a big, larger-than-life-sized face: Lincoln spliced with Trump to convey that Trump is a second Lincoln." Robinson wandered on to his movie, some light summer fare, but the image—advertising D'Souza's *Death of a Nation*—stuck with him. "I thought to myself, *Oh, Dinesh...*"

'The streets are irrigated with alcohol, urine, and blood,' former D'Souza colleague Glenn Loury quotes a gallingly sensational piece of scene-setting from D'Souza's *The End of Racism*. It's the first line of a chapter that goes on to claim black ghettos as empirical proof of racial inferiority. Loury calls the book 'snide, gratuitously provocative, arrogant'—an assessment that fits D'Souza's later works as well.

The breaking point for Hoover was *The Enemy at Home* (2007). D'Souza had at first seemed to settle into the West Coast bastion of conservatism. His *What's So Great About America* (2002) caught the national mood in the aftermath of 9/11. D'Souza now calls it a mercenary nod to patriotism—"The American tribe came together, and it seemed only natural." But his higher calling is to American disunity, which has led him to write less and less like a scholar. *The Enemy at Home* opens, "In this book I make a claim that will seem startling at the outset. The cultural left in this country is responsible for causing 9/11."

For D'Souza, the clash of civilizations is as much internal as external. In the book, he imagined an alliance between the American political left and radical Islamic terrorism. "These two forces have formed a strange coalition—a kind of alliance of the vicious and the immoral—and they are now working together against us," he concluded. "The only way to win the war on terror is to win the culture war. Thus we arrive at a sobering truth. In order to crush the Islamic radicals abroad, we must defeat the enemy at home." The book was so provocative and lightly researched that his fellow Hoover scholars, several of whom publicly critiqued his claims, couldn't bear the association any longer. In 2007, D'Souza resigned.

His next role was, by his own admission, the unlikeliest of all: In 2010, he became president of the evangelical King's College in New York City. D'Souza was raised Catholic, but his first wife, Dixie, exposed him to evangelical Christianity, and as he alienated the conservative think-tank circuit, he started addressing packed mega-churches,

debating famous atheists, and authoring apologetics with ambitious titles like *What's So Great About Christianity*; *Life After Death: The Evidence*; and *Godforsaken: Bad Things Happen*. There's a rabid audience for confident and confrontational defenses of Christianity, which D'Souza was happy to provide. This audience also proved just as hungry for partisan rage-making.

From a sales perspective, the move made sense. But evangelism was not his calling. And success on the evangelical speaking circuit is not particularly good training to lead a flock of scholarly young Christians. According to students and professors who remember D'Souza's tenure at King's, he talked about his extracurriculars oddly often. "When he lectured the student body, he'd talk about Obama, slam Hillary Clinton, and plug his new movie," one former student recalled. "Everyone got free tickets at least," English professor Ethan Campbell says of D'Souza's film *2016: Obama's America*. Although there were fewer than 30 of them, D'Souza rarely met with faculty: "He'd breeze in and say a few words maybe one or two times a year," remembers Campbell. And while his fundraising power could have made up for his administrative shortcomings, it didn't. "I found it frustrating to hear he'd secured donors for his movies while the college was struggling financially," Campbell says. Students and faculty all describe D'Souza as a predominantly absent president.

"It was a very strange kind of turn for me," D'Souza admits, "because obviously I hadn't been a college administrator. I hadn't been a provost." His Christian apologetics tour—including splashy debates with Christopher Hitchens—had made him a hero of the evangelical community. And the business-minded King's College board loved D'Souza even while the academic faculty worried about his inexperience and lack of an advanced degree and feared that his public persona would tarnish the school's reputation. The provost, Marvin Olasky, resigned in protest at the appointment. "I was not a fan of his candidacy," Olasky tells me. But the board had great hopes for the high-profile hire.

Olasky left King's for *World*, a popular biweekly evangelical magazine—and it was a *World* reporter who broke the news that D'Souza introduced a married woman as his fiancée at an evangelical conference in South Carolina in

2012. The magazine's exposé brought D'Souza's personal life—specifically, his love life—into the public realm. "The *World* magazine article was written in such a way to suppress all the facts," D'Souza vents. "And made it look like I took up with another woman." Yet he doesn't deny that he *did* take up with another woman, and a married woman at that, while he was still married himself.

THE 'MASTER OF LIES'

Her name is Denise Odie Joseph, and she hasn't spoken publicly about D'Souza since before their affair. "I thought the right thing to do was stay quiet," she says. "Did I make the right choice?" She



D'Souza with Ronald Reagan, 1988

has doubts even now, because avoiding the press meant never correcting what she calls a "gross mischaracterization" of who she is and what role she played in D'Souza's life. In reporting on the story of his infidelity, his ouster from King's, and then his arrest for campaign-finance fraud, the media, she says, treated her "like some sort of bimbo." This portrait of Joseph as a starstruck groupie turned homewrecker recirculates every time D'Souza hits the news. She bristles but proclaims a Zen-like acceptance. "This stuff makes you bitter," she admits, and she

chooses not to dwell on it. "You understand people who've had to face a beast. You become a much more understanding person. I've become closer to my God. I'm glad for it."

Joseph, 34, has homes in Palm Beach, Manhattan, and New Orleans. She's a lawyer specializing in art advisory, and her husband is the chairman of the psychiatry department at a Florida hospital. She met D'Souza in 2010 and wrote about him on her blog before they struck up a relationship. She was seen at various events with him while they courted, and people at King's assumed she was his daughter.

D'Souza claims Marvin Olasky knew his marriage to Dixie was not on stable ground and suggests *World* magazine took advantage of their geographical separation—Dixie stayed in California while their daughter finished high school—to fish for a story on his extramarital pursuits. "My relationship with Denise developed in the wake of a serious crisis that had been caused by my wife," he says. "That's kind of what makes the whole thing so unfair. Because this was known to me, known to King's, and known to Marvin." "That's not true," counters

Olasky. The departing provost and incoming president never once discussed anyone's marriage, he maintains. Olasky declined to discuss D'Souza further, citing the likelihood his comments will only inflame the situation, but, he insists, D'Souza "never confided to me."

The King's board drew a line at an adulterous president. They asked D'Souza to resign in October 2012. It's a blessing that cause for his dismissal came when it did, Ethan Campbell says. "If they hadn't," the King's professor believes, "they would've had a revolt on their hands." D'Souza had already begun to alienate the college community, insisting in a 2012 *New York Times* interview, "We don't teach Christian doctrine," and outlining his intention to produce conservative foot soldiers who would enter the ranks of global finance and American politics, where "they will be even more dangerous." The scandal that precipitated his ouster confirmed what many at the college already knew or suspected: His hiring had been a mistake.

D'Souza involved Joseph and her husband in his most consequential mistake—using them as straw donors to Wendy Long's campaign. The ensuing legal entanglements—the federal investigation that ensnared them both two years later—prevent Joseph from discussing the felonious side of their affair. But she does say of D'Souza, "It's pretty clear, even if you don't know him, that he's not sorry. He hasn't learned anything."

While Joseph has moved on, Dixie D'Souza's anger endures—proportional to the commitment a wife of decades has made. In a searing letter to Judge Berman, she described a marriage of ceaseless lying and physical abuse. "In one instance, it was my husband who physically abused me in April 2012 when he, using his purple belt karate skills, kicked me in the head and shoulder, knocking me to the ground and creating injuries that pain me to this day," she wrote. "I was married to Dinesh D'Souza for more than 20 years and together with him for over 26 years. I know Dinesh better than anyone and can attest to his flawed character and lack of truthfulness."

She contests her ex-husband's version of events at almost every turn. "The dissolution of our marriage came when Dinesh became engaged to a newly married woman, Denise Joseph, when we were married," she tells me. "He was president of a Christian college and found sleeping in a hotel room with a married woman. He and all his mistresses know who they are during our 20-year marriage." Asked

whether their marriage had essentially ended before he left San Diego for King's College, as D'Souza claims, she says, "No," and affirms the contents of her letter—which alleged abuse, manipulation, extreme narcissism, and a deep and abiding compulsion toward dishonesty—urging the court to hit him with the harshest possible punishment: "I stand by my letter to Judge Berman because it is true," she says. "Dinesh is the Master of Lies," she later texts me.

DINESH UNCHANGED

Ask Dixie and she'll say she now sees her ex-husband for the man he was all along. But one question still haunts his former-admirers: *Was D'Souza fooling us all along, or did he lose himself just as he lost us?*

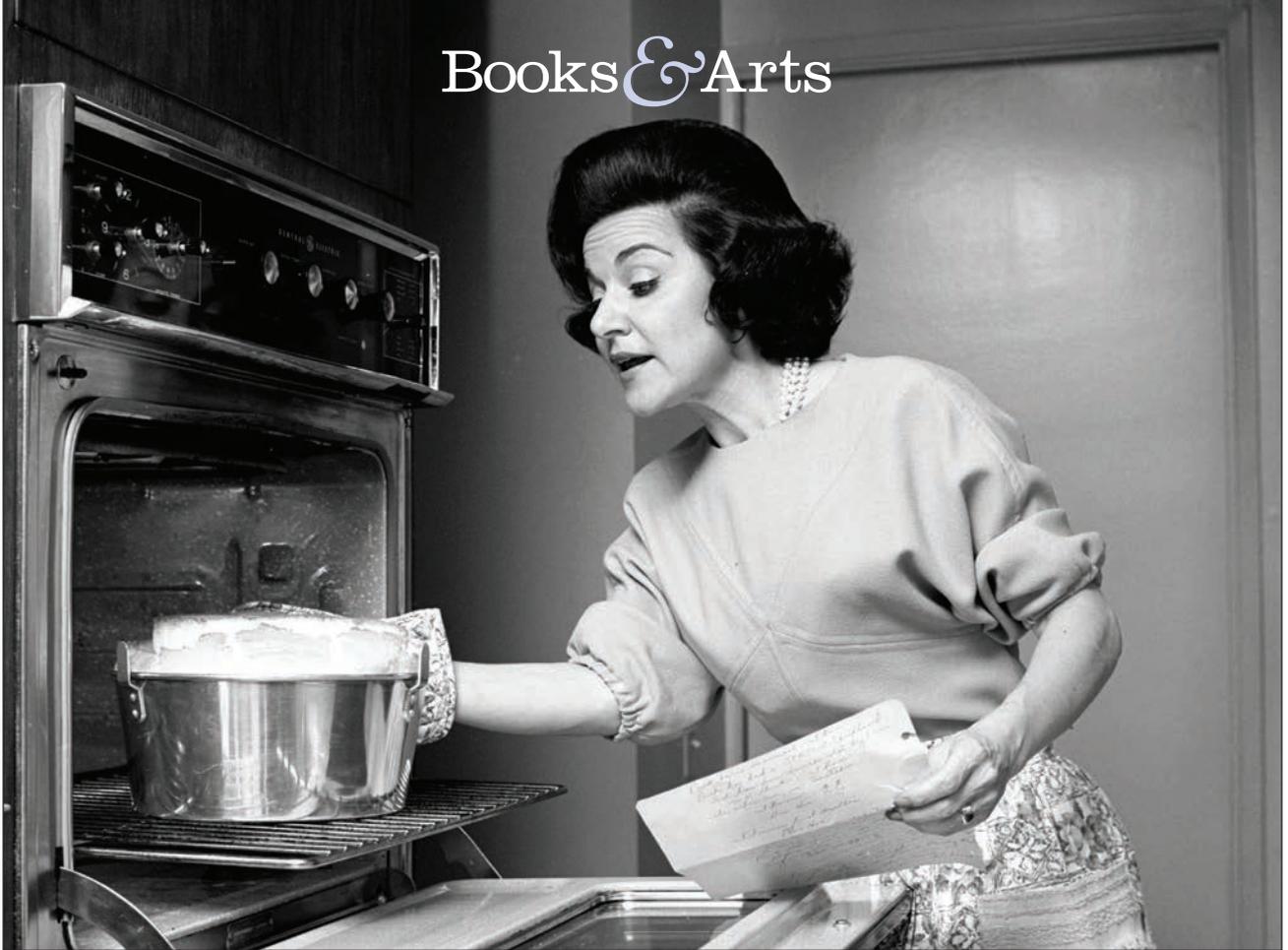
Ask D'Souza, and he'll tell you he's been fighting the same battles, and in the same way, since college. The Dartmouth Review's regular scraps with the college whose name it bore reflect his failed fights with the establishment.

Ask D'Souza, and he'll tell you he's been fighting the same battles, and in the same way, since college. The *Dartmouth Review's* regular scraps with the college whose name it bore reflect his failed fights with the establishment. "It was just a small example of the kind of aggression which I now see on the national scale," he tells me of the liberal Dartmouth community's disapproval of the alternative paper in the 1980s, which prints fortnightly to this day and has never shaken its association with D'Souza. "I'm different than I was then, but some of that sense

that, *Look, something is very wrong here at a basic level of fairness* has stayed with me from my Dartmouth days."

His federal trial didn't humble him, either. "I was stupid," he says. "There are many legal ways to give." He wishes, for instance, that Long had set up her PAC by the time he wanted to donate. And he is unrepentant. He's still thrilled by Trump's acting on his case. "There's more to the pardon than not having to do community service or getting to travel without permission," he says, calling it a "profound relief" from a punishment intended to humiliate. "I got to see the constipated expression of my prosecutor on CNN," he adds, with a crooked grin. When Preet Bharara held forth on cable news the day of the presidential pardon, D'Souza tweeted a storm of spite and glee: "Karma's a bitch," he summed up.

The sophomoric spirit shines on. "Since I'm a public figure, the left was able to hang the 'felon' label on me, and it became their automatic go-to epithet." Now, when they trot out the old insult, *Hey, aren't you a felon?*, he has his own handy go-to: "Actually, no, I'm not. I'm an *ex-felon*." He smiles, relishing the riposte. ♦



Pauline Phillips, who wrote the 'Dear Abby' column for nearly five decades, poses for a homey publicity shot with a reader's letter in 1963.

Help Wanted

America's love affair with amateur advice. BY CAITRIN KEIPER

Q: *I am obsessed with advice columns and I cannot tell you why. This is not very respectable, is it? But why are they so compelling?*

A: Gentle reader, you are most certainly not alone. "Make sure your paper has an advice column. Everybody claims to hate 'em, but everybody seems to read 'em," a video-store manager named Dan Savage once told a friend who was starting a magazine. The friend thanked him for volunteering.

Sure enough, Savage Love and its equivalents at every conceivable type of publication are considered "undignified reading material" carrying "a whiff

Caitrin Keiper is a senior editor at the New Atlantis.

Asking for a Friend

Three Centuries of Advice on Life, Love, Money, and Other Burning Questions from a Nation Obsessed
by Jessica Weisberg
Nation, 304 pp., \$27

of shame," writes Jessica Weisberg, but catnip for readers. Is it because, as a biographer of Ann Landers put it, "everybody reads her column with one hand over the answers to see if they can come up with better advice"? Because we are essentially voyeurs, as the founder of the website Quora discovered from his users' behavior?

For Weisberg, advice columns are a rich source of anthropological insight. In her fascinating first book *Asking for*

a Friend, she uses this largely American phenomenon to better understand a people inventing itself, discarding old institutions and sources of authority. The displacement of these forms of social guidance by a do-it-yourself approach is a vision of democracy, with all its virtues and vices.

A minority of the self-appointed sages Weisberg profiles are advice columnists per se; her motley crew includes advice-givers of other sorts, such as a celebrity psychotherapist, an astrologer, founders of popular courses on how to improve your career or marriage, several doctors with extramedical pronouncements, and a posthumously bestselling social climber whose entire contribution to parenting his son was a set of letters that he never meant to be published at all.

CBS / GETTY

Q: *What qualifies this group for the position of beacon to the masses?*

A: Not a blessed thing. Some pretended to more expertise than they had, such as John Dunton. Before Weisberg's story migrates to America, it begins with this 17th-century English founder of the "Athenian Society," advertised as a body of more than two dozen learned men who in the pages of a little magazine rendered judgment on readers' questions ranging from what angels really are to how to give a proper kiss. In reality, it was just Dunton himself—a bookseller and hardly an authority on any matter of philosophy or morals—and three questionable in-laws and hangers-on. Still, despite the fraud, he deserves our attention three centuries later for creating not just a new genre of publication but a new mode of social intercourse. "For a penny, readers could pick up a copy and know there were other people out there with the same strange questions," Weisberg writes. "And, for a minute, they might feel a little less alone."

Perhaps more revealing are the writers who pretended to *less* expertise than they really had. The accomplished Ben Franklin, writing as the dundering Poor Richard, was a populist American counterpoint to Dunton who set the tone for the new nation's tradition of self-help and social leveling. And for more than half the 20th century, the financial columnist Sylvia Porter was admired by tens of millions of Americans for translating economic "bafflegab" into sensible information—but to retain their trust, she felt she had to conceal her background and education in economics, pleading feminine ignorance on such basic tasks as balancing a checkbook.

Dr. Benjamin Spock both claimed the expert's mantle where he had none and disavowed it where he did. He rose to popularity by assuring parents that the answers were already within them; his role as a trained pediatrician was essentially to validate their instincts, and he remained pleasantly neutral on the big baby-rearing questions about which people can get so sanctimonious. But as he came to be nationally adored he lent his imprima-

tur to a wide range of unrelated issues. In Dr. Spock's first baby book, the one that made his name, he "said to *listen to yourself*; but, in person, political rallies, and his other books," Weisberg writes, "he turned into the kind of expert who invites eye-rolls, who says, *listen to me*."

Q: *With the democratization of expertise, why do people feel the need for all these new authorities with massive followings?*

A: It's often about something closer to



Dorothy Dix's column ran in 273 papers.

the bone. A strong subtheme of Weisberg's book is women's increased cultural influence, both cause and effect of the explosion in advice columns. Several of the female figures she describes took the helm of a column because it was one of the few careers open to them. And as they became more popular, they created more space for public shows of empathy. "My heart bleeds for you," said a typical response of the "sob sister" Dorothy Dix at the turn of the 20th century. Although her sympathies lay with the nascent feminist movement, she did not much use her platform to advance radical changes in society, her chief contribution being a shoulder to cry on. It wasn't common knowledge before her that this was something a newspaper would need, but she opened the market for it.

A century later, this deceptively passive quality is so central to our values that it powers entire enterprises, such as the "liberal arts course in empathy" (Weisberg's description) offered by

the Martha Beck Institute. Beck, who hates the term "life coach," has "done more than perhaps anyone to legitimize life coaching" and has produced literally thousands of them. Beck trains the trainers of the trainers—that is, she educates the master coaches who teach the new coaches who help everybody else live their lives with an extra-special dose of empathy, all part of a plan to bring about "a global transformation of human consciousness." But all it really is, says Beck, is paying someone to substitute for a good friend.

Like certain kinds of therapists and life coaches, columnists can come to feel like friends. They're there in your newspaper or browser window every morning, sorting out the most personal situations and drawing you into an exchange so intimate that it seems it could only be among friends (but actually *so* intimate that it could only be among strangers). The care and attention they pay to letter-writers seem like they could be yours by extension. You learn to anticipate what they are going to say.

These feelings of psychic connection may extend into the realm of, well, psychics. People read advice columns for the same reason they read their back-page neighbors, horoscopes, says Weisberg—"because everyone craves reassurance and because they address our ambitions and fantasies, the subjects that quietly consume us but that our daily lives often require us to ignore." Forging deeper into the comparison, Weisberg also connects it to women's changing place in culture with this expansive, arresting claim: "The occult and the pseudo-religious, across its many iterations—astrology, tarot, yoga, and so on—are among America's longest-running matriarchies. Their citizens and many of their leaders are women who have grown so tired of competing with men for social power that they opt to chase another kind of power instead: they concede the world to men while they focus on controlling the universe."

That said, the most hardheaded of the book's figures, the economist Sylvia Porter, anchors the other end of the esoteric spectrum for her sex,

BETTMANN / GETTY

with Miss Manners and others not far behind. Male or female, it is certainly true that, as Weisberg notes throughout, many such sources of advice developed as replacements for traditional religious guidance.

Q: *Comparing advice columns to astrology does not seem like a great bid for respectability. Are you sure you want to go there?*

A: The point here is less about the nature of the advice and more the insight into its seekers and givers. Also, the astonishing story of Joan Quigley is simply too good to leave out. Old political hands will remember, but the general or younger reader may not know, that Nancy Reagan spent her husband's presidency in close consultation with this San Francisco astrologer, often putting in hours a day on the phone with her and filtering the president's entire schedule through her predictions.

Quigley had offered Nancy her counsel to give Ronald's 1980 campaign a leg up, moving on when he took office as the Reagans tried to shed the trappings of their Hollywood past for a more stately image. But following the March 1981 assassination attempt, Nancy turned in terror back to Quigley, who assured her that her star charts could have predicted that event and could protect him going forward. It was an open secret among White House staffers, unknown to the public until former chief of staff Don Regan published a tell-all, that every event was to be run past this mystery person via Nancy.

Quigley's concentrated advice to one person was for the benefit of everyone, a patriotic duty she undertook without hope of recognition. The secrecy was understood to be part of a noble sacrifice. But she believed Nancy would ultimately express gratitude in some way proportionate to her service and the intimate trust placed in her. Instead, Regan's memoir broke the story, the women had an ugly and humiliating breakup, and Quigley sought comfort by looking for acknowledgment from the rest of the world: granting interviews to every major network and penning her own book.

The Quigley chapter in *Asking for a Friend* exemplifies Weisberg's twin

gifts as a storyteller: a radar for the peculiar and the ability to unpack it with warmth and sympathy, thus making this out-there episode of American political history relatable from both perspectives. Throughout the book, she reports events largely as participants understood them, such as her passing observation that Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's deceased patients hung around her for years after their deaths and "even left little notes on her desk."



Joan Quigley, Nancy Reagan's astrologer

Q: *Say what?*

A: Kübler-Ross, famous for defining the "five stages" of dying, had wanted to become a physician "to find out the purpose of life." She was another woman who wanted more than the path set before her (to become a secretary) and found adventure rebuilding European villages after World War II. More than the practical assistance, "the best thing we gave those people was love and hope," she realized. This and many similar experiences convinced her that what people most needed was to be heard.

Later, as a psychiatrist at the University of Chicago, she was recruited to interview terminally ill patients so that seminary students could learn to serve them better. She quickly came to believe that it was medical professionals who really needed this lesson, but the medical establishment viewed

her conversations with dying patients about death as actively harmful. Denial seemed a perfectly good stage to park at; they thought it offered the most peace of mind.

When she codified her findings into four stages beyond denial (anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—not necessarily sequential, contrary to popular belief), that turned out to be something doctors could work with. But with a lack of trust and respect on both sides, the distance between her and clinical medicine widened. She took her show on the road, holding workshops around the country that evolved to include folk-religious rituals and paranormal encounters. "Kübler-Ross had an open relationship with scientific convention, toggling between academic research and conversations with ghosts and fairies," writes Weisberg.

"At this time in my life, I was open to anything and everything," said Kübler-Ross in her memoir. Openness was what she craved—open and honest conversations, an open door to the beyond. She made meaningful contributions to the space just this side of it, fundamentally changing the language of grief and death and helping instigate the hospice movement. As to what lies over the threshold, a whole career peering through it did not yield any new or newly reliable information.

When Weisberg was 6, she had an existential crisis over the realization that everyone, including her, will eventually die. When she became physically ill and plagued by nightmares, her parents invited over a family friend to chat who had no particular credentials other than "that ineffable quality that makes you want to tell her things." Kathy offered the most unassuming responses to the most unanswerable of questions. "She told me that it was sad when someone died, especially when it was someone you loved. She told me that death scared her, too. She also said that it'd be tragic if I spent my life so distracted by death that I missed the many joys that came before it." Lacking any special answer but, like Kübler-Ross's patients, feeling heard, Weisberg found her nightmares went away. When she later asked *Why Kathy?*, her mother's answer

was *Why not?* “What did anyone else know about death that Kathy didn’t? She was as much an expert as anyone.”

Q: *Well, but here’s what I really want to know: Where can I find love? How do I identify my soulmate? How to make it last? Does the collective intelligence have any takers on this one?*

A: Why, yes. By my tally, only a few of the advice-givers romantically admit their ignorance and bow before the force of destiny. Most are more pragmatic, suggesting that success in love is a product of maturity, willpower, and rational how-tos. “There is not just one person on the planet whose soul can mate with yours,” writes Amy Dickinson.

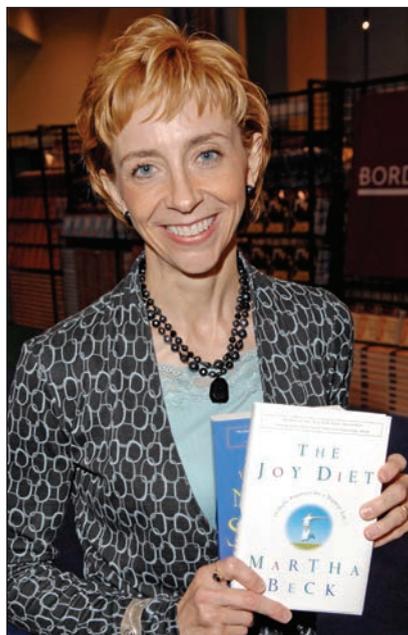
At the extreme end of this perspective are Harville Hendrix and Helen Hunt, founders of the Imago workshop series, which offers the tools for any two people to rescue their relationship. Oprah anointed Hendrix the “marriage whisperer.” Their own therapist described them as “the couple from hell.”

In the wake of a failed marriage each and equally unsuited for each other, they made a last-ditch effort to abolish negativity from their relationship and found that there was nothing left to talk about. “We had a silent love,” Hunt said. They filled the void systematically with compliments, validating dialogue, and methodical bonding activities, talking “about laughter the way other people talk about vitamins,” as Weisberg puts it.

Weisberg attends one of their seminars and is both skeptical of and moved by the interactions she witnesses. One woman reports feeling respected for the first time ever. Listless people doing a cheesy exercise suddenly have a moment. The validating dialogue, though stilted, seems to help. Simply the opportunity to spend time with a partner all day, with child care and lunch provided, is a major draw. Weisberg concludes that Imago “might not be an ideal model, but amid the eternal uncertainties of love and partnership, people are eager to have a model at all.”

Over long careers, some prominent advice-givers with once-held certainties about love and marriage have been chastened. Ann Landers, who had

passed glib judgment on other people’s relationship failures for years, crashed on the shoals of hard reality when her own husband left her. The experience revealed a layer of humanity often previously buried under pat decrees. When he broke the news, her first impulse was to trot out to buy him socks and groceries, worried about his ability to take care of himself without her. “The lady with all the answers,” she wrote, “does not know the answer to this one,”



Martha Beck, coach to the life coaches

and devoted four inches of blank column space as a “memorial to one of the world’s best marriages that didn’t make it to the finish line.”

From the starting line, it was clear theirs would be no ordinary marriage. Esther Pauline Friedman, the woman who would become Ann Landers, was wedding-veil shopping with her twin Pauline Esther Friedman, the woman who would become Dear Abby, when she met the man she was going to marry. The sisters, inseparable since birth, were both engaged and planning their double ceremony. The sales clerk asked “Eppie” out, almost immediately supplanted her prior fiancé, and the wedding went on as scheduled on the girls’ 21st birthday.

As this bond would later be sun-dered, so was the nearly supernatural

one between the twins. Eppie was the first to land a column; “Popo” followed a few months later, and from that point on the sisters were at war. The two doyens of 20th-century advice feuded for all the world to see, getting in digs at each other’s incomes, insecurities, and syndication numbers. Eppie once tested “off-the-charts” aggressive on a psychological profile; her identical twin displayed similar qualities.

As they guided and traveled with their readers from the 1950s to the end of the century, they changed their positions on divorce, women in the workforce, interfaith and interracial marriage, homosexuality, all the usual-suspect social issues—and each other. The sisters eventually reconciled, and in their final years, on July 4 they always used their columns to wish each other as well as their country a happy birthday.

Q: *Then many happy returns to America, her sages, her scolds, her quacks, her pursuers of happiness. And what’s the pursuit of anything without a healthy dose of curiosity?*

A: Like many of America’s children, the advice column wasn’t born in the United States, but it migrated here to flourish. It gave people trying to find their bearings empowering instruction and emotional support. No two advice-givers pointed in precisely the same direction—heck, no one advice-giver remained entirely consistent—but that is their democratic appeal. To catch these daily glimpses into other people’s lives and troubles, and the best efforts of someone else to help them, is to patch together a big picture out of infinite, conflicting details.

The book itself is a mosaic. Despite Weisberg’s best attempts to draw out organizing themes and theses, I found these contradictory and hard to follow. The strength of her book is in its storytelling—apropos for an anthropology of a people writing their own story. As seen in Weisberg’s profiles, that story is as likely as not to be aimless, kooky, and fractured. But that is the American experiment. We have the right to be wrong. With it comes the promise—or at least the hope—that we’ll have unlimited chances to set ourselves right. ♦

LARRY MARANO / GETTY

Fear Factor

Are our lives and our politics really dominated by fear?

BY JOHN WILSON

Most of you reading this piece have not yet reached the age of 70, as I did earlier this year (though some of you will have passed that milestone long ago). You no doubt have a vague set of notions about what it will be like, should you not die prematurely—and, of course, one size does not fit all. Still, it's safe to say that until you have actually attained that age, or approached it, you will have only a feeble grasp of what scholars like to call the “lived experience.”

For instance? All right: Everything reminds you of something else. The word “digression” becomes close to meaningless; thought simply is digression. (That sounds a bit like a riff on Derrida, which reminds me—but no, not now.)

For at least six months, I've been thinking about fear—or, more precisely, thinking about what various people might mean when they talk about “fear.” It's not that I never thought about this before! But over these months I've been thinking about it in a more concentrated way.

I'm aware that this may come across as a po-faced declaration (as if I had in mind one of those 1950s-vintage black-and-white magazine ads for pipe tobacco, featuring a clean-cut professorial type evidently thinking seriously about something). But I want to warn you: If you plunge into this subject, you'll encounter trails leading everywhere; you may never be seen again, or you may find yourself lumped in with

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The Monarchy of Fear
A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis
 by Martha C. Nussbaum
 Simon & Schuster, 249 pp., \$25.99



Kennedy assassination freaks, ufologists, and other such lost souls.

Of course, just like you, I know about fear firsthand. If there really are any “fearless” people, I'm the other kind. But “fear” is a slippery notion when deployed as an explanation for Everything. One of the best accounts of fear that I know comes in a book called *The Long Shadow of Temperament* by Jerome Kagan and Nancy Snidman:

The English words *fear* and *anxiety*, like terms for most human emotions, were invented centuries ago to name a person's interpretation of a family of feelings associated with thoughts of an unwanted experience. It is unlikely that these words, which fail to contextualize their origins and targets, are more useful as scientific concepts than a host of other words in the public vocabulary, such as *smart*, *arrogant*, *stubborn*, *crazy*, or *debauched*.

Of course, those words weren't “invented,” as suggested here; that's not how language evolves. But never mind.

If you tell people you are reading and thinking about fear, be prepared to hear quoted, ad nauseam, that perhaps inspiring but undeniably fatuous pronouncement by FDR. As an antidote, I'm reminded of Lee Clarke, who wrote a book a dozen years ago, *Worst Cases*, arguing that we ought to be worrying a lot *more* about events that are not *likely* to occur but that are *possible* and that would surely be devastating, should they come about—for instance, the threat of asteroids devastatingly striking

the planet or the accidental release of chemical weapons from military facilities where our Cold War stockpiles are being destroyed. (I should add that *Worst Cases* includes one of my all-time favorite sentences, in the form of a quotation from Scott Sagan, an expert on risk assessment: “Things that have never happened before happen all the time.”) Clarke wasn't recommending a perpetual paralyzing anxiety but what you could call a thoughtful fear, one that prods us to plan appropriately for the possibility of terrible things while recognizing that ultimately there

are severe limits to what we can control—a humbling realization. Perhaps “fear” can be healthy as well as destructive. Please hold that thought.

Are we living in an “Age of Fear”? Are Americans today more fearful than they were in the 1960s, say? The 1950s? The 1940s? The 1930s? How would we know? (By the way, how long is an “age” nowadays? Ten years? Five years? Two years? Ages aren't what they used to be.)

One thing we do know for certain: A lot of people are talking about fear. In July in these pages, I reviewed Matthew Kaemingk's important book *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear*. Around the same time, Eerdmans published *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump*, in which the excellent historian John

DURANTELLERA / SHUTTERSTOCK

Fea offered a “short history of evangelical fear” as an explanation for the mess we find ourselves in. In July, *Vox* critic Alissa Wilkinson (who is on my always-must-read list) posted a piece on the fictional Gileads of Margaret Atwood and Marilynne Robinson. “You’d have to be extraordinarily blind,” Wilkinson wrote, “to not know that fear is a dominant, if not *the* dominant, feeling in 2018.” (Oh, no. On top of all my other problems, I’m extraordinarily blind!) And then there’s Bob Woodward’s *Fear: Trump in the White House*.

Many instances of what we might call the discourse of fear depend on a rhetorical sleight of hand: To describe those you are arguing against as being driven by fear is thought to be effective, even as you are appealing to fear of the outcome should these fearful types get what they want. In his recent remarks on the Trump administration, a critique in many respects persuasive, former president Barack Obama denounced “the politics of fear,” as he had while he himself occupied the White House. Never mind that President Trump’s critics have themselves routinely waxed apocalyptic. Lisa Sharon Harper, a widely respected African-American evangelical speaker, writer, and organizer, tells us that “majority conservative rulings have already whittled back civil rights protections, leaving this generation’s children as vulnerable to a new Jim Crow as my great-grandparents, who fled for their lives from the terror of the Jim Crow South,” a warning clearly intended to inspire fear and dread.

Does such argumentation by fear prove that fear really is pervasive, bone-deep, or does it rather suggest the perceived advantage of employing a particular rhetorical strategy?

Martha Nussbaum’s *The Monarchy of Fear* is deeper and more subtle than many current accounts of fear, but at the same time (as the title suggests) it is even more sweeping in its assertion of fear’s role in our common life: “It is both chronologically and causally pri-

mary, getting its teeth into us very early and then coloring the rest of our lives to a greater or lesser degree.”

Nussbaum, who has taught for many years both in the department of philosophy and the law school of the University of Chicago, has been called America’s most prominent philosopher of public life. Her new book, Nussbaum explains at the outset, was inspired by



Martha Nussbaum

the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States. On election night, she was in Kyoto to accept an award. (The author’s bio inside the back flap of the dust jacket tells us that “the Kyoto Prize in Arts and Philosophy ... is regarded as the most prestigious award available in fields not eligible for a Nobel.” Good to know.) She describes, as many others have done, how, as “the election news kept coming in,” she felt “increasing alarm and then, finally, both grief and a deeper fear, for the country and its people and institutions.” So far, so familiar. But then, she writes, “I was aware that my fear was not balanced or fair-minded, so I was part of the problem that I worried about.” That’s not so common a

perspective. This book was the result.

Nussbaum here draws on and expands the argument of her 2004 book, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*. That was a full-dress academic work, though clear and readable, as Nussbaum always is. *The Monarchy of Fear*, by contrast, is much shorter, addressed to a wider range of readers, more conversational in style (occasionally she begins a paragraph by saying “Okay, ...”), perhaps drawing on her interactions with students. But at the core of the new book is the claim made in *Hiding from Humanity* that we humans must learn to overcome our “fear of our animal bodies.” We hide from our humanity when we pretend that we are not fundamentally animals and when we suppress self-knowledge of our mortality. “But this distancing from what Nussbaum regards as the bedrock reality of human existence,” as I wrote in a review back in 2004, “comes at a great cost. It leads me to distance myself from other people who remind me of my vulnerability—indeed, to define myself by my disgust for them. You stink, therefore I am. You are deformed, I am normal.” (It follows, as I wrote back then, that this unmastered fear “may also lead me to accept all kinds of crazy, dangerous notions—the notion, for instance, that there’s a God, and that when I die I’ll go to be with him in eternal bliss.” I’m just not tough enough.)

There’s much to chew on in *The Monarchy of Fear*, but I would draw your attention in particular to the beginning of Chapter 2, titled “Fear. Early and Powerful.” Here’s how it begins:

You are lying on your back in the dark. Wet. Cold. Hunger and thirst throb and throb. They are you, and you are nothing but pain. You try to scream, and you somehow make a sound come out—but nothing happens.

This paragraph continues for several more sentences in the same vein. Then the second paragraph begins: “This is the stuff of nightmare.” Indeed. But then, the punchline: It “is also the unremarkable daily life of every human baby.”

I do not exaggerate when I say that

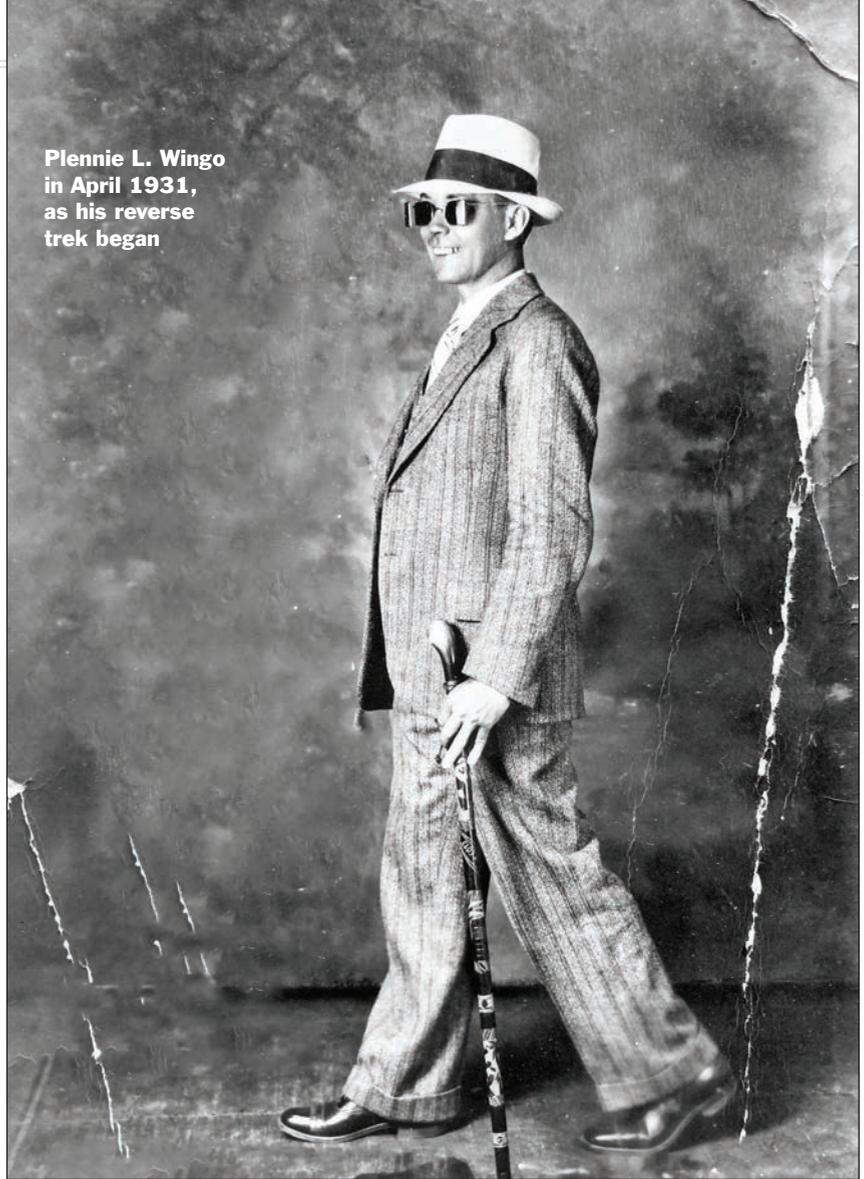
ROBERTO SERRA / IGUANA PRESS / GETTY

over a period of weeks I reread this opening and the following several pages at least 10 times. The words were clear enough, but how were we to understand them? For me it was difficult to believe that Nussbaum (for whose incisive intellect I have great respect) intended us to take this account seriously. As a satire, intended to jab at idealized renderings of infancy, it might be seen as darkly funny, but that reading doesn't seem to have any purchase here. And so I went back and read those pages again and they seemed as grotesque and ludicrous as they did on first acquaintance. I thought of the infant I currently know best, our youngest grandson George. Did Nussbaum's version square with my firsthand observation of this 1-year-old? Of course, I couldn't read George's mind. Does Nussbaum have that power? Does the road to becoming a Trump voter, and to all manner of other instances of "the monarchy of fear" in our lives, really begin in the nightmarish helplessness of our infant selves, as Nussbaum argues at length?

Maybe, as I warned earlier, thinking too much about fear can be dangerous. But even readers (like me) who are unconvinced by Nussbaum's account of the origin and extent of fear in our common life can agree with her that at this present moment, as ever, we have a pressing need to nurture and practice hope, faith, and love, as she argues in her concluding chapter. "Christian thought," Nussbaum writes, "traditionally links these three, and Saint Paul adds that the greatest of the three is love. Martin Luther King Jr. follows Christian teaching by linking the three attitudes, albeit not in a theistic and theological way, but in a this-worldly way that embraces all Americans." Set aside, for now, the anti-theological reading of King and the dubious assumptions underlying Nussbaum's phrase "a this-worldly way that embraces all Americans"; let's focus on the exercise of faith, hope, and love, as Nussbaum encourages us to do, adding this wisdom from Saint Paul: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." ♦

PAT LEFORS DAWSON

Plennie L. Wingo in April 1931, as his reverse trek began



BCA

The Retropedestrian

The odd tale of the Texan who tried to walk around the world backward. BY THOMAS VINCIGUERRA

Not long after the Crash of '29, when such zaniness as goldfish-swallowing and flagpole-sitting could still distract a desperate nation, 35-year-old Plennie L. Wingo (his real name) had an idea. His restaurant in Abilene, Texas, had gone under. So he

Thomas Vinciguerra is the author of Cast of Characters: Wolcott Gibbs, E. B. White, James Thurber, and the Golden Age of 'The New Yorker.'

The Man Who Walked Backward
An American Dreamer's Search for Meaning in the Great Depression
by Ben Montgomery
Little, Brown Spark, 291 pp., \$28

embarked on an attention-grabbing and, he hoped, moneymaking stunt of his own. He would walk around the world backward.

Wingo figured he would cash in with endorsements and pledges from

local businesses and chambers of commerce. He would sell postcards of himself. The press and newsreel publicity would be priceless! He would write a book! Priced only with a cane and a pair of sunglasses that sported small side mirrors—created for use by motorcyclists and sports-car drivers—Wingo set out east from Fort Worth on April 15, 1931.

He ultimately didn't trot the whole globe. He made it to Boston and then sailed for Hamburg. But after retrograding through Central and Eastern Europe, he was collared at the Turkish border. The police, the *Chicago Tribune* reported, "couldn't decide whether he was coming or going." Following his release from jail, the U.S. consul convinced him to abandon his kooky scheme. Not only was Wingo becoming an annoyance and even a threat to public safety, he was entering some pretty dangerous territory.

So Wingo came home and settled for walking with his rearview specs across his native land. Starting from Santa Monica on August 13, 1932, he returned to Fort Worth two-and-a-half months later. Altogether, author Ben Montgomery writes, he had backwalked for "one year, six months, nine days, four hours, and twelve minutes," logging more than 5,000 miles (or more than 7,000, depending on your source). In the end he made all of four dollars, wore out 12 pairs of shoes and, while on the road, was sued by his wife for divorce.

In this odd book about an odd little (5-foot-5) man, Montgomery, a veteran of the *Tampa Bay Times*, doesn't skimp on trivia and anecdote. Wingo, it turns out, intended only to walk backward *between* towns. By the time he got through 16 states (and Washington, D.C.), his musculature had become so reversed that his calves were at the front of his legs. In Lemont, Illinois, he amused onlookers by eating an entire meal in reverse, beginning with his dessert and finishing with his soup. Setting out for Hamburg, Wingo walked backward on the gangplank; in Germany, he backwalked a dozen miles or so in the wrong direction.

There's memorable drama, too. In

Baxter Springs, Kansas, a jealous husband threatened to kill the weird restaurateur merely for talking with his wife. Wingo himself beat the hell out of a chiseler who failed to pay him for walking backward along the top ledge of an Art Deco building in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He spent three weeks in a hospital after breaking his ankle near Canton, Ohio. In Pittsburgh, a cop told a frightened Wingo that he was ticketing him for "mopery in the second degree"—only to reveal, laughing, that he just wanted to have some fun with him. Wingo laughed along.

By the time Plennie Wingo had walked backward through 16 states, his musculature had become so reversed that his calves were at the front of his legs.

This is welcome color in a sloppy book. Montgomery's introduction stresses that his documentation is accurate. I believe him. But the book's subtitle is *An American Dreamer's Search for Meaning in the Great Depression*, and Wingo simply doesn't do a lot of dreaming. Ultimately he's just a guy with a gimmick. "With the whole world going backwards," our hero reflects in later life, "maybe the only way to see it was to turn around." That's as deep as his introspection gets.

If Wingo ever found a greater significance to his antics, Montgomery only occasionally divines it. More than once, Wingo entered towns that squinted at him as a dubious outsider, with suspicions fueled by financial jitters, recent crimes, simmering racial tensions, and similar unpleasantness. Happily, he also found kind strangers who fed him, cheered him on, and even took him in.

But Montgomery rarely analyzes and integrates this material into any

grand narrative. Instead, he unleashes torrents of historical recitation. Hence, when Wingo journeys through the Great Plains, we get about 2,880 words on regional topography and wildlife, broken Indian treaties and massacres, and the awfulness of the Dust Bowl. Montgomery chokes you with not especially fascinating statistics (did you know that when Wingo arrived in Joplin, Missouri, it had 7,468 telephones, 42 churches, and a library filled with 56,708 books?). During these asides, Wingo virtually disappears.

And unlike its subject's footsteps, the book is badly balanced. Montgomery takes more than 200 pages to set down Wingo's personal story and his odyssey until he reaches Germany. Yet he devotes only a dozen or so pages to Wingo's trek through Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece, and a mere nine to his 1,450-mile California-to-Texas leg. Perhaps this was unavoidable—maybe there just aren't many good documentary sources describing those parts of Wingo's trip—but the lopsidedness is striking.

Montgomery's attempts at philosophizing ("It's funny what a fella thinks about when he's alone") are as graceless as his rat-a-tat-tat sentences ("Prices dropped. Dropped fast. Dropped hard. Dropped vertically."). Sometimes he sins simultaneously ("Cities fall. Empires fade. History favors the persistent."). And oh, the clichés! "Without missing a beat," "vim and vigor," "between a rock and a hard place," "the jig was up," "old hat," "the college try," "fuel for the fire," and "hand over fist" are typical.

Plennie Wingo quickly became a footnote in the memory of the his and later generations. More than 30 years after his outlandish gambit he finally published his book, inaccurately titled *Around the World Backwards*, to little notice. He appeared on *The Tonight Show* in 1976 and that same year made \$500 by walking 400 miles backward to end up at the *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* museum in Santa Monica. In 1993, he died in poverty and obscurity at the age of 98 at his home in Wichita Falls. It's not clear if he was carried out feet first. ♦

Emmy Noether's Beautiful Theorem

One hundred years ago, she united symmetry and conservation in physics. BY DAVID GUASPARI

This year is the centennial of Noether's theorem, which is often called the most beautiful result in mathematical physics. Developed by Amalie Emmy Noether (1882-1935), the theorem resolves questions about the general theory of relativity and has helped to shape the way physicists think about their subject and continues to be an essential theoretical tool.

A consensus first-ballot Hall of Famer—Einstein called her “the most significant creative mathematical genius thus far produced since the higher education of women began”—Noether is famous among mathematicians primarily as one of the architects of modern abstract algebra. Her eponymous theorem, which seems almost a sideline in a very productive career, establishes a fundamental connection between conservation laws, such as the law of conservation of energy, and “symmetries,” a term that needs some explanation.

In ordinary usage we say that an object is symmetrical if it looks the same when reflected about an axis, as when we talk about the symmetry of faces. We might also, in a more technical sense, say that an object is symmetrical with respect to some change if the change leaves it looking the same. A perfect sphere looks unchanged after it's rotated, so it is “symmetric” with respect to any amount of rotation. Wallpaper may look identical after it's slid a certain distance right or left, or if it's reflected in a mirror, etc. It may

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Emmy Noether

have a variety of such symmetries. (A nontrivial theorem says that so far as symmetry is concerned, there are precisely 17 different kinds of wallpaper.)

Noether's theorem concerns the symmetries not of objects but of physical laws, transformations that leave the laws themselves unchanged. For example, laws are symmetric under translation if they don't distinguish one point in space from another. Roughly speaking, such laws predict that whether I do an experiment *here* or *there*—that is, after translating the experimental apparatus—I expect the same results. (This is speaking “roughly” because it requires

some commonsense qualifications: Experiments in the room down the hall might differ because the room is overheated, bombarded by radiation, shaken by passing trains, and so on.) Laws are time-symmetric if they apply in the same way at all points in time—so that, again roughly, it doesn't matter whether I do an experiment today or tomorrow.

Galileo proposed that experiments performed inside the cabin of a ship, so long as they don't refer to anything outside the cabin, could never distinguish between a ship resting at anchor or one moving smoothly straight across the sea. For example, something dropped will be seen to fall straight down. A ball rolled across the floor will travel in a straight line along the direction in which it was released.

The right way to express this kind of symmetry mathematically depends on our assumptions about space and time. Under the commonsense belief that time and distance mean the same on a smoothly sailing ship as they do on an anchored one, the math is simple and defines what has come to be called symmetry under “Galilean transformation.” Einstein pondered deeply the fact that while Newton's laws have this symmetry, the laws of electromagnetism do not. The result was the special theory of relativity. It preserves both Galileo's proposal and the laws of electromagnetism by adopting a different understanding of distance and time, which leads to a different mathematical formulation of Galileo's idea (symmetry under “Lorentz transformation”). The laws of electromagnetism and a modified version of Newton's laws are both symmetric under that.

Noether's theorem applies to laws that are formulated in a particular way and therefore to a particular way of thinking about nature. In Newtonian physics, bodies interact by exerting on one another forces that compel their motions. It's a bottom-up view that is easy to imagine simulating on a computer: Based on where the bodies are and how they're moving *now* compute where they'll be and how they'll be moving a fraction of a second later; repeat *ad infinitum*.

An alternative is to describe physical

processes not as if they are pushed from the past but as if pulled from the future, as if acting in order to produce a certain outcome. In the first century A.D., for example, Hero of Alexandria noted that some properties of light—the way it is reflected by a mirror, the fact that it travels through air in straight lines—can be explained by supposing that light proceeds from place to place by taking the shortest possible path. That principle can't explain refraction, the fact that a straight stick partly submerged in water appears to bend at the water line. In the 17th century, Pierre de Fermat managed to incorporate refraction by generalizing Hero's idea, proposing that light follows a path that takes the shortest possible *time*. If light travels more slowly in water than in air, it saves time by making a bit more of its journey through the air and a bit less in water than if it were to proceed directly—hence the stick's apparent bend.

Further generalizations were investigated intensely during the 18th century and reached their modern form in the 19th with Hamilton's principle (named for William Rowan Hamilton, an Irish mathematician). It tells you how to express the dynamics of a classical physical system by defining a quantity called *action* and postulating that the system will evolve in such a way as to minimize it. Pierre Louis Maupertuis, generally credited with originating this line of inquiry, regarded it as testimony to God's wisdom in achieving His effects by the most economical means.

Noether's theorem applies to systems described using Hamilton's principle. It defines precisely what constitutes a "continuous symmetry" of laws that are defined by an action and, importantly, from each such symmetry derives a conservation law. So translational symmetry implies that momentum is conserved. Time symmetry implies that energy is conserved. Rotational symmetry—all directions are the same; it is irrelevant which way the experimental apparatus faces—implies that angular momentum is conserved.

Hamilton's principle was devised for classical mechanics, the physics of planets and pendulums and springs and billiard balls. There it gives the

same results as the bottom-up application of Newton's laws (and in many circumstances, much more easily). But it has also provided an immensely helpful roadmap for discovering and developing theories in other domains—for example, the so-called Standard Model of particle physics that gives an account of the known elementary particles and their interactions via three of the four known fundamental forces (gravity being omitted). Much of its development proceeded by proposing symmetries and investigating the corresponding conservation laws, and

From string theory to dark matter, many of the furthest-reaching stretches of cosmology and theoretical physics today depend in some way on Noether's 100-year-old theorem.

Noether's theorem has been an essential part of the toolkit. Many of the furthest-reaching stretches of cosmology and theoretical physics today, from speculation about string theory to the hunt for dark matter, depend in some way on Noether's theorem.

So who was Emmy Noether? There seems to have been only one short scholarly biography so far. Her father was a distinguished mathematician at the University of Erlangen in Bavaria, which didn't admit women; she did, however, audit classes; after the rules changed she enrolled and, in 1907, obtained a Ph.D.; she worked without pay at the Erlangen Mathematical Institute until 1915, when she moved to Göttingen, an important center for mathematics. David Hilbert, then arguably the world's greatest mathematician, asked for her help investigating conservation laws in general relativity. This is what led to her formulating the theorem that bears her name, first described in an article in August 1918.

Hilbert wanted to keep her at Göttingen with an academic appointment, an attempt that led to a famous exchange in the faculty senate. A (nonmathematician) member objected, "What will our soldiers think when they return to the university and find that they are expected to learn at the feet of a woman?" Hilbert's reply—which, alas, did not carry the day: "I do not see that the sex of the candidate is an argument against her admission as a privatdozent. After all, the senate is not a bathhouse." Some years later she did get a modest appointment, with modest pay, and in the meantime gave lectures by means of a ruse: Hilbert would announce a course and she would be his permanent substitute. Hermann Weyl, a prominent Göttingen mathematician who also tried and failed to get her a position commensurate with her talent, wrote to a friend, "I was ashamed to occupy such a preferred position beside her whom I knew to be my superior as a mathematician in many respects." (Several web pages and at least one popular science book wrongly attribute this remark to Hilbert.)

Weyl described her personality as "warm like a loaf of bread." She was an inspiration to her students—through passionate conversations, not her lectures, which were poor. "She had a very clear understanding of what she was saying," said one colleague, "but she didn't have a clear idea of what she was going to say." Shortly after the Nazis came to power in 1933, she—a Jew and a pacifist—was dismissed from the university. In this dark time, Weyl said, "her courage, her frankness, her unconcern about her own fate" were "a moral solace."

The Rockefeller Foundation helped fund a professorship for Noether at Bryn Mawr. (The recommendation from Einstein couldn't have hurt.) In 1935, after surgery to remove a uterine tumor, she died, age 53, from a postoperative infection.

It was not a tragic life. Noether was not deterred or embittered by indignities from academic bureaucrats. She was, and was recognized as, a peer of towering intellects. And she did her work, by all accounts, with joy. ♦



Momma Drama

Comedy-thriller *A Simple Favor* is memorable despite its forgettable name. BY JOHN PODHORETZ



Anna Kendrick as Stephanie and Blake Lively as Emily

A new movie called *A Simple Favor* is a funny, twisty, surprising blend of mystery and light social satire. It's never believable, not even for a moment—but then, what comedy-thriller ever is? The whole conceit of the comedy-thriller is weird when you think about it; someone usually dies horribly in the course of such a movie, and yet the overall mood is supposed to remain peppy and light.

A Simple Favor sets its insouciant tone immediately with a dazzlingly new-old-fashioned credit sequence that evokes the great early-1960s titles designed by the Hollywood master Saul Bass. The screen seems to dance as it splits and splits again, alternating images of high fashion and suburban motherhood, all set to the rhythm of a French pop song. Director Paul Feig is telling us at the outset that his movie is a jape and that we're not to take what happens all that seriously—even though there are disappearances and corpses and fires

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, is THE WEEKLY STANDARD's movie critic.

at Gothic manses straight out of *Jane Eyre*. By the end, when a staged murder-suicide is interrupted by a moment of bonding between a stay-at-home mom and a working-outside-the-home mom, we've long passed from the dark uni-



verse of *Gone Girl* to the more amusing precincts of Feig's *Bridesmaids*.

A Simple Favor is about Stephanie (Anna Kendrick, wonderful as usual), the single mom so participatory and overeager that she has to be told by her first-grade son's teacher not to put her name down for every volunteer job on the sign-up sheet. Her desperate desire to pitch in is matched in intensity by the insistently chipper tone of the YouTube vlog she produces daily with cooking and organizing tips for other moms. Stephanie's fellow parents in their tony Connecticut suburb 90 minutes outside New York City watch her vlog to mock her.

Her son makes friends with a boy in his class whose mother is never about. When Emily does show up, she turns out to be a 10-foot-tall haute-couture bombshell living in a designer house and married to a famous novelist. Only

the house's mortgage is underwater, her husband hasn't written a word in a decade, and she works at a job in the city that she hates to support him and a way of life they cannot afford. Dry sarcasm oozes from her every pore, as does the sense that Emily has literally seen and done it all.

The gorgeous Blake Lively is a sinister comic revelation in the role. It's a terrific part and Lively seizes it just as Emily seizes the friendless and lonely Stephanie and begins to use her as unpaid help by pretending to be her best friend.

One day, Emily asks for the umpteenth time if Stephanie will take her son home from school and watch him until she gets off work—and then simply doesn't show up, leaving Stephanie with two children to take care of because Emily's husband is in London tending to his sick mother. Days pass. A body is found in a lake in Michigan. It's Emily. Or is it?

This is a corker of a little movie, but I fear it was doomed from the start commercially because of a terrible decision Feig and his studio made—the decision to retain the name of the Darcey Bell novel on which it is based. I am not kidding when I tell you that I found it impossible to recall the movie's title when I was searching for tickets to it on Fandango. “A Simple Favor” has a flat and toneless quality that simply does not resonate.

Indeed, it's not *supposed* to resonate, because the title is intended as an ironic comment on the proceedings therein. What Emily is asking turns out to be the very opposite of a simple favor. But the irony is only manifest when you've seen it—and even then, I have to confess, I found it difficult to summon up the title after I returned home from the theater and tried to recommend the movie to a friend. “What's it called again?” she said. And for the life of me, I couldn't remember.

Titles are weird. They shouldn't matter, but they do. When a title gives off a generic vibe, it makes you think the movie will be generic as well. *A Simple Favor* is anything but generic. And trust me on this—it should have been called *Charity*. You'll know why if you see it. ♦

LIONSGATE

“Mr. Trump also ordered that text messages from senior Justice Department and FBI officials be made public without redactions. Those officials include former FBI director James Comey, former deputy director Andrew McCabe, former FBI agent Peter Strzok, former FBI lawyer Lisa Page and Justice Department official Bruce Ohr.”

—Wall Street Journal, September 17, 2018

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UNREDACTED TEXT MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS *(cont'd)*:

5 People

MCCABE: AYFKM?

OHR: No, I'm deadly serious. They consulted me so I am assuming it's about me.

PAGE: Wut

COMEY: Just cuz you were consulted for new Jack Reacher movie doesn't make you Jack Reacher.

STRZOK: Yeah. More like Jack Reacher-round. Get it?

MCCABE: Lol!

COMEY: Lulz

PAGE: Funny, Peter, you should try that some time.

OHR: Boom!

STRZOK: Don't you have something better to do? Like go to Container Store? Again?

COMEY: Hey, I like Container Store.

MCCABE: You would.

STRZOK: You can't contain me!

PAGE: Small container, tbh

OHR: Boom again!

STRZOK: You seemed to enjoy contents of container last night

MCCABE: Ok, getting weird.

COMEY: I bought a container for my vegetable lasagna.

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