

What It Means When DeSantis Plays God

Not all Floridians have reacted passively to Republican Governor Ron DeSantis' racially divisive and politically motivated attacks on intellectual freedom and the teaching of history in the public schools. The author of this letter, Dick Batchelor, a former state legislator and Chair of the Central Florida Urban League, has a long history as a civic leader and an activist on behalf of racial justice in the Orlando community and across the state of Florida.

Dear Governor DeSantis,

YOUR KEEN INTEREST IN DIRECTING THE TEACHING of history got me thinking about my own history and whether I would even be able to share it in a Florida classroom or corporate training session without penalty.

You see, as a white child growing up with sharecropper parents in rural North Carolina during the early 1950s, I often heard guarded whispers about the Ku Klux Klan and their so-called activities. I was aware that some relatives were members and they claimed “bragging rights” about how much they hated Black people (though that hardly was the name they often used).

Later, when I was still a child, my family moved to Orlando. I remember going to shows at the Rialto and Beacham theaters, but while I could sit wherever I wanted, Black children were only allowed in the balcony.

I attended school at a time before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or integration took place. There were no Black students in my

high school. The only time my classmates and I would see Black students was when band members from the segregated Jones High School marched in the Orlando Christmas Parade.

Even though desegregation was finally ordered in 1968, the Orange County School Board, in an attempt to be clever (and in violation of the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brown vs. Board of Education*), decided to pick names of teachers from a jar and assign those randomly chosen white teachers to work in schools with Black students.

There was such overt resistance to school integration that it took almost 50 years for the system to be in full compliance. Fifty years! And let's not forget that in Orlando, there was not a single Black city council member elected until 1972.

Valuable history, don't you think, Gov. DeSantis?

There's more.

With no Black students in any of my schools and only briefly knowing a Black field hand from our sharecropping days, I didn't meet and befriend a Black person until I volunteered for the Marines in 1966. That year, James Johnson became my friend, and we remained close throughout the Vietnam War and afterward until he died last year.

James taught me a lot about race and the intentionally shameful ways in which Black people were treated—not only by individual white people but by the police powers of government itself.

Fast-forward to today. As I remember and reflect on my past, I wonder, Gov. DeSantis, can I legally share this truthful yet sordid history with a high school or college class? How about at a company diversity training session? Does the truth need defense in the “free state of Florida”?

Through your attack on what you deem “woke” culture, you are casually and spitefully invoking the police powers of the state to deny

history—history that must be told. These attacks coupled with your recent rejection of an AP course on African American history represent a cruel pattern of discrimination and remind me of how anti-literacy laws were used to deprive so many Black people of the ability to read or write.

As one who volunteered to serve our country in Vietnam, with the understanding that my service was in part to preserve all rights guaranteed in the First Amendment, I propose we continue open, unabridged and unvarnished discussions with one another about the history of race in our country.

Let the truth be heard, Gov. DeSantis, and let the so-called Woke Law be consigned to the only place it belongs: history. ■

—Dick Batchelor, Orlando, Florida



Photo by Hunter Crenian

ALSO INSIDE:

- 2 **Louis Clark** on Hunter's laptop
- 3 Helen Caldicott
- 4 **Steven Pressman** on money matters
- 6 **Dave Troy** on the Wide Angle
- 7 **Hugh Taylor** on the Greatest Generation
- 8 **Mort Rosenblum** on Joe Biden

The WASHINGTON SPECTATOR

Legal Affairs Correspondent

Andrew Cohen

Digital Editor

Amber Hewitt

Copy Editor

Kirsten Denker

Contributing Editor

Anne Nelson

Contributing Writers

Robert Alvarez

George Black

Cyrus Cassells

Barbara Koepfel

Anne Nelson

Steven Pressman

Dorothy Samuels

Katherine Stewart

Jonathan Winer

Circulation Management

Circulation Specialists LLC

Design Point Five, NY

Illustration Edel Rodriguez

Editor and Publisher

Hamilton Fish

Subscription inquiries

The Washington Spectator is being published bi-monthly during Covid as a digital edition only. To add your name to our free distribution list, sign up at trypico.com/washingtonspectator/registration.

We'll notify you as soon as we resume our regular publication schedule.

For questions relating to your subscription or for queries on editorial matters, please contact us at editors@washingtonspectator.org.

Letters to the editor Email to editors@washingtonspectator.org. Please include your full name and postal address and whether the letter is intended for publication. Letters, if published, may be edited for clarity and space. Hard-copy letters may be sent to: Washington Spectator—Letters, 105 Hudson Street, Suite 407, New York, NY 10013.

The Washington Spectator (ISSN 0887-428X) is published bi-monthly by the Public Concern Foundation Inc, 105 Hudson Street, Suite 407, New York, NY 10013. © 2023 in the U.S.

REGISTER TO JOIN THE WASHINGTON SPECTATOR COMMUNITY TODAY

Sign up at washingtonspectator.org/register to find out what's new at the Spectator, get special offers, and learn about our exclusive online programming.

Republicans Mishandle First Oversight Hearing

By Louis Clark

LAWYERS OFTEN WARN YOUNGER ASSOCIATES never to ask questions of a witness on cross-examination unless they know what the answer will be. The House Oversight Committee recently demonstrated a related point best described through an analogy: if you want to establish that the moon is made of green cheese, don't subpoena astronomers to testify at your hearing.

To take it one step further, when those witnesses actually share their expertise at your hearings, don't make yourself look even more foolish

by threatening to prosecute them for telling the truth. At the committee's much-touted first hearing on February 8, it set out to show that two years and four months ago, the FBI, then-private citizen Joe Biden, and Twitter executives conspired to block the *New York Post* from disseminating its article about the Hunter Biden laptop on the Twitter platform in violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Never mind that the First Amendment does not apply to private companies that limit speech or that Twitter quickly reversed its decision within 24 hours and apologized for its mistake.

Although the advance billing of the hearing seemed to promise something on the order of *The Greatest Show on Earth*, the result was more like the spectacular train wreck at the climax of that movie.

The Government Accountability Project (GAP) had a front row seat at the congressional committee's proceedings. In my (only slightly biased) view, the most compelling of the truth-telling witnesses was our client, Anika Collier Navaroli. We shared the privilege of representing this witness with the Signals Network. The Project on Government Oversight (POGO) joined the team in helping to prepare the witness for hearings that ended up lasting nearly six hours.

While an executive at Twitter, Anika was

responsible for flagging violent behavior and dangerous disinformation. She also testified at the House January 6 committee about her unsuccessful efforts to raise the alarm within the company that then-President Trump was using his tweets to foment violence. Frustrated with their seeming lack of urgency, on January 3, 2020, she reportedly told her Twitter bosses that unless they closed down Trump's Twitter account, "someone was going to get shot." Anika received the Ridenhour

Courage Prize for the warnings she made in advance of the violence unleashed on January 6, 2021, and for testifying about her failed efforts.

Anika's retelling of that experience at the hearing allowed many Democrats on the House committee to point to her prior testi-

mony and to compare its importance to the committee's trivial and seemingly retaliatory inquiry into the initial decision by Twitter to prevent the *New York Post* from posting a link to its article on Hunter Biden's laptop. It bears repeating that Twitter changed its position on the Post's article within 24 hours.

It appears that the House committee majority members intended to showcase a conspiracy by Joe Biden, the FBI, and Twitter executives. Their three former Twitter executive witnesses instead testified under oath that there was no communication at all or at any time between those parties about the article or the laptop. In fact, the Biden campaign apparently did not even complain about the article, published in October 2020. No one from the FBI mentioned the article to Twitter during routine meetings the two parties shared about law enforcement matters.

Meanwhile, during questioning, Anika Navaroli revealed that Trump, while he was president, had furiously demanded censorship of a widely published comment made by model Chrissy Teigen. Anika also testified about Trump's Twitter attack on the "Squad"—four young left-leaning women of color who were elected to Congress in 2018, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ilhan Omar. In 2019, Trump tweeted that the Squad should "go back and help fix the totally broken and

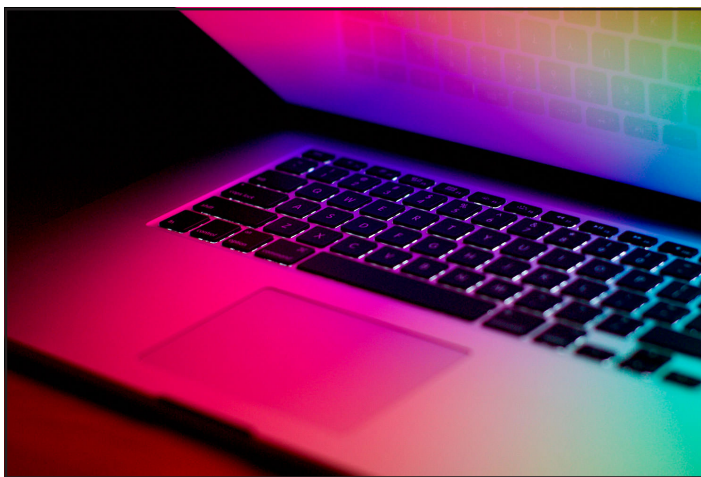


Photo by ipanacea

crime infested places from which they came.”

Until then the Twitter policy was to disallow that type of tweet as racist and demeaning. But within 48 hours, and despite Anika Navaroli's efforts to remove the offensive tweet as it violated Twitter's terms of service, Twitter changed its policies and allowed the tweet to remain on its platform. In fact, Twitter decided to allow those types of bigoted tweets in the future. The impact of this uncontested and undisputed testimony turned the hearing into even more of an embarrassment for the committee majority. Instead of showing that Biden and the FBI had coluded to delete messaging and manipulate Twitter policy in their favor, the hearing showcased Trump as the culprit who tried to interfere with “free speech,” manipulate policy in his favor, and engage in violence-spawning rhetoric without being censored.

Congresswomen Marjorie Taylor Greene and Lauren Boebert used their entire questioning time to complain about being denied the use of Twitter to launch and disseminate conspiracy theories and promote bizarre treatments for Covid-19. After six hours of feckless haranguing of witnesses, a few frustrated majority members on the committee began to threaten to prosecute the witnesses for nonexistent crimes. Congressman Gosar of Arizona lost most of his time having to repeat his own questions because none of the four witnesses were able to decipher his queries. He also appeared to have difficulty recalling his own questions each time he was respectfully asked by panelists to repeat them.

Of course, mainstream and progressive media outlets are having a field day with the now-famous tweet by Chrissy Teigen. For example, MSNBC's Lawrence O'Donnell spent the first 20 minutes of his program showcasing the hearing, beginning with the Teigen quote now heard around the world and memorialized in the Congressional Record. MSNBC did bleep out the words she used. And at the end of the day, it will take a miracle for conservative news outlets to splice together enough video to convey a contrary version of what happened for future broadcasts.

Overall, it was an eye-opening few hours. Despite the advance hype, the public didn't really hear anything new or probative about the laptop of private citizen Hunter Biden. The clownish behavior of the McCarthy-for-Speaker holdouts, who were assigned to the House Oversight Committee as a reward for flipping their support to the speaker after many rounds of voting, compounded the already amateurish atmosphere.

In this first anti-democratic and disinformation-generating House hearing in the 118th Congress, our client actually tried to contribute another critical message that got derailed at the proceeding. GAP counsel David Seide, who served in the hearing as counsel for Anika Navaroli, related her warning in advance of the hearing.

“Anika is a courageous whistleblower who at considerable personal risk has repeatedly sounded alarms about mismanagement at Twitter, which has produced dire consequences,” cautioned Seide. “Her testimony to Congress will make clear the problems are very much still present, that violence is going to happen again, and that doing nothing is not an option. We all need to listen.”

The majority chose a different path in a failed attempt to bolster a conspiracy theory with three witnesses who chose instead to tell the truth. Hats off to all four former Twitter executives who proved yet again that truth is stronger than fiction. ■

Louis Clark is the longtime executive director and CEO of the Government Accountability Project. This account of the recent House Oversight Committee hearing on Hunter Biden's laptop is his own and does not reflect GAP's official perspective.

Spotlight on Dr. Helen Caldicott



IT'S BEEN NEARLY 40 YEARS SINCE [IF YOU LOVE THIS Planet](#) won the Academy Award for Best Short Documentary.

The film is comprised of a lecture given to students by the celebrated nuclear critic Dr. Helen Caldicott, president at the time of Physicians for Social Responsibility.

With the growing intensity of the conflict in Ukraine, and the corresponding potential for the deployment of nuclear weapons, Dr. Caldicott's decades-old warning against the use of the atomic bomb is fresh and resonant.

Caldicott analyzes the medical and geo-physical consequences of the detonation of a modern nuclear weapon, explains why there is no surviving a nuclear war, and exposes the folly of superpower arguments on behalf of maintaining tactical nuclear superiority. The film ends with her call for citizen action, and this timeless and poetic plea:

“If you love this planet, and you watch the spring come, and you watch magnolias flower, and you watch the wisteria come out, and you smell a rose, you will realize that you are going to have to change the priorities of your life. If you love this planet.”

Four decades after “If You Love this Planet” was released, Helen Caldicott, now 85, sat down for this interview at her home in Australia. She notes the absence of progress toward the eradication of nuclear weapons, and decries the failure of the nuclear

states to eliminate the greatest threat to human survival.

WATCH ON YOUTUBE

An Exclusive Interview With Helen Caldicott

Arguably the most articulate and forceful advocate for disarmament and abolition in the nuclear era, Dr. Helen Caldicott has devoted the last forty two years to an international campaign to educate the public about the medical hazards of the nuclear age and the necessary changes in human behavior to prevent environmental destruction.

In 1971, Dr. Caldicott played a major role in Australia's opposition to French atmospheric nuclear testing in the Pacific; in 1975 she worked with the Australian trade unions to educate their members about the medical dangers of the nuclear fuel cycle, with particular reference to uranium mining.

While living in the United States from 1977 to 1986, as President of [Physicians for Social Responsibility](#), she helped invigorate an organization of 23,000 doctors committed to educating their colleagues about the dangers of nuclear power, nuclear weapons and nuclear war. The international umbrella group ([International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War](#)) won the [Nobel Peace Prize](#) in 1985. She also founded the [Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament](#) (WAND) in the US in 1980.

Dr. Caldicott has received many prizes and awards for her work, including the [Lannan Foundation's 2003 Prize for Cultural Freedom](#) and twenty one honorary doctoral degrees. The [Smithsonian](#) named Helen Caldicott one of the most influential women of the 20th Century. ■

Money Matters, Especially When It Comes to Children

By Steven Pressman

IT IS AN ARTICLE OF FAITH AMONG CONSERVATIVES that government programs are wasteful expenditures. This is the standard line of the Wall Street Journal editorial pages and the Republican Party.

Going further, Charles Murray's book *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950–1980*, argued that expanding welfare programs during the 1970s increased poverty in the United States and generated social and economic problems. While critics of Murray pointed out that the problems of the 1970s stemmed more from OPEC raising oil prices, which led to higher inflation and then sharp interest rate hikes by the Federal Reserve, his book was highly influential.

President Reagan and Republican politicians pushed for large cuts in social spending. So did Democrats. Bill Clinton ran for president in 1992 promising to “end welfare as we know it.” As president, he signed legislation in 1996 abolishing Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), the program most people associate with welfare, and replacing it with Temporary Assistance

to Needy Families (TANF), which (as the name implies) limited the ability of single parents with children to receive government benefits.

Murray won. Conservatives won. Republicans won. The United States lost.

With hindsight, the consequences of Clinton's dastardly deed have become clear. Promised benefits failed to materialize. The economic problems that began in the late 1970s and early 1980s remain—stagnant wages and incomes, a shrinking middle class, and substantial poverty. Poverty rates rose from 11.3 percent in 2000 to over 15 percent in the early 2010s, before declining to 11.8 percent in 2019.

The data shows that reducing government benefits and ending spending programs, contra Murray, did not reduce poverty in the United States. The best that can be said in support of Murray is that it made very little difference, as poverty rates right after the 1996 legislation became effective and right before the coronavirus struck were not very different. My take on recent U.S. economic history is that ripping holes in the U.S. safety net aided and abetted the decline of the U.S. middle class, slowed U.S. economic growth in the twenty-first century, and nudged the poverty rate up.

While Murray was writing his book, it was already known that government programs led to *positive* economic and social outcomes. During the 1960s and 1970s, several negative income tax (NIT) experiments were conducted in the United States. A NIT is a basic income for households (on this, see my article in the November 2018 *Washington Spectator*) that gets taxed away as income rises. In the NIT experiments, some people received money with no strings attached; a control group received no money from the government. The experiments examined the consequences of giving people a little extra money.

NIT recipients fared better than non-recipients when it came to health, school performance, homeownership, and feelings of well-being. And of course, household income was up and poverty was down for those receiving a NIT. There were few negative effects. Work effort fell a tiny bit among those receiving the money—mainly married women who decided to stay at home and care for their young children rather than take paid jobs. The overall results were remarkably positive.

U.S. poverty data for 2021, released in September 2022, provides even stronger evidence that money matters. The share of Americans living below the poverty line increased a bit in 2021—to 11.6 percent, from 11.5 percent in 2020. Poverty thresholds are defined for families of different sizes (\$27,949 for a family of four), and the poverty rate is the fraction of people living in a household with less than poverty-level income.

In making these estimates, the government surveys thousands of households and adds up all their income. Some, but not all, government benefits get counted as income. To count, income must be received as cash. As a result, SNAP (formerly Food Stamps) and free school lunches don't count as income. Social Security and unemployment insurance payments are counted, but special government cash benefits provided in the March 2021 American Rescue Plan (stimulus checks and the refundable child

tax credit) are not.

In 2011, the government introduced a supplemental poverty measure that also adds temporary cash payments and most in-kind benefits to household income before determining whether the household is poor or not. This makes it a more accurate measure of poverty. It also makes it possible to estimate the impact of government programs on poverty because these government benefits count toward income. Because more income gets counted in the supplemental poverty measure, the measure also employs higher poverty thresholds—a bit more than \$31,000 for a family of four that rents or has a mortgage (the figure is lower for a family owning a home but having no mortgage). Comparing the official and the supplemental poverty rates highlights the impact of government programs on poverty.

According to the supplemental measure, U.S. poverty in 2021 was at its lowest level since the government began using this measure—7.8 percent (down from 9.2 percent in 2020 and 16 percent in the early 2010s). The best news was that child poverty fell to 5.2 percent from 9.7 percent in 2020 and 18 percent in the early 2010s. This puts U.S. child poverty close to that of the Nordic countries, which have the lowest child poverty rates in the world (under 5 percent).

The key to a 5.2 percent child poverty rate was the fully refundable child tax credit. Between July 2021 and December 2021, most low-income families

received \$300 a month for each child under age 6 and \$250 per month for each child between the ages of 6 and 17. For a family with two children, one under 6 and one older than 6, this meant monthly payments of \$550, or \$3,300 over six months. In addition, most adults received a \$1,400 stimulus check.

Unfortunately, the refundable child tax credit ended in 2002. Efforts by congressional Democrats to reinstate it were thwarted by opposition from West Virginia's Democratic Senator Joe Manchin and every Republican in the Senate. The negative consequences of this can already be seen. A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that ending the child tax credit increased food insufficiency by 25 percent in July 2002 compared to when families received child tax credits. It is a no-brainer to expect U.S. child poverty to again approach 20 percent.

Growing up poor has many negative consequences. Impoverished and hungry children do worse in school, are less likely to graduate from high school or go to college, and earn less than children who do not grow up in poverty. The more years one grows up in a poor family, the worse the future outcomes.

Child poverty also has large costs for the nation—higher crime rates, greater health care spending, lower worker productivity, and reduced government tax receipts. This is why reducing child poverty pays for itself, and then some, over the long term.

The policy lesson here is inescapable—government benefits and programs matter, especially when it comes to children. Given the cost of child poverty to the nation, reviving the refundable child tax credit should be top priority for the Biden administration. If the administration cannot pass a generous version of the plan, a more conservative version would still do a lot of good. Even half the monthly amount of the 2021 refundable credit would reduce child poverty to 10 percent (on the supplemental measure), putting the U.S. child poverty rate near the level prevalent in Western Europe. Extra money will also make life a little easier for families with children that remain impoverished. And it will help create future generations of healthier and more productive workers.

Contrary to conservative pundits and politicians, we know

what matters when it comes to reducing child poverty: money paid by the government to families with children. Firms won't do this on their own. Those trying to do so are at a competitive disadvantage relative to less generous firms and can't survive. The best example of this is the French firm Val-des-Bois Works, the first business to provide higher pay to workers with children. It failed

because its higher labor costs required it to charge higher prices than its competitors. Every other developed nation has figured this out. They all employ a child or family allowance policy that is the equivalent of the U.S. refundable child tax credit (see my article in the May-June 2021 *Washington Spectator*). What is wrong with the United States? ■

Steven Pressman is part-time professor of economics at the New School for Social Research, professor emeritus of economics and finance at Monmouth University, and author of Fifty Major Economists, 3rd edition (Routledge, 2013).



Photos by True Touch Lifestyle, SergeMelkovart, JPRFPhotos

Crash the Global Economy? It's Harder than It Sounds.

By Dave Troy

MANY OF US ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE PHENOMENON of “dorm room philosophy” and its derivative field, “dorm room economics.” Often, it is rooted in the clunky prose of Ayn Rand and the simple, common-sense decrees of Austrian economics, along with the limited life experience common to all young people — particularly young men. Rand’s “objectivism” and its consorts help to simplify a complex world through pat assurances: communism is very bad, and bankers are usually up to no good.

So alluring is this worldview, it is tempting for some to use it as the foundation for their social reality. Organizations ranging from the [Mont Pelerin Society](#) to the Cato Institute to Elizabeth Clare Prophet’s [Church Universal and Triumphant](#) are each built on the work of Hayek, Friedman, Rothbard, and Mises.

Embedded within these social milieus is the idea of an inevitable reckoning with the cabal of shadowy globalist bankers that has spoiled humanity’s chances for peaceful, gold-backed commerce. So it is not surprising that accelerating this reckoning is at the heart of the global right’s plan for world domination.

Recently, I revisited warfare expert James Scaminaci’s excellent research from 2013 outlining what he calls the “[North-Paul Strategy](#)” advanced by Ron “End the Fed” Paul and his strategist Gary North. The plan predicts massive inflation that will accelerate the collapse of the Federal Reserve and the dollar, thus enabling the libertarian-right to seize control of and “fix” the monetary system.

Per Scaminaci, North wrote that “God’s judgment, which is pro-revolution, will produce a cataclysmic collapse of the American political-economic system,” and that the “unbiblical financial system will not be reformed *without a near-revolutionary crisis (the judgment of God).*”

But the idea of sparking a collapse to seize control goes back further. Lyndon LaRouche was pushing the same set of ideas in 1997. Dubbed “[The New Bretton Woods](#),” LaRouche sought to usher in a new, third iteration of the Bretton Woods banking system established in 1944 and then altered (to some, defiled) in 1971 with Nixon’s total abandonment of the gold standard. This Bretton Woods 3.0 would restore the idea of asset-backed currencies and subjugate the “banksters” once and for all — with the latent anti-Semitism being barely concealed.

LaRouche’s ideas might have been only a footnote, but for the alliances he cultivated with Sergey Glazyev, a Russian economist

and politician who is now [architecting](#) Putin’s plans for a BRICS-bloc asset-backed common currency. LaRouche and Glazyev were [close](#), and Glazyev [co-founded](#) the Rodina (Motherland) party with Aleksandr Dugin. Glazyev also serves on the board of Dugin’s *Katechon* think-tank, and is himself advocating for Bretton Woods 3.0.

Just yesterday, I [visited](#) the “Rage Against the War Machine” rally at the Lincoln Memorial. Organized by the Libertarian Party, the People’s Party, and the Schiller Institute (run by LaRouche’s widow, Helga Zepp), it was thick with leafleteers pushing LaRouche messaging and featured speeches by two dozen or so Putin-friendly speakers, including presidential candidates Jill Stein, Dennis Kucinich, Tulsi Gabbard, and Ron Paul.

One speaker led the crowd in a chant, “all wars are bankers’ wars,” bringing things full circle: the assertion being that it is only because we have departed from pure, good, and undefiled Austrian economics and the gold standard can (usually Jewish) bankers print the money required to fuel endless war. It seems no one

at this anti-war rally had arrived at the most obvious solution: tell Vladimir Putin to withdraw his troops and go home.

Paul, the final live speaker of the day, predictably took the podium to chants of “End the Fed” with a phalanx of Russian flags behind him in the afternoon light. (Ironically, the Eccles Federal Reserve building, barely a block away, is undergoing renovations.)

The North-Paul strategy seems to be alive and well. The most obvious strategy to achieve it

would be to crash the global economy by failing to raise the debt ceiling. Kevin McCarthy has repeatedly and explicitly stated his [intent](#) to pursue this, and the Washington Post recently reported that the strategy has been developed by former Trump budget director Russell Vought. But two things stand in his way.

First, reality is not conforming to the simple edicts of Austrian economics. In the North-Paul-LaRouche-Glazyev playbook embraced by McCarthy and Vought, there should be [blood in the streets](#) right now. Inflation should be spiraling out of control (it’s not), financial markets should be collapsing (they’re not), Ukraine should be losing ([it is not](#)), and Europe should be frozen into submission (it is not). Many complex systems have adapted and the world (particularly the West) is more resilient than they imagined.

The second is a collective action problem: it is difficult to get a large number of people to act against their self-interest in service of ideology alone. While the House Freedom Caucus has some [cult-like properties](#), it has not yet achieved a Jonestown or Heaven’s Gate level of solidarity. It also only comprises about 45 out of 435 seats in the House. And while it might feel good to accelerate the day of reckoning and usher in all the prophecy

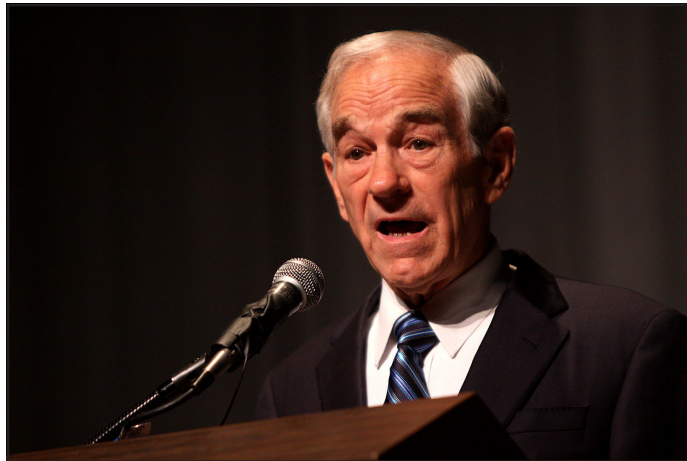


Photo by Gage Skidmore

that comes with it, no one, not even House Republicans, enjoys seeing their 401(k)'s decimated.

The price of gold is one possible measure of how close McCarthy might come to blowing up the global economy. It [peaked](#) on February 1st at about \$1,950 per ounce and has retreated since. That seems like a good sign. Perhaps if real-world conditions were closer to the North-Paul prognostications, the radical right might be closer to pulling the trigger and shooting the hostage.

Ultimately at issue is whether Austrian economics is useful for describing the real world. Evidence tends to suggest that it is more useful for building networks of people who wish the world was less complex than it is. But the fact that so many people in positions of power believe this mythology and are willing to take actions to prove its value should continue to give us pause. Just because a belief system is flawed doesn't mean it isn't dangerous. Indeed, danger is often directly proportional to popular appeal. ■

Dave Troy is an investigative journalist focused on exposing threats to democracy. Based in Baltimore, his background as a technologist with an interest in studying online extremism affords him a unique perspective. His work has appeared at MoMA in New York, and he is a fellow with New America Foundation's Future Frontlines. Dave writes regularly about information warfare, history, and politics. He is the host of the podcast Dave Troy Presents, and speaks regularly at conferences on disinformation, extremism, and information warfare. Contact information is available at davetroy.com.

How We're Forgetting the Greatest Generation's Message to Us

By Hugh Taylor

IN 1974, A SQUIRREL trap in the attic of our big house in Scarsdale, New York, snagged a rat. My father took the rat out into the driveway, doused it with lighter fluid, and burned it alive right in front of me. I was 9.

It shocked me that my father—the son of impoverished immigrants, who had vaulted to the heights of the medical profession as an ophthalmic surgeon—could do something so barbaric. Why, I asked him. Why did you do that? All he said was that he had more experience with rats than I did. And in offering that enigmatic explanation, this genteel Southerner, a man who combined courtly manners with steely resolve, showed

me an emotion I had never before seen in him: fear.

In retrospect, the incineration of that unfortunate rat was the first thread to come loose in the unraveling of my image of my father as a dauntless war hero. His valor was not in doubt. At 20, he had been the lead navigator for 650 B-17 bombers, setting the course as they flew from Italy to hit targets in Europe. His plane was shot down over Lintz, Austria, in 1945. He was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for navigating a burning plane to complete its mission.

He spent the last three months of the war as a Jewish prisoner of war in Nazi Germany, a chapter that included injuring his back while parachuting out of the plane, getting beaten nearly to death for being a Jew, having his front teeth smashed out by a Nazi interrogator, becoming infested with lice, and losing 60 pounds. He foraged for food in garbage cans and ate bugs to stay alive.

And dealing with rats. . . . He hadn't said that part out loud, but the picture emerged nonetheless. The prison camp, which he recalled as Stalag Luft III in Nuremberg, Germany, had been overrun by rats. My father, who wasn't frightened when he'd been trapped in a flaming plane loaded with explosives and gasoline, was terrified of rats.

Like so many veterans of that war, my father hid his trauma. It revealed itself in bits and pieces over the ensuing years, starting with the rat. As I got older, I developed a fuller appreciation of what he had been through and how it had affected him. He was a real war hero, but like most heroes, his story was more complex than it seemed on the surface.

After my father's death in 2016, my fascination with the war and the plane he flew only grew. This recently led me to sign up for the "Fans of the B-17" Facebook group. The group is mostly focused on the few B-17s still flying, but it also contains posts about the war and the men who fought in it.

I posted a photo of my father's prisoner of war ID card, which he had grabbed from the prison camp office after the Germans fled in the face of Patton's advancing 3rd Army. The post included

some details about my father's war record, where he was based, and his experiences at Stalag Luft III in Nuremberg.

Many of the group's members liked the post and commented that my father was a real hero, a true member of "the greatest generation." One member was not happy with me, however. He responded that I was "WRONG!" Didn't I know that the ID card was from a central POW processing center, and that my father had actually been in Stalag Luft VII in Moosburg, Germany?

(He could read German. I can't.) He ended his acid note by saying, "WRONG INFORMATION IS WORSE THAN NO INFORMATION."



Photo by Amy Lutz

As Steve Martin might have said, “Well, excuuuuuuuse me...” I dropped out of the group after taking umbrage at this dishonoring of my father’s memory. I wanted to say that I was sorry that my father’s recollections were inaccurate, but he was too busy being beaten and starved to record the correct Stalag data for your precious little group that obsesses over B-17 bombsights and landing gears. You could say that I was overreacting, but it still upset me.

The exchange also struck me as a microcosm of so many things that have gone off the rails here at home. We can’t talk civilly to one another, even about the simplest subjects. Why offer a polite correction when you can be a snotty troll? Why moderate your tone when you can scream? The same toxic dynamics on display on that Facebook page seem to be taking over almost every sphere of our society.

This person’s behavior also exemplified, at least to me, a trend among Americans, most of whom have never worn the uniform, of fetishizing military service—the hollow, hypocritical “Support our troops” rhetoric that’s so ubiquitous at professional sports events and other public settings. They’re fixated over the war and pander to veterans while utterly missing the point of the conflict and what we learned from it. That page offered many details of the B-17’s technical parameters but little real understanding of what the planes were used for or the fliers’ devastating experiences, and not much consideration for the people on the ground who got blown to bits by their bombs.

We’re losing the script when it comes to hearing the message of the greatest generation. As my father got older, like other veterans he acquired a more nuanced and complete understanding of the conflict. He was called to serve. He did his duty and got on with his life. He never owned a gun or pronounced himself superior to other Americans because he had been in the war. He would have hated the way the Army parades around at NFL games.

The B-17 group signifies how we have lost sight of what made the men and women of that generation special. These were people who understood sacrifice and what America stood for. In my father’s case, senior officers interceded with the Germans to save his life. As a Jew, he might not have been welcome in certain quarters of American culture, but in Stalag [fill in the blank] they were all Americans, no matter what. A little bit of that sentiment might go a long way in today’s downward-spiraling, hate-filled American society.

Theirs was a generation that, for all its faults, prized how to communicate and treat others with respect. Their greatness largely lies in what they accomplished after the war. They built enduring institutions. They endeavored to continue the American republic through times of great change, when it would have been so easy to say, forget it, let’s drop this whole democracy thing because it no longer serves our parochial interests. No, they did the opposite. They strengthened the system and opened it to participation by historically disfranchised sectors of the population.

As this generation passes from memory into history, we would be wise to remember what they fought against and what they really stood for and avoid jingoistic slogans and hollow tributes.

It doesn’t matter what stalag my father was in. What counted was the way he lived his life when he came out, damaged as he was. ■

Hugh Taylor is a technology analyst and author of the book Digital Downfall: Technology, Cyberattacks and the End of the American Republic. Prior to working in the tech field, Hugh was a script development executive in primetime television. He studied filmmaking at Harvard University.

Deadly Hot Air

By Mort Rosenblum

IF JOE BIDEN HAS DONE AS MUCH FOR AMERICA AS HE claims, asked a snide *Wall Street Journal* editorial after his uplifting 73-minute State of the Union report, “why does most of America not seem to appreciate it?”

Well, one reason is the *Journal* itself. A carpetbagging ex-Australian Darth Vader weaseled his way to control of the once stately financial daily while weaponizing Fox News and the *New York Post*. But of course, Rupert Murdoch is only part of it.

Too many voters today are easily conned, deeply biased, impervious to fact, and bereft of survival instincts. Contrary to myth, frogs leap out of heating pots. Stampeded cattle stop at the cliff’s edge. Lemmings don’t really commit mass suicide. We’ll find out about Americans in 2024.

Elected leaders dissemble by nature, some far more than others. “All governments lie,” I.F. Stone observed decades ago, “but disaster lies in wait for countries whose officials smoke the same hashish they give out.” Today in America, the problem is not hashish but rather hot air.

Days before Biden’s address, TV networks obsessed over a free-floating Chinese balloon no bigger than a few buses, like three or more others that went unnoticed during Trump’s tenure. A jet shot it down over shallow water so falling debris would cause no damage and experts could examine it.

But Marco Rubio blasted Biden for dereliction of duty. The Republican chorus chimed in: *What if it was a bomb to destroy America?*⁹ It was pronounced a spy balloon, as if Chinese satellites couldn’t read tattoos on American troops stationed on bases anywhere in the world. And vice versa. Emerging from an intelligence briefing, only Romney seemed grounded: “My questions were satisfactorily answered, and I believe the administration, the president, our military, and our intelligence agencies acted skillfully and with care.”

Antony Blinken had to scrap a trip to China, where he could have demanded answers while working to restore reasoned coexistence between superpowers. Instead, China cranked up the heat.

I am not actually on Biden’s payroll. I began touting him in 2016 when he talked about restoring America’s soul. I was thinking *sole*; he was comfortable like an old shoe. He could

compromise without caving at home. He had been everywhere, learning world realities and earning respect.

Yes, he is 80. Pretty soon I will be, too. A lot of us old guys can still tie our shoes. A seasoned hand could steer America into safer waters, then hand over a more decent, unified nation to new leaders of diverse background who he helped to season.

People obsess on Biden's age, neglecting to note that Trump is only four years younger, couldn't do a pushup without a forklift, and acts like a 5-year-old spoiled brat.

Against all odds, Biden picked up the pieces of NATO to arm Ukraine. He got Xi's attention while salvaging what he could after Trump made Iran a bitter foe. His action to confront climate collapse revitalized global action after the United States abandoned the 2015 Paris accord.

Biden curbed runaway inflation, the result of Covid disruption and the war in Ukraine. A growth spurt reduced joblessness to 3.4 percent. With the thinnest congressional edge in a century, he is doing more for working families and infrastructure than any president since Franklin Roosevelt.

A letter to my local daily in Tucson, Arizona caught the mood among many of the 27.6 million Americans who bothered to watch the speech: "I am so comforted and relieved to hear a competent, caring, hard-working president who displays decorum, while offering a vision for the America I remember."

Seasoned analysts on CNN and MSNBC pronounced it a Biden best-of. It was riveting at times, laced with self-deprecating humor and provable fact. When Lauren Boebert and Marjorie Taylor Greene heckled from the floor, he smiled indulgently as the nation got a firsthand look at the alternative.

At times, both sides of the House rose to cheer work in progress he needs reelection to complete. Nancy Pelosi received thundering applause for her work in the speaker's chair, which Kevin McCarthy reduced to a footstool to satisfy his fragile ego.

Afterward, for the few minutes my stomach would allow, I watched Sean Hannity deride a "stumbling, mumbling" old fool who has destroyed the booming economy Trump left behind. Republicans he interviewed assailed a crushing national debt they would have to slash.

A quarter of that \$31 trillion debt Republicans rail about was run up during Trump's single term. Biden is now whacking away at it while Republicans gut the IRS. They push for yet lower taxes as they block Democrats' attempts to make the über-rich pay a fairer share.

Plans are afoot to fix 70,000 miles of highways and rebuild the 150-year-old Hudson Tunnel that chokes off New York. But Americans tend not to see beyond their own line of sight. Rather than focusing on existential threats, Biden is forced to persuade

voters to let him finish the job.

Look at who is waiting in the wings. Trump may finally face justice for the highest of crimes and the most ignoble misdemeanors. If not, the alternative is likely worse: perhaps a housebroken nativist demagogue like Ron DeSantis motivated more by blind ambition than the Bill of Rights.

And that gets to the heart of America's challenge. Presidents have enough to do fulfilling their oath to the citizens who hire them: to keep the nation prosperous, safe from internal and foreign threats. Once elected, having to sell themselves is crippling distraction.

Until recent times, press secretaries did their job. Reporters asked questions; they answered. If they demurred, questions got hostile. If they lied, or shut out honest journalists to call on sycophants, they were soon gone. Or, in Richard Nixon's case, the president was.

Trump changed all that. The Republican response to Biden's State of the Union came from Sarah Huckabee Sanders, coiffed and made over as if no one remembered her days as Trump's junkyard dog, who bullied reporters—remember, the Fourth Estate?—and echoed her boss's unconscionable lies. In her short career, she mocked the early stutter Biden overcame.

Sanders said she was America's youngest governor. More

specifically for anyone who missed the point: *I am 40; Joe Biden is 80.* So? Her credentials are politicking for her evangelical father and toadying to Trump, who was impeached once for extorting a Ukraine faced with war and again for attempting to steal a presidential election.

Al Gore stepped aside rather than wage a protracted fight against a dubious vote count in Florida. He could have rallied the world against climate collapse and averted conflict with diplomacy. When a small band of terrorists struck on 9/11, the corporate "news media" allowed George W. Bush to needlessly set Iraq ablaze.

In retrospect, much is made of Izzy Stone's truth-seeking weekly report, but less so his son, Jeremy. For decades he was president of the American Federation of Scientists, bound by observable facts and logical conclusions.

"If something goes wrong with government, a free press will ferret it out and it will get fixed," he once wrote, "but if something goes wrong with the free press, the country will go straight to hell."

Free doesn't only mean unfettered. This is my constant theme. With time and trouble, anyone can find solid facts and sensitive reportage on just about any subject that matters. But talk about needles in haystacks.

As cliché has it, journalism is the first draft of history. But it



Photo by Shag 7799

takes time for historians and scholars to pore over the past. If we don't get the story straight in the present, we're not likely to have much of a future.

At best, global news coverage adds up to limited samplings of complex realities. Our most reliable sources are our own eyes and ears, along with commonsense context from thoughtful reading. "Headline news" only confuses.

Good reporters triangulate by starting with one solid source and confirming it with others. When something has a whiff of bullshit, that's probably what it is.

One useful guideline appears in Sanders's Wikipedia entry. After the January 6 attack, *Forbes* warned corporations against hiring Sanders or other Trump propagandists. The editor wrote: "*Forbes* will assume that everything your company or firm talks about is a lie."

Sanders got one thing correct in her speech, if characteristically twisted: "The choice is no longer between right or left. The choice is between normal and crazy."

A grasp on reality won't help unless it translates into action that gets informed voters to the polls. Most people who watched Biden's speech were over 50, skewed toward Democrat. In the midterms, 74 percent of eligible voters aged between 18 and 30 did not cast a ballot.

Opposition parties are crucial in a functioning democracy. But those old founders America reveres set safeguards meant for an earlier time. The Electoral College and states' rights now make it too easy for the crazies to prevail.

Beyond the usual far-right media, many millions are bombarded daily in podcasts, radio rants, and "newsletters" with murderous hateful blood libel. Because of gerrymandering and voter suppression, only a few swing states can make the difference in a presidential election.

We now know in stunning detail how far Trump's attorney general went to distort and then undermine Robert Mueller's damning revelations on Russian meddling. Merrick Garland finally may—or may not—take action.

Garland should be on the Supreme Court with other deliberative jurists who are free of political pressure rather than incompetents unable to isolate personal prejudice from national interests. Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzingers should not have to fall on their swords to do the right thing.

Down Alice's rabbit hole, things don't work that way. Adam Schiff and Eric Swalwell were booted off the House Select Intelligence Committee, replaced by vengeful partisans, clueless about the real world. I am just getting started, but no one with a conscience and a family needs another endless rant.

In the end, just remember Hitler came to power in a democratic state, where people fretted about high prices and suspicious outsiders in their midst. All that Goebbels's propagandists had to work with were crackling radios, a few daily papers, and rallies that harped on his Big Lie.

"Sleepy Joe" defined himself en route to Poland to confer with allies on the anniversary of Putin's war. With no U.S. military protection, he took a train into Kyiv for an outdoor stroll with Volodymyr Zelenskyy as air-raid sirens wailed. America, he said,

would do the right thing.

If Biden is hardly perfect, he is a lot more than hot air. ■

Mort Rosenblum has covered stories on seven continents since the 1960s, from war in Biafra to tango dancing by the Seine. He was editor of the International Herald Tribune; special correspondent for the Associated Press; AP bureau chief in Africa, Southeast Asia, Argentina, and France, and founding editor of the quarterly Dispatches. Today he writes and edits the Mort Report, which can be found at mortreport.org.