the great american reset
Introducing 1787, a New American Political Party

"To see this country happy...
is so much the wish of my soul.
Nothing on this side of
Elysium can be
placed in competition with it."

- George Washington

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~ Updated September 2026 ~

A Love Letter to Americans

I could not be prouder to be an American, and there is no one I would rather have in a foxhole with me than my fellow Americans.

Democracy is not always easy. It's not always easy to live in what is – by far – the most diverse country on the planet. It's not always easy to navigate a place that has almost 350 million people of multiple races, ethnicities and religions. It's not always easy to live in a place where many people have opposite political views. But yet we do it. And most of the time we do it amazingly well.

The United States of America is not some flimsy, delicate country, and Americans are far from fragile. We come from a long line of survivors who have overcome unfathomable atrocities, from the horror of slavery to brothers fighting brothers in the Civil War.

Our remarkably resilient country endured two hellish World Wars, one hot war in Asia, one Cold one in Eastern Europe and, here at home, a traumatizing terrorist attack. America survived our black citizens being terrorized by police dogs, firebombed buses and burning crosses, and the sickening murders of Kennedys and King. We fought for the right to vote for American Indians and female, black, and Asian Americans, and overcame a devastating depression, a monster financial crisis, a debilitating pandemic, and being deceived about Vietnam, Watergate, Iran-Contra, and WMDs.

We were the first to stand for the right of revolution, consent of the governed, and the principle of federalism. We are people who celebrate life, liberty and justice for all. We perfected freedom of speech and expression, freedom of the press, the right to privacy, the right to a fair trial, the right to peacefully assemble, due process, and the free exercise of religion.

We laid a telegraph cable from North America to Europe and built the Interstate Highway System, Transcontinental Railroad, Hoover Dam, Empire State Building, Trans-Alaska Pipeline, and the Erie and Panama Canals.

We created public schools, mapped the human genome, stopped polio, proved interstellar space and the expansion of the universe, and

discovered gravitational waves, charge conservation, electromagnetic induction, and cosmic radio waves. We pioneered heart bypass surgery, MRIs, anesthesia, treatments for HIV/AIDS and many cancers, chemotherapy, integrated circuits, artificial intelligence, operating systems, GPS, fiber optics, lasers, and nuclear power.

We invented the steamboat, cotton gin, light bulb, electric motor, telephone, refrigeration, air conditioning, the airplane, the Model T, television, typewriters, Kodiak cameras, microwaves, the dishwasher, personal computers, electric guitars, blue jeans, 3D printing, video games, smartphones, the space shuttle, email and the Internet. We were first in flight and the first to the moon.

We are the people who initiated the Lend-Lease policy – which helped defeat Germany, Japan and Italy in World War II by providing weapons, food, oil, and other supplies to the United Kingdom, China, the Soviet Union and France – and enacted the Marshall Plan, enabling Europe to rebuild after years of devastating war.

Our security and support have provided countries the opportunity to foster democratic governments *and* strong economies. With our support, South Korea evolved from a poor, vulnerable autocracy to a vibrant, healthy democracy – as did Japan. We were instrumental in creating landmark global organizations like NATO, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank.

We liberated concentration camps, greatly advanced human rights around the world, prevented a nuclear war, and stopped communism in its tracks. We steadfastly fought HIV/AIDS in developing countries, providing millions of people antiviral drugs and preventing hundreds of thousands of precious babies from being infected with HIV at birth.

Through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), support from the American people vastly increased access to education and healthcare for millions; helped achieve significant reductions in child and maternal mortality; was instrumental in eradicating smallpox and reducing malaria deaths; helped secure democracy for vulnerable nations; and is responsible for sparking economic development in regions throughout the world. We have provided critical assistance during natural disasters, famines, and other emergencies and provided access to clean drinking water for millions of desperate people.

This is who we are, America. We are the United States of America, and we are wonderful people! But the best thing we do as Americans – even when things look messy and at times unsalvageable – is grow and get better. Okay, so maybe at times it's more like two steps forward, one step backward, *BUT WE ALWAYS GET BETTER*.

Are we there yet? Of course not. But it's not about the finish line. It's about the rocky, sometimes chaotic journey. Regardless of who is in the Oval Office or in the seats of Congress, Americans will prevail – not *because* of our leaders, but *despite* them.

For those of you who feel like things have gone completely off the rails, I want to remind you that most Americans don't reject reflection – we embrace it. We don't allow momentary lapses in judgment to derail us – we gain wisdom that makes us even stronger.

Recently, I was driving the backroads of East Texas. Sometimes, you can see the glow from the moon and stars peek through the pine trees, but this night the towering trees won, successfully blocking out all light… creating a mood that demanded reflection.

Memories of a childhood lived in these woods came flooding back; the very heart of America where neighbors are family, you always get a return smile, and friends last a lifetime. I remember vividly my first day of kindergarten, when I stood in knee socks and pigtails and pledged allegiance to the flag that I already deeply believed in.

Nothing could be better than those sacred nights when my parents would come to kiss me goodnight, and we would read together, laugh together, and pray together. I was confident I could achieve all my hopes and dreams – and I could not wait to spread my wings and fly – because I knew that I lived in a place where no aspiration was too big and that the possibilities were endless.

As I grew, my belief in America grew with me. Not because we do everything right, but because I knew then – and know now – deep in my heart that we will always be ultimately led by the core values that make this country truly great.

I could not be prouder to be an American. We are optimistic not only for our own future, but also for our capacity to create a brighter tomorrow on a global scale. We are self-reliant and value our individuality but also have a strong sense of national pride and a

profound allegiance to our country. We are aware of our imperfections, and have a burning desire to always be better, but remain completely faithful to the belief that the United States is the best place to be.

But the absolute greatest privilege of being an American is the freedom and power we have to continually assess our government, our leaders, and our political and moral direction. Without that privilege, America would be lost. With it, *anything* is possible.

Love, Emily

Chapter One
The Great American Reset

The Butterfly Effect

Once upon a time, a young boy got a horse as a present for his 12th birthday. It was a coveted gift and his entire village cheered and said, "Isn't this wonderful!" "We'll see," replied the wise Zen master who lived in the village.

Two years later, the boy was violently thrown off his horse, shattering his leg and causing great dismay throughout the town. The villagers all cried, "How unfortunate this is for the boy!" "We'll see," replied the wise Zen master. Shortly after the boy's fall, a brutal war broke out near the village, but the boy could not fight because of his broken leg. Relieved that the boy would remain safe, the whole village said, "This is so fortunate for the boy!"

"We'll see," replied the Zen master – fully aware that, for better or worse, even the best intentions have unintended consequences. Fully understanding that events rarely occur in isolation and that seemingly random actions are often closely interconnected… and somewhere close by a butterfly flapped its wings.

The Butterfly Effect is the idea that small changes in the early state of a system can cause significant and unpredictable changes to its future state. For example, the flutter of a butterfly's wings in Africa could possibly alter the atmosphere *just enough* to change a hurricane's path from across the Gulf of Mexico to up the East Coast.

Although the butterfly does not cause the hurricane, it's a small part of a larger sequence of events that causes a major change in the ultimate outcome.

Most often The Butterfly Effect is associated with chaos theory, a field of study in mathematics. But this profound concept can extend far beyond mathematical equations or weather patterns. The power of this phenomenon is what Americans so desperately need to embrace to

solve our national challenges and change the way our dysfunctional political system operates once and for all.

Just as the butterfly and the hurricane are elaborately connected, our domestic and foreign policies are linked in intricate ways. If we don't pay close attention, a policy decision that we make today can have significant consequences down the road – in ways we may never have considered.

We have seen this happen many times over the years. History tells us that passing a three-strikes law *today* can cause significant over-incarceration *tomorrow*. Increasing domestic ethanol quotas *today* can cause a worldwide food shortage *tomorrow*. Redlining neighborhoods *today* can cause a substantial wealth gap *tomorrow*. Repealing a Glass-Steagall Act *today* can contribute to a devastating subprime financial crisis *tomorrow*. Arming the Afghan mujahideen without appropriate oversight *today* can fortify terrorism *tomorrow*.

The time has come for serious people to come up with serious solutions. From immigration to Social Security to our fiscal crisis – to the racial health, education and wealth gaps to criminal justice reform – the time has finally come for us to make very difficult decisions and come together as a nation to secure our future.

Einstein once said, "The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them." We should take his advice and move beyond the ineffectual thinking of our past.

The Butterfly Effect can work either for us or against us. Decisions can be altruistic and intelligent and therefore have a positive impact on our future. Or they can be self-serving and illogical and therefore lead this nation into chaos.

Lately it's been the latter, but that trend is about to end. This book will prove that even the slightest disruption can transform our severely broken political system. Better yet, a large one can transform the world.

America's Role in the World

The United States of America is at a crossroads, and every American has a decision to make. ***What kind of country do we want to be?*** See, that's the beauty of being Americans. ***We can choose to be anything we want.***

We can view the United States of America as an idea, a promise, a Dream. We can be a country that deeply believes in our elections, our institutions, our intelligence agencies, checks and balances, and the awesome Americans who work tirelessly for us on every level of our government.

We can be a country that is committed to fiscal responsibility and has: manageable debt; a sensible plan to stabilize Medicare and Social Security; an uncomplicated tax code; a smart and humane immigration policy; an evolving, self-reliant energy policy; affordable, high-quality health care; and a government that runs like a well-oiled machine. We can be a country that is wowed by the marvels of science; is committed to ground-breaking research and development; supports academic and scientific innovation; and creates a welcoming climate that attracts international capital and talent.

We can be a country that properly educates our children and values a healthy planet. We can be a country that believes that, just because one income level benefits, the others don't have to lose. A country where we can implement policies that help ALL Americans thrive – not with handouts, but with opportunity. A country that understands that to be successful, *every* player on Team America needs to make sure *every* other player has access to the very best education, health care, and job opportunities, and that other things – like housing and wages – are fair and equitable for *every* American.

We can be a United States of America that is the Gold Standard. A country that has unimpeachable integrity. A country that is committed to the rules-based global world order that has successfully governed peace, security, democracy and prosperity since World War II, and one that defends the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries. … a country that is the go-to nation during an international crisis – not

to foot the bill for everyone, but to offer bold solutions and coordinate multilateral responses.

We can be a United States that is a reliable and trustworthy friend. One that is fiercely loyal to our allies. An America that is *partners* with other countries, not one that arrogantly tries to dominate the entire world by acting superior and bossing everyone around.

We can be a United States of America that ensures our light shines far beyond our shores… a country that takes tremendous pride in our accomplishments but that is empathetic and supportive of those with less opportunity. One that champions human rights and works to improve the factors that enable violent extremism such as poverty, inequality and repression by creating economic advancements for those who don't have the opportunities we are blessed with. One that always strives to honor the motto of the United States Army Special Forces: *De Oppresso Liber*…To Free the Oppressed… and anytime anyone asks why we help defenseless people around the world? We say: *Because we are the United States of America, and it's our honor.*

OR

We can be a country with no heart and no soul… just a place on a map to simply exist. We can be a country where power is concentrated in a small, elite group distinguished by wealth, with a government that focuses on *their* interests, all but guaranteeing significant inequality – even though history tells us that, when that happens, this small, elite group will do anything necessary to keep that power, embracing autocratic ambitions and fascist tendencies.

… or a country where the president and his staff use their positions as a national extortion scam, taking their culture of corruption to Russia-level oligarchy proportions – unprecedently and unabashedly using the power and resources of the U.S. government to enrich themselves, their families, and their friends.

We can be a country where those same people – who have been given so many advantages by doing nothing more than being in America – only want to see the bad in it. It's failing. It's in decline. It's

filled with carnage, violence, and danger. American cities are killing fields, overrun with violent gangs and bloodthirsty criminals, and need to be under military control like in Russia and North Korea.

We can be a country that allows our leaders to trample all over the First Amendment, due process, and checks and balances. We can be a country that enables our leaders to curtail civil liberties, reject democratic principles, attack higher education, and strongarm law firms and private corporations. We can be a country whose leaders openly defy federal courts, unconstitutionally bypass Congress, and declare "national emergencies" on false pretenses. We can be a country where our leaders do everything under the sun to stifle free speech; control the news media; suppress inconvenient truths; eliminate dissent; silence political rivals; make political opposition more difficult; and punish those they perceive slight them in any way.

We can be a country that is fiscally irresponsible; is comfortable having a $1.8 trillion deficit and so much debt that it exceeds 100% of our entire gross domestic product; forsakes the education of our children; is perfectly fine having 36 million people live in poverty, plus staggering inequity in everything from wealth to incomes to education to our criminal justice system; abandons research and development; vilifies science; disregards the health of our planet; and gives tax cuts to the wealthy while cutting funding for everything from preschools to help for the vulnerable to emergency funding for federal programs that provide food, shelter, and housing for Americans after disasters.

We can be a country that turns its immigration enforcement agency into an unconstrained paramilitary force and one that dispatches the military into American streets to incite fear and suppress opposition – but then lets people who violently storm our beloved Capitol and try to disrupt our sacred elections completely off the hook.

We can be a country whose leaders govern through rash impulses and political theatre instead of substance, and who believe: flattery is more valuable than competency; expertise and intelligence are a negative; and empathy is a weakness.

We can be a country whose leaders are crude, harsh and mean; are fueled by ego, anger, grievance, revenge, and retribution; and who gaslight, point fingers, place blame, and provoke envy. We can be a

country whose leaders lie, invent villains, and encourage cruelty just for cruelty's sake. We can be a country whose leaders rewrite history, vilify marginalized groups, and think of Americans as factions divided by race, money and social class – and try hard to make everyone else think that way too. We can be a country whose leaders invent then stoke culture wars and try to weaponize the color of our skin, picking at old wounds and trying to revive outdated narratives.

We can be a country that doesn't have or deserve respect from those around the world. A country that kills survivors clinging to the wreckage of supposed drug boats we bombed and one that invades and takes over other countries with no legal basis or congressional oversight – saber-rattling and running roughshod over everyone in a reign of aggression and chaos, free from the rules-based international order established after World War II.

We can be a country that doesn't help desperate and defenseless nations; starts trade wars; withdraws from major global agreements; abandons our faithful military allies like the Syrian Democratic Forces; reneges on our promise to protect the incredibly brave men and women who risked their lives to serve alongside us in Afghanistan; and is rude to NATO members and world leaders, treating our most trusted allies like they are enemies – insulting them, bullying them, and threatening them right in the Oval Office.

It's time to choose. We can have any kind of country we want.

My fellow Americans, we are awesome people, but we have been asleep at the wheel for far too long – and this started way before Donald J. Trump.

We have allowed our politics to become a reality television show that we seem disengaged from; like we're watching an unavoidable train wreck from the side of the tracks. Our political state of play reminds me of those tricky Chinese finger traps we played with as kids

– the bamboo contraptions where you stick one of your fingers in each end. After fighting it the entire recess, you finally realized that the harder you pulled, the tighter it became.

It's abundantly clear that finding solutions to our problems is not the goal of most of our politicians and it hasn't been for a long time. Instead of constructing an arsenal of intelligent and thoughtful ideas, most of them lob Molotov cocktails of anger, frustration, blame, and fear. They distract with hateful attacks on one another; government shutdowns; whataboutism and false equivalencies; scapegoating; and – in the case of the Trump/Vance administration – made-up crime sprees; fake national emergencies; "threats" from peaceful protesters; plastic straws; windmills; the flushing power of toilets; pronouns; the "evilness" of DEI; and who is and is not "woke" (whatever that means).

Meanwhile, our total public debt is over $40 trillion, our federal budget deficit is $1.8 trillion, and all three major credit rating agencies have downgraded the U.S. debt rating. Our checks and balances are way out of whack; our First Amendment rights are being trampled on and our civil liberties are at risk; government waste is colossal; and lobbyists almost exclusively write our public policy. Over 36 million Americans are trapped in poverty; our inequality gaps in practically every category are massive; and our Medicare and Social Security funds are insolvent. We *still* have broken health care, education, and criminal justice systems, and our immigration policy is in total chaos.

Our closest allies are confused, deeply concerned, and making alternative plans; Russia and China have exploited our internal division and even made it far worse by interfering in our sacred elections; our exit from Afghanistan was a disaster; we are invading and/or bombing countries on a seemingly monthly basis; and Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Unare essentially shooting us the bird.

This snake oil, smoke and mirrors, side show approach to governing is absurd. THIS IS THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. We should be way past this by now.

The most damaging consequence of us allowing our leaders to distract us with shiny objects and drive us to the lowest-common denominator is that we have not had a long-term, comprehensive

strategy *for decades*… which is *not good* because, as Sun Tzu said in The Art of War, "Every battle is won before it's ever fought."

In the absence of any kind of strategy, we have relied on our strong economy and decades of global goodwill to sustain us while we fly blind with no plan and no navigation system. It's unsustainable.

You know who doesn't fly blind with no navigation? China.

China has had a strategy – and followed it come hell or high water – since Mao Zedong founded the People's Republic of China in 1949. Mao (a.k.a. the Great Helmsman) first detailed his vision for winning what he considered a long-drawn-out war in a series of 1938 speeches he collectively called *On Protracted War*. His idea was that a weaker force could defeat a stronger one through a long-term, multi-stage war of attrition (meaning, essentially wearing them down). Uh oh.

Mao originally developed his theory in response to the Second Sino-Japanese War, but this is clearly the strategy the Chinese are following in their current quest to defeat the United States.

It appears to me that we are already well into Phase Two of China's grand plan. Very regrettably for you and me, since both Republicans and Democrats in the U.S. Congress and the White House were not paying attention (*for decades*), the Chinese blew right through Phase One, known as the *strategic defensive* phase.

In Mao's *strategic defensive* phase, the stronger enemy is on the offensive and the weaker force retreats strategically. But don't mistake "retreats" for inaction. Phase One is not passive; its preparatory. In this case, the communist forces (China) prioritized survival, concentrating on building a sustainable base, gathering intelligence on the advancing "enemy" (the U.S.), and building strength for the future. The entire point of Phase One is to transform the revolutionary force from a weak movement into one capable of transitioning to the next two phases: the *strategic stalemate* and, ultimately, the *strategic offensive*.

The Chinese slayed Phase One. In 1978, they started opening their economy and implementing substantial reforms. Since then, gross domestic product (GDP) growth has averaged over 9 percent a year, over 800 million people have been lifted out of poverty (representing

about 75 percent of global poverty reduction), and they have made sizeable gains in access to health, education, and other services.

Now an upper-middle-income country, China is now the world's second largest economy, with a nominal GDP of $19.4 trillion. While the United States is still number one, with a nominal GDP of $30.62 trillion, purchasing power parity (PPP) adjusted GDP puts China at $43 trillion to America's $27.6 trillion (this number adjusts currencies based on what goods a country can buy rather than currency exchange rates, which basically adjusts for the difference in the cost of living among countries). For 2026, these numbers are estimated to be $45 trillion and $28 trillion, respectively. As of mid-2026, China held $660 billion in U.S. debt.

Credit Suisse's (now UBS) 2018 Global Wealth Report revealed that "aggregate global wealth rose by $14 trillion to $317 trillion, representing a growth rate of 4.6 percent." But here was the big red flag for the U.S.: "China was the main beneficiary of the newly recorded wealth. China is now clearly established in second place in the world wealth hierarchy... China overtook Japan with respect to the number of ultra-high net worth individuals in 2009, total wealth in 2011, and the number of millionaires in 2014." The following year, the same report revealed that "China overtook the United States to become the country with most people in the top 10 percent of global wealth distribution." The 2025 report revealed that the "U.S. and mainland China jointly account for more than half of the entire personal wealth," and that trend continued in the 2026 report.

China is now the world's largest exporter of goods, expanding its exports over 25-fold over the past two decades. In 2024, its exports amounted to $3.57 trillion, accounting for 15.9 percent of all global exports. To put this in perspective, that basically means that China was responsible for around one in every seven export dollars worldwide.

One of the most consequential moves China made during Phase One was to begin pursuing economic self-reliance by actively weaning its economy from the United States – enabling China to withstand both Donald Trump-led Republican Trade Wars (one launched in 2018 and the other in 2025).

Far from being crushed by Trade War 2.0, as Republicans intended and predicted, China's GDP expanded five percent in 2025 when adjusted for deflation, meeting Beijing's official growth target. Although China's growth slowed as the year went on – suggesting a potentially lower rate of expansion in 2026 – its trade surplus reached a record $1.2 trillion in 2025, up 20 percent from 2024.

China's exports were still surging in June 2026: Its exports rose 27 percent from one year earlier, increasing from a 19.4 percent gain in May, and its imports grew 36 percent from the year before, up from a 27.4 percent gain in May. July 2026 marked the third straight month that China's exports exceeded its imports by over $100 billion, putting China on track to exceed its 2025 record of a $1.19 trillion trade surplus. That said, China's economic growth of just 4.3 percent in the second quarter of 2026 was the slowest rate in three years (more on this in a minute).

Meanwhile – far from the Republican's promise that their steep tariffs would reduce U.S. imports, shrink our trade deficit, and bring American manufacturing "roaring back" – beginning in April, U.S. manufacturing employment declined every month in 2025 (factories employed 72,000 fewer people at the end of the year than when President Trump declared "Liberation Day" in April). This extended a contraction that had seen over 200,000 roles vanish since 2023.

American imports *grew* in 2025 and the trade deficit in goods hit a record high. It's true that the total trade deficit (i.e., trade in both goods and services) shrank slightly as growth in exports narrowly outpaced growth in imports. However, that was solely the result of an expanding trade surplus in services. Even though the global tariffs announced by the Trump/Vance administration in April were designed to specifically target the trade imbalance in goods, the trade deficit in physical goods *rose* to a record $1.24 trillion, up from $1.22 trillion the year before.

By May 2026, the U.S. trade deficit had *widened* 42.2 percent to $77.6 billion – *the highest level in 14 months*.

In China's quest for self-reliance, Beijing's first order of business was to identify domestic "chokepoints" (i.e., sectors where it was too reliant on the West) and worked to diffuse these points of leverage,

strengthening its domestic industries and developing alternative sources to the United States for resources that might be tight.

Although this cost them a fortune and was at times inefficient, this strategy allowed China to turn the tables and establish choke points to pressure the *American* economy.

… which has worked beautifully for them. Their switcharoo is the reason Beijing was able to call Donald Trump's bluff – and why he has retreated over and over again and got the nickname TACO (Trump Always Chickens Out) – since his return to the Oval Office. Our president obviously forgot (or more likely never understood) that U.S. negotiations with China are not like those in the Middle East, where the U.S. has leverage thanks to weapons systems, security umbrellas, superior technology, and a U.N. Security Council veto.

In quite an opposite scenario, China and the U.S. are bound by *mutual dependence* – which means that bullying, bluffing and bombastic tactics WILL NOT work. While China depends on America for advanced chip design and aerospace technology, America depends on China for about 70 percent of our rare earth imports, over 70 percent of lithium-ion battery imports, and A LOT of semiconductors and pharmaceuticals.

American importers have little choice but to continue buying smartphones, laptops, lithium-ion batteries, etc. from China because no other country can produce them at the levels Americans buy them. That's just a fact.

Bloomberg tracks 13 critical industries and says China dominates in five of them (unmanned aerial vehicles, solar panels, graphene, high-speed rail and electric vehicles/lithium batteries) – and is "catching up fast" in all the rest. China already leads the world in producing active pharmaceutical ingredients, aluminum, batteries, bullet trains, drones, consumer electronics, electric vehicles, equipment for 5G, ships, solar power, steel, and wind turbines.

While our Democratic and Republican leaders were repeatedly hitting the snooze button, China was amassing dominant control over global rare-earth mining and processing and now produces and/or controls roughly 90 percent of the world's supply of these and other critical minerals … oh, you know, the very ones the U.S. military needs

for things like drones, fighter jets, radar systems and precision-guided munitions. In fact, there aren't many things this doesn't affect, like medical lasers, electric-vehicle engines, and most consumer electronics.

So, naturally, after President Trump threatened China with "100 percent tariffs" on October 10, 2025 and warned that he would cancel a planned meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, China immediately announced sweeping countertariffs of its own, complete with strict restrictions on rare earth exports.

So, naturally, President Trump quickly backed down, posting an extremely rare – and off-brand – chummy message on social media about his desire to "help China, not hurt it," and that, *of course* the U.S.-China summit would take place after all. He even agreed to suspend a policy he had enacted months earlier that had expanded the number of military-related Chinese companies that Americans were not allowed to do business with.

One of the projects China designed in its pursuit of economic self-reliance – something called *Made in China 2025*, launched in 2015 – is a state-run initiative that uses government subsidies to upgrade its manufacturing sector from low-cost goods to an innovative, highly advanced dynamo. As a result, China's manufacturing ascendency happened quickly during Phase One. The share of Chinese global production increased from 3 percent to over 30 percent between 1990 and 2022 and is projected to account for 45 percent of global manufacturing by 2030.

While the Trump/Vance administration cuts/delays/reallocates billions of dollars of funding provided for by the CHIPS and Science Act without providing an alternative investment plan (their "strategy" relies mainly on high tariffs and tighter export controls), China remains steadfast in its commitment to funding the research and development and manufacturing of "hard technologies" like quantum computing, new AI models, robotics, and semiconductors.

< Sidebar: As it stands today, the United States accounts for roughly 18 percent of global manufacturing value added (and shrinking) while China controls 30 percent (and growing). In August 2022, the U.S. Congress passed the CHIPS and Science Act,

authorizing around $280 billion over ten years for semiconductor manufacturing, scientific R&D, innovation, workforce development and related programs. This legislation was in response to the fact that the U.S. manufactures only 10 percent of the world's semiconductors – a significant drop from roughly 37 percent in 1990.

This is a major national security issue because semiconductor manufacturing – particularly production of the world's most advanced chips – is heavily concentrated in East Asia, including Taiwan, just across the Taiwan Strait from China. Taiwan has historically produced over 90 percent of the world's most advanced logic chips… just one Taiwanese company, for example, manufactures over 70 percent of the microcontroller units used in automobiles, technology that is used in practically every vehicle in the entire world. (Please believe, I recognize that $280 billion is a ton of money and, if we invest in things like this, cuts will have to be made elsewhere… which we'll get to in a few minutes.)

Within two years of the CHIPS Act passing, the U.S. Commerce Department reported that the U.S. was on track to manufacture almost 30 percent of the world's leading-edge chips by 2032. In its 2025 report, the Semiconductor Industry Association said the legislation had ignited over 100 projects in 28 states, totaling over half-a-trillion dollars in private investment. These projects were expected to create and support over 500,000 American jobs and help triple U.S. chip-making capacity by 2032. Projects included the construction of new manufacturing facilities for advanced logic, memory, analog, and legacy chips; expansions of existing sites; and facilities that supply the key materials and equipment used in chip manufacturing. >

The CHIPS Act certainly wasn't perfect. *But it was at least a start* – at a time when China's research and development budget has been growing at an average of 8.9 percent a year… and that was *before* Beijing announced a new $138 billion state-backed research and development fund in March 2025.

China doubled down on this the following October – nine months into Trade War 2.0 – when Xi Jinping announced yet another new strategy that will take "extraordinary measures" to help China secure a

global lead in advanced manufacturing and technology, saying, "The balance of global power is undergoing profound readjustment, and breakthroughs in a new phase of technological revolution and industrial transformation are accelerating."

"Unilateralism and protectionism are raising their heads, and the threats from hegemony and power politics are escalating." So, China must "seize the window of opportunity to consolidate and expand our strengths, break past bottlenecks and surmount weaknesses, to gain the strategic initiative in intense international competition."

Nevertheless, Republicans immediately went after the legislation upon Donald Trump's return to the White House – again, with zero strategy of their own to replace it. The president went so far as calling the CHIPS Act a "horrible, horrible thing" and telling lawmakers to "get rid" of the law in his joint address to Congress on March 4, 2025… which means Donald Trump and congressional Republicans all but ensured the United States will fall behind.

The Information Technology & Innovation Foundation warns that data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) shows that "U.S. growth in Gross Domestic Expenditures on R&D (GERD) is slowing, while China's has remained relatively high and stable. In three key categories of research and development that contribute to GERD, U.S. spending growth is now only a fraction of China's. Even when adjusted for GDP, China's growth still exceeds that of the United States. At this rate, China will soon surpass the United States in gross R&D investment."

"Moreover, because Chinese R&D is less expensive than U.S. R&D, China likely already conducts more R&D activity than the United States… for every U.S. R&D worker supported by $100,000 of R&D spend, a Chinese firm spending $100,000 on R&D can throw 2.3 workers at the [same] problem."

Even before the Trump/Vance administration started slashing funding for research and development; spreading misinformation and perpetuating mistrust in basic science; driving talented researchers out of the country; and declaring war on our most prestigious academic centers – essentially sabotaging America's long-standing supremacy in

scientific leadership – Chinese biotech companies were developing drugs faster and cheaper than ours.

In 2020, China was involved in less than five percent of pharmaceutical transactions worth $50 million or more. Four years later, that number had risen to almost 30 percent. In 2024, China approved 48 first-in-class medicines, over double the total in 2022. China now hosts over 7,100 clinical trials, overtaking the United States as the world's go-to destination. Not only are Western pharmaceutical companies increasingly conducting their trials in China, but they are also progressively licensing the drug candidates that Chinese biotechs develop. Already, China controls the production of the active pharmaceutical ingredients the rest of the world – including the United States – depends on. In fact, the U.S. relies on China for 44 percent of our pharmaceutical imports (by weight) and for around 100 ingredients that *can't be sourced anywhere else*.

Now, because of the administration's war on vaccines, China is even better positioned to overtake us as the world's pharmaceutical leader. In January 2026, Moderna – a leading U.S. pharmaceutical and biotechnology company – announced it had scrapped plans to invest in new late-stage vaccine trials because of growing opposition to immunizations from U.S. officials.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Moderna CEO Stéphane Bancel said in an interview with Bloomberg TV that companies like his "cannot make a return on investment if you don't have access to the U.S. market" and that regulatory delays and a lack of support from U.S. authorities make the market size "much smaller."

This is one of the more outrageously irresponsible decisions being made by the Trump/Vance administration… and the list is getting long. Putting a pin in the fact that they are making life far less safe for many Americans – – for example, the consequences of President Trump's August 2026 executive order reducing universally recommended immunizations from 18 to 11 diseases at a time when measles cases are at a 35-year high will be suffered for decades – – in 2016, the U.S. government invested heavily in a vaccine technology called mRNA, a flexible, rapid-response tech that can be reprogrammed for other pathogens after learning its genetic sequence (scientists call this a

“platform” because it can be adapted quickly for new or mutating viruses). This tech is now being tested for personalized cancer vaccines, autoimmune therapies, and treatments for rare diseases.

The Department of Defense and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency have also invested in research and development for mRNA after realizing its potential for neutralizing biological threats, including those that may be weaponized.

These investments paid off big time. American mRNA technology is widely considered to be one of the most momentous medical advancements in decades. This breakthrough was the reason scientists were able to design a vaccine for Covid-19 so quickly, saving an estimated 20 million lives worldwide, including one million in America (human trials for the vaccine began in under 70 days).

Astonishingly, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently announced it was unwinding 22 mRNA vaccine development projects under the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), canceling almost $500 million in investments.

The long-term, real-world consequences of the administration’s snidely cavalier disdain for science is chilling. Thanks to the Trump/Vance administration, the European Research Council, the funding organization for academic work in the European Union, has seen a surge in applications, including nearly three times the number of American applicants compared with 2024. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the scientists and researchers who responded to a recent Nature survey said they are considering positions abroad.

Funds for the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Food and Drug Administration have been decimated. The Trump/Vance administration pulled one billion dollars of funding from Johns Hopkins, a university world renowned for pioneering medical and public health research (they are suing). The University of Pennsylvania – famous for its work in mRNA vaccine technology and CAR T-cell therapies – originally lost $175 million (it was later restored). Columbia – distinguished for its high-level research in medicine, physics and engineering, especially nuclear science, laser technology and medical imaging – lost $400 million (this was later reduced to $180 million). Harvard University – revered for researching

almost everything – initially lost $3.2 billion (a federal judge later ruled the cuts illegal).

The National Science Foundation – an independent government agency that once directly supported 357,600 students and researchers – is awarding new grants at the slowest pace in at least 35 years (this includes STEM education, and research for biology, chemistry, climate and computer science, engineering, geosciences, math, manufacturing innovations, physics, social sciences, and weather forecasting).

A study published in JAMA Internal Medicine in November 2025 revealed that, from the end of February to August 2025, grants for 383 clinical trials were cancelled, affecting over 74,000 trial participants. Over 100 of the axed grants were for cancer research.

Although the Trump/Vance administration claims they are simply eliminating wasteful "woke programs" that "poison the minds of Americans," what they are really doing is cutting funding for neuro-degenerative diseases (Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, ALS), cancer (breast, ovarian, pancreatic, and others), mental health, diabetes, strokes, sickle cell anemia, and infectious diseases. This is devastating because around 40 percent of Americans will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in their life. Strokes are the leading cause of adult disability in the United States and roughly 1 in 4 Americans over the age of 25 will have one in their lifetime.

This is insanity. Without question, one of our greatest national strengths is our revolutionary, leading-edge scientific research. Our research solves complex problems, advances technological innovation, improves public health, and strengthens national security. It propels economic growth and prosperity – generating jobs, creating new industries, boosting GDP, and ensuring the United States remains globally competitive.

Our research universities are immensely important engines of innovation, and federal support for them has been a driving force in our economic and military competitiveness as well as our biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries. The United States has almost 300 Nobel Prizes in the sciences, with Britain coming in second with only around one-third of that number.

When the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was created in 1946, the average life expectancy in the United States was around 66 years. Today it is 78 years. In the mid-1970s, the five-year cancer-survival rate in the United States was 49 percent. Today it is 70 percent…. with the most significant survival gains happening among people diagnosed with cancers that are generally more fatal, like myeloma, liver cancer, and lung cancer. Between 1991 and 2022 alone, the death rate from cancer in the U.S. fell by 34 percent, meaning 4.5 million fewer people died of cancer than otherwise would have.

The Trump/Vance administration is jeopardizing eighty years of American greatness that has not only transformed our country but has transformed the entire world.

And for what? It can't be about money because, when it comes to scientific research, the return on our investment is enormous. A study in the Journal of Clinical Oncology says that every $326 that the U.S. government spends researching cancer extends a human life by one year. Other studies have found that every dollar invested in research and development returns around $5 in economic gains – and this doesn't consider other benefits to our GDP, like people living longer and having more leisure time.

A study from American University's Institute for Macroeconomic and Policy Analysis found that "budget cuts to public R&D will significantly hurt the economy in the long run, with large negative effects on GDP, investment, and government revenue. A 25 percent cut to public R&D spending would reduce GDP by an amount comparable to the decline in GDP during the Great Recession. Cutting annual public R&D spending in half would making the average American approximately $10,000 poorer (in today's dollars) than the value implied by the historical trend in GDP. Cutting public R&D would also shrink federal government revenue. A 25 percent cut in R&D would decrease revenue by approximately 4.3 percent annually, while a 50 percent cut would decrease it by 8.6 percent annually."

… and with their eyes on the prize, China just keeps marching on.

For decades – as our leader's turned their attention to wars in the Middle East and domestic political squabbles – China was playing four-dimensional chess, developing not just cutting-edge industries, but entire technical ecosystems that all work in tandem with one another. Because China is designing their industries to overlap and interlock, they can leverage them in ways that significantly multiplies their efficiency, effectiveness and profitability.

They are also making sure they have the human resources necessary to continue their strategy far into the future. While the Trump/Vance administration focuses on fueling culture wars in our public schools through things like "critical race theory," who uses what bathroom, and putting the Ten Commandments in every classroom, China is focused on establishing national laboratories to develop top-level talent from an early age, giving tremendous state support to young scientists and engineers.

Every year, universities in China graduate roughly 3.5 million STEM graduates (science, technology, engineering and math), just short of the number of total graduates (associate, bachelor's, master's and PhD programs) in all disciplines in the United States.

These graduates are busy working on things like a low-earth orbit (LEO) satellite Internet service to compete with Western commercial satellite Internet services; future robot moon landings to follow-up those in 2020 and 2024 that returned with lunar samples; tweaks to the Tiangong ("Heavenly Palace") space station China established in 2022; developing antisatellite weapons that can cripple GPS and other U.S. space-based systems; and the space-based data centers that China plans to use to expand its already significant presence in space (this is in addition to their plans to expand resource development like asteroid mining; space debris monitoring; and an expansion into space tourism).

While America spends billions on reheating antiquated design concepts and overhauling outdated infrastructure, China is investing in infrastructure straight out of The Jetsons television show – enjoying practically full 5G coverage, a matrix of bullet trains, and almost nine times as many robots as the U.S. (and more than the rest of the world combined… in 2025, well over two million robots were working in Chinese factories).

While Donald Trump, JD Vance, and most Republicans double-down on America remaining a petro-state, China is fast becoming what people in Silicon Valley call the world's first electrostate – meaning, a nation that dominates the global energy transition by pivoting from fossil fuel dependency to an economy driven by electricity, clean tech manufacturing, and advanced digital infrastructure. Even its 30,000 miles of high-speed rail run on electricity.

Republicans like to say that China remains completely reliant on coal, with President Trump going as far as saying that China has "coal plants all over the place, but they build the windmills... They don't use it in terms of energy. They showed people, look how beautiful this is, as those poor suckers buy those windmills" – but unsurprisingly that is false.

China's national consumption of oil is projected to peak by 2027, then begin to fall. While China continues to rely heavily on coal through its evolution from fossil fuels to green technologies – – it remains the world's largest consumer of coal, accounting for 56 percent of global coal use in 2025 – – it has already made massive strides in the transition.

By the first half of 2026, coal's share of China's electricity generation had fallen below 50 percent for the first time, accounting for just 49.7 percent of the country's power generation, down from 65.5 percent a decade earlier. Meanwhile, non-fossil energy sources accounted for 62 percent of China's total installed power-generation capacity by May 2026, up from just 25 percent in 2010 – making non-fossil energy the dominant source of China's installed generating capacity. So, essentially, China went from 25 percent non-fossil installed capacity in 2010 to 62 percent in May 2026… an extraordinary structural change in only sixteen years.

China's huge shift from fossil fuels to becoming an electrostate is a brilliant move because it has allowed China – in classic Phase One fashion – to blunt a major U.S. pressure point. Now that the Chinese are curbing their domestic fossil fuel addiction, the United States can no longer compromise their economy by choking off supply of the foreign oil they once heavily depended on.

This is one reason the Trump/Vance administration's plan to topple Venezuela to, in part, redirect much of its oil away from Beijing will not be effective long-term. Sure, it probably stung a little at first, but China is estimated to hold the world's largest strategic oil stockpile and had already diversified its supply, having ample access to discounted Russian and Iranian crude.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that China's strategic oil inventories reached around 1.54 billion barrels by the first quarter of 2026 – compared to the United States Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which was around 413 million barrels.

The Wall Street Journal reported it this way: "No one knows the exact size of the reserves –China won't say, and it stores some crude underground. Analysts put the total, including strategic petroleum reserves, oil held in refineries and the commercial reserves that represent the largest share of China's stockpile, at between 1 billion and 1.4 billion barrels."

"Beijing began stockpiling cheap Russian and Iranian oil in 2025, well before the Iran war. China injected an average of 1.1 million barrels a day into its oil reserves last year, the U.S. Energy Information Administration estimated. The stockpiling continued in March and April with oil that had left the Persian Gulf before the war started."

"Since the start of May, China has withdrawn around 56 million barrels from its commercial reserves and 15 million barrels from refineries. Meanwhile, according to Vortexa, China's on-the-ground strategic reserve remains largely untouched."

The truth is that, although global oil prices have been significantly impacted by the Iran war and the chaos in the Strait of Hormuz, one major reason prices haven't soared even higher is because China didn't want them to. *It now has that level of power over the world market*.

For example, China restricted fuel exports and slashed its oil purchases not long after the war began, specifically to keep prices down. From February to June 2026, China cut imports by 5.8 million barrels a day, a 48.9 percent reduction – taking millions of barrels of demand out of the global market and considerably softening the potentially devastating global effects of the Strait of Hormuz debacle.

The concerning news is that this works both ways. When China's oil imports pick up – and, because there is no end in sight to the train wreck that is the Iran war, they most certainly will – it will put enormous upward pressure on prices, particularly if Middle Eastern supplies are still constrained.

The upshot is that, although OPEC and OPEC+ remain enormously powerful because of their ability to increase or restrict the actual supply of oil, China has emerged as something different: the world's most important *swing* buyer. China's decisions about when to buy oil, when to draw from its enormous inventories, and when to replenish them can now materially move the world market, which is incredibly counterintuitive when you consider that China's power comes not from being the world's largest oil *producer,* but the world's largest oil *importer*.

The turnaround here is remarkable. Not so long ago, in 2013, China became the world's largest net oil importer, meaning its reliance on foreign crude – which accounted for roughly half of global demand growth – had become a major vulnerability for them (not to mention the country's smog problem was becoming unbearable).

But then – surprise, surprise – Xi Jinping took a quick look at his notes from Mao's Phase One playbook and put an end to *that* nonsense. "The energy rice bowl must be held in our own hands," he told his advisers – then launched an energy revolution for the ages.

China generated roughly 45 percent *more* electricity than the United States and European Union *combined* in 2025, and A LOT of it (42 percent) was generated by clean sources**,** including hydro, wind, solar, nuclear and bioenergy.

In the first half of 2025, China alone installed over twice as much solar capacity as the rest of the world. China is not only building hundreds of square miles of solar panels, but they are building many on the Tibetan Plateau, the world's highest – almost 10,000 feet above sea level. Why? Because the panels soak up brighter sunlight since the air is so thin. At last count, these solar panels cover an area seven times the size of Manhattan. When the sun isn't shining, wind turbines and hydropower dams located on the Plateau pick up the slack.

In roughly the same time it took the United States to complete two new nuclear reactors – seven years late and $17 billion over budget – China built 13 and had 33 more under construction. Today, China has 36 reactors under construction, nearly half of all nuclear reactors being built worldwide. By 2030, China is expected to surpass the United States in installed nuclear capacity, making it the world's nuclear power leader – in a technology WE pioneered. The U.S. still has more operating nuclear reactors than any other country, but when it comes to building new ones, we're falling far behind.

China is also going all-in on nuclear fusion. Nuclear fusion – often called the holy grail of clean energy – combines light atomic nuclei to release extraordinary amounts of energy, potentially providing an abundant source of carbon-free electricity without the meltdown risk or long-lived nuclear waste associated with conventional nuclear power. Pound for pound, fusion can release about four times more energy than nuclear fission and nearly 4 *million* times more than burning coal.

China's state-owned nuclear company says nuclear fusion is "the main racetrack in future scientific and technological competition among the great powers" – which is probably a safe bet.

< Note: Nuclear power refers to electricity generated through nuclear fission, or the splitting of heavy atoms like uranium. Nuclear fusion is essentially the opposite process, combining light atoms such as hydrogen isotopes to release enormous amounts of energy. Fusion remains experimental, expensive and technically challenging, and no fusion power plant currently supplies electricity to the commercial grid. But fusion research also has important national-security implications: some fusion technologies, particularly inertial-confinement and high-energy-density research, can provide valuable knowledge and experimental capabilities for nuclear-weapons science. >

The good news is that, from the jump, the United States has led in nuclear fusion, pulling off the first-ever controlled fusion ignition at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's Ignition Facility in 2022. This breakthrough is widely hailed as one of the most impressive scientific feats of the 21st century. Yay, America!!

Since then, public and private investment in the 53 fusion companies around the world totals almost $10 billion (up five times

from 2021), and more than half of the fusion energy startups are based in the United States. By some accounts, fusion will be at least a $1 trillion market by 2050.

The bad news is that we're in danger of falling behind. Again. Not only are the Chinese seriously outpacing us in nuclear power, but they are also making remarkable breakthroughs in next-generation nuclear technology in general (China is now operating the world's first fourth-generation nuclear reactor, with more than 90 percent of its equipment domestically produced).

From 2008 to 2023, China's share of nuclear patents grew from 1.3 percent to 13.4 percent, and they now lead in the number of nuclear fusion patent applications. China is reportedly producing roughly ten times as many Ph.D.s in fusion science and engineering as America.

They are also dedicating way more public money to the effort. China is estimated to be spending roughly $1.5 billion a year on fusion – nearly twice recent annual U.S. federal funding for fusion-energy sciences. This is frustrating because, in 2020, hundreds of scientists published a long-range plan for the United States to deliver fusion energy and to advance plasma science.

But the United States Congress never fully funded the infrastructure envisioned in those plans. After it was announced that a massive state-funded Chinese project called the Comprehensive Research Facility for Fusion Technology (CRAFT) was close to coming online – complete with a $700 million 100-acre fusion campus in eastern China that will house a new tokamak (a magnetic confinement machine designed to harness fusion energy by containing superheated plasma in a vacuum vessel) – Andrew Holland, the CEO of the Fusion Industry Association, noticed that China's CRAFT facility looked an awful lot like one included in the plan our scientists released in 2020: "Congress has not done anything to spend the money to put this into action," he said. "We published this thing, and the Chinese then went and built it."

Not only are they copying our designs and moving fast to make them a reality, but they are also investing heavily in advanced material development – quickly cornering the supply chain for many of the

materials needed for fusion projects (think high power magnets, specific metals, capacitors, and power semiconductors).

…. and that just covers the fusion projects China is somewhat transparent about. In January 2025, satellite photos were released that appear to show a new large-scale laser fusion research center in Mianyang, China. Analysts believe this facility is likely focused on inertial confinement fusion (ICF), which rapidly compresses and heats tiny fuel pellets until their atoms fuse. This allows scientists to replicate and study the effects of nuclear weapons without performing an actual nuclear test. These types of facilities can also work on pulsed-power fusion. Pulsed power releases stored electrical energy in short, intense bursts to compress and heat fuel to extreme temperatures (kind of like a controlled lightning bolt).

Either way, these types of military fusion programs are positioning China to lead in next-level, pioneering nuclear-weapons science.

We can't let this go unanswered. President Trump championed advanced nuclear energy during his first term, although his administration's proposed budgets were less generous toward fusion research than the funding Congress ultimately provided.

In his second term, however, the administration has made fusion leadership an explicit priority, proposing more than $1 billion annually for Fusion Energy Sciences, creating a new Office of Fusion to coordinate commercialization efforts, and continuing and expanding public-private programs intended to turn America's scientific lead into commercial fusion power.

That's progress. But compared with the scale and speed of China's state-backed effort, this is not nearly enough money *or* attention. In 2025, several U.S. senators and fusion experts released a strategy for maintaining U.S. leadership in the fusion race. Its recommendation was considerably more ambitious: an additional $10 billion federal investment to build critical research infrastructure, accelerate commercialization-focused R&D, support fusion pilot plants and develop the domestic supply chain. < Again, I recognize this is a ton of money and cuts will have to be made elsewhere… read on! >

In classic Phase One style, China's energy revolution kills multiple birds with one stone. Not only does it call for widespread domestic

electrification, but also for dominant green energy exports… which means that China is becoming a green-energy superpower… which means they are quickly conquering the global market.

From solar farms to wind turbines to batteries to electric buses, Beijing's lead as the world's green salesman is overwhelming. Chinese firms produce over 80 percent of the world's solar panels, over 90 percent of solar cells, and roughly 95 percent of solar wafers. They own the global wind energy sector, controlling over 60 percent of wind turbine production capacity. Chinese manufacturers account for over 70 percent of new global wind installations and China holds around the lion's share (by far) of global wind energy patents. China produces around 85 percent of cathode active material and around 90 percent of anode active material for EV batteries, which leads to…

China's electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing industry crushes even the closest competitor. China now has well over 100 brands offering electric cars and half of its domestic new cars are powered by batteries.

The leading Chinese electric vehicle maker BYD – which, in a 2011 interview, Elon Musk laughed off as bush league but now expresses great admiration for – passed Tesla as the world's leader in electric car sales in 2025 and is building and/or buying assembly lines in Brazil, Hungary, Thailand and Uzbekistan, with future ones planned for Indonesia and Mexico.

BYD delivered over a million vehicles beyond China's borders in 2025, over double the year before. In the first quarter of 2025, BYD's market value hit almost $162 billion – more than the value of Ford, General Motors, and Volkswagen combined.

Not only are China's sales numbers larger, but their cars are arguably better. Xiaomi – often called the "Apple of China" – offers cars that are setting records at major racetracks around the world, and some Chinese EVs can now travel 500 miles on a single charge and recharge to 80 percent in under twenty minutes.

After visiting China multiple times, Ford Motors Company's CEO Jim Farley said its electric vehicle progress is "the most humbling thing" he has ever seen and poses a serious threat to the American automaker: "They have far superior in-vehicle technology… the quality of their vehicles is far superior to what I see in the West. We are in a

global competition with China, and it's not just EVs. And if we lose this, we do not have a future Ford." Uh oh.

GUYS, THIS IS RIDICULOUS.
WE ARE THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.
THE GREAT NEWS IS THAT THE PROBLEM IS OBVIOUS.
AND NOW THAT WE HAVE IDENTIFIED THE PROBLEM,
WE CAN FIX IT.

The problem is our two-party political system. PERIOD. The fact that we have no long-term plan or strategy for practically anything – along with the vicious, fangs-out gang wars played out among political junkies – all comes down to Social Psych 101.

Realistic Conflict Theory explains that hostilities and resentments emerge when groups compete over what they believe to be limited but valuable resources. These emotions are amplified when the groups feel there can only be one winner and one loser (i.e., one group's gain is another's loss). This causes feelings of prejudgment and discrimination and leads to groups developing negative stereotypes and antagonistic attitudes toward their "competitors." Sound familiar?

As a result, it then becomes all about – not the American people or solving our problems or securing our future – but *the game of politics*.

For instance, instead of understanding that solar and wind projects and subsidies for electric vehicles and heat pumps aren't necessarily about "libtards" being "woke," our current president – – who believes coal is "beautiful" and "clean" and who calls petroleum the "liquid gold under our feet," which is what Jed Clampett called it in 1962 – – energizes his political base by saying the green revolution is the "greatest hoax in history" and that Chinese manufacturers sell wind turbines (which, of course, are the "SCAM OF THE CENTURY!") to "stupid people."

His comments underscore how we have allowed the Republican Party to capture the energy narrative and incorrectly frame the issue as some hippy-dippy, anti-oil and gas industry conspiracy – which is just

not true. Every time Republicans say things like green technologies are the "greatest con job" ever, they think they are really stick'n it to those dumb tie-dye liberals in California. But what they're really doing is sabotaging America's ability to remain a dominant superpower.

It's true that moving from a high-carbon to a low-carbon energy system will protect our environment. But it's as much about moving to renewable resources before non-renewable ones run out. It's as much about securing an energy source that is less economically volatile and more diversified both geologically and technologically – two things that will greatly strengthen our national security. It's as much about market forces and straight-up economics. It's about not only the U.S domestic market but even more about the *world market.*

The thing that makes ZERO sense is that the same people who are trying to kill solar and wind projects and subsidies for electric vehicles and heat pumps are the same people who say they want to revive U.S. manufacturing.

But revive it for *what*?

Sure, the pandemic proved we need to bring vital goods back from overseas and that we must stop solely relying on "just in time" supply chains. And – yes – it's true the U.S. won World War II in part by producing more of everything than our enemies. In fact, in 1942 an American factory assembled a supply ship in less than five days.

But America no longer has that type of manufacturing capability. Hey, I'm all for building it back! But I hate to break it to the Trump/Vance administration: If we're not going to sell our products to the world market, there is really no need to. Our domestic needs simply don't justify it. This is yet another reason – out of many – their trade wars make no sense (read more on p. 636). Being a good ally isn't about just about being nice to our friends. If we push everyone away, who are we going to sell our stuff to? Does Donald Trump & Co. ever even think about that reality?

On the flip side, it will be a slam dunk for America if we decide to go all-in on global trade. Analysts estimate there is a $130 *trillion* cumulative global market opportunity in clean energy technology

through 2050. Right now, the United States captures only a small share of the global trade in many of these technologies, while China alone accounted for roughly half of global exports of key clean-energy technologies in 2025 – so just imagine the possible upside!

< Sidebar: A quick word about "globalization," defined here as the interconnectedness and interdependence of world economies, cultures, and populations, driven by cross-border trade in goods, services, tech, and capital flows.

Some people say globalization has resulted in wage stagnation for low-skilled U.S. workers and has led to job losses through outsourcing and, without question, global trade has hit certain sectors of our economy hard. That said, globalization is not wholly responsible for the displacement of the American worker. Even if we halt all progression toward globalization – including imports and outsourcing – automation, productivity improvements, changing consumer demand and technological change alone are causing some jobs to become obsolete.

One of the great strengths of a capitalist economy, however, is its ability to adapt – to create new industries, new businesses, and new kinds of work as old ways disappear. A healthy capitalist system should not try to freeze the economy in place; it should give people a realistic opportunity to acquire new skills, move into new work, and share in the prosperity that economic change creates.

Unfortunately, that doesn't mean every displaced worker can easily make the transition. The great news is that, if we are *proactive*, we can make the landing as soft as possible for those who may face hardships because of these shifts. Believe me, it is far better to endure a little pain now – while we still have control over how to absorb it – than to live in denial until the music just stops and there aren't enough chairs… *which is exactly why we need a comprehensive, well-planned strategy*.

To that end, 1787 has really cool ones to help with this transition. Read about *America's Best Chance*, our education reform initiative, on p. 608 and *U.S. Works*, our jobs program, on p. 258 of the *Policy Guide*. >

A two-part report from Boston Consulting Group – one the world's "Big Three" management consulting firms – found that the U.S. has an opportunity to boost economic growth, create millions of jobs, and solidify America's position as a global leader in the clean energy marketplace by creating an unparalleled advantage across ten clean energy technologies (the think tank Third Way and Breakthrough Energy commissioned the report).

The first part of the report revealed six of these – electric vehicles, clean steel, low-carbon hydrogen, long-duration energy storage, direct air capture, and advanced nuclear small modular reactors – and estimated that "American players could enjoy a cumulative domestic market in these technologies that will be worth from $9 trillion to $10 trillion from now through 2050."

But it gets even better: "U.S. players stand to gain far more by developing a competitive edge that gives them a leading position in global markets. We estimate that the cumulative global serviceable addressable market (SAM) for U.S. companies in the six technologies – which encompasses all countries where US exports are possible – could be worth a staggering $60 trillion through 2050 in prioritized value chain segments."

The second part of the report added geothermal, carbon capture utilization and storage, offshore wind, and solar to the list and surmised that "the priority value chain segments within these four technologies will have a cumulative global market size of $70 trillion between now and 2050, and U.S. industries are well-positioned to grab a large share."

So, here's the trillion-dollar question: If we do decide to bring our manufacturing, in Donald Trump's words, "roaring back," why on God's green earth would we not kill multiple birds with one stone when we do it – *like China does*?

Ships are a great example. Since 2017, China has been the largest shipbuilder on the planet. Fourteen of the twenty largest shipyards in the world by the size of their order books are Chinese. Of the 89 million deadweight tons of commercial ships built worldwide in 2024, 50.8 million – 57 percent – were built in China. Its largest state-owned shipbuilder produced more commercial vessels by tonnage that year than the entire American shipbuilding industry has built since the end

of World War II. U.S. Navy data puts China's overall shipbuilding capacity by gross tonnage at more than *200 times* that of the United States. In 2023, China delivered 972 commercial ships; the United States delivered seven.

China isn't building ships because they like to see them bob up and down in their own harbor – *they sell them to people around the world.* Companies around the globe purchase 75 percent of ships built at China's dual-use shipyards. This obviously provides billions of dollars in revenue, but it does *way* more: It transfers key technologies from government laboratories and academic institutions into China's naval industrial base.

This so-called "military-civil fusion" strategy – one that integrates military and commercial production at China's shipyards – speeds up the adoption of innovative technology, reduces production costs, and increases their capacity to build, repair and sustain its fleet.

Guys, we have got to start thinking more like this. Donald Trump, JD Vance, and other Republicans can call green technologies whatever kooky, eighth grade-schoolyard names they want, but whether they like it or not, this is where the world is headed… and if we don't pull ourselves together – fast – we're going to miss the boat from all sides.

Low-carbon power sources provided more than 40 percent of the world's electricity in 2024, and global investment in clean energy was nearly double investment in fossil fuels. Worldwide, renewable energy accounted for 92.5 percent of all new power-generating capacity added in 2024, and renewables represented 46.4 percent of all installed electricity-generating capacity. Solar alone accounted for more than three-quarters of the renewable capacity added that year. And in 2026, renewable energy is expected to overtake coal as the world's largest source of electricity.

We've already covered China's insane progress in this transition, and in June 2025, the European Union (EU) – one of the world's largest economies – produced more electricity from solar power than from any other source for the first time ever. That month, roughly three-quarters of EU electricity came from non-fossil-fuel sources.

The New York Times reports that "countries like Brazil, India and Vietnam are rapidly expanding solar and wind power. Poorer countries

like Ethiopia and Nepal are leapfrogging over gasoline-burning cars to battery-powered ones. Nigeria, a petrostate, plans to build its first solar-panel manufacturing plant. Morocco is creating a battery hub to supply European automakers. Santiago, the capital of Chile, has electrified more than half of its bus fleet in recent years." < They are doing this, of course, with cheap equipment coming from China. >

And despite what it sometimes feels like, the U.S. has made major progress as well. In 2005, non-fossil-fuel sources supplied around 28 percent of American electricity generation. By 2025, that figure had climbed to more than 40 percent, with renewables supplying about 24 percent of utility-scale generation and nuclear power contributing another 18 percent. And in 2025, renewable energy and battery storage accounted for more than 90 percent of new utility-scale power capacity added to the U.S. grid. This is a tremendous leap forward.

Texas, of all places, has emerged as an American clean-energy powerhouse. It produces more wind power than any other state, and in 2024 it surpassed California to become the national leader in utility-scale solar capacity. Texas has also become one of the country's largest markets for grid-scale battery storage.

That growth accelerated after passage of the Biden-era Inflation Reduction Act in 2022, which created hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of incentives and federal support for clean energy, electric vehicles, domestic manufacturing and other emissions-reducing technologies. Texas became one of the nation's biggest destinations for the resulting private investment, particularly in solar generation and battery storage.

This was an incredibly important development for Texas at a time when the state's power grid faces major challenges thanks to enormous surges in demand from new manufacturing plants and large data centers for artificial intelligence. The Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) – Texas' grid manager – predicts its demand for power could increase by more than 50 percent within five years, prompting Pablo Vegas, ERCOT's CEO, to say that any legislation restricting renewable energy sources would compound the grid's existing risks.

One of the Trump/Vance administration's justifications for its hardline stance against wind and solar is that increasing our reliance on

intermittent renewable energy will make the electric grid less reliable. There is a legitimate challenge here: because the wind doesn't always blow and the sun doesn't always shine, a grid increasingly dependent on these resources requires adequate storage, transmission, dispatchable power and other means of balancing supply and demand. But the evidence does not support the broader claim that a grid with a high proportion of renewable energy is inherently unreliable.

Republicans frequently point to Germany's aggressive *Energiewende* – its transition away from fossil fuels and nuclear power and toward efficiency and renewable energy – as a cautionary tale, although I'm not sure why they bring this up because the German experience seems to make my point far better than it makes theirs.

The most common measure of grid reliability is the System Average Interruption Duration Index (SAIDI), which measures the average duration of electricity interruptions experienced by customers during a year. By this measure, Germany operates one of the world's most reliable electric grids. In 2020, Germany's federal grid regulator reported an average interruption time of just 10.73 minutes per customer – the lowest recorded since it began publishing the figures in 2006. The regulator specifically concluded that Germany's energy transition and increasing share of distributed generation had not negatively affected the quality of its electricity supply.

Although it's not as scientific, I can offer real-life knowledge of this. Now I must warn you, this might sound a little hostile because I happened to be in Texas – without water and power for days and days – during the electricity fiasco that transpired there in February 2021 and I have never been so freak'n miserable in my entire life.

Never has a state loathed regulation or government intervention as has my beloved Texas. At one point during the crisis, former Texas governor and former Secretary of Energy Rick Perry actually said that "Texans would be without electricity for longer than three days to keep the federal government out of their business." Speak for yourself dude. WE WERE FREEZING!

So, I was already in a bad mood when posts on my Facebook feed started blaming the Texas power outages on windmills (never mind that, at the time, two-thirds of the winter electricity demand in Texas

was generated by natural gas and wind power made up less than 10 percent of the state's generation mix). After months of election lies and conspiracy theories, this idiotic, politically motivated garbage nearly sent me over the edge.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott went on The Sean Hannity Show and said, "This shows how the Green New Deal would be a deadly deal for the United States of America," while the Fox News scroll at the bottom of the screen declared "Green Energy Failure." I mean, what? These statements are just laughable.

Politicians and conservative media trying to gaslight people into believing this massive failure was the fault of windmills is beyond the pale. Yes, non-winterized wind turbines froze. But, since they were not properly winterized *because they weren't forced to be*, so did power plants, natural gas wells and gathering systems, pipelines, oil rigs, piles of coal, and even a nuclear reactor water pump. This means that the main culprit in the Great Texas Blackout of 2021 was the inability of natural gas to get to power plants… and no amount of spin on Fox News is going to change that fact (read more about why and how this happened on p. 82 in the *Policy Guide*).

< Sidebar: I wasn't going to mention this here but, while I'm at it – and since this traumatic flashback to 2021 is irritating me all over again – let me say this: *Global warming* refers to the long-term increase in Earth's average temperature, which is happening. That's just a fact. Global warming, in turn, changes the climate. *Climate change* is the broader phenomenon – including rising sea levels, changing precipitation patterns, melting ice, shifting ecosystems and changes in the frequency and intensity of many kinds of extreme weather. As the planet warms, heat waves become more frequent and extreme, heavy rainfall becomes more intense in many regions, and drought and flooding risks change substantially.

None of this means that cold weather disappears. Even on a warming planet, individual places can still experience brutal cold snaps, snowstorms and record-low temperatures. So, when people use the fact that parts of America have historic cold and icy weather any given day as proof that there is no *global warming*, they're confusing weather

with climate. A single cold spell neither disproves nor proves global warming. What matters is the long-term global trend – and that trend is unmistakably upward. The twisting and misunderstanding of this bug me to no end, so I just wanted to clear it up while I had the chance. >

The takeaway from all this is that no energy source is completely reliable, which is the very reason we need to *diversify*. In truth, we don't have a choice. This country desperately needs more electricity – regardless of where it comes from.

Regional stress and capacity crunches are expected to become much more common as electricity demand grows faster than generating and transmission infrastructure can be deployed. The surge is being driven by new manufacturing, electrification and, increasingly, massive data centers needed to support artificial intelligence. Some of these facilities can require hundreds of megawatts of electricity, while enormous data-center campuses can consume power on the scale of entire cities. In 2023, U.S. data centers consumed about 4.4 percent of the nation's electricity; by 2028, the Department of Energy's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory estimates they could consume as much as 12 percent.

A December 2024 report from Grid Strategies, a power sector consulting firm, reveals that the U.S. "5-year load growth forecast has increased by almost a factor of five, from 23 GW to 128 GW."

"It is worrisome that strategic industries, such as the development of an American advanced manufacturing sector or A.I. leadership, may face headwinds from the limited ability of the nation's electricity systems to respond. Electricity systems need to supply new generation, connect that generation to load, and – of course – connect new load to the system. There are real risks to America's economic, technological, and geopolitical leadership if the grid can't keep up with demand."

Report after report like this one make clear: Our ability as a nation to generate huge amounts of electricity the cheapest and cleanest way possible has a direct connection to our ability to remain a superpower – both economically and militarily.

But I guess the Trump/Vance administration didn't get the memo. From the time the Inflation Reduction Act was passed in 2022 through

the first quarter of 2025, companies invested $321 billion in clean manufacturing, electricity generation and industrial facilities, helping bring 2,369 new facilities online across the country. And there was much more in the pipeline: another $522 billion in announced investment across 2,217 facilities, associated with approximately 686,000 projected construction and operational jobs.

Ironically, the overwhelming majority of this investment was flowing into Republican-held congressional districts. Nevertheless, the Republicans' Big Beautiful Bill eliminated or sharply curtailed tax credits for a wide range of climate-friendly technologies, while the Trump/Vance administration threw up additional roadblocks to renewable-energy projects – like blocking federal permits for wind and attacking "farmer destroying solar," whatever in the world that means.

The administration also cancelled the federal environmental review for a solar project in the Nevada desert known as Esmeralda 7 – one of the world's largest proposed solar developments, which would have had enough generating capacity to power nearly two million homes – and halted construction on multiple wind farms, although it has since suffered a string of federal court defeats on that front.

On October 1, 2025 alone, the Department of Energy announced that it was terminating 321 financial awards supporting 223 energy projects worth approximately $7.56 billion (they didn't release a public list identifying the individual projects whose awards were being terminated).

Now listen, I recognize there may be no better illustration of the differences between China's system of government and ours than this. The Center for Strategic and International Studies estimates that, from 2009 through 2023, the Chinese government provided $231 ***billion*** in support for its electric-vehicle industry, through purchase subsidies, tax exemptions, charging infrastructure, research and development, and government procurement.

That's what one-party socialist systems can do. They can spend as much as they want on whatever they want. They can build things fast and have little to no cumbersome regulation. They can "encourage" a "996" work culture – 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week (although such

extreme schedules have been declared illegal under Chinese labor law, they are still widespread amid notoriously weak enforcement).

They also call the shots – 100%. They want a new transmission line right through a heavily populated neighborhood? They go right ahead and build it no matter who or what's in its way – regardless of how their citizens feel about it… unlike in America, where the Trump/Vance administration just cancelled a $4.9 billion loan guarantee for the $11 billion Grain Belt Express, a major transmission project that would cross 800 miles of farmland to deliver wind energy generated in Kansas to deliver electricity to more than three million homes (the project had drawn intense backlash from some landowners and Republicans).

I'm certainly not suggesting we adopt even one or two aspects of China's economic model (as you will see in a few minutes when we cover the Trump/Vance administration's embrace of corporate statism). But the U.S. giving tax breaks for domestic manufacturing or a federal government subsidy here and there for electric vehicles, batteries, wind turbines, solar panels and nuclear reactors until carbon-free technology matures beyond the need for subsidies does not make us China. It makes us responsible realists.

That said, one maddening thing we have to work through is the harsh reality that our Democratic and Republican leaders have allowed our budget deficit to drastically widen ($1.8 trillion) and our total public debt to completely blow out ($40 trillion) …yet we don't have squat to show for it because we have been spending on consumption instead of investment.

It would be one thing if our leaders had borrowed all this money to buy ourselves state-of-the-art airports, subways, railways and ports; sophisticated fiber-optic lines, bandwidth and wireless networks; modern schools, roads, bridges, levees, dams and water systems; hi-tech electricity-distribution grids; or extensive high-speed rail systems. But they didn't. So, we have nothing. Nada.

You and I don't have to be Nobel Prize-winning economists to understand that we can't continue borrowing for consumption rather than investment. But we also can't afford to not invest in our future, especially considering what China has been up to.

We'll discuss these and other budgetary issues later in this section and on p. 407. In the meantime, I hope we can all agree that to best leverage the dollars we do spend, we should start killing multiple birds with one stone like China does.

In the case of investing in American-made clean technologies, we can kill at least five birds with one stone. We can: 1) Increase our domestic electricity supply; 2) Move more quickly to renewable resources before non-renewable ones run out; 3) Secure energy sources that are less economically volatile and more diversified; 4) Shift more rapidly from a high-carbon to a low-carbon energy system to protect our environment for future generations; and number five….

We can finally give China a run for its money in the world market. Let's look at electric vehicles (EVs) as an example. Following years of investments into EV technology, the Detroit Big Three – General Motors, Ford Motor and Stellantis (formally Chrysler) – announced over $50 billion in combined write-downs. EV sales fell over 30 percent in the fourth quarter of 2025 and over $20 billion in previously announced investments in EV and battery facilities were cancelled.

Donald Trump, JD Vance and other Republicans would have you believe that this is because Americans just aren't interested in driving electric vehicles. But there is actually pretty strong evidence suggesting their claims are inaccurate.

Even though U.S. consumers remain a bit leery of fully committing to EVs – in part because of relatively high sticker prices, along with concerns about battery range and access to charging stations – sales of hybrid vehicles, which combine gasoline engines with electric motors and batteries, continue to soar. Hybrid sales have increased more than 80 percent since 2023, to more than 2 million vehicles a year. Through July 2026, hybrids accounted for 15.4 percent of all new vehicles sold in the United States, compared with just 5.9 percent for fully electric vehicles.

There is also strong demand for electric vehicles on the used market, where lower prices can make the technology affordable to many more buyers. Sales of used electric vehicles rose 40 percent in July 2025 from a year earlier and continued to experience double-digit year-over-year growth in 2026.

So then, what's up with the $19.5 billion hit Ford was forced to take as it scaled back its EV ambitions and shifted more resources toward hybrids? It wasn't simply that Americans didn't want electric cars. For one, Ford appears to have misread the kind of EVs Americans want to drive. When it comes to EVs, Americans seemingly want smaller, affordable models – not an expensive big ass F-150 Lightning pickup. < Ford is not alone. Tesla's Model S, Model X, and Cybertruck; GMC's EV Hummer; Honda's Acura ZDX sport utility vehicle; and the Porsche Taycan all struggled. One exception is the Cadillac Optiq, a midsize SUV, whose sales grew by 65 percent in the first quarter of 2026. >

So, okay, U.S. automakers misread the market a little, which was a major factor in their write-downs. But automakers' mistakes weren't the only major factor. They were also hit by extraordinary whiplash in federal policy over just four years. In fact, Ford itself cited "regulatory changes," along with lower-than-expected demand and high costs**,** when it announced its $19.5 billion restructuring.

U.S. auto executives had just sharpened their strategy to comply with Biden-era policies, investing billions adapting their factories, battery supply chains and product plans to take advantage of Biden-era incentives and comply with increasingly stringent emissions and fuel-economy requirements… just to have the Trump/Vance administration and Republican Congress come in and reverse much of it. Federal tax credits for new, used and leased/commercial electric vehicles were terminated; fuel-economy and emissions policy was weakened; and tariffs on imported vehicles, components, steel and aluminum simultaneously slashed billions of dollars from their bottom lines and disrupted their supply chains.

This is yet another clear distinction between China's form of government and ours: consistent inconsistency. China's industrial policy has plenty of disadvantages, but *consistency* isn't usually one of them. American automakers, by contrast, can be encouraged by one administration to spend tens of billions reorganizing their businesses around one set of rules – only to have the next administration rewrite those rules before the factories are even finished.

Chaotic and unpredictable policy is a killer for Corporate America. Companies responsible to shareholders, customers, employees and the communities they serve must make investment decisions based on the world as it exists *today* – even when those investments won't pay off for five, ten or twenty years. They must decide where to build factories, which technologies to develop and how to deploy billions of dollars in capital *today*. Which means they need something our political system has become increasingly bad at providing: some reasonable degree of consistency about what the rules will be *tomorrow*.

Remarkably, our automakers – God bless them – don't seem to have concluded from all this red ink that electrification is dead. Quite the opposite. Ford, GM, Toyota and Volkswagen are pursuing very different strategies, but all remain committed to putting more batteries and electric motors into the vehicles Americans drive.

Despite its setbacks, Ford management has reiterated that, far from abandoning the idea of cleaner vehicles altogether, their new strategy is to pull back from unprofitable designs and redeploy capital to models with higher near-term profitability. Ford is continuing to develop a new low-cost EV platform designed to support a family of smaller, more affordable electric vehicles, and expect around half their global volume to consist of hybrids, extended-range vehicles, and EVs by 2030.

Even though General Motors' EV story is much like Ford's – GM took a $6 billion hit for similarly shifting its strategy – its CEO Mary Barra recently said that the company "believes the long-term future is profitable electric vehicle production, and this continues to be our North Star."

Foreign companies are also hangin' in there with the U.S. market. Around half of Toyota's U.S. vehicle sales are hybrids or EVs – around double the industry's overall share – and they expect 70 percent of U.S. vehicle sales across its Toyota and Lexus brands to be "electrified" by 2030. Already, some of their most popular models, like the Camry sedan and Sienna minivan, are now sold exclusively as hybrids.

Toyota's North Carolina plant is a huge $13.9 billion facility that began production in late 2025 as the company's first U.S. automotive battery factory, producing lithium-ion batteries for hybrid and electric

vehicles – and announced plans to invest up to an additional $10 billion in American manufacturing over the next five years.

Volkswagen, meanwhile, has confirmed plans to develop hybrid versions of its bestselling U.S. SUVs, including the Tiguan and Atlas, after its American dealers pushed hard for hybrid options as consumer demand for the technology surged.

Our automakers are doing their part and being America TOUGH… which is why making a massive ***transition*** like the one from cars with solely internal combustion engines to electric motors is exactly the time the U.S. government should jump in and help them survive the lean times – giving them time to position themselves to ***compete***.

It makes perfect sense that hybrids are a gateway to EVs because, not only can hybrids get up to 50 percent better gas mileage than comparable conventional gas-powered vehicles, but they seem more practical to consumers who are still reluctant to commit to pure EVs because of price, battery range, and/or charging station concerns.

However, this extra step means it will likely take our automakers more time to scale. The federal government can stand in the gap for them as they work to scale up – allowing for expansion without a proportional rise in expenses while they enhance operational efficiency, automate processes, and leverage technology to handle higher demand even as they maintain quality and profitability.

< The charging station chicken-and-egg challenge is another area where the federal government can help bridge the gap. Consumers will only be comfortable purchasing EVs if rapid charging is as easy as using a gas pump, but private businesses can't make money until more EVs are on the road. EV charging infrastructure is growing quickly, though in the United States it remains unevenly distributed and heavily concentrated in California and other major metropolitan and coastal markets. By early 2025, China already had nearly 14 million charging points – about 4 million public and 10 million private – and the total continued growing rapidly during the year. The United States had roughly 200,000 public charging ports going into 2025, with that number also climbing substantially during the year (the U.S. figures don't include the millions of Americans who charge their EVs at home). >

We need to get this show on the road because, although steep tariffs and other trade barriers have effectively kept Chinese automakers out of the U.S. passenger-vehicle market for the time begin, they won't be kept out of our market forever… and you can bet your bottom dollar they are already in their factories, wearing cowboy hats for inspiration as they take the bull by the horns to figure out what American pickup buyers want (and they'll figure it out faster than you can say *Cowboy Up*).

Some would argue that, if the Chinese are coming anyway, why should our carmakers even bother? After all, American oil and gas companies made the decision years ago that, even though a peak in supply is inevitable, they wouldn't pivot to solar and wind investments because they simply didn't yield as high of returns.

Okay, I have thoughts on this but, before I go any further, I'd like to remind everyone that I'm from East Texas. I started my career in the oil and gas business. I have family, clients, and lots of friends whose livelihoods depend on the oil and gas business. Believe me, I get it. The oil patch is not just a job; *it's a way of life*.

I love all you guys, but I gotta say: What an insanely irresponsible, short-sighted approach. Unfortunately, I've seen this unwise attitude my entire career, which, because I'm old, has been a long time. Regardless of the facts on the ground, it's just DRILL, BABY, DRILL …*right this second*. With little regard for tomorrow. Just churn and burn until the next inevitable bust.

This is wildly irresponsible on so many levels. Sure, oil and gas executives have been able to generate tons of near-term cash for their investors for an extra year, or two or maybe even ten. *But then what?*

< Note to Self: You probably should start looking for new clients because several of your current ones will probably stop speaking to you after reading this. In fact, that ship probably sailed when you uttered the words "low-carbon energy system." Also, you may need to find somewhere else to go for Thanksgiving this year. >

WAKE-UP FELLAS. Even Saudi Arabia doesn't see a conflict between oil and gas and renewable energy. *They see dollar signs*. Three Saudi companies – ACWA Power, the Water and Electricity Holding Company (Badeel), and Saudi Aramco Power Company (SAPCO) –

are jointly developing $8.3 billion worth of renewable-energy projects with 15 gigawatts of capacity, including 12 GW of solar and 3 GW of wind. The projects are part of Saudi Arabia's National Renewable Energy Program and PIF's mandate to develop 70 percent of the Kingdom's targeted renewable-energy capacity by 2030.

We need to get with the program. The good news is that this is not nearly as hard as people try to make it. Lobbyists, hard-core activists, and Democratic and Republican politicians like to portray our energy portfolio as a black and white issue: *fossil fuels v. renewable energy*. This is generally where the argument gets super heated and people on both sides get really ticked off. This is also where, as in most political arguments, everyone develops tunnel vision and stops listening.

We can avoid the drama if, from the jump, all sides understand that a successful outcome depends on cooperation, collaboration, and a little bit of patience. This is a *process*.

Fossil fuels and green energy sources *are* *not* mutually exclusive, at least at this point in the process. Picture a large brass scale like the scales of justice. The left side of the scale represents fossil fuels, and the right side represents renewable energy. Currently, the scale is tipped toward fossil fuels because renewable sources in the U.S. don't yet provide enough energy. But, as we begin to implement an intelligent energy shift, the scales will slowly begin to balance, then begin tipping toward renewable energy.

It really comes down to this: There are many different types of energy sources (like coal, oil, natural gas, wind, hydro, nuclear, solar, geothermal, and hydrogen). Our simple goal can be to phase these out, dirtiest to cleanest. See? Simple.

The undeniable truth is that there are many reasons beyond environmental concerns that make this shift necessary, including the fact that our feverish oil and gas drilling often leads to massive gluts in the global energy markets and the fact that this nation is running out of water at an alarming pace. These reasons join geologic limits, maturing oil and gas fields and declining wells, increasingly difficult wastewater disposal, and a financial landscape in which producers no longer have the same access to abundant private-equity capital to fund relentless drilling. < Read more about all this on p. 82 of the *Policy Guide*. Also,

another Note to Self: You should probably go ahead and make those Thanksgiving reservations at Cracker Barrel right away. >

The moral of the story is that, even though the Trump/Vance years may slow our roll a little, we must push through and ***keep going***. This process takes time and we have a responsibility to set these things in motion to protect future generations of Americans.

So, that covers Phase One. Now we're on to Mao Zedong's Phase Two, known as the *strategic stalemate* phase. A hallmark of the *strategic stalemate* phase is building strength and recruiting allies while eroding the opposition's morale through propaganda and guerrilla attacks. Over time, Mao believed this erodes the enemy's will to fight and builds up the weaker force's strength.

This stage is tricky for China's "opposition" (the U.S) because it assumes our advance gets bogged down as we become overstretched (hmmm… bogged down? overstretched? seem familiar?). Meanwhile, all the underdog has to do is stay the course. Former U.S. secretary of state and national security advisor Henry Kissinger summed this phase up this way: "The conventional army loses if it does not win. The guerrilla wins if he does not lose."

This is the Point Where the Flaming Red Flags Better Start Waving, America!

The days of inadequate leadership, gaslighting, and distraction ARE OVER. Since we are already in Phase Two, we have NO MORE time to waste. After tolerating incompetence and irresponsibility for decades, we have to take back the wheel, buckle down, and get serious about protecting our future.

We have no choice but to make a hard correction and right the ship – FAST – because we cannot under any circumstance let China achieve

the third and final phase of Mao Zedong's brainchild: the *strategic offensive* phase, where the balance of power shifts in favor of the weaker force. Now, the stronger enemy is weakened and demoralized, allowing the weaker force to transition to conventional warfare and launch a final counter-offensive to retake lost territory and win the war.

If China reaches the *strategic offensive* phase, they will have tilted the global balance of power in their favor – *literally reshaping the entire global international order away from the United States.*

We have to Wake-Up America. This Can Happen. This is Not a Drill.

Listen up, my fellow Americans. I'm about to say something that Americans – including and especially myself – don't like to hear. In fact, Americans are pretty much hardwired *not* to hear it, but it must be said: If we don't wise up – AND FAST – we are going to lose. Yes, I said it. LOSE. We are going to LOSE to China.

… and I don't know about you, but I love this country and the people in it way too much to let that happen.

The great news is that it's not too late to correct our course. We are still THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. At this point, America retains enormous economic and military advantages. American companies dominate many of the world's most consequential industries, including technology, aerospace and defense, banking and capital markets, biotech and pharmaceuticals, media and entertainment, and professional services, while American universities remain among the world's leading centers of research and higher education.

Our private economy remains unmatched in its depth and capacity to finance innovation. The United States attracted nearly two-thirds of global venture-capital investment in 2025, with some $320 billion invested in American companies, and U.S. firms captured roughly three-quarters of all global venture funding for artificial intelligence. More than half of the world's 100 most valuable publicly traded corporations are American. And while the United States has only about

4 percent of the world's population, its stock markets account for around 44 percent of global equity-market capitalization.

Also, President Xi Jinping faces some real domestic challenges. China has serious economic and social imbalances; growth remains uneven; returns on investment are diminishing; consumer demand is sluggish; wages are depressed; productivity growth is slowing; housing is in a slump; the working age population is declining; youth unemployment is sky high; college graduates can't find work; birthrates are plunging; mental health is deteriorating; poisonous pollution, while better, is severe; and the human rights atrocities are still next level.

When I say next level, I mean truly next level. In truth, China is just one big human rights catastrophe. The U.S. State Department reports that in China:

> "Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; disappearances; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; involuntary or coercive medical or psychological practices; arbitrary arrest and detention by the government including, since 2017, of more than one million Uyghurs and members of other predominantly Muslim minority groups in extrajudicial internment camps, prisons, and an additional unknown number subjected to daytime-only "re-education" training; acts of transnational repression against individuals in other countries; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including unjustified arrests and criminal prosecution of journalists, lawyers, writers, bloggers, dissidents, petitioners, and others, and restrictions on internet freedom; restrictions of religious freedom; instances of coerced abortions and forced sterilization; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; prohibiting independent trade unions and systematic restrictions on workers' freedom of association; and significant presence of some of the worst forms of child labor."

< All these human rights abuses are abominable, but what the Chinese government is doing in Xinjiang to over one million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities – including mass detention, intense surveillance,

forced labor, and forced sterilization – must be stopped at once. Its actions are at best crimes against humanity and at worst genocide (China denies all allegations, claiming the vile facilities their victims are subjected to are "vocational training centers"). >

Meanwhile, many people in China feel their leaders are prioritizing world domination over their needs. As Chinese freelance writer Helen Gao wrote in a November 2025 New York Times guest essay, there is a "quiet desperation" among the Chinese people, captured in the Chinese phrase "wai qiang, zhong gan," roughly translated as "outwardly strong, inwardly brittle."

While their leaders were throwing money at other countries in 2019, for example, 40 percent of Chinese households – over 600 million people – were living on just $135 a month. At the same time, many local governments piled up debt to pay for infrastructure projects, so they didn't have the money to pay the salaries of teachers and other local workers.

As a result, young people in China – who had been content to live with limited freedoms if there were jobs and a chance for upward mobility – were seemingly activated by the pandemic. They were particularly angry about the social and economic havoc Covid wreaked, made worse by Beijing's lack of transparency and efforts to conceal any culpability China may have had in the origins of the crisis. Public protests, once thought to be virtually impossible, erupted. This sparked larger conversations about censorship, the treatment of whistleblowers and opposition, and the need for financial accountability at the top – which is obviously a very dangerous can of worms for Beijing to be forced to open.

All this at a time when President Xi seems to be on a major power trip (and maybe even a bit paranoid). In January 2026, he launched a purge of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) high command, including top generals Zhang Youxia, a childhood friend who he once called his "big brother," and Liu Zhenli – both of whom were considered among his closest allies. Xi has now removed five of the six generals appointed to the Central Military Commission (CMC) in 2022, leaving only Zhang Shengmin. It seems like he plans to keep his grip

on power through these periodic purges, which is yet another scheme straight from Mao Zedong's playbook.

< To be fair to Xi, Zhang was officially accused of leaking data regarding China's nuclear-weapons program to the United States; forming "political cliques;" and accepting bribes to promote officials – but God only knows whether any of that is true. >

Without question, the United States can solidify our lead while China is still in Phase Two. But for that to happen, from this point forward, every single policy decision we make – EVERY SINGLE ONE – must be made with tomorrow seared in our minds. We must keep our eyes firmly on the horizon and visualize the future we want for our *shining city upon the hill,* not only in the 21st century, but far beyond.

THAT MEANS WE MUST REJECT THE DYSTOPIAN VISION FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE BEING THRUST UPON US BY DONALD TRUMP, JD VANCE, MARCO RUBIO, AND CONGRESSIONAL REPUBLICANS.

Everything these guys do is designed to move us backward. They are *obsessed* with the past. Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and congressional Republicans long for the days when U.S. military bases were named after Confederate generals, women and black people were second-class citizens, and the Redskins and Indians took the field. They love the days when there were no emissions standards or wimpy toilets, and coal was king. They yearn for the time when Alcatraz was in full swing, police officers could beat people up, kids didn't have to be in stupid car seats, and there was a secretary of war. They pine for the days when Joseph McCarthy went after "communists," you could grab women by the p$$#, fly on a pedophile's jet without worry, and diversity wasn't yet a thing.

Their isolationist, imperialistic national security strategy prioritizes U.S. sovereignty over multilateral alliances and collective security, harkening back to the days when the world was carved up into spheres of influence. Taking the position of "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em," it

seems they have no problem with China and Russia dictating the rules in their own backyards as long as the United States has the freedom to do whatever we want to have total dominion over the entire Western Hemisphere.

In this Cold War-inspired mindset, strategic interests are key, which explains the Venezuela invasion and The Donald's obsession with the U.S. "owning" Greenland. And don't be fooled, locking down strategic assets is exactly why President Trump is doing these things – using the same logic that Vladimir Putin used when he brutally invaded Ukraine in 2022 in the first major land offensive for territorial advantage in Europe since World War II.

Even though Marco Rubio, the late Senator Lindsey Graham, and other Trump enablers turned themselves into pretzels trying to convince us that Venezuela was about "narcotrafficking," President Trump toppled Nicolás Maduro while pardoning ex-Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, who actually said – out loud – that he wanted to "stuff the drugs up the gringos' noses"…. which is why the narcotrafficking explanation made no sense from the jump.

What made perfect sense – and came as no surprise – was President Trump's announcement in late August 2026 that he had cut what he called the "biggest oil deal in world history" with President Delcy Rodríguez for preferential rights to 65 billion barrels of Venezuelan oil reserves. Essentially, America will take a 35 percent stake in a private company run by Alejandro Betancourt, a Venezuelan businessman who Swiss authorities have issued a warrant for in connection with a money laundering investigation. His company, North American Blue Energy Partners, will have the right to develop those 65 billion in reserves and America will have the right to 20 percent of what they produce at the cost of production. Colonialism at its finest.

In his role as Lord over the Western Hemisphere, President Trump believes Canada should be our 51st state; the Gulf of Mexico should be the Gulf of America; and we should control the Panama Canal. He endorsed political candidates in elections in Honduras and Chile; gave his buddy President Javier Milei of Argentina a $20 billion bailout; and, after his snatch and grab in Venezuela, turned his sites to U.S. intervention in Cuba, Colombia and even Mexico.

Then there's Greenland. Always Greenland. Without question, the allure of this semiautonomous territory of the kingdom of Denmark is understandable at a time when there is a worldwide scramble for the Arctic, both economically and militarily. The world's largest island, around three times the size of Texas, is located on the North American continent, to Canada's northeast, and is situated between North America, Western Europe and Russia. It is positioned along what is known as the GIUK Gap, a Cold War term that indicates a critical point between Greenland, Iceland and Britain that can protect the North Atlantic from Russian ships and submarines.

China and Russia – who have agreed to work together to develop new Arctic shipping routes – are clamoring to take advantage of the island's position as global warming opens more trade routes (an estimated 11,000 square miles of Greenland's ice sheets and glaciers have melted over the past thirty years).

The location of Greenland is especially useful to China and its "Polar Silk Road," as it creates shorter distances for China to ship goods via the Arctic and lets them avoid bottlenecks at the Suez Canal and the Malacca Strait. Melting ice will also bring more opportunities to drill for Greenland's 17.5 billion untapped barrels of oil and 148.2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and increase opportunities to mine its 1.5 million tons of reserves of rare-earth elements.

From a national security perspective, the U.S. military base located on Greenland, Pituffik Space Base, is strategically located for missile defense and space surveillance missions and includes a radar station that is part of our ballistic missile early-warning system… but we are far from alone in the Arctic. Russia has already reopened dozens of old Soviet military bases; its Northern Fleet and its main submarine base are headquartered on the Barents Sea near Murmansk; and its vessels operate freely in the North Atlantic. Russia is also playing Arctic wargames that include amphibious assaults in the glacial seas.

So, okay, sure. It would be awesome to "own" Greenland. But they have made it very clear it's not for sale. Either way, the bully posturing, tantrums and threats are unnecessary because, under a 1951 agreement, the U.S. maintains "the right of free access to and movement between the defense areas through Greenland" by land, air, and sea. Plus, the

agreement doesn't impose a specified numerical cap on U.S. personnel at Pituffik.

Not to mention that carrying out Donald Trump's Greenland "vision" by force would run headlong into U.S. law. The Senate ratified the North Atlantic Treaty, making it part of the "supreme Law of the Land" under the Constitution's Supremacy Clause. And Article 1 explicitly requires NATO members to settle international disputes peacefully and refrain from the threat or use of force inconsistent with the U.N. Charter (and shockingly, seizing territory from a fellow NATO ally is not among our treaty obligations).

In case there was any doubt of their intentions, the Trump/Vance administration actually wrote their thoughts down in a November 2025 National Security Strategy document. In what they called the "Trump Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine (named for President James Monroe's 1823 declaration that said the U.S. would not stand for outside powers interfering in the Western Hemisphere) they made it known that the United States will "reassert and enforce the Monroe Doctrine to restore American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere, and to protect our homeland and our access to key geographies throughout the region" and that they "will deny non-Hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or other threatening capabilities, or to own or control strategically vital assets, in our Hemisphere."

The "Trump Corollary" mirrors the "Roosevelt Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine when, in 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt said the United States would not only block European meddling in the Hemisphere but act as an "international police power" to intervene in countries vulnerable to debt crises, chronic instability, or what Roosevelt regarded as governmental "wrongdoing or impotence." Ultimately, in the early 20th century, the United States used the "Roosevelt Corollary" to justify U.S. military interventions and occupations in Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic.

The Monroe Doctrine – which was neither a treaty nor a law, but a unilateral statement of American foreign policy – came at a time when the United States was still a young republic of around ten million people and 24 states, with a small military and limited ability to project

power around the world. Two hundred years later, the United States is the world's preeminent military and financial power. So, invoking Monroe today is not a return to the geopolitical circumstances of 1823; it's the world's most powerful country invoking a doctrine conceived when America was not yet powerful enough to enforce it on its own. Because of this…

The national security strategy Republicans – including Donald Trump, JD Vance & Marco Rubio – have laid out is <u>not</u> what a strong, strategic world power would do.

It's what an empire in decline would do.

There is *<u>no</u> <u>chance</u>* that a plan allowing China (in Asia) and Russia (in Europe/Eurasia) to operate unrestrained while the United States runs around the Western Hemisphere invading countries, overthrowing leaders, and just taking everyone else's stuff ends in anything but total disaster.

THAT'S NOT A STRATEGY, THAT'S SUPERPOWER SUICIDE.

< Dr. Stacie Goddard from Wellesley College and Dr. Abraham Newman from Georgetown University suggest that the new world order being promoted by the Trump/Vance administration and other Republicans is more like something out of the 16th-century rather than the 19th. The "neoroyalist order," as they call it, "centers on an international system structured by a small group of hyper elites (cliques). Such cliques seek to legitimize their authority through appeals to their exceptionalism in order to generate durable material and status hierarchies based on the extraction of financial and cultural tributes."

They suggest other modern-day leaders have embraced elements of a neoroyalist order, including Recep Erdoğan (Turkey), Narendra Modi (India), Viktor Orbán (Hungary), Mohammed bin Salman (Saudi

Arabia), Xi Jinping (China) and, naturally, Vladimir Putin – which should send a chill down all our spines.

In a guest essay in The New York Times, the two experts say that "America's foreign policy establishment has morphed from a set of staid bureaucracies into a royal family, such as the Tudors or Hapsburgs. Foreign policy is molded in the hands of the court clique – a small, exclusive network. Some are in Mr. Trump's cabinet, like Marco Rubio, who is simultaneously the secretary of state, interim national security adviser, acting chief archivist and perhaps viceroy of Venezuela."

"Mr. Trump's clique also centers on his family members and individuals who donated to his 2024 campaign (like Elon Musk and Paul Singer, the billionaire founder and co-chief executive of the hedge fund Elliott Investment Management). Ukraine peace negotiations continue to be led by Mr. Trump's fellow real estate magnate Steve Witkoff and Mr. Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner."

"While Mr. Trump boasts that the Venezuela intervention will increase American prosperity, there is actually little promise of national benefit. Instead, the gains appear to be flowing to Mr. Trump and his insiders. Amber Energy, an affiliate of Mr. Singer's hedge-fund company, won an auction for Citgo, the U.S. subsidiary of the Venezuelan state-owned oil company, a few months ago and is now strategically positioned to play a key role in refining and distributing that oil. As a down payment, Mr. Trump announced that up to 50 million barrels would be sold and that "that money will be controlled by me." The first sale was routed through the company of another megadonor… fifty million barrels is a mere two and a half days' worth of domestic consumption, but it would be well more than what Mr. Trump spent on his 2024 election campaign – a pot of patronage rather than a national investment."

"Mr. Trump's trade policy follows a similar script. While not delivering a rebirth in U.S. manufacturing jobs, tariffs have served as a ready-made tool to get countries and companies to tithe. South Korea and Japan have collectively pledged hundreds of billions in investment funds operated under opaque governance rules. Vietnam fast-

tracked the approval of a $1.5 billion Trump family golf course at the same time that it sought to reduce its tariff rate."

"Private companies, too, pay the king a benevolence. Apple's chief executive, Tim Cook, delivered a gold-based plaque and a donation to Mr. Trump's planned ballroom. And the spoils system has paid off for members of the Trump family, with their personal wealth reportedly increasing by at least $4 billion since the election." >

An imperialistic, secluded approach to the world is not only perilous, but it's also a massive waste of time and global goodwill – *because isolationism will never be a long-term option for the United States.* Sure, there will be times when the United States should embrace sovereignty, but we must reject isolationism at all costs. Isolationist rants may make for a great show at campaign rallies but, in the real world, it is reckless and puts Americans in danger.

Like it or not, the world has become entangled in extraordinary ways. We live in an incomparable era of global interdependence, multilateralism and competition, and our success depends not only on our willingness to aggressively pursue economic, technological and military supremacy, but also on our ability to build coalitions that enhance and protect those efforts (more on this in a few minutes).

Whether it be by two, four or five centuries, the foreign policy and national security strategy of Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, and other Republicans look backward. Full stop. But when it comes to Donald Trump's economic heroes, his longings for the past get even more misguided – and his misunderstanding of history is taking this country into incredibly dangerous territory.

Since his second inauguration, Donald "Tariff Man" Trump has loved comparing himself to William McKinley, the 25th president of the United States (1897–1901). He even celebrated McKinley in his inaugural address, declaring that McKinley "made our country very rich through tariffs and through talent."

There is just one problem: the current president leaves out an important part of McKinley's story. McKinley was unquestionably a protectionist. He initially believed tariffs could shield U.S. manufacturers and workers from foreign competition, and he signed the

highly protectionist Dingley Tariff into law in 1897. But as American industry and productivity surged, McKinley started to understand that the United States could not simply build tariff walls around an increasingly powerful and productive economy. He came to recognize that American companies needed customers abroad.

As a result, by the end of his presidency, McKinley was championing reciprocity agreements that would lower trade barriers and open foreign markets to American goods. By then, McKinley wasn't arguing that America should retreat behind ever-higher tariff walls; rather, he was telling Americans that their newfound industrial might made greater access to the world economy essential. In his final public speech in 1901, he declared: "We should sell everywhere we can and buy wherever the buying will enlarge our sales and productions" and "the period of exclusiveness is past… commercial wars are unprofitable." America, he explained, was producing more than its domestic market could consume: "What we produce beyond our domestic consumption must have a vent abroad."

… an approach significantly different from that of President Trump, who has used tariffs not to protect American industries or negotiate better trade terms, but as a blunt-force instrument of economic coercion to influence policies having little to do with trade itself (like immigration, for example).

Tariff Man Trump is also wrong to credit tariffs with making the United States "probably the wealthiest it ever was" during the 1890s – a decade that included one of the most severe economic contractions in American history. In fact, the Panic of 1893 was followed by years of bank failures, business collapses and extraordinarily high unemployment, with a sustained recovery not taking hold until around 1897.

And when prosperity returned, America was experiencing extraordinary gains in industrial productivity and technological innovation, massive railroad and infrastructure investment, rapid population growth, expanding exports and capital formation. At the same time, new supplies of gold helped expand the money supply.

President McKinley certainly believed in tariffs. But the lesson he eventually drew from our emergence as an industrial powerhouse was

ultimately less protectionist than The Donald claims: protect American industry when necessary, but recognize that a rich, productive America also needs the world's markets.

Donald Trump and Co. are wrong yet again when they try to convince the American people that turning the United States toward state capitalism is a good thing. IT IS NOT.

Moving miles away from free-market enterprise, the Trump/Vance administration is now demanding an actual stake in private companies (i.e., equity, warrants, licenses to intellectual property, royalties and/or revenue sharing, or other things that ensure a return on investment); significantly intervening in business transactions; and negotiating cuts of the revenue of the sales of American companies overseas.

The U.S. government now has equity stakes in over 30 private companies, up from ZERO just one year earlier. This can, among other things, inflate share prices, lead to capital misallocation, and allow *the government* to dictate business terms – undoubtably making the American economy less neutral, less dynamic, and less productive in the years to come.

I don't want to hear one Republican say ANYTHING about how the Democrats are going to bring "socialism" to America. If they want to see "socialism," they need to look in the mirror.

First came the U.S. government's 10 percent stake in Intel – which effectively made the United States a shareholder in a technology company – and the "golden share" arrangement in the Nippon Steel/U.S. Steel merger that gave the U.S. government the right to appoint a director to the board of U.S. Steel. The U.S. government's approval is also needed for many of the strategic moves made by the company.

Lest you think these were one-off deals, they were not. They were precedents. By the end of 2025, the United States also had a stake in Atlantic Alumina, Korea Zinc, Lithium Americas, MP Materials, ReElement Technologies, Trilogy Metals, Vulcan Elements, xLight and Westinghouse.

In yet another move that looks far more like something that would happen in China than in the United States, the Trump/Vance administration has taken the unprecedented step of using export-control

powers in a way that effectively forced an American A.I. developer to pull frontier models from the market over purported national-security concerns.

The most hard-core example is the way the administration has treated Anthropic, one of the most advanced A.I. laboratories on the planet – and a company that the leaders of the United States of America should be immensely proud of.

The official story from Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Pete Hegseth is that their administration, using its export-control power, demanded that Anthropic restrict access to its powerful Mythos model over concerns adversaries could exploit it for cyber warfare. To help assuage the administration's concerns, Anthropic then released Fable 5, a version that has most of the capabilities of its Mythos model (i.e., advanced coding, research, analytic, and agentic features) but also includes safeguards to prevent its use for cyber. < In reality, Anthropic itself had already deliberately restricted Mythos because of its cyber capabilities and Fable was Anthropic's attempt to make Mythos-level capabilities generally available safely. >

But that still didn't seem to be good enough for the brain trust of Trump, Vance, Rubio and Hegseth (whom I'm guessing know next to nothing about the inner workings of A.I.). While it's true that Amazon researchers found a way to bypass Fable's guardrails soon after its release, it's very likely that concerns about the adequacy of safeguards were only one of the reasons these guys have beef with Anthropic.

There is no public proof that the June export-control action was retaliation for that earlier fight. But given what happened between Anthropic and the administration only months earlier, I'm suspicious that the main reason Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Pete Hegseth and the rest of the gang are ticked off at Anthropic is that its CEO Dario Amodei had the *audacity* to demand restrictions on how the Pentagon can deploy Anthropic's tech for mass domestic surveillance and fully autonomous weapons. In other words, Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Pete Hegseth and the rest of the gang are ticked off at Anthropic for *having a conscience*.

For years, Anthropic has been, by far, the most vocal advocate from the A.I. world for guardrails to ensure the technology is used

safely and responsibly. In a statement made amid heated discussions with administration officials, Mr. Amodei made Anthropic's position clear: "I believe deeply in the existential importance of using A.I. to defend the United States and other democracies, and to defeat our autocratic adversaries."

"However, in a narrow set of cases, we believe A.I. can undermine, rather than defend, democratic values. Some uses are also simply outside the bounds of what today's technology can safely and reliably do. Two such use cases have never been included in our contracts with the Department of War, and we believe they should not be included now: mass domestic surveillance and fully autonomous weapons."

Outraged, this led to Pete Hegseth designating Anthropic a "supply-chain risk," removing its models from military systems, and President Trump directing federal agencies to stop working with the A.I. giant, accusing the company's executives of being "leftwing nutjobs."

Amodei responded: "These threats do not change our position: We cannot in good conscience accede to their request." (BRAVO and THANK YOU, Dario!)

So, to recap: For 18 days, the United States federal government demonstrated that it could use export-control authority to impose restrictions so sweeping that one of America's leading A.I. companies was effectively forced to pull its most advanced commercial models from the global market. That is an extraordinary precedent for government intervention in America's A.I. industry and could not only potentially undermines our lead in A.I., but also push companies around the world into the arms of the Chinese and their open-weight and open-source A.I. models.

< Open-weight means you are given pre-trained parameters to fine-tune the A.I. model, but the source code, architecture details, and datasets remain confidential. Open-source goes further, providing total transparency by including the source code, training methodologies, and training data so the public can audit and rebuild it. These models work great for users who want unconstrained access to systems they control because they are free to download, modify, and adapt them.

By advancing these types of models, China can bypass U.S. hardware sanctions and restrictions; learn and implement best practices; rapidly integrate A.I. across its vast manufacturing base; and build global soft power through A.I. influence and dominance. >

The Trump/Vance administration's inconsistent approach to A.I. is confounding, but it looks even more contradictory and careless when you consider the Nvidia deal.

In December 2025, President Trump announced that the United States would allow Nvidia – the dominant supplier of the advanced GPUs powering the A.I. boom – to sell its powerful H200 chips to approved customers in China, with the government collecting the equivalent of 25 percent through an unusual tariff arrangement.

Five months earlier, the administration had brokered an even more extraordinary arrangement requiring Nvidia and AMD to pay the federal government 15 percent of revenue from certain A.I.-chip sales to China in exchange for export licenses. That arrangement immediately raised serious legal questions under both the Export Control Reform Act – which generally prohibits fees in connection with export-license applications – and the Constitution's Export Clause, which prohibits federal taxes or duties on exports.

This is quite possibly the most stupefying idea I have ever heard. For one, if advanced American A.I. chips really pose a national-security threat in Chinese hands, why does that threat become acceptable when the United States government gets paid?

But setting aside the legal and national security concerns, why in the name of all that is holy would our leaders give our biggest economic competitor the chance to catch up with us in artificial intelligence?

…. especially when experts say that China's domestic accelerators still lag Nvidia's most advanced chips in important areas, particularly frontier-model training. Basically, we are gifting China our computing power so they can buy time while *their* companies improve *their* own supply and performance.

Donald Trump and JD Vance just handed Xi Jinping U.S. technological superiority on a silver platter… for what? 15 percent? I

guarantee you, this type of ridiculousness is not *anywhere* in Mao's Phase Two plan. This is insanity. I mean, whose side are these guys on?

The Institute for Progress, a think tank, estimates the American advantage over China in A.I. compute will shrink from around ten times to five times within a year of the Chinese having H200 chips (the H200 – a high-speed graphics processing units (GPUs) used for AI applications and high-performance computing – is Nvidia's second-most-powerful chip). Well, that's just great, isn't it?

In a most ironic twist, literally hours before the Trump/Vance administration's announcement of their A.I. sabotage, the U.S. Justice Department announced that our federal government had "exposed a sophisticated smuggling network that threatens our nation's security by funneling cutting-edge A.I. technology to those who would use it against American interests." This "criminal network" – their words – tried to smuggle over $160 million worth of Nvidia chips to China (irony is not a strong enough word for this).

The reasoning behind the bust, according to U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Texas Nicholas J. Ganjei, is that the H100 and H200 chips are "designed to process massive amounts of data, advancing generative AI and large language models and accelerating scientific computing. These GPUs are used for both civilian and military applications."

"These chips are the building blocks of A.I. superiority and are integral to modern military applications. *The country that controls these chips will control AI technology; the country that controls A.I. technology will control the future.*" Oh, for the love of %$#%.

By the way, the Trump/Vance administration is trying to sabotage our technological superiority in other ways, like their wanting a piece of the patents owned by universities that result from new discoveries. At first glance, this may appear to make perfect sense. After all, as Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said, "If we give them the money, don't you think it's fair the USA and taxpayers who funded it get a piece of that?" But I assure you, it makes no sense whatsoever. This is nothing more than a tax on innovation.

They can try to put lipstick on this pig all they want, but private-sector development featuring government ownership and control is

state-controlled industry, pure and simple. I mean, come on! You know it's not a very capitalist idea when Senator Bernie Sanders is all for it.

It's no wonder that Donald Trump and JD Vance prefer this path because state capitalism is a means of not just economic, but political control. Blatantly exceeding authority; pressuring executives; singling out favored companies that kiss a$$ and pay to play; blurring the lines between public policy and personal business interests; arbitrarily picking "winners" and "losers;" and instilling fear and uncertainty into the entire process is what authoritarian governments do – and are now par for the course for these guys.

Trump & Co. want the United States to control things so they can control things – handing out favors like King Midas to those who kiss the ring… a ploy Apple CEO Tim Cook took advantage of brilliantly when he, as Dr. Goddard and Dr. Newman mentioned, entered the Oval Office bearing some sort of engraved glass sculpture with, of course, a 24-karat gold base, and left the Oval Office with tariff exemptions.

It's no secret President Trump is using the office of the presidency to enrich himself and his family, administration officials, and business partners like no other president in history ever dreamed of – everything from inaugural and White House ballroom fundraising bribes to pardon kickbacks to cryptocurrency to foreign partnerships to Middle Eastern-funded golf tournaments and luxury jets. One must look no further than the highly corrupt United Arab Emirates chip deal that Steve Witkoff and David Sacks, key figures of the administration, negotiated, or the TikTok deal, which proved they aren't even trying to hide their blatant cronyism (read more on p. 490).

This all is just gross. Please don't be fooled. None of this is the *Art of the Deal*. This is corporate statism and staying on its path would squash innovation and invention, distort markets, and fertilize and water unthinkable corruption. It's un-American and it would end in disaster.

Quite frankly, the American people should be insulted by the Trump/Vance administration's turn toward state capitalism, because it feels like a declaration of defeat more than anything else. It's as if they don't think Americans can cut it without the Fatherland.

They are dead wrong. *We can't beat Xi Jinping by becoming him*. At the end of the day – if we play our cards right and remember what makes America, well, America – there is NO WAY China beats us.

The way we win is to commit to smart, rigorous economic norms, stable and consistent rules, nonpolitical institutional integrity, and the rule of law. The way we win is by nurturing market-driven innovation, empowering entrepreneurs, ensuring that risks and rewards are shared fairly across society, and that opportunities are available to everyone.

It wasn't tariffs that made our country "very rich" in the 20th century. It was our unleashed ingenuity, entrepreneurial spirit, bold experimentation, economic freedom, smart foreign investment, and sensible immigration that propelled America forward – and allowed us to thrive. It will be these things – not oil in the ground or new territories on our map – that will help us do it again.

It's time for America and Americans to up our game. Our leaders have had us playing small for decades and that's just not going to cut it anymore. To begin, we need to develop a comprehensive long-term strategy to stop our slide and solidify our course.

There are two things I am certain of. The first is that the continued dominance and national security of the United States depend on four things. Not one of these, *all four*: the dollar, diplomacy, development, and defense. The second thing I am certain of is that, for the first time in decades, we face a rival that has reached dimensions of strength that we cannot entirely combat alone.

Let's take the first one first: The Dollar. America is not just a country; America is a brand. And not just any brand. The United States of America is still the mightiest, most trusted, most admired brand in the entire world.

A huge part of our brand is our economic dominance. For decades, regardless of who was in the White House or in the seats of Congress,

countries around the world have had incomparable trust in the economic integrity of the United States of America. This has made America a magnet for long-term investment; led to the dollar being the global reserve currency; and inspired continued faith in U.S. Treasurys.

The recipe for the extraordinary economic position we hold in the world is simple: fidelity to smart, rigorous economic norms and structured international economic order; nonpolitical institutional integrity; and commitment to the rule of law.

Although our stellar credibility and the trust that other countries, investors, and citizens of the world have in our economic competence have taken decades to build, they are both rapidly collapsing under the Trump/Vance administration.

The irresponsibility and unseriousness of these people's actions is nothing short of breathtaking. In addition to the catastrophic mess they have made of our global alliances, they have done everything from relentlessly criticize and threaten the independence of the U.S. Federal Reserve – to the point that the U.S. Department of Justice opened a criminal investigation into its chairman – to brazenly undermine the credibility of independent, nonpolitical agencies like the Congressional Budget Office and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics – substantially damaging the credibility of our official economic data and our accountability procedures.

These are not things that dependable, established governments do.
These are things that emerging, corrupt governments do.

The Economist's adjectives for the Trump/Vance administration capture it perfectly: "shambolic, incoherent" and "a mockery of policymaking." They were speaking specifically about tariffs but could have easily been talking about almost every decision they make.

Already, global confidence in the American economy has been slowly eroding thanks to our rising national debt, increasing deficits, and worsening domestic political turmoil. As a result, many countries have taken actions to "de-risk" from America – including diversifying their investments and supply chains, reducing dependency on American technology, and strengthening their partnerships with other countries.

This comes at a time when China is pushing to globalize its own currency (the yuan) particularly for things like bank payments. It seems their main goal is to offer an alternative to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT) system, a U.S.-dollar dominant network that facilitates secure money and securities transfers for over 11,500 financial institutions in 220 countries and territories.

While the U.S. dollar makes up over 50 percent of payments using the SWIFT network and 80 percent of trade finance (compared with 3-4 percent and 8 percent, respectively, for the yuan) countries are increasingly using the Cross-border Interbank Payment System (CIPS), China's settlement system. In fact, because sanctions have cut Russia off from the Western financial system, yuan-based financial channels now handle the overwhelming majority of Russia-China trade payments. CIPS, which launched in 2015, now links over 5,000 banks across 190 countries and reported RMB (renminbi, the official name of China's currency) 100.9 trillion of payments in the first half of 2026 alone**.**

China is also encouraging global firms to issue bonds in the yuan, creating a market of investible securities for the currency, and the yuan is already the settlement currency for around half of China's cross-border deals, up from practically zero fifteen years ago.

Make no mistake, although the yuan is nowhere close to replacing the dollar, almost everything mentioned in the last three paragraphs points toward a concerning long-term direction for the United States. The danger is not that the yuan will suddenly dethrone the dollar. It's that these developments can gradually erode the extraordinary advantages the United States enjoys from dollar dominance: cheaper financing, enormous financial leverage, and a degree of economic power no other country possesses.

But the Trump/Vance administration doesn't see it that way. President Trump, for one, thinks it was "great" that the dollar fell to a four-year low in late January 2026 because, in his mind, a weaker dollar means the world isn't "looting," "pillaging," and "plundering" the United States anymore – proving yet again that he has little understanding of how global trade actually works.

One of his favorite rally themes – and it really gets the MAGA crowd going – is that the entire world is out to get us, screwing us at every opportunity. But that's just not true. Guys, honestly, that's just not happening.

Trade deficit doesn't automatically mean *we're getting screwed*. Trade deficits are not scorecards that keep track of who is winning and who is losing, or if trade deals are "good" or "bad." Unlike what the Trump/Vance administration seems to believe about *everything*, trade is not a zero-sum game.

It's very important to keep in mind that trade deficits are different for the United States than other countries because our currency is the dominant global reserve currency – meaning the U.S. dollar is used in many transactions that the United States has nothing to do with. Many countries trade with one another – and borrow and lend – using the U.S. dollar. This increases the demand for our dollar on foreign exchange markets which, in turn, makes our dollar stronger. A stronger U.S. dollar, in turn, makes our exports more expensive and imports less expensive – which ultimately leads to an overall trade deficit.

In fact, because of our currency's position in the world, the U.S. running a trade surplus would create serious strain on the entire global market. That sounds dramatic but remember that, in the past four decades, the United States has had current-account surpluses in only three years –1980, 1981 and 1991 – and each of those years was tied to a recession.

Far from being a burden, we as a country *want* this role. It gives us unparalleled power in global finance, not to mention lower interest rates which leads to cheaper financing.

So, guys in the Trump/Vance administration, the lesson here is that, if the U.S. economy is growing faster than other economies around the world, our trade deficit will probably increase – because strong domestic growth increases America's demand for imports while, at the same time, weaker foreign growth decreases the world's demand for America's exports.

But here's the bad news: America enjoys these extraordinary privileges only as long as the rest of the world continues to trust the United States, its institutions, its financial markets, and ultimately its

ability and willingness to honor its debts. If the world starts to question the United States as the leading global economic force – or continues to lose confidence in our direction – there could be a major sell-off of U.S. assets, particularly Treasury bonds and stocks.

This could likely trigger a debt crisis and worldwide panic. Next comes major stock market volatility and a run on the dollar. Interest rates spike, exponentially increasing the pain of our massive indebtedness and make it more expensive, if not impossible, to raise capital, invest in innovation, and create jobs.

It will also be much harder for the United States to borrow money to respond to short-term financial emergencies such as wars, recessions, or economic calamities like the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis (when we desperately needed our public balance sheets to offset the enormous de-leveraging of private ones) or things like the economic fallout caused by the Covid pandemic (when American families were in dire straits).

Inflation will come in even hotter which, as we already well know, causes serious pain for most American households. And this will do nothing but get more painful. Longer-term, high inflation strikes at the very heart of the financial security of the Middle Class, affecting savings accounts, pensions, and home ownership even more.

This will make us more beholden to foreign investors – including foreign private investors as well as foreign governments – who already hold roughly 9 trillion of Treasury securities. It's important to remember that our vulnerability isn't that China can suddenly call in our loans. It's that the United States depends on a vast, continuous pool of domestic and foreign demand for Treasury securities to finance increasingly large deficits at manageable interest rates.

This underscores a fundamental tension in the Trump/Vance administration's strategy: They want smaller trade deficits and a weaker dollar while simultaneously wanting the dollar to remain the world's dominant reserve currency, foreigners to continue pouring enormous amounts of capital into the United States, and American borrowing costs to remain low. Those objectives don't coexist. The same global demand for dollars and dollar-denominated assets that gives the United States extraordinary financial power also tends to

strengthen the dollar and helps sustain the capital inflows associated with America's external deficits.

For all the reasons given above, the possibility of the world questioning the United States as the leading global economic force and/or losing confidence in our direction is something we must watch very, very closely because there are already serious warning signs.

In August 2026, The Wall Street Journal reported that two new studies – one from MIT and the other from Stanford – suggest investors don't seem as willing to accept low bond yields because of the U.S. Treasurys' safety: "Treasurys, long the world's preferred 'safe' asset, are looking less safe. Relative to other securities, their yields are no longer quite so low, and in moments of stress, they don't behave like a haven."

Okay, gosh, that's enough, Debbie Downer. Now you know how my Saturday night dates feel! :)

Moving on… The second thing I am certain of is that, for the first time in decades, we face a rival that has reached dimensions of strength that we cannot entirely combat alone… which is why the way our friends around the world have been treated by the Trump/Vance administration is so utterly horrifying – and completely unacceptable.

Time after time, the boorish actions and behavior of Trump & Co. have made our nation look smaller and weaker, not bigger and stronger. They obviously don't get that it's unnecessary for America to be a bully. It's unnecessary for America to be threatening and hostile. It's unnecessary for America to be arrogant and petty. America does not need to overtly flaunt our strength *because we are actually strong*.

There are many foolish assumptions that fuel the Trump/Vance administration's disastrous approach to the world, but one of the worst is their false belief that, if America disengages from the rest of the world, the rest of the world will just somehow disappear – leaving America in a gloriously isolated bubble of nothing but fabulous health and wealth.

Their thought process reminds me of the mythical ostrich that sticks his head in the sand to avoid danger. If we can't see them, they can't see us, right? Well, not exactly guys. < Honestly, they are getting so good at this trick that I have a mental image of hundreds of little

ostrich butts sticking straight up in the air on the lawn of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. >

Clearly, these guys take American exceptionalism for granted, believing we are somehow owed this honorable distinction instead of understanding that we must continually earn it. They can't seem to grasp that, while being a world leader is an enormous responsibility and is at times costly, the bigger picture is that being one gives us tremendous advantages.

No more! Anyone who believes we can keep our superpower status without diplomacy, generosity, and *humility* needs to think again. That is exactly what the Greeks, Spanish and Romans thought, and they are now named in history books as failed empires. We better stop thinking their fate can't happen to us, because it absolutely can.

The strongest part of the American brand – even more impressive than our economic dominance – is our unprecedented and unparalleled time-honored reputation as a collaborative, compassionate, and supportive global leader and friend… yet another enormous advantage that has taken decades to build.

We are the people who initiated the Lend-Lease policy – which helped defeat Germany, Japan and Italy in World War II by providing weapons, food, oil, and other supplies to the United Kingdom, China, the Soviet Union and France – and enacted the Marshall Plan, enabling Europe to rebuild after years of devastating war.

Our security and support have provided countries the opportunity to foster democratic governments *and* strong economies. With our support, South Korea evolved from a poor, vulnerable autocracy to a vibrant, healthy democracy – as did Japan. We were instrumental in creating landmark global organizations like NATO, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank.

We liberated concentration camps, greatly advanced human rights around the world, prevented a nuclear war, and stopped communism in its tracks. We steadfastly fought HIV/AIDS in developing countries, providing millions of people antiviral drugs and preventing hundreds of thousands of precious babies from being infected with HIV at birth.

Through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), support from the American people vastly increased access to education

and healthcare for millions; helped achieve significant reductions in child and maternal mortality; was instrumental in eradicating smallpox and reducing malaria deaths; helped secure democracy for vulnerable nations; and is responsible for sparking economic development in regions throughout the world. We have provided critical assistance during natural disasters, famines, and other emergencies and provided access to clean drinking water for millions of desperate people.

There is a major misconception in our politics today that the United States did these things for other countries just to be nice. The story seems to be that the billions and billions we have given to people in other countries (which equals less than 1 percent of the annual federal budget, by the way) is nothing more than a wasted gift given to foreigners while the American people get nothing in return as we suffer through our own problems here at home.

This is 1000% false. Sure, helping people in need is a nice thing to do – and I do believe at our core Americans are super nice people – but we did many of these things in our own self-interest as much as anything else. After World War II, for example, we helped rebuild many economies from afar mainly to put us in a position to create a new world order… which we did.

We not only rebuilt this new international order to our advantage by making sure we would lead and operate it, but we also restored prosperity to a shattered world, repaired and strengthened our global alliances, and put mechanisms in place to prevent future conflicts. These actions ensured we would enjoy political, economic and security cooperation around the world, plus created stability, predictability and financial gains not only for ourselves, but for many grateful nations.

The global rules, institutions, and alliances that emerged from this period – that WE wrote and formed – remain the foundation of our modern-day global structure. *A structure that still significantly benefits the United States.*

Our unprecedented and unparalleled reputation as a collaborative, compassionate, and supportive global leader and friend is also rapidly collapsing under the Trump/Vance administration. In fact, the words "rapidly collapsing" are hardly adequate to describe the absolute trainwreck that has happened here.

A 29-country Ipsos poll from April 2025 found that the number of people saying the United States would have an overall positive influence on global affairs had fallen in 26 out of 29 countries in just *six months*. On average, almost 46 percent across the 29 countries said the U.S. would have a positive influence, down from 59 percent who said the same in Sept/Oct 2024. While 52 percent of Canadians saw America as a positive influencer before the U.S. presidential election, only 19 percent felt the same way six months after.

Likewise, results from the 2025 Democracy Perception Index – the world's largest study on how people around the world perceive democracy – was heartbreaking. *For the first time, more countries around the world had a positive view of China than of the United States*. The perception of the United States had declined noticeably – the proportion of countries where the United States held a net positive image decreased from 76 percent to 45 percent – with our global net perception rating similar to Russia's.

When it came to the perception of political leaders in 2025, "Donald Trump had an almost universal negative perception rating: in 82 percent of countries around the world, Trump had a net negative rating, significantly worse than both Putin (61 percent) and Xi (44 percent)."

In the 2026 survey, global perceptions of the United States fell *below* those of Russia for the first time. The survey found that views of the U.S. deteriorated for a second consecutive year, citing perceptions to U.S. foreign policy decisions, including tariffs, tensions with NATO allies, reduced support for Ukraine, and threats involving Greenland.

In July 2026, the Pew Research Center reported that China is now seen more positively than the U.S. in most of 36 countries surveyed. The gap is especially large in several Asia-Pacific and Middle Eastern countries, and Canadians and Mexicans also view China more positively than the United States. This happened quickly. A majority of Canadians (57 percent) had a positive view of America in 2023, while only 14 percent viewed China positively. In 2025, Canadians were equally favorable toward America and China. Now, however, more Canadians have a favorable view of China (44 percent) than America (33 percent).

Further, "confidence in these countries' respective leaders to d*o the right thing regarding world affairs* has followed a similar pattern. In the latter half of Joe Biden's presidency, confidence in him was higher than confidence in Chinese President Xi Jinping across most countries surveyed, though Biden's rating declined in many places from 2023 to 2024. During the first two years of Trump's second term, ratings of the U.S. president worsened significantly. While many people still lack confidence in Xi, positive views of him have become more widespread, and more overall now say they have confidence in Xi than in Trump."

Without question, the Trump/Vance administration's isolationist, transactional, conditional and antagonistic approach to foreign policy has shaken the world's fundamental assumptions about American exceptionalism and called into question the special role we have been so fortunate to play.

It's not just the policies they initiate or fail to initiate – which are bad enough. It's also the insults, the tantrums, the mixed signals, the inconsistencies and contradictions, the reversals, the dismantling of key global agreements and institutions, and the outright lies that cause so much harm. It's the complete absence of risk versus reward analysis, serious deliberation with experts, or even the most rudimentary inquiry into potential consequences.

Instead of strengthening and solidifying our envied position on the world stage, Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, and many other Republicans have done the opposite – hell-bent on tearing down eighty years of proven success and replacing it with an imperialistic, protectionist foreign policy that has zero chance of long-term success.

The National Security Strategy released by the White House in November 2025 reads like a declaration of surrender more than anything else. I'm not a conspiracy theorist, but if anything were going to convince me that Donald Trump is a Russian asset, this document – plus his 28-point "plan" to end the Russia/Ukraine war – would be it.

The Trump/Vance administration skewers our European allies, saying the European Union is not only "adverse" to American economic interests but is also facing "civilizational erasure." They warn that "within a few decades at the latest, certain NATO members

will become majority non-European," meaning they are trying to export their vision of a white-preferred immigration system overseas. (I wonder how devastated these guys are going to be when they finally realize there are just not enough white people on planet earth to execute their grand plans?)

They condescendingly suggest that because the European Union is jeopardizing "political liberty," repressing free speech, and "cratering birthrates," the "goal" of the United States "should be to help Europe correct its current trajectory." (For people who claim they value national sovereignty, they sure do like to get up in everyone's business. They're like the Gladys Kravitz-s of nations.)

Apparently, the U.S. can achieve this goal by elevating "patriotic European parties" (read: far-right populist parties). This reaffirms Vice President JD Vance's diatribe in Germany in February 2025, when he sneeringly lectured our allies about their retreat from "traditional values" – while, at the same time, meeting with and lavishing praise on the leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, who many accuse of aligning, at least on some level, with Nazism.

< Sidebar: The Trump/Vance administration's full-scale attack on our European allies – together with President Trump's threats against Greenland and his saying things like the continent is a "decaying" group of nations led by "weak" people and that European soldiers "stayed a little back, a little off the front lines" in Afghanistan – have been so disrespectful and misguided that even the far-right nationalist leaders there, who once saw the administration as an ideological ally, are now distancing themselves from them. >

Most frightening, the administration says that European nations should take "primary responsibility" for their own defense, signaling that they believe the United States should no longer guarantee Europe's security – taking direct aim at the U.S.-European military cooperation that is fundamental to the peace and security of the United States.

This is a continuation of the war Donald Trump has waged against NATO for years. On the 2016 campaign trail, candidate Trump made references to NATO's waning effectiveness, even calling it "obsolete" at one point (he backtracked on this in 2019, saying NATO has "a great

purpose, especially with the fact that NATO is becoming much more flexible, in terms of what it looks at," whatever that means).

On the 2024 campaign trail, he said he wouldn't defend NATO members if they didn't meet their defense spending targets. This obviously alarmed many of our European allies, whose anxiety was also heightened by President Trump's selection of Pete Hegseth as his second administration's Defense Secretary.

In Hegseth's book, The War on Warriors: Behind the Betrayal of the Men Who Keep Us Free, he wrote: "Why should America, the European 'emergency contact number' for the past century, listen to self-righteous and impotent nations asking us to honor outdated and one-sided defense arrangements they no longer live up to? Maybe if NATO countries actually ponied up for their own defense – but they don't. They just yell about the rules while gutting their militaries and yelling at America for help."

Donald Trump's bombastic campaign rhetoric and Pete Hegseth's insulting words highlight their belief that our European allies had been taking advantage of our military protection for decades without paying their fair share financially.

While it's true that many NATO members fell short of their defense-spending commitments for years, those days are over. In 2025, all 32 members of the alliance met or exceeded the benchmark of spending two percent of GDP on defense – the first time that has happened since NATO adopted the target in 2014.

And NATO has now raised the bar considerably. At the 2025 summit in The Hague, members committed to investing five percent of GDP annually in defense and security by 2035: at least 3.5 percent for core military requirements and up to another 1.5 percent for critical infrastructure, cybersecurity, civil preparedness, resilience and the defense industrial base.

Although President Trump takes credit for this, naturally, I feel it's more a response to Vladimir Putin's unrelenting aggression, Europe's rising apprehension of Russia and China, and the Trump/Vance administration pulling the U.S. away from global alliances than it is a reaction to rants and threats made by the likes of Donald Trump, JD

Vance, Marco Rubio and Pete Hegseth (*meaning it could have been achieved without them being such jerks about it*).

President Trump's ire at NATO has gone into overdrive since he chose to go to war with Iran. He has repeatedly lashed out at our NATO allies for not, in his estimation, "helping" enough with the war effort – obviously forgetting that 1) he forgot to loop them in beforehand, and 2) that he had been a complete jackass to them for months.

This all came to a head at the White House on April 8, 2026. After a meeting between President Trump and Mark Rutte, the secretary general of the military alliance – where President Trump reportedly ranted and raved at the poor man – the U.S. president posted: "NATO WASN'T THERE WHEN WE NEEDED THEM, AND THEY WON'T BE THERE IF WE NEED THEM AGAIN. REMEMBER GREENLAND, THAT BIG, POORLY RUN, PIECE OF ICE!!!" – whatever in the world that non sequitur even means.

Then, of course, came the July 2026 NATO summit in Turkey, where our president once again blasted allies he believed had failed to adequately support the U.S. in Iran. Spain received particularly harsh treatment: "Spain is a wasted cause. We don't want to do any trade business with Spain anymore."

He wasn't finished, then calling Spain a "terrible partner in NATO" and instructing Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to "cut off all trade with Spain" – even saying the United States should stop visits and communication with the country. Incidentally, Spain had already reached NATO's previous benchmark of spending two percent of GDP on defense; its dispute with Trump centered in part on its refusal to embrace the alliance's new five-percent target on the timetable he wanted.

In August 2026, as the 60-day U.S.-Iran ceasefire arrangement expired, Trump weirdly threatened Oman – a key mediator in efforts involving Iran – warning that if Oman "gets in the way," the United States would "bomb the shit out of them again."

Around the same time, he ordered the Pentagon to substantially scale back the annual Ulchi Freedom Shield military exercises with South Korea. He cited the cost of the exercises and his relationship with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, but he also made clear in a

discombobulated Truth Social posy that Seoul's refusal to participate in the Iran campaign was very much on his mind: "While somewhat unrelated (?), I recently asked the President of South Korea if they would like to join us in the Denuclearization of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and they said, 'No thanks!'"

Typically, the connection was apparently not so "unrelated" after all, since Trump's order regarding the military exercises ultimately resulted in the U.S. and South Korea agreeing to shorten the exercises from eleven days to five and reduce field-training activities – modifying one of the longstanding pillars of our military alliance with Seoul while an erratic, nuclear-armed North Korea remains just across the border.

Please believe, the United States needs NATO now as much as we did in 1949, when the group was formed as a defense against Soviet aggression. NATO provides the U.S. valuable partnerships that fortify our national defense and security plus crisis-management capabilities around the world.

If nothing else, we benefit greatly from NATO's Principle of Collective Defense, which is the idea that an attack against one of its members is considered as an attack against all (this principle is commonly known as Article 5). Article 5 has been invoked only once, in response to the 9/11 U.S. terrorist attacks. On one of the worst days in our nation's history, our faithful allies didn't blink and had our back 100%. NATO troops then fought alongside us in Afghanistan for two decades – which is why Donald Trump saying that NATO soldiers "stayed a little back, a little off the front lines" in Afghanistan is so incredibly offensive.

Denmark suffered one of the very highest per-capita military death rates of any NATO ally in Afghanistan – which makes Donald Trump's Greenland temper tantrums even more horrifying. Every single American should be beyond embarrassed that our leaders are acting like mob bosses overseas. It's not only mortifying but, if we don't stop this madness, it will come back to haunt us in ways we can't even imagine (more on this in a minute).

The Trump/Vance administration's insulting answer to a "weak" Europe and "ineffective" NATO is to expand the "Board of Peace," a

scheme originally designed to supervise their plan to transform Gaza into the new Las Vegas. Lately, however, the Board of Peace is marketing itself as a new international peacekeeping body. Kind of like a global Mar-a-Lago, countries can upgrade to permanent membership if they pay over a billion dollars in cash. “This is not just a board of peace,” Secretary of State Marco Rubio declared. “This is a board of action.” (insert: eye-roll emoji)

Surprising no one, the Board of Peace will be permanently led by one Donald J. Trump, who posted on social media that the board is “the Greatest and Most Prestigious Board ever assembled at any time, any place.” The charter explains that the chairman has the “exclusive authority” to create other entities to carry out the board’s mission and has the power to invite states to join, adopt resolutions and directives, veto resolutions, dissolve the board, and to decide how the billions are spent. The chairman can only be removed by voluntary resignation or if he becomes incapacitated – meaning, he doesn’t have to leave when he is no longer the U.S. president. Plus, Donald Trump and only Donald Trump can designate his successor. (insert: facepalm emoji)

The Trump/Vance administration reportedly reached out to around 60 countries to join the board, but a full list was not made public. I’m not sure you could trust any list the White House released anyway, because at one point they said Belgium had joined the board but Maxime Prévot, the country’s deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, was quick to deny that report, saying Belgium, like other European nations, had “reservations” about this new endeavor. Belgian then reported that, according to a government source, the United States had apparently confused Belgium with Belarus. (insert: is there an emoji for humiliation?)

Not so with former Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who posted on X that, “We have, of course, accepted this honourable invitation” (insert: throw-up emoji).

Many bewildered countries are stalling, but others have officially joined, including Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Bulgaria, Egypt, Hungary, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Mongolia, Morocco, Pakistan, Paraguay, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.

Norway, Sweden, Slovenia, Spain and France have definitively said they would *not* join – France making Donald Trump so mad that he threatened to impose 200% tariffs on their wine (surprise, surprise). Canada's invitation has been rescinded since Prime Minister Mark Carney upstaged President Trump at the World Economic Forum in Davos (surprise, surprise) – although I doubt Mr. Carney is losing much sleep over it.

In fact, it's hard to imagine France – or China, Russia or the United Kingdom – joining, not wanting to weaken the United Nations in any way since they serve permanently on its Security Council and have a veto over its actions – but good 'ol Vladimir, ever crafty, said the Kremlin would consider joining and paying the $1 billion initiation fee if he could get it from frozen Russian assets.

In July 2026, the Board of Peace announced its 15-point proposal to achieve peace and security in Gaza, which included a plan for the disarmament of Hamas and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza – a proposal that was met with an immediate escalation of Israeli bombings. Israeli bombs killed 18 people right after the announcement, making it one of the deadliest days there since the "cease-fire" announced in October.

In case the bombings didn't make clear the Israeli position, a spokesman for the Israeli prime minister's office said, "The version that has been made public does not reflect Israel's positions. Israel has conveyed its comments and concerns on the proposed framework to our American counterparts."

So, seven months after Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio unveiled their shiny new Board of Peace, its inaugural peace project has reached the awkward stage where one side says it has accepted the board's plan, America's closest ally in the conflict refuses to accept it, and the "peace" being overseen by the Board of Peace continues to include Israeli bombs falling on Gaza. In fact, Jared Kushner – Donald's son-in-law, informal advisor and key negotiator on Middle East policy – personally met both Hamas leader Khalil al-Hayya and Netanyahu trying to rescue the deal… and still couldn't get Israel to accept it. Is this really better than NATO can do?

This, of course, was all playing out amid President Trump's proclamation (yet again) that the U.S. would acquire Greenland "the easy way" or "the hard way" – a once unthinkable threat to take over the sovereign territory of a European Union member and NATO ally by the president of the United States.

….so unthinkable that Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said such an act would mark the end of NATO: "If the United States were to choose to attack another NATO country, then everything would come to an end. The international community as we know it, democratic rules of the game, NATO, the world's strongest defensive alliance – all of that would collapse if one NATO country chose to attack another."

Far from being chastened, President Trump, America's very own Michael Corleone, took delight in rubbing Europe's face in his threat, posting a map showing Greenland, Canada and Venezuela all as part of the United States and putting a 10 percent tariff increase on imports from Britain, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden – all of which had recently deployed troops to Greenland – until they helped the United States strike a deal to obtain the Danish territory.

A few months earlier, our allies may have just rolled their eyes and kept their mouths shut – even when the president of the United States (who is 79 years old, not 12) taunted them, saying things like, without America's help in World War II, "you'd all be speaking German" and "the United States is keeping the whole world afloat" and their "countries are going to hell."

But the Greenland episode made clear they have had enough of his foolishness. Whereas, before, they tried everything from capitulation and false flattery – sending him love letters, building custom-made McDonalds food trucks, draping banners of his face around their cities, nominating him for the Nobel Peace Prize, actually *giving* him their Nobel Peace Prize, *creating* peace prizes to give him, and calling him "daddy" at a NATO summit – this debacle seemed to be the last straw.

Miraculously, Donald Trump seemed to sense that the rest of the world had lost patience with his unquenchable ego and unpredictable hissy fits but, unfortunately, despite President TACO's (*Trump Always*

Chickens Out) whiplash reversal – where he pivoted from double-digit tariffs to settling for a "framework of a future deal" within literally an hour – the damage was done.

Belgium Prime Minister Bart De Wever: "Until now, we tried to appease the new president in the White House. We were very lenient, also with the tariffs, we were lenient, hoping to get his support for the Ukraine war. But now so many red lines are being crossed. Being a happy vassal is one thing, being a miserable slave is something else."

Polish prime minister Donald Tusk: "Appeasement is always a sign of weakness. Europe cannot afford to be weak – neither against its enemies, nor ally. Appeasement means no results, only humiliation."

In a brave speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos – where he received a standing ovation – Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said that the United States had basically abdicated its once unassailable leadership role in NATO: "We are in the midst of a rupture, not a transition." The "middle powers must act together – because if we're not at the table, we're on the menu… When the rules no longer protect you, you must protect yourself."

In July 2026, President Trump revived his crusade to seize Greenland at the beginning of NATO's annual summit in Turkey – – saying "Greenland should be controlled by the United States, not by Denmark" – – forcing the Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen to reiterate that "we are ready to defend every inch of NATO, including our own territory. One of the reasons why we built NATO many, many years ago is if anything happens to one of us then everybody should stand up for each other."

Make no mistake, the two people who benefit most – or perhaps the *only* people who benefit *at all* – from Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio blowing apart our relationships with our European allies are Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. Hands down.

Since NATO was founded in 1949, Soviet, then Russian, leaders have tried to undermine the alliance. Vladimir Putin especially loathes the trans-Atlantic bond because, as NATO expands eastward, it's the only thing that stands in the way of his imperial aspirations.

The more NATO membership extends to former Soviet states and their former communist allies, the harder it is for Putin to re-establish

his own sphere of influence (already, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland are some of NATO's most committed members). By creating such a deep rift between the United States and Europe, Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio are doing the Kremlin's dirty work for them, helping achieve what has alluded them for over 75 years.

So, of course the Russians were downright giddy over this turn of events. "Trans-Atlantic unity is over," declared Russian presidential envoy Kirill Dmitriev. "Collapse of the transatlantic union."

"It was hard to imagine before that such a thing could happen," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said, marveling over a scenario where "one NATO member is going to attack another NATO member." He quickly likened President Trump's strategy for Greenland with Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian Black Sea peninsula of Crimea: "Crimea is no less important for the Russian Federation than Greenland is for the United States" – and just like that, the world understood that the United States of America was now operating from the same playbook as Russia.

Likewise, China is thrilled by the Trump/Vance administration's National Security Strategy and foreign policy – particularly the military strike on Venezuela – because it gives Xi Jinping the perfect excuse to forcefully assert his ambitions in his own neighborhood, including his aggressive plans for the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

In a January 20, 2025 commentary, Xinhua, the Chinese state-news agency, said that the United States' "true colors are revealed" and the U.S. is now a "purely extractive superpower" that is returning "the world to a barbaric colonial era of plunder."

"The world map is no longer a political chart of alliances and sovereignties," they said, "but a crude inventory of assets. A country's status – ally, rival or neutral – is irrelevant beside the fundamental question of its utility." Ouch.

Really think about the direction Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio are taking us. The United States used to lead by example – and in many ways that was enough to keep China and others in line. Now, however, we have no right to say anything if Xi Jinping decides to overthrow Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te. Worse, now that Trump, Vance and Rubio have successfully ticked off all our allies, we

may not be able to coordinate an international response if they do (which we have already seen happen in Iran).

Some Republicans have tried to spin the silver lining that the ousting of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela in particular was a huge blow to China – since they have tried diligently to build close ties in Latin America for decades, only to have the playing field in the Western Hemisphere potentially shift toward America (these are probably the same people who have posters depicting Donald Trump as Rambo or riding a T-rex).

That's overselling the reality. Venezuela isn't nearly as important to China as the Trump/Vance administration would have you believe. While China has been the largest buyer of Venezuelan oil, Venezuelan crude amounted to less than 5 percent of China's seaborne crude imports in 2025. And despite all the talk about China's grip on Venezuela, the country's trade with China is tiny compared with Beijing's overall economic footprint: China-Venezuela trade accounted for only about 1.2 percent of China's total trade with Latin America and the Caribbean during the first eleven months of 2025.

In truth, China could actually benefit from America successfully rebuilding the Venezuelan economy and energy sector. China is one of Venezuela's largest creditors, having poured tens of billions of dollars into the country over the years, much of it through oil-backed loans. Venezuela subsequently defaulted on its sovereign debt and is still estimated to owe Chinese creditors at least $10 billion. A healthier Venezuelan economy pumping – and selling – a lot more oil would have a much better chance of paying that money back.

And China's relationship with Caracas hasn't exactly been a love affair. Beijing became increasingly frustrated with Venezuela's corruption, economic mismanagement and collapsing oil industry after lending the country enormous sums of money. Beijing had become sufficiently wary of Venezuela's perilous economic situation by 2016 – making no new sovereign loans to them as of 2016 – meaning they stopped throwing good money after bad nearly a decade before the United States intervened.

So, let's take a minute to assess what the United States has both lost and gained from attacking at least 67 boats, killing at least 221

people – including Alejandro Carranza, a Colombian fisherman who had long fished the Caribbean for marlin and tuna (we learned of this from his 14-year-old daughter, who told The New York Times, "I never thought I would lose my father in this way.") – and seizing Nicolás Maduro and his wife.

I've already mentioned we lost the right to say anything if Xi Jinping decides to overthrow Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te.

We lost any moral authority we had since the military strikes the Trump/Vance administration is conducting in the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific are illegal under domestic and international law. The administration has ordered the execution of people who are not at war with the United States and who have not been afforded due process. Essentially, they are acting as judge, jury and executioner – and that is not allowed by the global community or by the United States of America.

We lost this round in the war on drugs itself. President Trump has said at least 15 times that the American strikes have reduced maritime drug trafficking into the country by 97 or 98 percent, including an April post on Truth Social that said, "98.2% of Drugs coming into the U.S. by Ocean or Sea have STOPPED!"

That's a flat out lie. On May 29, 2026 – after the United States had spent $4.7 billion, which included AC-130J Ghostrider gunships, F-35 fighter jets and guided-missile destroyers, and around 15,000 U.S. military personnel – The New York Times reported that "epidemiologists, addiction scientists and public health experts say cocaine, by far the top drug smuggled out of South America, is as easy to get in much of the United States as it was before the strikes began" (these findings were based on evaluations of street prices, lethal overdoses, purity of samples and drug seizures at U.S. borders).

For example, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection "seized 47,808 pounds of cocaine in the eight months since the strikes began, more than the 43,227 pounds the agency seized in the eight-month period before the campaign."

Then, on July 27, 2026, The Washington Post followed that up with a report of its own. According to a previously unreported assessment by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), a closed-

door congressional briefing, and interviews with current and former U.S. and foreign officials: “The Trump administration’s deadly military strikes on alleged drug trafficking boats have not reduced the amount of cocaine entering the United States, but they’re prompting criminal organizations to develop new strategies and tactics and undermining traditional investigative methods.”

“In a recent assessment reviewed by The Washington Post, DEA analysts found the strikes had failed to affect the supply or price of cocaine in the United States and had led traffickers to diversify beyond go-fast boats and to avoid international waters, opting instead for larger boats and hemming close to coastlines, where U.S. forces are less likely to open fire… traffickers are also relying more on aircraft, which take off from clandestine airstrips along the Colombian-Venezuelan border and head east to Guyana and Suriname to avoid U.S. forces.”

A senior Colombian security official told the Post that the boat strikes have had a minimal impact: “There was a dissuasive effect in one type of transportation. So, it has forced them to seek out other methods. Taking the drugs out through ports has increased, stockpiling it on large ships.”

We have gained one thing though!! Now that we are “running” Venezuela until it can be “put back on track,” in President Trump’s words, the United States is now on the hook to help cleanup and rebuild after two earthquakes on June 24th caused an estimated $37 billion in damage (equivalent to roughly a third of Venezuela’s annual economic output) and killed more than 4,930 people.

Danny Muñoz, “a bricklayer who pulled the lifeless body of his pregnant stepdaughter out from underneath debris after their apartment building along the coast collapsed”, summed it up perfectly to the Wall Street Journal: “We’re in the hands of God, as well as the Americans. No one else can save us now.”

In a million years I will never understand what Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and congressional Republicans are thinking. Being a loyal ally and putting "America First" DO NOT have to be mutually exclusive endeavors. We can be faithful to our interests without insulting (and abandoning) the entire world. ***America First doesn't have to mean America Alone***.

Of course we should always put America first. Few people in this country would argue that. And *of course* there will be times when we should embrace sovereignty. But we must reject isolationism at all costs. Isolationist rants may make for a great show at campaign rallies but, in the real world, it is reckless and puts Americans in danger.

Without question, any deterioration in our NATO relationships undermines our military edge, diminishes our global leverage, and weakens our ability to wrangle China… all of which make our nation less safe. The abject disaster that is the war in Iran – recklessly entered without the broad allied military coalition characteristic of several previous U.S.-led Middle East campaigns – has already made this depressingly apparent.

For one, America's premiere leadership role in NATO has given us the opportunity to have roughly 30 major/persistent U.S. bases, plus numerous additional military sites throughout Europe. Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and congressional Republicans seem to think we have these bases in other countries as some sort of favor to them. That's inaccurate. While it's true that having the U.S. military around is advantageous for other countries, having a strong military presence in Europe allows the U.S. to not only project power in that region, but also in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Many of our military operations in the Middle East alone have heavily depended on these European bases, and our allies typically allow us wide-ranging access, whether they agree with our mission or not.

Dumping on our allies is also just bad business, because our strong relationships have not only benefited national security but our economy as well. How many times can I say it? *We don't have such an embarrassment of riches in this country that we can just blow everyone else off*.

Trump, Vance, Rubio, Hegseth and the rest can rant and rave about Europe all they want, but American military manufacturers make a fortune from NATO members – building drones, Patriot missiles, helicopters, radar systems and our F-35 fighter jets that numerous NATO countries either fly or plan to fly. In fact, Europe accounted for 38 percent of U.S. major-arms exports from 2021 through 2025 – more than any other region in the world. The United States also supplied 58 percent of the major arms imported by European NATO members during that period.

Thanks to our current leadership's thuggish behavior, however, the European Commission – the main executive body of the European Union (EU) – has stepped up efforts to increase the share of European weaponry in its arsenals and procurement contracts to effectively replace those of the United States to any extent possible.

In response – in what must be one of the most hypocritical statements of the year – the Trump/Vance administration actually had the nerve to say: "The United States strongly opposes any changes to the Directive that would limit U.S. industry's ability to support or otherwise participate in EU member state national defense procurements. *Protectionist* and *exclusionary* policies that strong-arm American companies out of the market – when Europe's largest defense firms continue to greatly benefit from market access in the United States – are the wrong course of action." Do these guys even hear themselves?

Also, the EU outlined a plan in early June 2026 to expand its data centers, semiconductors and cloud computing capabilities with the goal of reducing its dependence on U.S. technology. The plan put forth by the 27 nations goes as far as excluding some American technology providers from sensitive government and critical-infrastructure cloud contracts if they fail the EU's sovereignty and security requirements.

On the economic front, the European Union is part of the world's largest bilateral trade and investment relationship with the United States, supporting millions of jobs on both sides of the Atlantic. In 2025, U.S.–EU trade in goods and services totaled approximately $1.6 trillion – about $4.4 billion every day – while goods trade alone reached $1.0 trillion and services trade reached $542.4 billion. The

relationship is especially important for U.S. services: in 2025, the United States ran a $107.3 billion services trade surplus with the EU, an increase of 10.8 percent over 2024. This was offset by a $220.3 billion U.S. goods trade deficit with the EU, itself a 6.9 percent improvement from 2024.

This means our European allies can hurt us economically – big time. Even before Donald Trump's first Greenland tirade, the EU had compiled a list of U.S. goods worth 93 billion euro – $107 billion – that they can hit us with in retaliatory tariffs (the list was made in 2025 in response to President Trump's Trade War 2.0).

Another thing the EU devised is the "Anti-Coercion Instrument" (ACI) – sometimes referred to as their trade "bazooka" – that allows the European Commission to target almost any U.S. goods or services in Europe with an assortment of barriers and restrictions. These can include restrictions on investment, the lifting of intellectual property protections, the suspension of business licenses, and straight-up bans on market access to the Eurozone.

While Donald Trump remains convinced (despite mountains of evidence to the contrary) that his authoritarian, tough guy approach to trade will bring other countries (with their tails between their legs) to the table, that's just not the world we live in anymore. All his clumsy attempts at hardball have managed to do is further alienate our allies, endanger our access to global markets, wreck our supply chains, and embolden our number one competitor.

So, now – huge surprise – it looks like our allies have decided to move on without us.… just like they did when, in the first week of his first presidency, President Trump withdrew the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

TPP was an ambitious free trade agreement among twelve Asia-Pacific countries – Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnan – designed to eliminate trade barriers and establish new market-oriented trade rules.

At the time, these twelve countries represented nearly 40 percent of the global economy. U.S. trade with TPP countries totaled more than $1.5 trillion in merchandise in 2015 and more than $276 billion in

services in 2014. Annual U.S. foreign direct investment flowing into TPP countries totaled $61 billion in 2014, while TPP countries invested nearly $59 billion in the United States that year.

TPP was offering greater access to markets for service providers, and addressed tariffs on goods and services, nondiscrimination rules, investor protections, e-commerce rules, intellectual property rights, worker's rights, environmental safety and stewardship, dispute resolution mechanisms, and restrictions on state-owned enterprises. The agreement also significantly lowered tariffs and other trade barriers on a wide range of goods. The agreement would have eliminated more than 18,000 tariffs that other TPP countries imposed on U.S. products alone.

After grueling negotiations, TPP was signed by the twelve member countries on February 4, 2016. But the agreement became a political lightning rod during the 2016 presidential campaign, with both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton opposing it. Facing uncertain support in Congress, the Obama administration never submitted implementing legislation for a vote, and the United States therefore never ratified the agreement.

At the time, the Peterson Institute for International Economics, a think tank, estimated that TPP would "increase annual real incomes in the U.S. by $131 billion, or 0.5 percent of GDP, and annual exports by $357 billion, or 9.1 percent of exports, over baseline projections by 2030, when the agreement is nearly fully implemented."

So, after all that hard work, President Trump sure showed the world who was boss when he pulled us out of the deal on January 23, 2017, just three days after his first inauguration. Wow, what a gutsy move! "America First," baby!

Surely there was loud weeping and gnashing of teeth by the other eleven countries when we left, right? All eleven probably went into a fetal position because they had nowhere else to turn!!

Ummm… nope. Not even close. The other countries just carried right on without us, signing a new deal called the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), an agreement designed to expand trade and investment, lower trade barriers and consumer costs, and increase economic growth and

employment among its members. The United Kingdom joined in 2024, becoming its 12th member. China, Taiwan, Ecuador and Ukraine have formally applied to join; Uruguay is now in accession negotiations; and Costa Rica substantially concluded its accession negotiations in May 2026. Indonesia, the Philippines and the United Arab Emirates entered preparatory accession discussions in June 2026, while South Korea and Thailand have also expressed interest in joining.

So, CPTPP didn't just survive America's departure – it has continued expanding. An additional bonus was that our exit from TPP gave China even more room to amplify what was already becoming a dominant presence in Asia, which is the last thing we needed to be doing at the time and a mistake we are paying for more and more by the day. We showed them all right!

President Trump made a huge mistake when he pulled us out of TPP, a fact he seemed to realize pretty quickly. One year after our withdrawal, he indicated during a television interview that he would be willing to get back in the deal and, in April 2018, he officially ordered his top administration officials to investigate rejoining the partnership.

Two years later, in a stunning lack of self-awareness, the U.S. Ambassador to Japan William Hagerty simply could not believe the *nerve* of Japan to forge an economic partnership agreement with the European Union and their *nerve* to continue with the CPTPP, which by that time had taken effect.

"By implementing these agreements before addressing our bilateral trade relationship," he said, "Japan is effectively redistributing market share away from its strongest ally, the United States... Given the strength of our security and diplomatic relationships, our view is that we should have an equally strong economic relationship."

I'm sorry, *who* has *what* nerve? He had to be kidding. Sorry boys, that's just not the way real life works. Has Mr. Hagerty never heard the phrase *what's good* for *the goose is good for the gander*? My guess is that Japan decided that, since the United States decided to turn inward and not be a cooperative world player, they should just *Make Japan Great Again*! I bet that would look great on a red hat!

After that delightful experience, one would think that Donald Trump & Co. would have gained some much-needed wisdom and insight but … nope… eight years later, it all started again.

But this time the world was ready. Immediately after President Trump announced 25 percent tariffs on all goods from Canada and Mexico on January 20, 2025 – his very first day back in office – then Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau revealed he and Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum had agreed to work together to fight back against his nonsense.

< Donald Trump has always had an inexplicable trade grudge with Canada, a beef that was still going strong in August 2026 when Canada suspended trade negotiations; which triggered President Trump's 50 percent tariffs on a range of Canadian goods; which caused Prime Minister Mark Carney to say he would retaliate "dollar for dollar." Trump's long-standing grievance is bizarre because Canada is actually one of our best trading partners. Personally, I'm convinced that Donald's main problem with Canada initially started in his first term because then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was younger, smarter, thinner and looks uber hot in a suit, but I can't prove it. >

President Sheinbaum also weighed in, saying Mexico's response would include both tariff and nontariff measures, including an import-substitution program called "Plan Mexico" as well as a potential "carousel retaliation," which would regularly but randomly rotate the U.S. products that were subject to Trump's tariffs with products from other countries. This savvy move injected uncertainty into many American export sectors like agriculture.

South Korea's president dispatched special envoys to Australia and Germany to discuss defense and trade issues, with plans to send delegations to several others. Brazil and India announced plans to increase their bilateral trade by 70 percent, to $20 billion, and Brazil and Mexico began deepening their relationship.

In January 2025, Indonesia became a full member of BRICS, the grouping of major emerging economies whose first leaders' summit was held in 2009. It joined Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia was also invited to join and is listed as a member by BRICS itself, although

Riyadh has stopped short of formally confirming its accession. The expanded BRICS represents nearly half the world's population and roughly 40 percent of global economic output when measured by purchasing-power parity. Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda and Uzbekistan also became BRICS "partner countries" in 2025, with Vietnam subsequently joining them.

In May 2025, the ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) –Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – met in Malaysia with the six Middle Eastern nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Timor-Leste, then an observer, was poised to become ASEAN's eleventh member, with ASEAN leaders agreeing at their May summit to admit it formally in October 2025. The ASEAN-GCC summit sought to deepen economic ties between the two regions, including exploring a potential free-trade agreement. Meanwhile, India, which already maintains a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and extensive economic and political cooperation with ASEAN, was moving to deepen that relationship under a new 2026–2030 Plan of Action. Canada, an ASEAN Strategic Partner since 2023, was likewise developing a new 2026–2030 Plan of Action covering political-security, economic and socio-cultural cooperation.

Britain and the Gulf Cooperation Council concluded their free-trade negotiations on May 20, 2026. The agreement reduces tariffs and nontariff barriers and expands market access for goods, services and investment between Britain and one of the wealthiest regional blocs in the world. The UK government estimates that once fully implemented, the tariff reductions alone will eliminate nearly $800 million annually in duties on current UK exports to the GCC.

Within weeks after Donald Trump's 2024 victory – well before he was even sworn in – the European Union reached a new political pact with Switzerland to deepen economic ties, update existing trade deals, and establish new cooperation agreements.

A couple of weeks after *that*, the EU struck a deal to increase trade with Mexico before finalizing an economic partnership with Indonesia. They then started negotiating trade deals with Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand and moved to build closer ties with India, South Africa, and other countries across South America and Asia. In May 2025, Britain and the EU announced a "reset" of post-Brexit relations and in June 2025, the EU and Canada struck a defense agreement, expanding their military cooperation.

In June 2026, the European Commission formally sent the EU–Indonesia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement forward for authorization to sign, and on January 9, 2026, EU countries approved a trade deal with the South American Mercosur nations, bringing together a market of more than 700 million consumers accounting for a quarter of global gross domestic product. Mercosur's full members are Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Bolivia, and the associated states are Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, and Suriname (Venezuela has been suspended).

At the signing, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said, "We choose fair trade over tariffs. We choose a productive long-term partnership over isolation. We will join forces like never before, because we believe that this is the best way to make our people and our countries prosper." Must be nice.

Two weeks later, India and the European Union finalized what Ursula von der Leyen called "the mother of all deals" – a free-trade agreement that is the largest such pact by population ever. The deal links almost two billion consumers and eliminates or reduces tariffs for over 90 percent of EU goods, potentially saving the EU around $4.8 billion a year. The agreement is expected to double the total value of goods that the EU exports to India within the next six years.

Of the deal, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that this was "the biggest free-trade agreement by India so far" and that the deal demonstrated India's and Europe's "shared commitment to democracy and rule of law."

India, clearly on a roll, wasn't even close to finished. After remarkably fast negotiations, India and New Zealand signed their new free-trade agreement on April 27, 2026. The agreement provides duty-

free access for all Indian exports to New Zealand, while India will cut or eliminate tariffs on about 95 percent of New Zealand exports. New Zealand also committed to facilitating $20 billion of investment into India over 15 years.

THEN, India signed an agreement with the United Kingdom that entered into force on July 15, 2026 – wherein India substantially reduces tariffs on British goods, while the UK provides greatly expanded duty-free access to Indian exports. Britain estimates the agreement could increase bilateral trade by approximately $35 billion annually in the long run and increase UK GDP by about $6.5 billion annually. THEN, India and Oman's Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement entered into force June 1, 2026. The deal gives Indian products duty-free access across most of Oman's tariff lines and expands access for services and investment.

But once again, the biggest winner – by far – in Donald Trump's Trade War 2.0 is Xi Jinping, because when the United States acts crazy, all roads lead to China.

The first time around, China helped facilitate the signing of the ASEAN-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), an agreement between the ten ASEAN nations and China, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea. Signed in 2020 after eight years of negotiations, RCEP became the world's largest free-trade agreement by the combined GDP of its members, encompassing roughly 30 percent of global economic output and around 2.2 billion people – nearly 30 percent of the world's population.

Now, the haphazard, incompetent trade moves by the Trump/Vance administration have played right into Xi Jinping's hand for a *second* time, helping him leverage the global goodwill he has cultivated for decades.

After President Trump's January 2026 broadside against Europe, Xi Jinping and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney announced a new "strategic partnership" that will lead to "considerable" Chinese investment in Canada's auto sector within three years. In a remarkable statement, Carney said, "In terms of the way that our relationship has progressed in recent months, with China, it is more predictable" –

meaning, China is now more predictable than the United States of America. Wow.

Also in January, United Kingdom Prime Minister Keir Starmer headed to Beijing, the first visit by a UK prime minister in eight years, and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung said that he wants a "full-scale restoration" of ties with China. Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo also traveled to Beijing and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz announced a trip there as well. French President Emmanuel Macron would have probably announced a trip, but he had already been there in December.

China and Switzerland completed negotiations on a substantial expansion of their existing free-trade agreement on August 20, 2026, which expands rules covering services, digital trade, trade facilitation, competition and economic cooperation. Under the new terms, 99.8 percent of current Swiss exports will be able to enter China duty-free, compared with only about half under the previous arrangement.

After President Trump insulted Colombia with his Trade War 2.0 threats – calling Colombian President Gustavo Petro a "lunatic who has many mental problems" and "an illegal drug leader" before hitting him with sanctions – China's ambassador to Colombia posted on X: "We are at the best moment in our relations between China and Colombia, which we've had for 45 years."

Thanks to both Trump administrations, China's trade with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has exploded. China is now LAC's second-largest trading partner, behind the United States, with bilateral merchandise trade reaching roughly $510 billion in 2024. In South America, however, China has become the largest trading partner overall and is the number one trading partner of several of the region's major economies, including Brazil, Chile and Peru.

In March 2026, President Trump met with leaders from across Latin America and the Caribbean for his inaugural *Shield of the Americas* Summit. The meeting was yet another attempt by the Trump/Vance administration to telegraph their supposed geopolitical primacy in the Western Hemisphere.

Although members of the Trump Bro-Club – like Argentina's Javier Milei and El Salvador's Nayib Bukele – showed up, leaders of

Brazil, Mexico and Colombia (which combined make-up over half of the region's GDP) were no-shows. This could be that, since Chinese banks have given over $120 billion in loans to LAC nations, they can keep their options open, or it could be because the Trump/Vance administration's heavy-handed economic coercion approach isn't sitting well with them.

Even those who showed up are playing both sides. Javier Milei – who gladly accepted $20 billion from the Trump/Vance administration and who has done things his buddy Trump wants, like rejecting an invite to join BRICS and blocking Chinese projects – has nevertheless overseen a remarkable expansion of economic ties with China. Argentine exports to China surged 125 percent year-on-year, and China even overtook Brazil as Argentina's largest trading partner during certain months. At the same time, Milei's government has maintained important Chinese investments and extended Argentina's multibillion-dollar currency-swap arrangement with Beijing.

Then there is China's blossoming relationship with Mexico. After investing $140 million in a Nuevo León factory producing electric aerial work platforms, China's Lingong Machinery Group (LGMG), a major construction-machinery manufacturer, announced plans with strategic partners and suppliers for a much larger industrial development in the state, with total investment estimated at $5 billion and the potential to create roughly 7,000 jobs. Nuevo León's proximity to the United States and access to the broader North American market were major attractions. In 2024, BYD, China's leading electric-vehicle manufacturer, sent a delegation to the Mexican state of Jalisco to explore establishing an EV manufacturing plant there.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – with a combined GDP of roughly $3.8 trillion – is China's largest trading partner, while China is ASEAN's largest external trading partner. According to Chinese statistics, bilateral trade reached $982.3 billion in 2024, roughly twice the value of U.S.-ASEAN merchandise trade. On October 28, 2025, ASEAN and China signed the ACFTA 3.0 Upgrade Protocol, the latest expansion of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area, which was originally established in 2002 and fully implemented in

2010. The new agreement expands cooperation into areas including the digital and green economies and strengthens supply-chain connectivity.

China is the largest trading partner of both Japan and South Korea. Chinese manufacturers have also made startling headway into Southeast Asian consumer markets. In 2024, roughly 90 percent of battery-electric vehicles sold in Indonesia were produced by Chinese automakers, while Chinese automakers have increasingly challenged the longstanding dominance of Japanese brands in markets such as Thailand and Malaysia. Chinese smartphone manufacturers have likewise captured a large share of Southeast Asia's smartphone market, collectively far outselling Apple's iPhones in unit shipments.

In April 2025, Xi Jinping embarked on a three-nation tour of Southeast Asia – to Cambodia, Malysia and Vietnam – where he signed over 100 agreements addressing infrastructure, technology, education and health.

Between 2018 and 2022, Chinese investment in Vietnam roughly doubled, while Chinese exports to Vietnam surged 75 percent, reaching $147 billion. The relationship has continued to deepen. In 2025, investors from mainland China and Hong Kong together registered roughly $8.14 billion in pledged foreign direct investment in the strategically important Southeast Asian country. Meanwhile, U.S. registered investment in Vietnam fell from roughly $700 million in 2022 to $500 million in 2023**.** In 2024, U.S. registered investment fell further, to just $287 million – a 54 percent decline from the previous year – leaving the United States 12th among sources of registered foreign investment in Vietnam.

This is not good. It's impossible to overstate how critical the manufacturing hub along the South China Sea is to global supply chain.

< The importance of the U.S. maintaining a strong relationship with Vietnam goes way beyond trade. An October 2025 investigative report from The New York Times revealed that Vietnam and Russia have strengthened their military and political relationship. The report found that Vietnam is secretly buying arms from Russia in defiance of sanctions, using third-party intermediaries to hide payments.

The NYT also reports that Vietnamese officials are frustrated by the Trump/Vance administration's foreign aid cuts and unpredictable

tariff games – developments that are pushing them farther away from Washington and even closer to Moscow. Plus, a $1.5 billion golf complex outside Hanoi – as well as plans for a Trump skyscraper in Ho Chi Minh City – have infuriated Vietnamese residents because their leaders are granting the Trump family more generous concessions than anyone in Vietnam, however connected, receives. >

Then there is India. On January 20, 2025, India's foreign minister was seated in the front row for President Trump's second inauguration, a symbol of our special relationship with the world's most populous democratic country.

Eight months later, after the Trump/Vance administration slapped the highest tariff rate in the world on India, a photo emerged of Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The photo was taken in September 2025 at the Tianjin summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which was attended by 20 foreign leaders, including the leaders of Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Belarus and Central Asian and Caucasus states (although Kim Jong Un didn't attend the summit, he joined the group later for the infamous Chinese military parade, which we'll cover in few minutes).

In response to the alarming photo, President Trump posted: "Looks like we've lost India and Russia to deepest, darkest, China. May they have a long and prosperous future together!" – as if he had nothing to do with it.

As of late August 2026, the comprehensive U.S.–India Free Trade Agreement that was negotiated in February is still not completed, but regardless of what happens with it, major damage has already been done … which may be one of the most outrageously irresponsible things the Trump/Vance administration has done yet regarding one of our closest allies.

For one, India is absolutely critical to our Indo-Pacific national security strategy. China's aggressive moves in the Indian Ocean make it imperative that the United States and India have even ***more*** bilateral defense cooperation, certainly not less (more on this in a few minutes). India is also our best economic hedge against China. It is a vital geopolitical counterweight, offering supply chain diversification and a massive workforce with expanding manufacturing capabilities.

Before Donald Trump's reelection, many American and multinational companies had begun planning major investments in India as part of what is known as "China Plus One" – a strategy in which companies reduce their dependence on China by adding manufacturing and sourcing capacity in other countries. India emerged as one of the leading beneficiaries. But in August 2025, the Trump/Vance administration levied tariffs reaching 50 percent on many Indian exports to the United States, including an additional 25 percent penalty tied to India's purchases of Russian oil. The tariffs weakened India's cost advantage for U.S.-bound manufacturing and threatened to undercut some of the progress it had made in attracting supply chains away from China.

What happened next was entirely predictable because the minute the United States turned into a bully and started acting shady and shifty, India had little choice but to turn to Beijing. Prime Minister Modi immediately booked passage to China, his first trip there in seven years.

China and India have an extremely complicated relationship, complete with soldiers facing off across their disputed borders in the Himalayas. That said, in classic Phase Two fashion, Xi Jinping is eager to cooperate with Prime Minister Modi, at least economically, because once again he recognizes what Donald Trump and JD Vance obviously don't: India is a massive ***market*** with 1.47 ***billion*** customers.

Measured at current exchange rates, India is among the world's five largest economies and is rapidly moving up the rankings as it closes the gap with Japan and Germany. The Indian government has explicitly set its sights on becoming the world's third-largest economy. On a purchasing-power-parity basis, India has already achieved that ranking and accounts for roughly 8–10 percent of global economic output.

Think about it this way: middle-income countries are home to roughly 75 percent of the world's population and account for nearly one-third of global GDP. During Donald Trump's first term, researchers at the Brookings Institution – a nonprofit think tank that conducts research in the social sciences – reported that "just over 50 percent of the world's population, or some 3.8 billion people, lived in households with enough discretionary expenditure to be considered

‘middle class’ or ‘rich’.” The middle class, they concluded, had already become the largest source of consumer demand in the global economy. Their projections at the time illustrated where that market was heading: by 2030, they estimated India’s middle-class consumption market could reach $12.3 trillion in 2011 purchasing-power-parity dollars, approaching the projected $15.9 trillion U.S. middle-class market.

But even more important, India is a perfect example of how, if we disengage from the world and forfeit our role as an international force, dictatorial leaders will race to fill the void.

In December 2025 – with perfect timing – Vladimir Putin followed up the September Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit with a two-day summit in New Delhi with Prime Minister Modi. After Modi greeted Putin at the airport with a big bear hug, the two leaders solidified the relationship between their countries by finalizing an economic plan to boost annual trade to $100 billion by 2030 (their bilateral trade was $68.7 billion in FY2025); reinforcing energy security (Putin promised Modi “uninterrupted shipments” of fuel); and signing multiple labor agreements.

Back in China, Xi Jinping continues to execute Mao’s Phase Two like a boss. Remember the *strategic stalemate* phase? Where China is supposed to be building strength and *recruiting allies* while eroding the opposition’s morale through guerrilla attacks and propaganda?

We’ll get to the last part of that – eroding the opposition’s morale through guerrilla attacks and propaganda – in a second, but as for the recruiting allies part, hold on to your hats.

As the Trump/Vance administration withdraws from the world and does super shitty things like shutter the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) – – an agency that cost less than 1 percent of the U.S. federal budget but saved an estimated 5.6 million lives every year by providing interventions for HIV/AIDS, vaccine-preventable illnesses, and emergency/ humanitarian relief alone (this number doesn’t even include interventions for water and sanitation, family planning, and nutrition, which are significant in and of themselves) – – the Chinese continue on with the extensive global outreach they have nurtured for years.

"Gracias China!!!," Mexico's foreign minister posted to Twitter after China – now Mexico's second-largest trading partner in Latin America – sent his country a planeload of masks, testing kits, vaccines and ventilators during the Covid crisis.

China began its global charm offensive in 2013, when Xi Jinping announced what would become the multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). One Belt, One Road extends low-cost loans and builds infrastructure for countries across the world – including roads, ports, railways, power plants, 5G networks and fiber-optic cables.

Since then, Xi Jinping has worked hard to convince the world that, even though China has a state-controlled, rabidly protected economy, *they* are actually the true champions of globalization and free trade – a narrative that the Trump/Vance administration is feeding into with their protectionist policies.

"Pursuing protectionism is just like locking oneself in a dark room. While wind and rain may be kept outside, that dark room will also block light and air. No one will emerge as a winner in a trade war," Xi Jinping said at the World Economic Forum on January 17, 2017, just days before Donald Trump was inaugurated for his first term.

< If you remember a few pages back to the polls taken around the world – the ones where people in most European and Latin American countries now say China is the global economic leader – their strategy is clearly working. >

Most anyone who is paying attention considers One Belt, One Road to be the most aggressive worldwide outreach endeavor in recent history, if not ever – and for good reason.

Between 2013 and early 2019, China dramatically expanded the reach of the Belt and Road Initiative. By March 2019, Beijing had signed 173 cooperation documents with 125 countries and 29 international organizations. Eighteen of the European Union's 27 members would sign memoranda of understanding with China on the initiative. Between 2013 and 2018, trade between China and Belt and Road countries exceeded $6 trillion, growing by an average of 4 percent annually. Even during the pandemic, Beijing continued pursuing economic agreements.

Ten years after Xi Jinping launched what he would later call his "project of the century," nearly 150 countries had signed on to the Belt and Road Initiative in some form, while Chinese institutions had committed hundreds of billions of dollars to infrastructure and other development projects around the world.

These deals are alarmingly strategic. In September 2024, in the South American town of Guyana, the Chinese were busy building everything from hotels to bridges to a $150 million international airport – while, offshore, ExxonMobil pumped thousands of barrels daily from a new oil discovery.

Just how deep into the global economy does China's reach extend thanks to One Belt, One Road? In 2019, the Kiel Institute for the World Economy – an independent, nonprofit economic research institute and think tank based in Kiel, Germany – analyzed "a total of 1,974 Chinese loans and 2,947 Chinese grants to 152 countries from 1949 to 2017."

The analysis revealed that "China's direct loans and trade credits had climbed from almost zero in 1998 to more than $1.6 trillion, or close to 2 percent of world GDP in 2018. These loans mostly went to low- and middle-income countries. In total, estimates suggest that the Chinese state now accounted for a quarter of total bank lending to emerging markets. This had transformed China into the largest official creditor, *easily surpassing the IMF or the World Bank*."

Although these are huge numbers, they added, the actual numbers are much larger because "about one half of China's large-scale lending to developing countries is 'hidden' and not recorded in the main international databases used by researchers and practitioners alike."

A January 2026 investment report published by Christoph Nedopil – a University of Queensland professor, a visiting professor at Fudan International School of Finance Shanghai, and a professorial research associate at SOAS University of London – found that the Belt and Road Initiative hit a record level of engagement in 2025 (over $213 billion), driven by massive energy, mining, and technology investments, with significant increases in Central Asia and construction deals in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America.

That said, in recent years, China's role as global creditor has changed. After two decades of explosive growth, lending for large new

overseas infrastructure projects fell sharply, while many developing-country borrowers struggled to service existing debts. Beijing increasingly found itself refinancing and restructuring old loans and providing emergency financing to distressed borrowers. By 2023, researchers had identified more than $1.3 trillion in Chinese official-sector loans and grants supporting nearly 21,000 projects in 165 low- and middle-income countries between 2000 and 2021. And by 2025, researchers had uncovered another feature of China's lending system: nearly $420 billion in public and publicly guaranteed loans across 57 countries were effectively secured by collateral, often through foreign-currency revenues deposited in accounts controlled by Chinese lenders. So essentially, China has evolved from one of the world's most aggressive development lenders into something else as well – a major creditor managing the consequences of its own unprecedented global lending boom.

Meanwhile, China has been wooing Russia for years, all the way back to when Presidents Putin and Xi Jinping made pancakes together at a joint military drill in 2018. Declaring their friendship had "no limits," Putin and Xi Jinping signed an agreement during the Beijing Olympics (just weeks before Putin's invasion of Ukraine) that rejected NATO expansion and framed Western democracy as some sort of evil plot.

Since then, China has been happily shoving drone parts and other war hardware to its new best friend Russia. In fact, Russia imported $1.9 billion of "high-priority dual-use items" from China in the first half of 2025, including products that can help make armored vehicles, body armor, drones, military jets, and tanks (these are all subject to Western export controls). Chinese components have repeatedly been identified in Russian drones and other weapons, while Chinese machinery, electronics, materials, and other dual-use goods continue to feed Russia's defense-industrial base.

China has also been Russia's largest purchaser of fossil fuels during the war in Ukraine. From December 5, 2022, when the Western oil price cap and EU embargo took effect, through July 2026, China bought 50 percent of all Russian crude exports. In July 2026 alone, China bought approximately $9 billion worth of Russian fossil fuels,

accounting for 43 percent of Russia's fossil-fuel export revenues from its five largest importing countries. Crude oil accounted for roughly $6.3 billion of those purchases.

This has provided Moscow with a crucial source of revenue as it finances its war: oil and gas revenues remain an important source of funding for the Russian federal budget, while oil proceeds have also helped replenish reserves that Moscow has drawn upon to finance defense spending.

China, meanwhile, has become an exceptionally important market for oil constrained by Western sanctions. Sanctioned crude from Iran, Russia, and Venezuela probably supplied more than one-fifth of China's total crude-oil imports in 2025 – at least 2.6 million barrels per day. China bought approximately 1.38 million barrels per day from Iran and 389,000 from Venezuela, in addition to at least 800,000 barrels per day of sanctioned Russian crude.

China makes no secret of why they are doing this. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has said openly that his country doesn't want Russia to lose in Ukraine because it wants the attention of the United States divided between Europe and Asia.

The help between Russia and China goes both ways. Documents obtained by the hactivist group Black Moon – and reviewed by The Washington Post – revealed that Russia is helping prepare China to attack Taiwan, agreeing to provide equipment and training for a Chinese airborne battalion and sharing its knowledge in airdropping armored vehicles.

This is not a small development. In October 2024, Russia agreed to sell the People's Liberation Army Air Force 37 BMD-4M light amphibious vehicles, 11 Sprut-SDM1 self-propelled anti-tank guns, and 11 BTR-MDM airborne armored personnel carriers, in addition to command and observation vehicles and special purpose parachute systems designed to airdrop heavy loads from high altitudes.

And now Russia and China are both helping Iran fight against *the United States*. In March 2026, three U.S. officials told The Washington Post that Russia was providing Iran with targeting intelligence to attack American forces in the Middle East, including the locations of U.S. warships and aircraft. The assistance reportedly included satellite

imagery and other intelligence that could help Iran target American military positions, radars, and command-and-control facilities. Russia did this even as Moscow publicly called for an end to the war, which it condemned as an "unprovoked act of armed aggression."

This helped Iran … A LOT. Iran subsequently demonstrated a striking ability to hit American military facilities: a Washington Post analysis of satellite imagery found that Iranian attacks damaged or destroyed at least 228 structures or pieces of equipment at 15 U.S. military sites across the Middle East. Russia has also reportedly shared drone tactics and technology developed during its war in Ukraine with Iran.

China has continued supplying Iran with materials critical to its ballistic-missile program. In March, The Washington Post tracked two ships operated by Iran's sanctioned state shipping company, the Shabdis and Barzin, as they left the Gaolan chemical-storage port in Zhuhai, China, loaded with cargo and headed for Iran. Both ships had taken on cargo at a port known for handling sodium perchlorate, a key precursor used to manufacture the solid propellant in ballistic missiles.

Those shipments were not isolated. At least four sanctioned Iranian ships believed to be carrying sodium perchlorate from China subsequently reached Iranian ports, while a fifth was tracked near Iranian waters. All had departed from Gaolan. These shipments continued even as Iran was firing ballistic missiles and drones at American forces and U.S. allies across the Middle East.

And this was part of a much larger pipeline. European intelligence sources reported that China had already supplied Iran with roughly 2,000 tons of sodium perchlorate in several shipments beginning in September 2025, as Tehran attempted to rebuild its ballistic-missile arsenal after its war with Israel. Earlier shipments in 2025 reportedly included roughly another 2,000 tons – about 1,000 tons in February and another 1,000 tons in June. The U.S. Treasury has sanctioned Chinese and Iranian companies involved in procuring sodium perchlorate from China for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The evidence that Russia and China are both helping Iran fight against the United States is only getting stronger. Russia's help didn't stop at satellite intel. The Wall Street Journal reported Moscow also

sent Iran upgraded Shahed drone parts – better navigation, better targeting – plus tactical playbooks straight from the Ukraine battlefield: how many drones to send, what altitude to fly. One Carnegie analyst put it bluntly: Iran barely has its own military satellites, so Russian imagery is a massive force multiplier. The irony isn't lost on Ukraine, which is now sending air-defense specialists to the Gulf to help U.S. partners shoot down the exact same drones Ukraine has spent years learning to counter.

Even Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth is admitting this reality, telling Congress that both Russia and China are helping Iran "to some extent." UK Defense Secretary John Healey has said Britain suspects Russia of helping Iran improve its drone tactics**,** including techniques developed in Ukraine, while Volodymyr Zelensky himself says Ukraine has its own signals intelligence proving Russia is still feeding Tehran targeting data.

China's role is murkier but no less alarming. Experts told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) a Chinese firm may have used A.I. to analyze satellite imagery of Prince Sultan Air Base days before Iran hit it hard.

The Guardian reported that Iranian missiles were displaying increasingly sophisticated capabilities, including steerable warheads and improved terminal guidance, while analysts pointed separately to Chinese electronics and imagery and tactics resembling those Russia developed in Ukraine. And leaked documents shared with Iran International revealed Chinese trading firms allegedly lining up a shipment big enough for 2,500 missiles. So, all this means that the sodium perchlorate pipeline from March wasn't a one-off, it was a preview.

China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are obviously doing anything and everything possible to solidify their "We Hate America" club, and we can't allow this to get any worse than it already is. Individually, these countries pose constant challenges to our national security but, together, their collective capabilities improve their resilience against our efforts to constrain and/or deter their activities.

The disruptive and destructive collateral damage of tyranny knows no borders. Authoritarian powers will always try to expand their control

by sabotaging the democratic sovereignty of other states. And they will zealously join together to do it. That's just a fact.

Can you imagine what would happen if Xi Jinping had a free pass at Taiwan, then decided he wanted to reshape the entire Indo-Pacific order, starting with the Philippines? Or if Putin had free reign to charge through the rest of Eastern Europe, and then through the Balkans?

I *can* imagine these things, which is one of many reasons why I'm completely bewildered by the thought process of Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, congressional Republicans, and many others in this administration. The new China, Russia, Iran, North Korea Fight Club makes it essential we have as many countries on our side as possible.

China's increasingly aggressive military posture toward Taiwan and its massive military buildup in the South China Sea make strong U.S. alliances in the Indo-Pacific an urgent priority.

China claims enormous portions of the South China Sea are within its famous "nine-dash line," but in 2016 an international tribunal ruled that there was no legal basis for China's sweeping claims of historic rights beyond those allowed under international maritime law. Unsurprisingly, Beijing simply rejected the ruling, still claiming Taiwan as its territory, saying that roughly 90 percent of the South China Sea has belonged to them since "ancient times." They again pointed to waters within the "nine-dash line" that, oddly enough, appears only on Chinese maps. Maybe Xi Jinping would like to borrow Donald Trump's black Sharpie! :) Because of its staunch position, China has repeatedly pledged to take Taiwan "back," by force if necessary.

In any event, the scale of China's buildup is staggering. A Washington Post analysis estimated that the replacement value of Chinese military infrastructure on Hainan Island and across its South China Sea positions exceeded $50 billion as of 2022. About $15 billion of that was on its fortified artificial-island bases, which now feature long runways, hardened aircraft shelters, missiles, radars and other military infrastructure. Hainan – sometimes called China's Hawaii – serves as a major launching pad into the South China Sea, hosting

warships, aircraft, missiles and submarines, including ballistic-missile submarines that carry nuclear weapons.

And China is still expanding. In August 2026, satellite imagery showed that Beijing had completed the first stage of reclamation at disputed Antelope Reef, creating a roughly six-kilometer artificial island with a harbor and indications of a future runway.

China has also developed an enormous state-supported maritime militia operating partly through ostensibly civilian fishing vessels. In December 2025, roughly 2,000 Chinese fishing boats assembled into enormous formations in the East China Sea. Weeks later, about 1,400 vessels formed another floating formation stretching more than 200 miles – demonstrating a remarkable ability to coordinate civilian vessels that could potentially obstruct shipping or support a blockade.

In May 2026, The Wall Street Journal reported that "about 200 Chinese fishing boats – part of China's state-directed maritime fleet – recently pushed further east in the Yellow Sea. Some came within 150 miles of the Japanese city of Sasebo, home to a core U.S. naval base."

The elaborate system being built is designed to allow China to restrict who has access to the Western Pacific – and it's working. For decades, analysists have worried that China would eventually be able to extend its reach to what is known as the "Second Island Chain," a route that connects Japan, Guam, and Papua-New Guinea. This is a huge deal because this area is up to 3,000 kilometers away from China.

Well, I'm sorry to report we have now let this happen. While it's not evident China has built permanent bases there yet, China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) crossed into the Second Island Chain in June 2025, demonstrating the growing ability of the People's Liberation Army Navy to project power thousands of kilometers from China.

Clearly, Beijing is steadily acquiring more ways to threaten, surveil and potentially deny access to U.S. and allied forces across a much larger area… which brings us to Taiwan. For years, China has used significant pressure to force Taiwan to accept its "One China" vision, which essentially gives China complete control of Taiwan.

Let's be crystal clear: We *cannot* under any circumstances allow China to invade Taiwan. Period. Full stop.

There are multiple reasons this cannot happen. For one, a Chinese attack could pull Japan – and potentially the United States – into the conflict. Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi has said some Chinese military action against Taiwan could constitute a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan, potentially allowing Japanese military intervention.

While the U.S.-Japan security treaty does not automatically require America to enter a Taiwan war simply because Japan does, if China attacked Japanese territory or U.S. forces stationed in Japan, America's treaty obligations could come directly into play.

A Chinese invasion or blockade would also be an economic catastrophe since Taiwan sits at a crucial maritime crossroads that a huge portion of global trade passes through (with crucial chokepoints like the Bashi Channel sitting at Taiwan's edges). It's impossible to overstate the importance of the South China Sea to worldwide commerce. Roughly one-third of global maritime shipping – trillions and trillions of dollars – passes through the South China Sea, making it one of the most important commercial waterways on Earth.

Not to mention that, if China cut off Taiwan's chip exports to American companies, our tech industry – heck, the entire U.S. economy – would be paralyzed.

A 2022 confidential report commissioned by the Semiconductor Industry Association and reviewed by The New York Times revealed that America losing access to chips from Taiwan would lead to the largest economic crisis since the Great Depression. U.S. economic output would drop 11 percent, twice as much as the 2008 recession.

Four years later, a 2026 Bloomberg Economics analysis estimated that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan that draws the United States into the conflict could cost the global economy $10.6 trillion – nearly 10 percent of worldwide GDP – in the first year alone. U.S. GDP could fall 6.6 percent. Much of the damage would come from losing access to Taiwan's semiconductor production, which currently accounts for roughly 62 percent of the world's cutting-edge logic chips. Even a

yearlong blockade of Taiwan, without a full-scale war, could reduce global GDP by 5.3 percent and U.S. GDP by 3.2 percent.

But the strategic and human consequences could be even greater. A forcible takeover of democratic Taiwan would dramatically alter the military balance in East Asia and increase pressure on U.S. allies including Japan and the Philippines.

When Washington established diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1979, the United States recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) government as the sole legal government of China. But it did not recognize Beijing's sovereignty over Taiwan. Instead, Washington merely "acknowledged" the Chinese position that Taiwan is part of China.

Congress simultaneously passed the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 which obligates the U.S. to assist Taiwan in maintaining its defensive capability, demands peaceful resolutions between Beijing and Taipei, and forbids unilateral changes to the status quo by either side. While there is no formal defense pact, meaning the U.S. isn't automatically required to go to war if China attacks Taiwan, we are required to make defensive weapons available to Taiwan and maintain the capacity to resist force or coercion against it.

We cannot ignore the danger here. In late December 2025 – in what China called a "stern warning" against outside interference in Chinese affairs, after the Trump/Vance administration approved an $11 billon U.S. arms sales package to Taiwan – the People's Liberation Army (PLA) fired over two dozen long-range rockets into the waters around Taiwan and surrounded the island with bombers, fighter jets, and new amphibious assault ships, while its vessels and aircraft practiced repelling an approaching enemy force. These live-fire military exercises sure looked a lot like a practice run for an assault on the democratically governed island.

Now, as of August 2026, the Trump/Vance administration is procrastinating on a $14 billion arms package to Taiwan – in addition to $30 billion of U.S. approved weapons to Taiwan that have yet to be delivered – enabling China and further undermining U.S. deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. We need to get these air-defense systems, missiles, drones and other weapons to Taiwan to strengthen deterrence and to

allow Taiwan to defend itself against China when – not if – it comes to that.

So, as you can see, we need as many allies as we can get.

Yet, instead of building a global coalition to deal with these issues, Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio not only pick petty fights with our best allies but also withdraw from global partnerships. In January 2026 alone, they pulled us out of 66 multilateral organizations, 31 of which are entities associated with the United Nations.

This last move ***really*** makes no sense. To win the global game, we must use every tool in our arsenal. This means we need to understand that, far from being a drag on us, multilateral international institutions – much like positive relationships with our allies – are, to use a military term, force multipliers – meaning, they magnify our strengths and allow us to leverage our investments, advancements, and safety. It's a stone-cold fact: There is strength in numbers, plain and simple.

If most of the world created a unified block under the ***leadership*** of ***America***, China would have little choice but to come around because, if they don't, they will be isolated and that simply does not work for their ambitious global plans. To be a legitimate, fully accepted international player, China must be held accountable and forced to be transparent, modernize its trading practices, protect intellectual property, and allow better access for foreign business. Ironically, if we play our cards right, China's thirst for world domination is the very thing that can help us ultimately keep them in line.

Take the World Trade Organization (WTO), for example. Even amid all the trade chaos, the Trump/Vance administration's actions still don't remotely resolve one of the fundamental complaints U.S. companies have about China: Beijing's heavily state-directed economic model gives favored Chinese companies advantages their market-based competitors don't enjoy.

When China joined the WTO in 2001, many Western policymakers hoped integration into the global trading system would push Beijing toward a more market-oriented economy. Instead, China remains heavily reliant on state-owned enterprises, industrial policy, preferential

financing and government subsidies. WTO members continue to complain about inadequate subsidy transparency, state intervention and policies that contribute to global overcapacity.

Steel is a prime example. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Chinese steelmakers receive substantially more government support than competitors elsewhere. As Chinese domestic demand has weakened, more of that production has gone overseas: Chinese steel exports reached a record 131 million metric tons in 2025, putting additional pressure on manufacturers and prices around the world.

China's frustrating trade practices extend beyond subsidies. U.S. officials continue to raise concerns about forced or pressured technology transfers, discriminatory intellectual-property policies and alleged state-supported cyber theft of commercial information. China also manages its currency closely; although the U.S. Treasury does not currently label China a currency manipulator, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has concluded that the renminbi is undervalued in real terms.

These are precisely the kinds of problems that demand a coordinated response. The WTO provides a multilateral, rules-based trading system covering 166 countries and roughly 98 percent of world trade, along with mechanisms for challenging subsidies, discrimination and other violations.

And this may be an unusually good time to do so, because America is no longer alone in complaining about China's economic model. As trade with the United States weakened, China increasingly redirected exports elsewhere. In 2025, Chinese exports to the U.S. fell roughly 20 percent, while exports increased 8.4 percent to the European Union, 13.4 percent to ASEAN countries and 25.8 percent to Africa. China finished the year with a record trade surplus of nearly $1.2 trillion.

That means other countries are increasingly being asked to absorb China's surplus production. Cheap imports benefit consumers, but massive flows of subsidized goods can also squeeze domestic manufacturers, depress prices and discourage investment.

Europe has certainly noticed. At the July 2025 EU-China summit, European leaders told Xi Jinping that the trading relationship had

become “critically unbalanced,” citing manufacturing overcapacity, market distortions and unequal access to China’s market. French President Emmanuel Macron subsequently warned that the imbalance was becoming unsustainable.

Then, in February 2026, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz delivered essentially the same message in Beijing. He called on China to reduce market-distorting subsidies and industrial overcapacity, open its markets further, allow greater flexibility in its currency and improve access to raw materials and critical minerals.

In other words, this is no longer just an American complaint. Many of China’s major trading partners increasingly share the same concerns… which creates an opportunity. Rather than fighting its trading partners one by one, the United States should be building a coalition of market economies and using the WTO to confront Chinese subsidies, overcapacity and discriminatory trade practices collectively. There is strength in numbers – and when it comes to China, America has more potential allies than adversaries.

For example, the WTO could set rules on how to detect market distortion, along with how to properly monitor and punish it. Same goes with state subsidies. The WTO can do this through “plurilateral” agreements which have a narrower group of signatories, in this case a group of the larger WTO economies.

It probably won’t come as a galloping shock that Donald Trump doesn’t care much for the WTO, saying it’s “a disaster,” “rigged” against the United States, and that we must “do something about the WTO because they’ve let China get away with murder.”

But the record tells a different story. The *Economic Report of the President* for 2018, signed by none other than President Donald Trump himself, said that “the United States had won 85.7 percent of the cases it had initiated before the WTO since 1995, compared with a global average of 84.4 percent. In contrast, China’s success rate was just 66.7 percent.”

A 2019 analysis by the Peterson Institute the following year revealed that, “Contrary to President Trump’s assertion that ‘We lose the lawsuits, almost all the lawsuits in the WTO,’ U.S. officials have won 20 times in their challenges to Chinese trade practices since the

first U.S. WTO case against China in 2004. None were lost, and three cases are still pending. Chinese officials have brought 16 complaints against the United States since 2002 and won five, lost one, and gotten a split decision on three, with seven cases pending."

It also won't come as a galloping shock that I believe President Trump is deeply misguided on this. To me, one of the most important functions of the WTO is the appellate body that essentially functions as the Supreme Court for international trade. As designed, this body hears appeals regarding decisions by lower WTO dispute settlement panels (which provides a mechanism to challenge unfair trade practices). Historically, around two-thirds of all WTO disputes reach the appellate body, and its rulings are binding on WTO member states. There are seven seats on the appellate body, and the rules require at least three judges appear to form a panel to adjudicate a given dispute.

… and herein lies the problem. The Appellate Body effectively stopped functioning on December 11, 2019, when it fell below the three members needed to hear an appeal. Beginning in the Obama administration, the United States started blocking all new appointments to the appellate body as the terms of its judges expired. Without a functioning appellate body to hear cases, the entire process has broken down. As of August 2026, the United States had blocked a motion to fill these vacancies 92 times in a row.

This is ridiculous. Do Presidents Obama, Biden and Trump not understand that, far from looking savvy, they look foolish because they did nothing more than allow China's transgressions to go unchecked *for years*? How does it make sense that a system in which the United States historically won the overwhelming majority of the cases it brought – including an extraordinary record against China – was effectively disabled in significant part by the United States itself?

Look, the WTO is far from perfect and there are legitimate concerns about judicial overreach, missed deadlines, and the body exceeding its mandate. But disabling the appeals system without replacing it with something better weakened one of the most useful mechanisms the United States had for holding China accountable.

Now is the time the United States should be leading an effort with Europe, Japan and other major trading partners to reform WTO dispute

settlement, strengthen rules governing industrial subsidies and state-owned enterprises, and confront China collectively… you know… actually LEAD SOMETHING AGAIN!

Okay, so now we're back to our list of the four things the United States must have to ensure our continued dominance and formidable national security. We just covered the dollar, so now let's wrap it up with diplomacy, development and defense.

Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio demolishing our relationships with our closest allies is just one way they have been obliterating U.S. soft power around the world.

"Soft power" is a concept coined in the late 1980s by my former graduate school dean Joseph Nye, his central theme being that the U.S. enhances its global authority by promoting values like human rights and democracy. Soft power allows us to cultivate goodwill, influence others, and impact global politics through attraction and persuasion (think culture, values and policies) rather than coercion, economic pressure, and/or military action (a.k.a., hard power).

Although people in the Trump/Vance administration clearly don't understand this concept AT ALL, can you guess who does understand it perfectly? Yep, you guessed it. Xi Jinping… which is why he is also laser-focused on obliterating U.S. soft power around the world. On this point, he has taken one of the tent poles of Mao Zedong's Phase Two *strategic stalemate* phase – "eroding the opposition's morale through propaganda" – next level.

A report from the U.S. State Department's Global Engagement Center reveals that "the People's Republic of China (PRC) "spends billions of dollars annually on foreign information manipulation efforts. Beijing uses false or biased information to promote positive views of the PRC and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). At the same time, the PRC suppresses critical information that contradicts its desired narratives on issues such as Taiwan, its human rights practices, the

South China Sea, its domestic economy, and international economic engagement. More broadly, the PRC seeks to cultivate and uphold a global incentive structure that encourages foreign governments, elites, journalists, and civil society to accept its preferred narratives and avoid criticizing its conduct."

"The PRC's approach to information manipulation includes leveraging propaganda and censorship, promoting digital authoritarianism, exploiting international organizations and bilateral partnerships, pairing cooptation and pressure, and exercising control of Chinese-language media." The Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a right-of-center American think tank, put a dollar number to China's efforts: $10 billion.

China has also been busy boosting its geopolitical standing by giving all-expenses-paid trips to American social-media influencers they hope will help promote a "cooler China."

Russia is also heavily into the propaganda game. The Kremlin's official declared expenditures report showed they spent 13 percent more on spreading propaganda in 2025 than the year before (around $1.4 billion) and you can bet that's just the tip of the iceberg.

The way Russia significantly and systematically interfered in our 2016 elections is outrageous, and the fact that Vladimir Putin has never been held accountable is disgraceful.

But it's not just America; Putin pulls this mess across the board. The minute Russia brutally attacked Ukraine, Putin's propaganda went into overdrive. To justify the invasion, he told the Russian people that he started the war to "demilitarize and denazify" the Ukrainian government. He perpetuated the lie that Kyiv had been carrying out "genocide" against the Russian-speaking people who live in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine (known as the Donbas).

The New York Times reported that, after the war started, "the Kremlin cycled through a torrent of lies to explain why it had to wage a 'special military operation' against a sovereign neighbor. Drug-addled neo-Nazis. Genocide. American biological weapons factories. Birds and reptiles trained to carry pathogens into Russia. Ukrainian forces bombing their own cities, including theaters sheltering children."

The RAND Corporation – an American nonprofit global policy think tank, research institute, and public sector consulting firm – "characterizes the contemporary Russian model for propaganda as 'the firehose of falsehood' because of two of its distinctive features: high numbers of channels and messages and a shameless willingness to disseminate partial truths or outright fictions. In the words of one observer, 'new Russian propaganda entertains, confuses and overwhelms the audience.'"

But nevertheless, from Day One the geniuses in the Trump/Vance administration tried to take away our very best way of combatting the propaganda nonsense spread by China and Russian by cutting funding for the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) – which means they tried to silence the Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, and Middle East Broadcasting Networks, among others.

USAGM networks bring news and information to 427 million listeners around the world in 64 languages, producing more than 3,000 hours of original programming each week. < Following legal battles, federal courts ordered a temporary reinstatement of these funds, then Congress did the right thing and passed funding for them once again. >

I cannot overstate how stupid jeopardizing USAGM is (I don't like using that word, but I can't think of another one in this case). Just think about it in terms of our fight against global terrorism. For decades, terrorist organizations have worked hard to distort America's image for a vulnerable portion of the Muslim world in hopes of enlisting new recruits to their cause.

These terrorists have done a masterful job of making sure their target audience knows all about the "evil" that is America: The brutal, wealthy bully that uses power and military strength to repress Muslims around the globe. Naturally, the terrorists are the good guys who fight bravely and unselfishly to protect Islam and its people.

Terrorists do this because they understand the alluring power of democratic values, and that those values are a potent antidote to their extremist actions.

So, without question, the best way to fight against the propagation of radical ideologies and false American narratives that help drive their recruitment in the Middle East is a massive, global counter-ideology

campaign that reframes this highly damaging, globally destructive narrative – and USAGM is one of the only vehicles we can use for this.

The same goes for repressive regimes. The bottom line is this: The number one thing we have going for us in our competition with China is the fact that WE ARE US! We are the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. We're free! We're hip! We're cool! We're FUN!! We have great sports, great food, great clothes, great movies and great movie stars.

In 2025, the animated sequel Zootopia 2 made more money than the second Avatar thanks in large part to China, where it earned $104 million *in its first day* (it's now grossed over $625 million there).

The first Zootopia, which until its sequel was the highest-grossing American animated film in China, made over $236 million in 2016. Disney opened a Zootopia-themed land at Shanghai Disneyland in 2023 (yes, although it's kind of surprising that Xi Jinping allows it, a Disney resort opened in China in 2016. It's a joint venture between The Walt Disney Company and the Shanghai government and features classic Disney elements with a Chinese twist).

There is no easier or more effective way to block China's global progress than to unleash American democracy and culture on them. As Judy Hopps, the Zootopia bunny rabbit police officer says, "Life's a little bit more complicated than a slogan on a bumper sticker. Real life is messy. We all have limitations. We all make mistakes. Which means, hey, glass half full, we all have a lot in common. And the more we try to understand one another, the more exceptional each of us will be. But we have to try. So, no matter what kind of person you are, I implore you: Try. Try to make the world a better place." :)

So that brings us to Mao Zedong's Phase Two "eroding the opposition's morale through guerrilla attacks" < See how deftly I'm transitioning us into Defense? Genius! >

China's shrewd asymmetric-warfare strategies are game-changers (asymmetric-warfare is essentially a conflict between two countries that have uneven military capabilities). These hybrid warfare tactics are designed to significantly raise the cost and risk of retaliation by China's potential adversaries, and to keep them guessing. This creates a kind of permanent gray zone between war and peace, where things don't

necessarily escalate into military conflict, but where potential rivals know the threats exist nonetheless.

Cyber warfare, for example, has created an entirely new battlefield for China to exploit. Between 2020 and 2024, a Chinese government-affiliated hacking group, Salt-Typhoon, launched an unprecedented espionage campaign compromising over a dozen telecommunications companies, including Lumen Technologies, AT&T, T-Mobile and Verizon. Targeting American wiretap systems, the hack gave the Chinese unparalleled access to our foreign-intelligence surveillance systems.

A statement from the U.S., Britian, Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan and Spain, among other countries, said the "unrestrained" and "indiscriminate" Salt Typhoon attack targeted over 80 countries and may have stolen information from almost every American.

Other Chinese "typhoon" threats include Volt Typhoon, which targeted U.S. infrastructure, and Flax Typhoon, which targeted routers, cameras and other internet-connected consumer devices ("typhoon" is the name used by Microsoft to differentiate between various Chinese-backed cyber campaigns/threats).

Unfortunately, China is not the only one following this playbook. Russia's guerilla-style brand of cyber asymmetric-warfare has been targeting the United States for decades. Moonlight Maze, Russia's three-year covert operation to hack into U.S. governmental agencies, started in 1996 and penetrated both NASA and the Pentagon. In fact, Moonlight Maze is the reason the U.S. Cyber Command center was created in the first place.

Russia has just gotten better and better at hacking since Moonlight Maze, so much so that we now are engaged in an ongoing and unrelenting cyberconflict. This battle reached deep inside the good 'ol USA not only when the Russians significantly intervened in our 2016 elections, but also in 2020 when they unleashed the mother of all cyberattacks against us.

In early 2020, as Americans were settling into Covid lockdowns and the U.S. cyber-defense agencies were obsessively focused on protecting the upcoming presidential election, Russian hackers known as APT29 and Cozy Bear – the pride of the Foreign Intelligence

Service of the Russia Federation (SVR) – launched a massive cyber hack against the United States. Thousands of people, both inside and outside of the U.S. government, downloaded corrupted software, giving the Russians a pathway to create hidden back doors to access each user's network.

This went way beyond spying, which most every country does to some degree. Instead, this was a global espionage supply chain attack that compromised U.S. intelligence agencies; nuclear laboratories; Fortune 500 companies; companies that monitor and protect critical domestic infrastructure; the National Institutes of Health; and the U.S. departments of State, Treasury, Commerce and Energy. The hack is believed to have reached at least 250 United States federal agencies and American corporations of all sizes, including Microsoft and Amazon.

The National Nuclear Security Administration, which oversees our nuclear stockpile, was also breached, as was the Los Alamos National Laboratory, where most of our nuclear weapons are designed. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) was compromised, which may not seem like a big deal until you find out that FERC is responsible for *Black Start*, the United States' strategy for restoring power if we ever experience a disastrous national blackout (which you can bet is already on Russia's attack checklist).

The Department of Homeland Security and Pentagon were also hit, which is ironic given they are the departments tasked with protecting our networks (read more on p. 350 of the *Policy Guide*).

Biological weapons are another hybrid warfare tactics and present an increasingly significant national security threat. We must look no further than the social disruption, economic devastation, and millions of deaths caused by the outbreak of Covid-19 to understand just how serious this is… and Covid19 is nothing compared to the microbes and pathogens Russia and China are actively exploring.

The Washington Post reported that satellite images reveal Russia has reopened Sergiev Posad-6, a center used for viral biological weapons research during the Cold War. Back then, Russians used the facility to conduct experiments using viruses that cause smallpox, Ebola and hemorrhagic fevers. They are now expanding the compound, building labs that appear consistent with top-secret, high-containment

biological facilities designed to handle hazardous pathogens < Russia publicly confirmed the labs but says they will use them to study deadly microbes to prevent future pandemics and for national security purposes. Yeah, right. >

From all angles, it's clear China and Russia are testing the global order that America has ruled for decades. These countries are even more dangerous because they view pesky things like human rights and the rule of law as nothing more than nuisances.

Before the Iran war began on February 28, 2026, the United States was spending $2.6 billion *a day* on defense.

Military spending – which makes up over 3 percent of our GDP – is the largest individual area of federal discretionary spending, accounting for about 13 percent of all federal spending in 2025.

We spend more on our military – by far – than any other country on the planet. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), U.S. military spending represented 33 percent of all military expenditure worldwide in 2025. At $954 billion, the United States spent about 2.8 times as much as China, the world's second-largest military spender.

Nevertheless, Donald Trump, JD Vance, Pete Hegseth, Marco Rubio and many other Republicans think we need to spend *even more*: For "the Good of our Country, especially in these very troubled and dangerous times," Donald Trump posted on Truth Social, "our Military Budget for the year 2027 should not be $1 Trillion Dollars, but rather *$1.5 Trillion* Dollars."

That 50 percent increase would be, in inflation-adjusted terms, the largest defense budget ever – including what it was during World War II.

… yet weirdly, somehow, as the war with Iran uncovered, we didn't have enough munitions for *just that one fight*…. against an

adversary that doesn't have even close to the capabilities we supposedly do. The claim about American munitions stockpiles that the U.S. president made in March 2026 – that they were "unlimited" and "higher or better than ever," and enough to fight "forever" – was a flat-out lie.

On April 23, 2026, The New York Times reported that "the United States has burned through around 1,100 of its long-range stealth cruise missiles built for a war with China, close to the total number remaining in the U.S. stockpile. The military has fired off more than 1,000 Tomahawk cruise missiles, roughly ten times the number it currently buys each year."

"The Pentagon used more than 1,200 Patriot interceptor missiles in the war, at more than $4 million a pop, and more than 1,000 Precision Strike and ATACMS ground-based missiles, leaving inventories worrisomely low, according to internal Defense Department estimates and congressional officials."

The situation has worsened considerably since then. The Washington Post reported on August 1st that "the top U.S. general in Europe privately warned the Pentagon that he lacks sufficient naval forces to continue protecting Israel from incoming ballistic missiles, officials said, illustrating how the ongoing Iran war has imposed constraints on the military. Gen. Alexus Grynkewich, the head of U.S. European Command, sent written notification to senior Pentagon officials saying that without another Navy destroyer he will be forced to choose defense of the United States 'homeland' over that of Israel, said the officials, who like some others spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the correspondence."

Five days later, The Atlantic's Nancy A. Youssef and Jonathan Lemire reported this: "The United States is running out of missiles. After five months of war with Iran, stockpiles of long-range weapons are so low, current and former U.S. defense officials told us, that they don't believe the U.S. has enough to combat a threat in Asia."

"The remaining supplies, depending on the munition, are as low as 20 percent of what the Pentagon would like to have in hand. And stores of sophisticated interceptor missiles, such as Patriots and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missiles, are too depleted to

give or sell the weapons to Ukraine or effectively defend against Iran's launch of ballistic missiles. Even when troops see Iranian missiles approaching, they are forced to decide in a matter of seconds whether to expend a limited number of interceptors or hope for the best, the defense officials told us."

On August 13th, The Washington Post reported that "the U.S. military has lost at least 45 MQ-9 Reaper drones during the war with Iran, or roughly 25 percent of its fleet, according to three U.S. officials familiar with the matter. The Reaper is used to conduct surveillance and targeted strikes, and it can cost between $30 million and $50 million depending on the type of sensors and weapons it carries, according to the Air Force. The potential taxpayer cost of recent losses is over $1.3 billion for that weapon system alone."

While the United States has "deep inventories" of less advanced munitions, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, those came with trade-offs: "Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM), for example, has the same precision and explosive yield as Tomahawk or Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM). However, it is short-ranged and requires aircraft to overfly adversary territory, resulting in greater vulnerability and potentially greater losses."

Meaning, the warplanes that carry them have to get close to their target, which obviously puts them at far greater risk.

Our diminished stockpile of weapons – particularly air-defense interceptors – is a key reason further escalation against Iran has been repeatedly taken off the table. In July, the Trump/Vance administration effectively acknowledged that constraint when President Trump halted a nearly two-week renewed bombing campaign against Iran.

In truth, the defense industry has struggled for years to produce enough defense interceptors to protect against incoming missiles because of their complexity and production time. Just days into the war, The Wall Street Journal reported that the U.S. was straining its stockpiles by rapidly expending air-defense interceptors and other munitions in strikes against Iran. The Pentagon was racing to replenish stocks of THAAD, Patriot, and Standard Missile interceptors that were being used faster than they could be replaced.

The munitions shortage came as no surprise within the Pentagon. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dan Caine and other military leaders had been sounding the alarm about the military's shortage of air defense interceptors and other munition stockpiles for months – a concern obviously exacerbated by even the slightest possibility of an extended military campaign in the Middle East.

In December 2024 – before the Trump/Vance administration even took office, President Joe Biden's national security advisor Jake Sullivan publicly warned the incoming administration that, as it stood, the United States would run out of munitions in a war with China and urged them to pursue more sustained defense production.

What in heck is going on here? Well, for one, it takes four times longer to complete the acquisition cycle today than it did in the 1970s. A report from the right-leaning Hudson Institute reveals that "decision time analysis for ships shows an increase from less than six months in the 1950s to four years in 2020 when considering a decision start time as the approval of ship characteristics, or as many as eight years now when considering a start time as initial planning efforts. The weapon system time-to-market metric (from contract award to Initial Operational Capability) held constant from 1950 to 1975 at around five years, and has more than doubled since then, across multiple system types. Finally, the full acquisition cycle for new-start systems has increased by a factor of four from 1950 to 2020."

In December 2025, The New York Times Editorial Board ran a series of articles called *Overmatched*. The series included a story that would be funny if it weren't so terrifying: "In 2011, the Army decided to get its soldiers new pistols. The odyssey that followed included a 350-page list of technical specifications, years of testing and a protracted battle on Capitol Hill between competing gun makers. The Pentagon won't complete delivery until 2027 at the earliest. The Army could have raised an infantryman from birth to within two years of enlistment age in the time it would have taken to get him a new handgun."

It certainly doesn't help that, since the 1990s, the defense sector has consolidated to the point the number of defense prime contractors has shrunk from 51 to fewer than 10, forcing the Department of

Defense (DoD) to increasingly rely on a small number of contractors for critical defense capabilities. Aerospace and defense prime contractors declined from 51 to 5; tactical missile suppliers declined from 13 to 3; fixed-wing aircraft suppliers declined from 8 to 3; and satellite suppliers from 8 to 4. According to the Pentagon, 90 percent of missiles come from just three sources.

You can just imagine what this lack of competition does to costs. Incidentally, another major problem is DoD's "cost-plus" contract, which reimburses expenses and just adds a negotiated profit. This not only removes any incentive to control expenses, but it also removes any pressure on these guys to deliver on time.

There are really disturbing things about this reality, but one of the biggest is that Russia and China are just sitting by, licking their chops… because the very long-range missiles we would use against them – like say if China invaded Taiwan – are the very ones we've burned through in Iran.

So, now let's circle back to money. At the time The New York Times published its April 23rd article, White House officials had refused to provide a comprehensive estimate of the cost of the war, while two independent groups put the price at between $28 billion and $35 billion – just under $1 billion a day. Defense officials told lawmakers that the military had burned through $5.6 billion in munitions in the first two days alone.

The administration's own estimates subsequently crept upward. Pentagon comptroller Jay Hurst put the cost at $25 billion on April 29th and $29 billion on May 12th. In late June, OMB Director Russell Vought said roughly $30 billion had been spent. Then, in late July, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth put the figure at $37.5 billion.

We now know the cost was higher. In September, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that the war had already cost about $38 billion through August 1st and was continuing to cost another $2 billion to $3 billion every month. Then U.S. Central Command provided Congress with an even newer estimate: at least $43.6 billion through September 3rd, including roughly $28 billion just to replace munitions already expended and another $4.3 billion in lost or damaged equipment.

And even that $43.6 billion figure is not the full bill. There is the *expensive weapons stockpiles depletion* situation, but this number also doesn't include the future cost of repairing or rebuilding U.S. military bases damaged by Iranian attacks. A Pentagon inspector general report found that Iran had damaged or destroyed hundreds of buildings and other structures at American bases across Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Oman and Jordan. Dozens of American aircraft and drones were also damaged or destroyed, while U.S. diplomatic facilities sustained an estimated $184 million in damage – meaning the ultimate cost will include not only what we have already spent, but billions more to replenish weapons and repair damaged infrastructure (more on this later).

That helps explain the enormous additional funding requests. Just days before Vought put the war's cost at roughly $30 billion, the White House requested another $67.1 billion for the Defense Department, including $21 billion for munitions, $17.3 billion for operational costs and $12.1 billion for classified programs. By July, Hegseth was defending still more defense funding before Congress.

Since the September 11 attacks, Congress has given the Pentagon well over *$15 trillion* for military spending.

... which begs the question: Where in the world does all the Pentagon money go?

It's certainly not going toward protecting us from asymmetric warfare threats. Even though cyberattacks, cyber-terrorism and cyber-espionage pose an increasingly significant national security threat to America, the Trump/Vance administration has reduced the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's (CISA) workforce by roughly 1,000 people through layoffs, buyouts, resignations, contract cuts and eliminated positions; dismantled election security programs; retreated from supporting state and local governments in protecting against cyber threats; and cut funding for the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center, a core cyber threat sharing service that improves the overall cybersecurity posture of state, local,

tribal, and territorial government organizations via coordination, collaboration, cooperation, and increased communication.

Although biological weapons also pose an increasingly significant national security threat, the Trump/Vance administration fired dozens of employees from the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, many of whom have top-secret clearance; worked with intelligence agencies on biodefense issues like weaponized pathogens; and were responsible for monitoring and protecting the U.S. from biological, chemical and nuclear threats.

So, again, *where does the money go*?

Well, we know a lot of it is wasted. Seriously wasted. Like just flush-it-down-the-toilet wasted. Sadly, the Pentagon's wasteful spending and Congress' irresponsibility when it comes to funding our defense are legendary.

Throughout the years, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has found things like this: "In 2014, Congress authorized the creation of the Iraq Train and Equip Fund (ITEF) to provide equipment and other assistance to Iraq's security forces, including the Kurdistan Regional Government forces, to counter the expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. As of December 2016, DoD had disbursed about $2 billion of the $2.3 billion Congress appropriated for ITEF in fiscal years 2015 and 2016 to purchase, for example, personal protective equipment, weapons, and vehicles for these forces."

However – hear this – *the Pentagon had no idea where many of these shipments ultimately landed*. According to the GAO, "DoD could not fully account for ITEF-funded equipment transfers because of missing or incomplete transfer documentation. Without timely and accurate transit information, DoD could not ensure that the equipment had reached its intended destination, nor could program managers conduct effective oversight of ITEF-funded equipment."

In 2015, in what I'm guessing was an effort to clean this mess up, consultants from management consulting firm McKinsey and Co. and members of the Defense Business Board – a group that provides senior leaders at the Department of Defense (DoD) independent advice on

business management issues – found that DoD could save $125 billion over five years... an assertion that inherently implied there was $125 billion being wasted there.

The report revealed the Pentagon was spending almost a quarter of its then $580 billion budget on overhead and operations (think human resources, accounting, logistics and property management), and that the agency was paying 1,014,000 contractors, civilians and uniformed personnel to fill administrative-type jobs in support of just 1.3 million active-duty troops, the fewest number of troops in 75 years.

Even though the study was commissioned by President Obama's Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work, Pentagon leaders ultimately buried the results, placing secrecy restrictions on it and removing it from its website …. which is a strange reaction because members of the Defense Business Board warned them about the possible ramifications from the start.

The Washington Post reported that Kenneth Klepper, the former chief executive of Medco Health Solutions, told Robert Work that he was "about to turn on the light in a very dark room" and that "all the crap was going to float to the surface and stink the place up." To which Work replied, "Do it."

After seeing the jarring results of the study, however, Work changed his tune, making excuses like, "We will never be as efficient as a commercial organization. We're the largest bureaucracy in the world. There's going to be some inherent inefficiencies in that" – a statement that was not encouraging for those of us who hope for a more efficient Defense Department.

The final report included a "clear path" for savings that should be achieved not through civil servant or military personnel layoffs but by focusing on streamlining bureaucracy, offering early retirements, reducing the number of high-priced contractors, and embracing information technology (remember, this was 2015).

Have things improved? Over TEN years later, The Department of Defense (DOD) remains on the Government Accountability Office High Risk List because of, among other things, persistent financial management vulnerabilities, weapons acquisition challenges, and a massive infrastructure maintenance backlog.

Yep. Even though the DoD's financial management practices have been on the GAO's High-Risk List since 1995 – yes, you did the math right, that's OVER 30 YEARS – it still has major issues: "DOD's financial management is hampered by ineffective processes, aging systems, and inadequate controls; incomplete corrective action plans; and insufficient monitoring and reporting. Further, DOD has not taken effective steps to manage its interrelated fraud risks, including developing and implementing a robust fraud risk management program."

Another GAO report put it this way: "Although DoD's spending makes up about half of the federal government's discretionary spending, and its physical assets represent more than 70 percent of the federal government's physical assets, it remains the only major agency that has never been able to accurately account for and report on its spending or physical assets. DOD's financial management issues extend beyond financial reporting as long-standing control deficiencies adversely affect the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of its operations."

John F. Sopko was the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) from 2012 to 2025 (he was appointed by President Obama and served under the Obama, Trump and Biden administrations before leaving at the beginning of Donald Trump's second term).

In a January 2025 guest essay for The New York Times, Mr. Sopko said that, in the absence of actual success on the ground, spending became the default measure of success in Afghanistan – which he acknowledges is true of most things in Washington, "where unspent allocations are tantamount to failure, leading to budget cuts."

He recounted a story where one general told him that he faced a challenge: "How to spend the remaining $1 billion from his annual budget in just over a month. Returning the money was not an option." Another official his group spoke with said he "refused to cancel a multimillion-dollar building project that field commanders did not want, because the funding had to be spent." But "the building was never used."

Mr. Sopko continued, “As one former U.S. military adviser told my office, the entire system became a self-licking ice cream cone: More money was always being spent to justify previous spending. Old staff departed, new staff arrived with ‘better’ ideas, and new iterations of the same old solutions were repeated, for years.”

There are two other major problems beyond wasteful spending: 1) the status quo seems to be so entrenched in the old-school, traditional way of doing things – clinging to antiquated philosophies, concepts, assumptions, and tactics – that they have been slow to anticipate and adapt to new realities, and 2) many people in Washington have fought hard to preserve the military industrial base.

Let’s start with that last one first. U.S. defense contractors spent a whopping $190,998,142 to lobby Congress in 2025. The Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft reports that over 80 percent of four-star generals and admirals who retired between 2018 and 2023 went on to work in the defense industry as executives, board members, advisors, consultants, lobbyists, or members of financial institutions that invest in the defense sector.

In FY2025, federal defense agencies obligated approximately $491 billion in contracts, accounting for more than 60 percent of the roughly $793 billion in contract obligations across the entire federal government. Lockheed Martin alone reported $49.4 billion in net sales to the U.S. government in 2023, representing about 73 percent of the company’s total sales that year. (incidentally, Lockheed Martin has spent $356,735,302 to lobby Congress since 1998).

Does this sound like a good idea to you?

It’s pretty obvious who writes our national security strategy, and it ain’t the people we elect. Now, more than ever, we need to heed the brilliant piece of advice from five-star Army general and former President of the United States Dwight D. Eisenhower: “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”

Allowing defense lobbyists to write our national security strategy guarantees our approach will be all about *super expensive* bombers, helicopters, Super Hornets, Growlers, HIJENKS, B-21 Raiders, F-47/NGAD, Lightning IIs, LRHW Dark Eagles, PAC-3, F-15EX Eagle II, Block V subs, ICBMs, B-52s, MHTKs, M7 and M250 rifles – and a lot of other cool weapons that ensure the United States' arsenal has all the latest, greatest hardware.

But it also guarantees that creative, forward-thinking strategic planning is discouraged. After all, *if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail, right*?

The most dangerous part of punting our national security strategy to the defense lobby is that it lets members of Congress – who, through their Article I powers, hold extensive constitutional authority over military and defense policy – off the hook from asking the truly critical questions.

Questions like: Can our military handle simultaneous, competing threats around the world? Given the changing nature of war, how many armored brigade combat teams do we need to keep active and what exactly will their role be going forward? What should our troop structure be in this age of modern warfare? How will the military handle adversaries in the "gray zone?" How best can we capitalize on A.I., robotics, directed-energy weapons, and space-based systems? What types of missions will hypersonic weapons be used for, and are they even necessary for deterrence? … and, while we're at it, what exactly is up with the Conventional Prompt Strike program and why in the heck does it cost so much money?

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) explains that the Conventional Prompt Strike (CPS) program "allows the U.S. to strike targets anywhere on Earth in as little as an hour. This capability may bolster U.S. efforts to deter and defeat adversaries by allowing the U.S. to attack high-value targets or 'fleeting targets' at the start of or during a conflict. These weapons would not substitute for nuclear weapons but would supplement U.S. conventional capabilities. They would provide a 'niche' capability, with a small number of weapons directed against select, critical targets."

Okay, that sounds pretty good, but in 2021 the CRS reported that the "Pentagon's FY2021 budget request continues to show significant increases in funding for the Navy's CPS program. In FY2019, this program received $278 million. The Navy received $512 million for this program in FY2020 and requested $1.008 billion for FY2021. The budget request shows continuing increases in funding over the next five years, with $5.3 billion allocated to the program between FY2021 through FY2025."

Cut to 2025, when the CRS reported that "the Pentagon's FY2025 budget request for hypersonic research < maneuvering weapons that fly at speeds of at least Mach 5 and are part of the CPS program > was $6.9 billion – up from $4.7 billion in the FY2023 request. The Pentagon declined to provide a breakout of funding for hypersonic-related research in FY2024 but requested $11 billion for long-range fires – a category that includes hypersonic weapons. The Missile Defense Agency additionally requested $182.3 million for hypersonic defense in FY2025."

Unfortunately, in July 2026 the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported that "the Navy is currently 24 months behind in its efforts to modernize three DDG 1000 Zumwalt class destroyers to host the Conventional Prompt Strike (CPS) hypersonic missile as part of its surface strike mission" – and continues to face significant challenges.

Nevertheless, "DoD is planning to invest at least $50 billion into developing, testing, producing, and fielding CPS capability across several programs," even though the department "does not have a comprehensive strategy across all programs that ensures that each program's investments achieve CPS's common objectives."

"Without a comprehensive investment strategy that includes more formal coordination," they warn, "the Army and Navy are not well-positioned to make timely and efficient investments in key areas, such as addressing shortfalls on their shared production lines or ensuring the economical sustainment and performance of the DDG 1000."

Oh, for the love of %$#%. You have GOT to be kidding me with this.

This is downright ridiculous. We have spent an obscene amount of money on this already. What due diligence is being done to justify this program? What are the accountability procedures, beyond DoD simply ignoring the GAO's recommendations? What is the end game, or do we even have one? Who are the players involved in making these decisions? Are strategies like these even the best way forward? Does anyone even know?

We have got to get with the program, people – and *force* the U.S. Department of Defense to *do better*. War is clearly evolving, BIG TIME. As we learned the hard way, Iran has been stockpiling Shahed drones – propellor-driven aircraft with eight-foot wingspans that carry 110-pound explosives in the nose of the fuselage – for years. They cost between $30,000 to $50,000 each to produce. Meanwhile, the Center for Strategic and International Studies estimates the total cost of the Patriot – still America's "workhorse" go-to for high-to-medium air defense, anti-ballistic missiles, and cruise missile defense – is likely around $1.1 billion ($400 million for the system itself and $690 million for its missiles).

Clearly, our military and defense strategies *must* evolve as quickly as possible… which means we *must* start thinking about all this differently. The "my bomb is bigger than your bomb" strategy we have depended on for decades now seems lazy and terribly inadequate.

It goes without saying that the United States should never be forced to sacrifice the military capabilities we need to protect ourselves. America must have a military that has the fortitude to fully protect this country, regardless of where the threat comes from or in what form it comes in – and have everything we need to operate successfully whether the theatre is land, sea, air, cyberspace or outer space.

The United States should also never be in a position where we are forced to pick and choose between the most dangerous regions of the world. We must be able to sustain security simultaneously in Russia, Africa, South and East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

Given all that's been said here about China, safeguarding stability in the Asia-Pacific region is increasingly important to our economic and national security. At the same time, we obviously can't fixate solely on that region of the world when Africa, the Middle East and

Eastern Europe remain so unstable and unpredictable. Even before Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, and Pete Hegseth started a war with Iran, one had to look no further than Putin's invasion of Ukraine; Hamas' attack on Israel; Syria's new reality; the War on Terror increasingly moving to Africa; and the fact that Afghanistan is once again a refuge for jihadists to see how quickly things can escalate in those regions.

Because of the sheer scope of operational and geographical realities – and the rapidly changing nature of weapons – U.S. national security must be forward-thinking, highly innovative, and cutting-edge to deter and counter our adversaries.

Beyond the risk and danger of it all, we simply can't afford to keep this up. Contrary to what some in Washington want to believe, we don't have a bottomless bank account for military spending and national security – and saying that does not make me soft on defense, disloyal to the military, or unpatriotic in any way. What it makes me is a responsible realist.

But our leaders still don't seem to get it. Decade after decade – over and over and time and time again – those in charge seem to take actions and repeat behaviors that didn't work the first, second or even the third time around… and the military in particular seems to be having an exceptionally difficult time keeping up with the times.

The Wall Street Journal reported back in September 2025 that the Pentagon's Replicator program, launched during the Biden administration, had fallen short of its goal of fielding thousands of cutting-edge air, land and sea-based drones by August 2025. The reporting found that many Replicator systems were unreliable, expensive, and/or couldn't be manufactured fast enough to be bought in the quantity we need. The Pentagon has also struggled to find software that can successfully control large numbers of drones.

Even though Silicon Valley has been pouring tons of money into this – looking for that sweet military-industrial complex cash – almost a year later the WSJ reported that, in April and May 2026, Ukrainian drone operators easily spotted and defeated American troops and armored vehicles during a military exercise in Germany called Combined Resolve. "Ukrainian drones were doing this so quickly that

they had to be sent back into the exercises as new units, or 're-spawned,' to keep the exercise going, a U.S. official briefed on the drill said."

… and what was the Pete Hegseth-led military's response? To shut down the U.S. Army's new 600-member "Unmanned Assault Battalion" that was established in January 2026 to master drone and ground robot warfare. Specifically, the new battalion was supposed to learn tactics and skills from Ukraine's fight against Russia and apply them to the U.S. military.

Even though General Christopher LaNeve – the acting chief of staff of the Army who replaced General Randy George after he was fired by Pete Hegseth – vowed the Army would establish units to advance cyber, electronic-warfare and A.I. technologies, he shuttered the specialized drone unit so the Army could "refocus on its core warfighting tasks as an airborne infantry battalion." Pete and LaNeve think our military should go "back-to-basics" – evidently meaning the 1950s.

But they aren't the only ones. The FY2026 defense appropriations process included more than $300 million in unrequested Humvee-related procurement and upgrades. Congress also ultimately provided $240 million for additional MQ-1C Gray Eagle drones, even though Army leaders had announced plans to stop buying what they called "obsolete" Gray Eagles, and $360 million for additional AH-64E Apache aircraft that were not included in the Army's FY2026 request.

At one stage of the appropriations process, the House and Senate bills contained a combined $52.2 billion in 1,403 "program increases" above the Pentagon's weapons request, according to an analysis by Taxpayers for Common Sense. This came after Congress had enacted $156.2 billion in mandatory defense funding through the One Big Beautiful Bill Act in July 2025.

Congress forcing the military to spend money on weapons and equipment it hasn't requested is nothing new. During the post-Iraq War drawdown, for example, the Army repeatedly sought to pause production and upgrades of the Abrams tank, only to have Congress continue funding them, in part to preserve the tank-production industrial base.

Way back in 2015, Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno told the Senate Armed Services Committee, "We are still having to procure systems we don't need." (The Army) spends hundreds of millions of dollars on tanks that we simply don't have the structure for anymore."

Nevertheless, even though this four-star general told Congress point blank they were wasting millions and millions and millions of dollars and to please reallocate the funds, they appropriated $120 million for Abrams tank upgrades anyway. And not for the first time. Three years earlier, General Odierno made the exact same plea to Congress, which resulted in $183 million for tanks. In 2019, the Army announced that it would spend around $714 million to upgrade M1A1 Abrams tanks at the Joint Systems Manufacturing Center (a.k.a. the Lima Army Tank Plant) in Lima, Ohio, and in 2025, the One Big Beautiful Bill included around $724.5 million for Abrams tanks.

As for the equipment and weapons the Pentagon says it does need? Well… there is really no other way to say this… it appears that, as we now have seen in Iran, they have been the wrong ones.

In The New York Times *Overmatched* series, it was reported that the most recent Overmatch brief – a comprehensive, multiyear assessment of American military power prepared by the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment – not only warned about the risk of the U.S. continuing to rely on expensive weapons as our adversaries use cheap, technologically advanced ones, but also about China's ability to destroy U.S. fighter planes and large ships and satellites.

From the report "To see where American defense dollars go, consider the U.S.S. Gerald R. Ford, America's latest aircraft carrier, which deployed for the first time in 2022 after more than a decade of construction and delays. The ship incorporates new technologies, including advanced nuclear reactors and electromagnetic catapults for launching aircraft, which make it more efficient than the Nimitz-class aircraft carriers it is intended to replace. The price tag: an estimated $13 billion. That figure is for a single ship. It does not include the billions of dollars-worth of military aircraft carried by the Ford and the escort ships needed to defend it."

"Such formidable firepower is effective if you want to go to war with a relatively poor, weak country like, say, Venezuela. Yet the Ford, is fatally vulnerable to new forms of attack. China in recent years has amassed an arsenal of around 600 hypersonic weapons, which can travel at five times the speed of sound and are difficult to intercept. Other countries possess quiet diesel-electric submarines capable of sinking American carriers. *In war games like those depicted in the Overmatch brief, ships like the Ford are often destroyed. Still, the Navy plans to build at least nine additional Ford-class carriers in the coming decades.* So far, the United States has yet to deploy a single hypersonic missile."

But here we go again. Donald Trump is building a "Golden Fleet" of 15 nuclear-powered battleships that the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates will be at least 50 percent more expensive than the original estimate. The total cost now stands at $275 billion. The first ship – that will have Donald's name plastered all over it, naturally – is estimated to cost $23.4 billion, making it the most expensive warship ever built, with the next 14 ships averaging $18 billion.

Incidentally, even though the Navy's new aircraft carriers are in various stages of development, our president has decided he wants a major redesign of them, to look more like those from World War II… a change that could cost billions. Even before this brilliant design idea, our president issued a national security memorandum directing the Navy to replace electromagnetic catapult systems on future aircraft carriers with steam catapults. This redesign will also add billions to the cost.

Our president also thinks the Golden Dome missile-defense system is a fabulous idea. Although the Trump/Vance administration initially put its cost at about $175 billion, the CBO has since estimated that an illustrative missile-defense architecture capable of meeting the administration's stated objectives could cost $1.2 trillion over 20 years.

Let's be clear: This is *not* a fabulous idea. For one, don't let the name fool you. Golden Dome has faced serious criticism from physicists, arms-control experts and budget analysts who question its cost, feasibility and strategic consequences – mainly because even an

enormously expensive system like this can't provide an impenetrable shield against a large Russian or Chinese nuclear attack.

Then there are the basic laws of physics. Golden Dome's proposed space-based interceptors would have only minutes to detect and destroy an ICBM during its boost phase, potentially requiring thousands of orbiting interceptors. Russia and China could simply counter the system by building more missiles and warheads, deploying decoys and other countermeasures, or attacking Golden Dome's satellites and communications systems.

Meanwhile, while our leaders have, for decades, been recklessly relying on extremely expensive missiles and munitions – – and Pete Hegseth and President Trump were rambling disjointed and incoherent sermons to the 800+ senior U.S. military officers they summoned to Quantico from around the world, going on about fat generals, beardos, woke garbage, dudes in dresses, the enemy within, sleepy Joe Biden, stupid rules of engagement, the inferiority of women, and using American cities as military training grounds – – the Chinese remained laser focused on investing in new strategies and technologies to exploit our weaknesses and vulnerabilities, which they have been doing now for decades.

The implications of this are colossal. Solar panels and electric vehicles and wind technology are one thing, but China is also quickly becoming the main supplier of things that the rest of the world – including the United States – must have on the modern battlefield… like the cheap, battery-powered drones that Ukraine used to obliterate part of Russia's air fleet and that the Israelis deployed to destroy multimillion-dollar surface-to-air missiles and radars in Iran the first time around, ultimately allowing them to destroy billions of dollars' worth of Iranian command and nuclear facilities.

Since the time China changed the game with their DF-21D "carrier killer" anti-ship ballistic missiles that threaten our naval forces in the Pacific, they have developed even longer-range versions like the DF-26 and DF-27. In what some referred to as a "sputnik moment," in 2021 China tested a nuclear-capable hypersonic glide vehicle launched by a rocket into low-orbit that almost circled the earth before re-entering the atmosphere and hitting its intended target in China.

In December 2024, images of what seemed to be new Chinese military aircraft went viral on social media. Defense experts said these aircraft, though blurry on the video, appeared to be highly original advanced stealth designs – most likely part of China's next-generation (sixth generation) fighter program.

In September 2025, China held a military parade celebrating the 80th anniversary of the role Communist soldiers played in fighting Japanese invaders in World War II. Xi Jinping held court, flanked by Kim Jong Un and Vladimir Putin – who attended the parade with leaders from 24 other countries, including Iran and Pakistan. At one point, Xi stood in the open sunroof of a Chinese-made Red Flag limousine while pigeons and balloons – supposedly numbering 80,000 each – were released into the air.

Xi's intended message hit hard as the advanced weapons appeared one after the other: We, the Chinese, can stop American forces in the Asia-Pacific region by using every kind of weapon imageable, and we can rapidly deploy to Taiwan or even far beyond China whenever we damn well please.

The parade extravaganza – which included thousands of troops goose-stepping in unison across a bright red carpet covering Tiananmen Square – showcased things like jet fighter-bombers, ship-sinking hypersonic missiles, unmanned combat platforms, a cyberspace combat force, remote-controlled armored buggies that can clear mines and pick up wounded soldiers, and armored ground vehicles that can be dropped from transport planes.

Four models of anti-ship missiles rolled through, three of which are hypersonic – meaning they travel at least five times the speed of sound and can maneuver to evade defenses. The new YJ-19 anti-ship missile was there, which is a cruise missile that apparently uses a "scramjet" and burns its fuel in an airflow moving at supersonic speed.

The stars of the show were the nuclear-capable ballistic missiles that can already hit the continental United States – like one labeled "DF-31BJ," indicating that the missile is likely a version of China's road-mobile DF-31 intercontinental nuclear missile that has been adapted for silo launch.

Trucks carrying drones that look like small fighter jets drove past, as well as smaller ground, naval and aerial drones, including "loyal wingmen" that can fly alongside piloted jets for extra protection. Two submersible drones were unveiled, confirming that China has indeed been working on building extra-large uncrewed underwater vehicles (XLUUVs). It was thought they had been testing at least five XLUUV designs since 2022, which obviously they have been.

The drones were a particularly cruel slap in our face because, as we've already covered, we're not making much progress on them – or on the batteries that power them (yet another area where China is leading in almost every industrial component). As it stands today, the Pentagon relies on around 6,000 individual foreign-sourced components across its weapons programs, and there are zero U.S. weapon systems and/or military platforms that have no foreign parts.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov says that the industrial capacity of Ukrainian companies has increased enough to produce four million drones a year. These Linza drones are equipped with anti-jamming modules; utilize AI navigation; and can gather reconnaissance, deliver supplies, and even set land mines.

Even before that, Ukrainian soldiers were giving the Russians one hell of a fight by adding deadly modifications to the Mavic, a drone sold to ordinary people by a Chinese company called DJI. DJI, the world's largest drone manufacturer, sells 70 percent of all commercial drones sold for hobby and industrial use worldwide (you can get a version of the Mavic for as little as $300). Experts say that DJI can make millions of drones per year, more than a hundred times more than anybody in the United States can make.

Ukraine has gotten so good at this that the Trump/Vance administration was forced to ask them for help within a week of its 2026 attack on Iran. As swarms of Iranian Shahed drones rained down over the middle East – breaching allied air defense systems and killing at least six U.S. soldiers – Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky posted on X: "We received a request from the United States for specific support in protection."

< This is yet another reason that you should never invite your allies into the Oval Office, then start berating and insulting them. What goes around comes around, Donny Boy. >

The questions about our national defense just keep coming: Do we need the New START Treaty limit of 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), deployed submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and deployed heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments – especially since there isn't even a New START Treaty anymore?

Or, for that matter, do we even really need the treaty limit of 1,550 nuclear warheads on deployed ICBMs, deployed SLBMs, and deployed heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments, or 800 deployed and non-deployed ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers, and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments – *when it takes only a fraction of that to blow any country off the face of the earth?*

Really think about that last sentence for a second. There are roughly 195 generally recognized sovereign states in the world. We have an estimated 3,700 nuclear warheads in our military stockpile (1,477 are retired and awaiting dismantlement).

If you take only our 1,770 deployed warheads – which include intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers – we could literally blow up *every single country* in the world 9 *times*!

In 2025, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that, based on the Department of Defense's and the Department of Energy's FY2025 budget requests, operating, sustaining, and modernizing our current nuclear forces and purchasing new forces would cost a total of $946 billion over the next ten years, or an average of about $95 billion a year. This is 25 percent (or $190 billion) larger than the CBO 10-year estimate just two years before.

And remember, that's just the money it takes *going forward*… but this outrageous spending has now been going on for well over *eight decades*. The Brookings Institution found that: "From 1940 through 1996, we spent nearly $5.5 trillion on nuclear weapons and weapons-related programs, in constant 1996 dollars." In today's dollars, that's $11.2 trillion. "If we could represent $5.5 trillion as a stack of dollar

bills, it would reach from the Earth to the Moon and nearly back again, a distance of more than 459,000 miles."

Does this make sense to you?

I gotta be honest, it makes no sense to me. *Why in the world are we still spending so much money on nuclear weapons*? To me, spending money on a ridiculously gigantic arsenal of big, scary bombs – again, *when it takes only a fraction of what we already have to blow any country off the face of the earth* – to prove nothing more than we have as many bombs as other people feels like the dumbest penis measuring contest of all time.

Look, I get the concept of deterrence and the value of signaling to potential adversaries that an attack on America is too costly to launch. But do you really think it deters anyone *less* if the U.S. just had 1,760 deployed warheads rather than 1,770? … which is a difference of *billions* of dollars in our bank account?

We already know that the global nuclear arms competition is the ultimate Prisoner's Dilemma, where two adversaries would both be better off if each limits its arsenal, yet neither can be certain the other will commit to the same restraint. So, each believes they must maintain or even increase its military capabilities rather than risk falling behind. The result is that individually rational decisions can produce a collectively worse outcome, as both sides spend more and potentially increase the danger to themselves.

Worse, this misdirected spending leaves us extremely vulnerable in other areas. In a 2024 essay for The Wall Street Journal, Glen VanHerck, a retired U.S. Air Force general who served as commander of U.S. Northern Command and the North American Aerospace Defense command, and Pete Fesler, a retired Air Force major general who served as deputy director of operations for the North American Aerospace Defense Command warned:

"The services are investing heavily in modernizing the nation's nuclear deterrent… these systems were designed to deter a nuclear attack by promising devastating retaliation. They were never intended to deter more limited non-nuclear strikes, cyberattacks or attacks by

small, unmanned drones on infrastructure. Adversaries are unlikely to believe the U.S. will respond with nukes to a non-nuclear attack. *Nuclear deterrence isn't enough to defend against new weapons*."

"Despite the National Defense Strategy's declaration that homeland defense is the Pentagon's top priority, almost no additional resources have been allocated, and none are forthcoming. The focus is on offense and the fight around the world. Today the nation is defended by a small number of professionals equipped with systems largely designed and bought in the 1970s and '80s, with no defined path to modernization. Today, as Russian ultraquiet submarines prowl off American shores and Chinese and Russian bombers and warships conduct joint operations near Alaska, our military is focused elsewhere. *Fortress America stands largely unguarded*."

And please let's not forget that there are many ways to skin the deterrence cat (I think I need to take a coffee break because my East Texas is starting to come out strong). In my mind – yes – the United States needs a strong military to deter future wars, but it's better not to be that close to war in the first place. As Sun Tzu said, "The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting."

… but here is yet another example of how Donald Trump has made the world far less safe. In August 2019, during his first administration, he formally withdrew the United States from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Then came February 2023, when Vladimir Putin announced the suspension of Russia's participation in the New START Treaty, the last remaining nuclear arms control pact between the United States and Russia.

Even though Putin offered to uphold the treaty's central limits for one year following its expiration, Donald Trump declined the offer and the New START Treaty officially expired on February 5, 2026 – ending more than half a century in which U.S.-Soviet/Russian strategic arms control agreements imposed negotiated constraints on their nuclear forces. We have now returned to a world that has virtually no limits on the size or structure of nuclear arsenals and where nuclear weapons can reach unconstrained levels – entering a dangerous new nuclear age.

This is a huge bummer because the world has made remarkable progress in reducing its total nuclear arsenal. The global inventory has fallen by more than 80 percent from a Cold War peak of roughly 70,000 warheads in the mid-1980s, to an estimated 12,187 at the beginning of 2026, and of the over fifty nation states that could have worked toward a nuclear option, only nine have them today – Russia, the United States, China, France, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India, Israel and North Korea. < Note: The U.S., Russia, China, France and the UK are the only recognized "nuclear-weapon states" under the NPT. They are also the P5 (Permanent 5) members of the UN Security Council >.

The NPT (1970) was followed by the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty (1987), which was signed by President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987 to eliminate intermediate- and shorter-range missiles (those with ranges between 300 to 3,400 miles); the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, signed in 1991 by George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev; and the New START Treaty, signed in 2010, again by the presidents of the United States and Russia, Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev. On February 3, 2021, Presidents Biden and Putin agreed to extend the New START Treaty through February 5, 2026.

Now, not only is the Trump/Vance administration threatening the deployment of even more nuclear weapons, but also the resumption of underground nuclear testing. < The last nuclear weapon test in the United States was in 1992, before President George H.W. Bush halted such exercises at the conclusion of the Cold War. >

"Because of other countries testing programs," President Trump posted on October 29, 2025, "I have instructed the Department of War to start testing our Nuclear Weapons on an equal basis. That process will begin immediately."

What I'm sure he considered a flex was actually a really dangerous and wildly irresponsible thing for him to say. Setting aside the fact that the Energy Department would test nuclear weapons, not the Defense Department – plus the fact that underground nuclear testing is no longer necessary since we can now maintain our arsenal through computer modeling – his flippant statement was likely taken very seriously by

our adversaries – potentially publicly greenlighting a practice that has been a global taboo for three decades.

< Sidebar: There is evidence that Russia has conducted critical nuclear-weapons experiments, and the United States has now accused China of doing so as well. In February 2026, U.S. officials alleged that China secretly conducted a very-low-yield underground nuclear explosive test at Lop Nur in June 2020 and employed techniques intended to conceal its seismic signature. China denies the allegation, and international monitoring data have not independently established that the event was a nuclear explosion. But the evidence and China's lack of transparency certainly demand serious concern. That said, we need to demonstrate leadership and not immediately sink to their level. President Trump's response is just an extensive of the "my bomb is bigger than your bomb" tit-for-tat strategy that we need to move away from. >

Donald Trump is the last person on earth to care about the environmental destruction explosive testing causes, but does he care (or even know about) the human toll it takes? The radioactive fallout from our 20th-century nuclear testing programs created devastating generational health crises for populations in the Marshall Islands and the American West (known as "Downwinders"). The people alive then suffered acute radiation sickness, and subsequent generations have endured high rates of cancer (specifically thyroid, leukemia, and breast cancer); birth defects (like "jellyfish babies" born with no bones); and miscarriages.

The Trump/Vance administration's abdication of leadership regarding the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the New START Treaty, and nuclear testing could not have come at a worse time…. especially since the world's authoritarian dictators clearly don't take anyone in the administration seriously.

For example, in October 2025, President Trump practically begged Kim Jong Un to meet with him on a swing through Asia. The answer was no. Then in August 2026, after he scaled back military drills with South Korea – giving Kim Jong Un a huge gift on a silver platter – the U.S. president boasted about his friendship and "very good relationship" with Kim, adding that they "understand" one other. He

also claimed, without evidence, that the North Korean leader had responded "positively" to his request for a meeting by the end of the year. Again, there was the sound of crickets from North Korea.

This is not good. In 2024, the Annual Threat Assessment from the U.S. Director of National Intelligence warned that "the expansion of nuclear weapons stockpiles and their delivery systems, coupled with increasing regional conflict involving nuclear weapons states, pose a significant challenge to global efforts to prevent the spread and use of nuclear weapons."

"China and Russia are seeking to ensure strategic stability with the United States through the growth and development of a range of weapons capabilities, including nontraditional weapons intended to defeat or evade U.S. missile defenses. Consequently, these new technologies probably will challenge the way states think about arms control, and we expect it will be difficult to achieve agreement on new weapon definitions or verification measures, particularly at the multilateral level. North Korea continues to threaten to conduct a seventh nuclear test and the potential for heightened tension between Pakistan and India could increase the risk of nuclear escalation."

Seventh nuclear test, huh? Seems like, despite what Donald Trump would like the world to believe, the June 12, 2018 "summit" (read: photo op) between Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump during Trump's first term didn't go quite as planned.

You know the one, where an American president met with a brutal tyrant and relentlessly praised him as being just another "very, very talented leader" who "wants to do the right thing" while being "very open, very honorable," and very "worthy." Donald even complimented the "respect" Little Rocket Man receives from his people: "His country does love him. His people, you see the fervor." < You better believe there's fervor. You don't show fervor in North Korea you get your head chopped off. What *is* it with this man's fascination with dictators? >

After the June 2018 spectacle, a second summit in February 2019 ended early with no deal on nukes and, four months later, Donald Trump swung by North Korea on his way home from the Group of 20 summit in Japan and stepped across the demilitarized zone between

North and South Korea, becoming the first sitting U.S. president to step foot in North Korea… yet another visit that ended in no deal.

However, it seems President Trump didn't get the memo that the visits with his new buddy were a total bust because on his way home, he tweeted: "There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea." …which was a completely delusional thing to say, even for him.

Right after Trump's love fest, North Korea repeatedly fired short-range ballistic missiles and rockets, conducted two ground tests at one of its nuclear test sites, and increased production of long-range missiles and the fissile material used in nuclear weapons.

One year after the summit, The Wall Street Journal reported that "Siegfried Hecker, a Stanford University nuclear scientist who has visited North Korea's nuclear facilities, has estimated that North Korea might be capable of producing six or seven nuclear bombs a year."

In May 2020, Kim Jong Un made it clear he was evoking "new policies for further increasing" North Korea's nuclear capabilities. That October, he threw a huge military parade to introduce his humongous new intercontinental ballistic missile… a missile that military experts said, if truly operational, was one of the largest road-mobile ICBMs in the entire world.

Fast-forward to January 2021, when he made clear where North Korea stands with the U.S.: "Our external political activities must focus on controlling and subjugating the United States, our archenemy and the biggest stumbling block to the development of our revolution" – then launched another ballistic missile, this time off its east coast.

… and Little Rocket Man hasn't slowed down one bit since then. Pyongyang is now estimated to have around 60 assembled nuclear warheads in its stockpile and enough fissile material to produce at least 30 more, while continuing to produce additional fissile material.

The 2025 Annual Threat Assessment confirmed that Kim "remains committed to increasing the number of North Korea's nuclear warheads and improving its missile capabilities to threaten the Homeland and U.S. forces, citizens, and allies, and to weaken U.S. power in the AsiaPacific region, as evidenced by the pace of the North's missile flight tests and the regime's public touting of its uranium enrichment capabilities… North Korea is probably prepared to conduct a nuclear

test and continues to flight test ICBMs so Kim can threaten the Homeland. Russia is increasingly supporting North Korea's nuclear status in exchange for Pyongyang's support to Moscow's war against Ukraine."

A June 2025 report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) – the United Nation's nuclear watchdog – revealed that North Korea's nuclear test site at Punggye-ri can now support a nuclear test on short notice. The country has increased its missile testing; is working to build a new nuclear-powered submarine; and, on January 4, 2026, test fired hypersonic missiles.

Four months later, Kim hosted yet another military parade – with Chinese, Vietnamese and Russian guests of honor – where he unveiled a new intercontinental ballistic missile, which he called his "most powerful" nuclear weapon yet.

By April 2026, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi had announced there had been a "very serious" expansion in North Korea's nuclear weapons production capabilities, including heightened activity at the Yongbyon nuclear site (which has a 5-megawatt reactor, a light water reactor, and reprocessing units).

< Interesting fact: Although North Korea remains one of the most dangerous and unpredictable threats to the U.S., it was not mentioned even once in the Trump/Vance administration's new National Security Strategy. My thought is that Donald Trump didn't include it because doing so would be an omission of his complete failure to sway his boyfriend during his first term, but whatever. >

Meanwhile, China is expanding its nuclear stockpile and weapons-production facilities faster than any other country on earth. When Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, China was estimated to have around 240 nuclear warheads, but that number is changing quickly. In its December 2025 assessment, the Pentagon estimated that China's nuclear stockpile remained in the low 600s and that the country was on track to possess more than 1,000 warheads by 2030. The Federation of American Scientists' current 2026 estimate puts China's stockpile at approximately 620 warheads (34 deployed strategic warheads and 586 reserve or nondeployed warheads).

We already covered the disturbing display of nuclear-capable missiles for submarines and aircraft Xi Jinping unveiled in his military parade spectacle in September 2025, but China has also increased its number of road-mobile ICBM bases and has finished construction of three new ICBM silo fields. FAS estimates that roughly 30 silos have been loaded. They possess a fully operational nuclear triad – land-launched nuclear missiles, nuclear-missile-armed submarines, and strategic aircraft – and are developing a "launch on warning" posture (i.e., launching a retaliatory nuclear-weapons strike while an adversary's missiles are still in the air).

With all this going on, maybe – just maybe – it would make more sense for Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio to spend more time, as President Dwight Eisenhower advised back in 1961, "learning how to compose differences not with arms, but with *intellect* and *decent purpose*."

This is the perfect time to talk about the foundational philosophy and moral compass we want our military to be led by.

Two days after the February 28, 2026 launch of Operation Epic Fury in Iran, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth described the Trump/Vance administration's version of what this philosophy and compass should look like (I'm paraphrasing here, using his own words): The warrior ethos. Lethality. U.S. soldiers are not defenders, they are warriors… trained to kill the enemy and break their will. Regardless of what so-called international institutions and our traditional allies – who wring their hands and clutch their pearls, hemming and hawing about the use of force – say, we wage war on our terms with maximum authorities. No stupid rules of engagement, no nation building quagmire, no democracy building exercise, no politically correct wars.

I could not disagree more with this grossly underqualified, ridiculous man.

His words bring to mind a prescient quote from President Ronald Reagan: “There are some who’ve forgotten why we have a military. It’s not to promote war. It’s to be prepared for peace.” But it was President Franklin Roosevelt who really hit the nail on the head: “A nation that cannot resist aggression is inviting it.”

Less than 20 months into President Trump’s second term, he had authorized military operations in seven nations – Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Nigeria and Venezuela, where U.S. forces captured President Nicolás Maduro, removed him from power, and declared that the United States would now “run” the country. He threatened to use military force to take control of Greenland; threatened military action in Colombia; pressed Mexico to allow American forces to participate in operations against suspected fentanyl labs; and directed a campaign of lethal strikes against suspected “drug smugglers” at sea that, at the one year mark, had killed at least 227 people in 68 strikes in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific – while providing zero evidence substantiating the government’s claims about many of those targeted (leading to the strikes being heavily questioned by the UN and legal experts).

Across his two terms, Trump had ordered military strikes in 10 countries – more countries than any other U.S. president in the post-9/11 era. In 2025 alone, the Trump/Vance administration carried out 658 air and drone strikes, nearly as many as the 694 conducted during President Biden’s entire four-year term.

All this, even though Donald Trump explicitly ran as the anti-war candidate: “Globalists want to squander all of America’s strength, blood and treasure, chasing monsters and phantoms overseas while keeping us distracted from the havoc they’re creating here at home,” he said on the 2024 campaign trail.

Even after moving back into the Oval Office, President Trump was still hawking that message around the world: “In the end, the so-called nation builders wrecked far more nations than they built,” then going on to ridicule the “Western interventionalists giving you lectures on how to live and how to govern your own affairs” – – before, just nine months later, launching the largest U.S. military operation the Middle East has seen in two decades.

One of the smartest things President Theodore Roosevelt ever said was that foreign policy should be an "exercise of intelligent forethought and of decisive action *sufficiently far in advance of any likely crisis* to make it improbable that we would run into serious trouble." This approach won him the 1906 Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating a peace treaty that ultimately ended the Russo-Japanese War.

If only President Trump had heeded this advice back in 2018.

As we can see even more clearly now, pulling out of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018 was without a doubt one of the most irresponsible things Donald Trump did during his first time in office. The JCPOA was a landmark deal among Iran and Britain, China, the European Union, France, Germany, Russia and the United States that placed significant restrictions on Iran's nuclear program. < Note: China, Russia, France, Germany and the United Kingdom all remained in the JCPOA after President Trump withdrew the United States from the agreement in 2018. >

For one, leaving the deal made the United States look completely unreliable and put us at odds, yet again, with our European allies. In truth, we looked like total amateurs. But, far worse, it made the entire world much more vulnerable and unstable.

Donald Trump had a huge problem with the deal from the jump, saying things like (this is a direct quote hence the discombobulated wording), "We gave them $150 billion and $1.8 billion and we got nothing... look at what they did to John Kerry and to President Obama. Look what happened, where they're bringing planeloads of cash, planeloads, big planes, 757s, Boeing 757s coming in loaded up with cash. What kind of a deal is that?"

This is a total distortion of what happened. As sanctions were lifted under the JCPOA, Iran regained access to billions of dollars *of its own* previously restricted assets abroad. Separately, the United States paid Iran $1.7 billion to settle a decades-old legal claim stemming from money Iran had paid the United States for military equipment before the 1979 Iranian Revolution that was never delivered. The $1.7 billion consisted of $400 million in Iranian funds held in a Foreign Military

Sales account and approximately $1.3 billion to settle Iran's claim for accrued interest, which was paid from the U.S. Treasury's Judgment Fund. Because sanctions effectively prevented a normal dollar-denominated transfer to Iran, the settlement was paid in foreign currency and delivered in cash. The initial $400 million was transported by air, with the remaining roughly $1.3 billion subsequently disbursed in two additional installments.

Either way, even if you disagree with the deal or the way the Obama administration handled it, *it had already happened*. The money had already been paid, so why in the world would you blow everything up after the most controversial, hard-to-swallow part of the deal was already in our rearview?

The JCPOA was far from perfect, but the agreement achieved a major goal: The Iranian government agreed to cut its stockpile to no more than 300 kilograms of low-enriched uranium; agreed not to enrich uranium beyond 3.67 percent; and agreed that, for 15 years, uranium enrichment would take place only at Natanz. Iran's Fordow facility would remain open but would no longer enrich uranium or contain nuclear material. Most importantly, Iran accepted an extensive monitoring and verification regime that gave the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) substantially greater access to and information about Iran's nuclear program.

And make no mistake: Despite President Trump's claims that Iran had violated the agreement, when he withdrew the United States from the JCPOA the IAEA was reporting that Iran was implementing its nuclear-related commitments.

On May 9, 2018 – one day after President Trump announced the U.S. withdrawal – IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano stated that "Iran is subject to the world's most robust nuclear verification regime under the JCPOA, which is a significant verification gain." He added: "*As of today, the IAEA can confirm that the nuclear-related commitments are being implemented by Iran.*"

Surprising nobody but Donald Trump, not long after our exit, what had become a relatively stable situation devolved into a complete mess – a Donald Trump specialty.

Now operating alone, the first Trump administration tried a "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran, imposing economic sanctions against the country, individuals, companies, and financial institutions that did business with Iran. While the U.S. sanctions did have a devastating effect, they did not deliver the knockout blow the administration envisioned. At least fourteen banks continued to do business with Tehran.

The U.S. also designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization – the first time the United States had applied that designation to part of another government – and seized Iranian petroleum cargoes aboard foreign-flagged vessels. Iran seized foreign oil tankers and shot down a U.S. surveillance drone, while the United States destroyed what it said was an Iranian drone that had threatened the USS Boxer. The U.S. also deployed additional forces to the Persian Gulf region, including Saudi Arabia, as confrontations in and around the Strait of Hormuz intensified.

But the worst part was that Iran wasted little time getting back into the nuclear bomb-making business – with gusto. Beginning in 2019, Iran progressively exceeded the JCPOA limit on its enriched-uranium stockpile, eventually breaching its 3.67 percent enrichment ceiling and expanding its use of advanced centrifuges. By September 2020, the IAEA reported that Iran possessed more than 2,100 kilograms of enriched uranium, many times the amount permitted under the agreement. These actions helped Iran significantly reduce its "breakout time," the estimated time it would need to produce enough weapons-grade uranium for a nuclear weapon.

By 2020, Iran was also moving critical nuclear infrastructure underground. Following the destruction of an above-ground centrifuge-assembly facility at Natanz, Iran began constructing a deeply buried replacement complex in the mountains south of the site, making important parts of its nuclear program substantially harder to destroy from the air.

This entire ordeal escalated even further with the January 2020 U.S. drone assassination of Maj. Gen. Qassem Suleimani, a senior official of the Islamic Republic of Iran who was close to its then supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Suleimani was also the

commander of the Quds Force, an agency that is part of Iran's formal military structure and responsible for Iran's covert military operations. Two days after he was killed, Iran announced that it would no longer observe the JCPOA's operational limits on centrifuges, enrichment capacity, enrichment levels or its enriched-uranium stockpile.

Then after the November 2020 assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in an attack Iran attributed to Israel, Iran enacted legislation accelerating its nuclear activities. In January 2021, it began enriching uranium to 20 percent at Fordow, an underground facility where the JCPOA had prohibited enrichment altogether. Iran eventually enriched uranium to 60 percent**,** far above the JCPOA's 3.67 percent ceiling and much closer to weapons-grade material.

Another thing the administration naïvely envisioned was being able to control issues within the JCPOA without being a part of it. This led to some embarrassing moments, like in August 2020, when the United States attempted to invoke the UN "snapback" mechanism to restore sanctions on Iran. Britain, France and Germany rejected the attempt, arguing that the United States could no longer use the mechanism after withdrawing from the JCPOA. China and Russia agreed, and 13 of the Security Council's 15 members rejected the U.S. position.

Earlier that same month, the Security Council had rejected a U.S. proposal to extend UN restrictions on conventional-arms transfers involving Iran. The vote was striking: Only the United States and Dominican Republic voted in favor; China and Russia voted against; and the other 11 members – including Britain, France and Germany – abstained.

Cut to June 22, 2025, when the confrontation reached an entirely different level. During the 12-day Israel-Iran war, the United States launched Operation Midnight Hammer, directly attacking Iran's Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan nuclear facilities. Seven B-2 stealth bombers dropped 14 30,000-pound GBU-57 bunker-busting bombs, while a U.S. submarine launched more than two dozen Tomahawk missiles. The strikes came during an Israeli campaign that also targeted Iran's nuclear infrastructure, senior military officials and nuclear scientists.

Next, of course, came Operation Epic Fury.

Regardless of what happens from here, the Trump/Vance administration's decision to launch a war of choice was a mistake of epic proportions (at least they got one of the words in the name of the operation right!). Let's just call this what it is: an unmitigated disaster.

For one, it's another example of unchecked executive overreach. The U.S. Constitution entrusts Congress with the power to "declare war," not the president. I'm not saying that this means Congress must authorize every single use of American power, specifically when he or she is responding to attacks on our nation or forces, but when a president launches a war of choice – especially when a substantial portion of America's military is involved and American lives are on the line – the president must go to Congress and Congress must authorize it. < It's also not smart for a U.S. president to proceed in these circumstances without the buy-in of the American people, but Republicans will have to answer for that in the next few elections. >

Even if you disregard what the U.S. Constitution clearly states, the War Powers Resolution of 1973 only allows the president to initiate hostilities when there has been a declaration of war or a specific authorization from Congress, or a national emergency created by an attack on the U.S., its territories or possessions, or its armed forces.

… and don't even get me started on international law, which the Trump/Vance administration has repeatedly blown right through. It was bad enough in the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific Ocean, where they conducted lethal and illegal boat strikes, and Venezuela, where they illegally abducted a head of state, but Operation Epic Fury is another ballgame altogether.

Regardless of what you think of Iran or Venezuela, the United Nations Charter – which the U.S. Senate overwhelmingly approved in 1945 and President Truman ratified on behalf of the United States – requires member states to refrain from the threat or use of force "against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations." (Iran and Venezuela both joined the UN in 1945 as two of the original founding members and remain full members today.)

The Charter does recognize exceptions, most importantly the right of individual or collective self-defense and military action authorized by the UN Security Council. But absent a valid legal justification under the Charter, using military force to overthrow another country's government would violate the Charter's prohibition on the use of force and its foundational principles of state sovereignty and political independence. Likewise, using force in another state's territory to attack its political leadership must have a valid basis under international law; the fact that the intended target is a head of state does not, by itself, create an exception to the Charter.

< I understand there are those who would argue that there were "valid legal justifications" for the recent violence in the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific Ocean, Venezuela and Iran – I just vehemently disagree. In the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific Ocean, the Trump/Vance administration ordered the execution of people who were not at war with the U.S. and who were not afforded due process. In Venezuela, the Trump/Vance administration launched the military operation under false pretenses. In Iran, the non-violent JCPOA *was working* before Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States, plus the administration's 2026 self-defense claims make no sense because there was no imminent threat from Iran (more on this in a minute). >

Worse, President Trump has repeatedly threatened what are – by *any* measure – war crimes. The most wicked example of this started in his expletive-filled message on Easter Sunday 2026 that managed to offend pretty much every country and every religion: "Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it!!! Open the Fuckin' Strait, you crazy bastards, or you'll be living in Hell – JUST WATCH! Praise be to Allah." This gem was followed two days later with: "A whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again."

This is beyond disgraceful.

… and quite possibly one of the worst things a U.S. president has *ever* threatened. I was so saddened by this – and wanted to express my

heartbreak for the people of Iran and America eloquently – but couldn't find the right words.

But, as usual, Peggy Noonan could, God bless her: "I want to talk about why (Trump's posts) were so horrifying. They constituted hitting a new bottom, a new and infernal, face-lit-by-flames bottom, in world communications. The posts weren't showbiz, they were sinister. You destabilize the world when, as the American president, you say such things. You make all the babies in this delicately poised, always knock-down-able world less safe. You rob your own nation of a claim to moral seriousness in the military action in which it's engaged: You are saying we're not trying to protect life but plan to attack, and in the attacking kill noncombatants who are members of the targeted civilization."

"The moral high ground is relinquished. You lower the bar for all potential response. You encourage violent action by trumpeting your readiness for it. It bolsters the position of your enemies – their animus is justified, their commitment deepened. It allows them to pretend they're fighting for the continuation of their people and not only the continuation of their regime… It is not sentimental to care about this; it is babyish to think it means nothing."

Without question, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was a bad man. His regime inflicted systemic human rights abuses against its own people and massacred thousands of protesters. Iran's leaders imprison, torture, and execute political dissidents, and severely oppress women, LGBTQ people, and religious and ethnic minorities. They thrive on terror and repeatedly vow death to America and Israel. Iran has caused trouble for decades, sponsoring Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and other proxies as they wreaked havoc and killed Americans.

But let's be clear on two things: One, the Iranian people should never by punished for the sins of their leaders (it's shocking this even must be said). They have suffered enough, to say the least.

And two, there was absolutely ZERO reason we had to attack Iran when we did – *right now*, *right this second*. There was no imminent threat; no involvement from Congress; no support from allies; no coherent justification for the American people; no tangible goals; no clear objectives; no plan for helping Americans safely leave the region;

no coherent strategy to help the Iranian people build a legitimate state; no discernable endgame; and little regional American expertise, thanks to the fact that the administration has fired dozens of career diplomats – leaving several strategic posts in the Middle East vacant for over a year – plus, U.S. State Department and FBI employees, many of whom were Middle Eastern, counterterrorism, and counter-intelligence experts.

This entire fiasco makes us look like complete amateurs. Just hours after greenlighting Operation Epic Fury – as he used Mar-a-Lago as a home base for monitoring the unfolding attack on Iran between greeting guests at a charity event – President Trump was also posting updates on social media. These updates, posted on the White House's official social media accounts, included videos combining real footage from the Iran war intermingled with scenes from the Call of Duty video game and clips from superhero and anime films, as well as movies like Top Gun and Braveheart.

Phrases like "wasted," "Courtesy of the Red, White & Blue," and "JUSTICE THE AMERICAN WAY" were shown over images of explosives, along with plenty of American flags and fire emojis. Audio clips from the video game Mortal Kombat – saying things like "flawless victory" – and song lyrics including "kaboom, kablow" played in the background. One video showed footage of a real missile strike, before cutting to a scene from SpongeBob SquarePants, where SpongeBob asks, "Do you want to see me do it again?" – before cutting to a clip of another strike. Another showed a scene from the video game Grand Theft Auto with the caption: "Ah shit, here we go again."

We look ridiculous. It's embarrassing and horrifying in equal measure. You can't improvise war plans as you go along, which is exactly what happened. A war room is not a fake boardroom filled with D-level celebrities who all read from a pre-written script. This is the real world, where real people can get really hurt… and where real people are the ones who pay for ignorance and incompetence.

And now we are stuck in yet another astronomically expensive quagmire in the Middle East.

When Winston Churchill was young – way before he became Britain's prime minister – he wrote these brilliant words: "Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The statesman who yields to war fever must realize that once the signal is given, he is no longer the Master of Policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events."

Inevitably, even if we left Iran today, the Trump/Vance administration has unleashed forces that will continue to spill across borders, disrupt energy markets and global trade, and could lead to asymmetric terrorist attack retaliations.

As concerning, the reputational damage this has caused us is immeasurable. The haphazard and irresponsible way this war has been executed has only accelerated the new worries many around the world already had about America's reliability. Even more people around the world now view the United States as untrustworthy, unpredictable and undependable, as the polls earlier in the chapter revealed. Our influence and legitimacy continue to rapidly erode.

It's true that by operational standards, the Operation Epic Fury initial military strikes achieved substantial successes. But more than six months in, Iran's nuclear and ballistic-missile programs have been severely degraded, not destroyed. Kenneth Pollack, a former CIA analyst who is vice president for policy at the Middle East Institute, summed it up nicely for the Wall Street Journal: "The Iranians have shown a remarkable ability to innovate and reconstitute their forces quickly. They are a much more formidable opponent than most Middle East militaries other than the Israelis."

But what the United States has or has not blown up is beside the point. *Of course* a withering air campaign of cruise and supersonic ballistic missiles carried out by the best military in the world has had successes. *But the least important part of war is blowing things up.*

Operational success doesn't necessarily equal victory. It reminds me of a story U.S. Army Colonel Harry G. Summers Jr. once told about a conversation between him and North Vietnamese Colonel Tu. Colonel Summers: "You know, you never defeated us on the battlefield." Colonel Tu: "That may be so, but it is also irrelevant."

… meaning that, while the American military won virtually every major tactical battle against the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong, those victories meant little because the North Vietnamese faithfully pursued the strategic goal of just surviving the war until – after spending roughly $168 billion (over $1 trillion in today's dollars) and losing 58,220 American lives – the United States finally just left.

Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Pete Hegseth, and congressional Republicans can't seem to grasp that the Islamic Republic wins this war by doing nothing more than ***surviving***. Their ability to withstand an onslaught from two of the world's most powerful militaries is the greatest victory they have had since taking power in 1979.

The Trump/Vance administration has now replaced military action with an economic one called "Operation Economic Outcast" (insert: eyeroll emoji) – – which begs the question, why didn't they just do that in the first place – – but it will likely also fail since Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent named severing Iran's economic lifelines and pushing it toward global isolation as goals, but failed to articulate how long the campaign will last, what would constitute success, and precisely what conditions Washington would accept as an end state.

Not to mention that the Islamic Republic's leaders have had experience withstanding American sanctions for decades. In fact, the government, says Ali Madanizadeh, the economy minister, "has been planning to confront U.S. sanctions for a long time and is fully prepared for new sanctions." He even alluded to a secret two-year plan they have in place for dealing with harsher sanctions.

Plus, as The Wall Street Journal points out, "the experience of Western sanctions and economic pressure on autocracies such as Cuba, North Korea, Venezuela and Syria shows the challenges facing Washington in trying to bend Tehran to its will. Indeed, the strongmen ruling such countries have historically used a mix of violence, economic adaptation and political suppression that enables them to withstand economic pain for years, if not decades. Autocratic countries adapt in various ways. Sanctions typically push activity underground, creating flourishing black markets for goods, services and

even people. Dictators also use outside pressure to rally their populations, especially among elites."

In the end, the success of "Operation Economic Outcast" will depend largely on whether the Trump/Vance administration can convince Iran's main trade partners – above all China, but also countries such as Turkey, Iraq and Russia – to join. This looks to be easier said than done. Beijing, which buys the overwhelming majority of Iran's oil exports and has long maintained economic ties with Tehran despite U.S. sanctions, has already denounced the new measures and said it would "take all necessary measures to firmly safeguard its own rights and interests."

Iran is already warning Gulf states against participating in the new sanctions campaign. Its new national security chief, Mohsen Rezaei, has threatened the interests of Gulf states if they join the American pressure campaign and warned that Tehran would seek to prevent "even a single drop of oil" from leaving the Persian Gulf. He also said that any country that becomes a partner in imposing economic restrictions on Iran would be regarded as an enemy.

Even though the objectives for why we went to war have been a constant moving target – they at times have included destroying Iran's military capability; preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon; breaking its regional proxies; protecting the Strait of Hormuz; protecting the Iranian people; creating an opening for regime change; "getting back" at them for trying to "kill" Donald Trump; Iran's past transgressions against America; and even achieving "world peace" in general – after almost seven months of bombastic threats, scorched-earth bombing, whipsawed markets, panicked allies, and widespread civilian terror, *nothing* has been accomplished. *Literally nothing*.

In fact, in many ways Iran now has *more* advantages than it had before the conflict began. Two months *before* the war started, the leaders of Iran – headed by an 86-year-old leader with major health issues – were struggling to contain one of the most perilous moments of their 47-year rule as their economy tanked and citizens rebelled.

Two months *after* the war started, Iran had learned they had the power to inflict substantial global economic pain by weaponizing the Strait of Hormuz – which is more leverage than their nuclear program

ever was – and the same people who had been rising against them were forming human chains around infrastructure that support civilian life, waving Iranian flags and holding up banners.

On September 4, 2026, The New York Times reported that "Iran has grown more confident in its ability to attack targets in the Middle East and appears determined to continue the conflict for months to frustrate the United States, according to U.S. intelligence reports in recent weeks."

"The intelligence reports, according to people who have read them, suggest that Iran's hardline government might be contemplating a significant escalation. Iran has emerged from months of the on-again, off-again war with a far better understanding of its military strengths and is more sure of its capabilities, according to officials briefed on the intelligence."

The article continues: "U.S. officials also believe that Iran-linked hackers were most likely responsible for cyberattacks on more than 100 water systems throughout the United States in late July. Though there were no indications any system was degraded in a way that made water unsafe to drink, the attacks in some cases led to disruptions that required manual overrides and precautionary boil-water advisories." < Naturally, the president of the United States blamed Minnesota Democratic governor Tim Walz for the cyberattack on his state's own water systems – without an ounce of evidence, of course. >

Despite President Trump's absurd claim that there has been regime change in Iran – – "We're dealing with a much different regime than before; we're dealing with different people. They're smarter, they're sharper, far less radical. We have regime change." – – the Iranian regime is not only unchanged but more hard-lined and emboldened.

The new leaders – including the newly appointed supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, son of Ali – are considered by experts to be particularly close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), reinforcing the growing influence of Iran's security establishment over the country's leadership. And unsurprisingly, the Iranian leaders are even angrier and more resentful than they were before the United States and Israel – in the case of Mojtaba Khamenei – killed his father,

mother, wife, at least one of his sons, his sister, her husband, and their young daughter.

In fact, The New York Times reports that "American intelligence agencies believe that Iran's new supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, is far more interested than his father and predecessor in pursuing a nuclear weapon, according to officials briefed on the assessments. Ayatollah Khamenei's father, who was killed at the start of the war in an Israeli attack aided by U.S. intelligence, had sworn off developing a nuclear weapon. While American officials long asserted that Iran wanted to be capable of building a nuclear weapon, many believed Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's hesitancy was genuine."

"U.S. intelligence agencies believe that Mojtaba Khamenei and the harder-line government that emerged after the United States and Israel killed many of Iran's previous leaders have ambitions to develop advanced nuclear weaponry… If the U.S.-Israeli war has made Tehran more, rather than less, likely to pursue a nuclear weapon, it would amount to one more grave consequence of the killing of the supreme leader and the steps toward regime change the Trump administration initially pursued."

The fact that the Iranian government is still in place and that Iran's chain of command is still functioning should be no surprise to anyone who bothered to study Iran before bombing them, because its political and military systems contain layered and overlapping centers of authority, along with constitutional and institutional mechanisms designed to preserve continuity after the death or incapacitation of senior leaders. As a result, removing individual officials – even those at the very top – does not necessarily dismantle the system itself.

This tracks with a classified report by the National Intelligence Council – completed about a week before the U.S. and Israel launched their 2026 attacks and was reported on by multiple news outlets – which concluded that even a large-scale military assault on the country would be unlikely to topple its theocratic government, even if Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in a U.S.-led military operation.

Meanwhile, there is no agreement requiring Iran to end its support for regional armed groups, including the Houthis, Hamas and

Hezbollah. These groups have continued carrying out attacks across the region throughout the war, including Houthi missile and drone strikes in Yemen and the Red Sea, Hezbollah drone attacks against Israeli forces, and attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian militants in Gaza.

Globally, the war has metastasized into a full-blown international crisis, with more than a dozen countries subjected to attacks, military operations, or other direct consequences of the fighting, while several others have been reluctantly pulled into supporting roles. Early on, the U.S. sank an Iranian warship off the coast of Sri Lanka, *more than 2,000 miles from Tehran*. NATO forces shot down a missile headed into Turkey's airspace and multiple drones even crossed over into Azerbaijan.

Over 1,000,000 people were driven from their homes in Lebanon at the height of the crisis, and more than 330,000 remain displaced across Lebanon today. The U.S. military targeted Iranian-backed militias so – just like that – we were back in combat in Iraq. An Iranian-backed drone assault hit the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center, a large logistical hub for U.S. diplomats near Iraqi military bases and the Baghdad airport, and a U.S. Air Force refueling aircraft crashed after an apparent accident involving two KC-135 tankers, killing six American service members.

Our Gulf allies have been royally screwed by this entire mess. Even though many of them tried hard in the months leading to Operation Epic Fury to get the Trump/Vance administration to understand the dire consequences of an all-out war in Iran, they now face weakened economies, major oil market disruptions and massive regional instability, not to mention bombed out energy infrastructure that will take years and years and billions and billions to rebuild.

A Congressional Research Service report found that Iran fired more than 6,700 drones and missiles at Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states between February 28 and May 17 alone. All six GCC countries were attacked. In its April regional outlook, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected GCC economic growth of just 2 percent in 2026 – a 2.3-percentage-point downward revision from its October 2025 forecast. By July, economists surveyed by Reuters had

downgraded most Gulf economies again as hopes for a rapid normalization of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz faded.

There is also understandable infuriation among them that the war has unraveled their reputation as regional safe havens for business and tourism – a huge blow for nations that have tried hard to transform the region into a center of finance, aviation, technology and tourism. Their airports, five-star hotels, and data centers have been bombarded; tourists have cancelled; expats are rethinking their futures; and real-estate deals are on hold. During the initial weeks of fighting, the World Travel & Tourism Council estimated that the war was costing the region around $600 million *a day* in lost tourism revenue.

Dubai billionaire Khalaf Ahmad Al Habtoor, chairman of the Al Habtoor Group, gave voice to that anger when he addressed President Trump in a post on X: "Who gave you the authority to drag our region into a war with Iran? And on what basis did you make this dangerous decision? You have placed the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab countries at the heart of a danger they did not choose." He ended with this: "Who gave you permission to turn our region into a battlefield?"

And now – regardless of what happens from here – our allies are stuck with an empowered, resentful, defiant, and extremely ticked-off Iran that has nothing to lose.

Then there's the fate of Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium (HEU) – which is far (FAR!) from resolved. In the last verified inventory from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) before the June 2025 strikes, the agency estimated that Iran possessed 440.9 kilograms – roughly 970 pounds – of uranium enriched to 60 percent. The IAEA believed that most of it, though less than 70 percent, was stored in an Isfahan tunnel complex (satellite imagery from June 2025 appeared to show a truck moving blue barrels – possibly overpacked HEU containers – into the Isfahan tunnel complex). IAEA Director General Grossi had said publicly that Iran's HEU was held across Isfahan, Natanz, and Fordow.

Although it's impossible to know with certainty the extent of the damage done to Iran's nuclear program during Operation Midnight Hammer – the June 2025 assault by the U.S and Israel – a convincing

consensus seems to be that the military strikes destroyed and/or rendered inoperable only one of Iran's three principal nuclear facilities, the Fordow site, where B-2 stealth bombers dropped twelve GBU-57 ground-penetrating bombs through two ventilation shafts (two additional GBU-57s hit Natanz). The intelligence evidently suggests that the attack destroyed perhaps thousands of nuclear centrifuges at the deepest levels of Fordow (estimated to be over 250 feet under a mountain), although, again, it's unclear whether the centrifuges were destroyed or just rendered inoperable.

The extent of the damage at the other two nuclear enrichment facilities, Natanz and Isfahan, is harder to determine, but the general assumption seems to be that neither was taken out completely – even though Natanz had been targeted by Israel for days and was finally hit with two Massive Ordnance Penetrator bombs. By March 2026, even with the new U.S. and Israeli strikes, U.S. intelligence officials told The New York Times that Iran or others could now get to Iran's primary store of highly enriched uranium that had been buried under Isfahan through a very narrow access point (the uranium is in gas form and stored in canisters).

Of course, before Operation Midnight Hammer, Iran's nuclear capabilities reached much further than Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan and, even though it appears Iran lost many of its nuclear scientists in the June 2025 Israel-Iran war, it still likely had the knowledge and sophistication to rebuild. To that end, by September 2025, satellite imagery was picking up signs of new construction underway at Pickaxe Mountain – a location that has never been attacked, mainly because it's estimated to be buried 80 to 100 meters below ground, even deeper than the Fordow facility, and even the Massive Ordnance Penetrators may not be able to get to it.

The massive underground complex, located about a mile south of Natanz, has also never been inspected by the IAEA, so there is no way to know exactly what is inside. Iran claims Pickaxe was constructed to replace an advanced centrifuge assembly facility destroyed in 2020, but outside experts believe it's large enough to accommodate considerably more – potentially including centrifuge production and assembly,

uranium enrichment, storage, and other nuclear-related activities. HOW'S THE JCPOA LOOKING ABOUT NOW, AMERICA?

I was going to try to just move past this, but I simply cannot let the firehose of lies that spew from Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Pete Hegseth and most of the rest of this administration go. After Operation Midnight Hammer targeted Iranian nuclear facilities in June 2025, President Trump and others in the administration swore to the American people that Tehran's nuclear program had been "totally obliterated."

President Trump said this over and over and over: "Iran's key nuclear enrichment facilities have been completely and totally obliterated" AND "Monumental Damage" has been done to "all Nuclear sites in Iran… Obliteration is an accurate term!" AND "It was my great honor to Destroy All Nuclear facilities & capability" AND "THE NUCLEAR SITES IN IRAN ARE COMPLETELY DESTROYED!"

On NBC's Meet the Press, JD Vance said: "We destroyed the Iranian nuclear program." Afterward, he qualified that somewhat, saying, "I think we set that program back substantially," but days later, he again said that Iran's nuclear program had been destroyed and was no longer capable of producing a nuclear weapon. Marco Rubio said of the damage beneath Fordow: "This was complete and total obliteration."

At a Pentagon briefing, Pete Hegseth said, "We devastated the Iranian nuclear program" and "Iran's nuclear ambitions have been obliterated." Later, he went even further: "Our bombing campaign obliterated Iran's ability to create nuclear weapons. You want to call it destroyed, you want to call it defeated, you want to call it obliterated – choose your word." White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said on ABC that, "We are confident, yes, that Iran's nuclear sites were completely and totally obliterated" and, three days later, she reiterated that the strikes represented "a total obliteration" and described the three facilities as "completely demolished." Steve Witkoff called suggestions that Midnight Hammer had failed to achieve its objective "completely preposterous."

But then, to justify starting Operation Epic Fury, the Trump/Vance administration and some congressional Republicans claimed that Iran not only still had its nuclear program but was developing long-range missiles that would be able to *hit the United States*. *Really soon*. Nearly three months after the war started, Energy Secretary Chris Wright told the Senate Armed Services Committee that Iran was "frighteningly close" to a nuclear weapon. Steve Witkoff even said on Fox News on February 21st that Iran was "probably *a week away* from having industrial-grade bomb making material." … just a downright, flat-out lie.

Four days before the war began, President Trump told Congress in his February 24th State of the Union address that Iran was developing long-range missiles that "could soon reach the American homeland." Later, he said, "If we didn't hit within two weeks, they would've had a nuclear weapon" AND "Remember, they were two weeks away"…. "If we didn't knock the hell out of them, they would have had a nuclear weapon within two to four weeks."

Were they lying then or are they lying now – because both things can't be true. There's also the fact that they started this war in the first place. I can't imagine how betrayed MAGA feels, after Donald Trump promised them in three straight presidential campaigns that he wouldn't be a war president. "I'm not going to start wars," he vowed on election night in 2024. "I'm going to stop wars." In his second inaugural address, he said his "proudest legacy will be that of a peacemaker." How can *anyone* still believe *anything* that comes out of this man's mouth?

Here are a few facts: Three U.S. officials with access to current intelligence about Iran's missile programs told The New York Times that President Trump had "exaggerated the immediacy of the threat posed to the United States." One official said some intelligence analysts were concerned that senior officials had inflated the threats, or that intelligence was being selectively presented or distorted.

On February 27th – the day before the war began – Reuters reported that three sources familiar with U.S. intelligence reports said President Trump's claims that Iran would soon possess missiles capable of striking the United States was not backed by the intelligence

assessments they had reviewed. The sources said they were unaware of any U.S. intelligence assessment concluding that Iran was developing a missile that could soon reach the American homeland.

Two sources told Reuters that there had been no change to the Defense Intelligence Agency's 2025 assessment that Iran could take until 2035 to develop a "militarily viable intercontinental ballistic missile" from its existing space-launch technology. Another source said that even with technological assistance from China or North Korea, Iran would probably need as long as *eight years* to produce something operational at the ICBM level – obviously a far cry from "soon."

While Iran's missiles could strike U.S. military bases throughout the Middle East and reach Israel and portions of Europe, it's existing missiles generally have maximum ranges of approximately 2,000 kilometers, or roughly 1,240 miles. This matters when Tehran is approximately 10,000 kilometers from Washington, D.C.

Just two days before the war began, Daryl G. Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, wrote that "there is no imminent threat. Iran is not close to 'weaponizing' its nuclear material so as to justify another U.S. attack." That assessment was consistent with what International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi said after the war began. Asked directly whether Iran had been days or weeks away from building a nuclear bomb, Grossi said no. Just say'n...

So, how much has this strategic loss and profound humiliation cost the United States of America? Earlier, we covered the actual cost: In September, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that the war had already cost about $38 billion through August 1st and was continuing to cost another $2 billion to $3 billion every month. Then U.S. Central Command provided Congress with an even newer estimate: at least $43.6 billion through September 3rd, including roughly $28 billion just to replace munitions already expended and another $4.3 billion in lost or damaged equipment.

And even that $43.6 billion figure is not the full bill. There is the *expensive weapons stockpiles depletion* situation, but this number also doesn't include the future cost of repairing or rebuilding U.S. military bases damaged by Iranian attacks. In just one incident, three American

F-15E Strike Eagles were mistakenly shot down by Kuwaiti air defenses during an Iranian attack – aircraft worth $100 million *each*. In early April, Iranian fire brought down another U.S. F-15E Strike Eagle over Iran and an A-10 Warthog attack aircraft. Two U.S. combat-search-and-rescue helicopters also came under Iranian fire during the operation, and two MC-130J Commando II transport aircraft used in the rescue mission were subsequently abandoned at a makeshift airstrip inside Iran and deliberately destroyed by U.S. forces after they could not be flown out.

Iranian drones and missiles have significantly damaged U.S. military facilities across the Middle East. On the very first day of the war, Iran targeted several major U.S. installations, including Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia; Ali Al Salem Air Base and Camp Buehring in Kuwait; and Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, one of the largest U.S. air bases in the Middle East.

The attacks continued from there, damaging bases, barracks, hangars, fuel depots, aircraft, radar and communications systems, and critical air-defense infrastructure across the region. Some of the heaviest damage was concentrated at Naval Support Activity Bahrain – headquarters of the U.S. Fifth Fleet – and three U.S. bases in Kuwait: Ali Al Salem Air Base, Camp Arifjan and Camp Buehring.

It's undeniable that the Iran war has tied down an extraordinary share of U.S. military power. Even before the first bombs fell, the Pentagon had massed two aircraft-carrier strike groups, 16 surface warships and hundreds of combat and support aircraft in and around the Middle East – a buildup that some analysts estimated represented roughly 40 to 50 percent of America's globally deployable air power.

As the war dragged on, the buildup only grew. By March, the Army had mobilized roughly 2,000 soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division, joining a U.S. force in the region that swelled past 50,000 troops. Six months later, much of that force is still there. Roughly 50,000 U.S. troops and 19 warships – including two aircraft carriers and 13 guided-missile destroyers – remain deployed across the region, while elements of the 82nd Airborne have had their deployments extended into 2027.

The toll this war has already taken on our troops came into stark relief when families of those on the USS Abraham Lincoln reported that the roughly 5,000 sailors and Marines onboard faced severe supply shortages, deteriorating living conditions, and a mounting mental health crisis – after the 1,100-foot warship left its homeport of San Diego in November 2025 for a routine Pacific cruise but was redirected to the Middle East by January 2026.

Families said the crew suffered from shortages of fresh food, rationed meals, and a lack of basic hygiene items like soap, toothpaste, and deodorant at the ship's store. There were also reports of broken laundry facilities and toilets, moldy showers without hot water, and chronic mail disruptions. Many relatives reported that their family members were raising alarms over extreme exhaustion and psychological distress, recounting stories of sailors expressing suicidal thoughts and/or self-harm and even attempting to jump overboard.

During a town hall meeting, family members spoke directly to Acting Secretary of the Navy Hung Cao and other senior officials. One spouse, through tears, shared that she had received a message from her husband saying "he hopes he doesn't wake up tomorrow."

Finally, after 286 total days at sea, including 264 consecutive days without a port visit, the USS Abraham Lincoln began its journey home after making a scheduled port visit in Thailand. The ship arrived in Thailand for its first full port call in nearly nine months, visibly covered in rust from bow to stern thanks to an extraordinary nine-month deployment without routine maintenance.

Naturally, the full extent of the mayhem and destruction to our military facilities emerged only gradually as the Pentagon tried to gaslight the American people. A Washington Post investigation using satellite imagery ultimately identified at least 228 damaged or destroyed structures and pieces of equipment at 15 U.S. military sites – including Patriot and THAAD air-defense equipment, satellite communications systems, an E-3 Sentry command-and-control aircraft and a refueling tanker. The Post concluded that the damage was far more extensive than the U.S. government had publicly acknowledged.

Complicating efforts to determine the full extent of the damage, the U.S. government asked commercial satellite-imagery providers to

withhold recent images of the war zone. Planet Labs complied, ultimately imposing an indefinite hold on imagery dating back to March 9 and moving to a managed-access system. The restrictions made it considerably more difficult for journalists and independent analysts to assess Iranian strikes on U.S. facilities. Vantor also restricted access to imagery from parts of the Middle East, although the company said those restrictions were imposed under its own conflict-zone policies and that it had not been contacted by the U.S. government.

Meanwhile, our interests in other parts of the world are now precariously exposed as the war is 1) distracting us from what China is doing in the Indo-Pacific, which includes building a military base on Antelope Reef in the Paracel Islands and imposing widespread airspace restrictions covering waters facing Japan and South Korea, and 2) as mentioned earlier, draining our missile stockpiles and stretching our forces, threatening our readiness for what may happen in the Yellow, East and South China seas. A terrifying example is that, as of early September, we have no aircraft carrier strike group forward-deployed in the western Pacific – precisely the region where we would need substantial naval power if China decided to make a move against Taiwan.

The Gulf, home to about half of the world's proven oil reserves, has been in turmoil since February 2026, and the International Energy Agency has called the conflict the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market.

Because shipping through the Strait of Hormuz – which before the war carried roughly 20 percent of the world's oil and one-fifth of global liquefied-natural-gas trade – remains severely restricted, prices at American pumps were nearly a dollar higher by Labor Day 2026 than a year earlier… and the highest Labor Day gasoline price on record. Diesel prices also reached a record national average of $5.85 per gallon in early September. And remember, before the U.S. and Israel launched their attacks on Iran on February 28th, the Strait had been operating as a major free-flowing international shipping artery.

Now there is another major problem. In September, Iran-aligned Houthi forces swept through Yemen's Red Sea coast, capturing the

strategic port of Mocha and Perim Island in the middle of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait – another of the world's most important shipping chokepoints. This had become an increasingly important alternative for Saudi oil exports after traffic through Hormuz was disrupted. Houthi attacks and territorial gains have now sharply reduced traffic there as well, threatening to squeeze global energy supplies from both directions and putting additional upward pressure on oil prices.

And even the principal land-based workaround has been hit. Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline – built to carry oil from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea and bypass the Strait of Hormuz – was attacked in September, disrupting shipments through the Red Sea port of Yanbu. Saudi Aramco subsequently halted some October crude deliveries to European refiners. So, pressure is now being applied not only to the two critical maritime chokepoints, Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb, but also to one of Saudi Arabia's most important routes for bypassing them.

Although traffic through Hormuz is still well below prewar averages, some ships are starting to get through. But with the Bab el-Mandeb route now also under severe pressure, there is even less room for the global oil market to compensate for disruptions in the Gulf. And energy prices could remain elevated even if crude prices decline because of a phenomenon economists call "rockets and feathers": gasoline prices tend to rise like rockets when oil prices increase but fall like feathers when oil prices come back down.

Plus, missile and drone strikes have damaged more than 80 energy facilities across the Middle East, with more than one-third sustaining severe or very severe damage. Repairing some of the hardest-hit facilities, including Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG complex, could take years. Rystad Energy initially estimated regional energy-infrastructure repair costs at more than $25 billion but subsequently raised its estimate to between $34 billion and $58 billion, with a $46 billion midpoint.

Incidentally, because the Trump/Vance administration authorized a massive emergency release after the war disrupted tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, America's emergency oil stockpile has fallen to a level not seen since the Reagan era. The Strategic Petroleum

Reserve (SPR) dropped to 298.7 million in early August, its lowest level since January 1983, and by August 28th it had fallen further to roughly 286.6 million barrels (the reserve held roughly 415 million barrels in mid-March).

But the only costs that truly matter are heartbreaking. As of mid-September 2026, the latest U.S. Defense Department figures put total American military casualties at 808: 18 killed and roughly 790 wounded/injured.

But those numbers may understate the human toll. In September, The Washington Post reported that six U.S. officials familiar with the Pentagon's internal casualty data said more American service members have died than the military has publicly acknowledged. Five put the death toll at at least 22 and a sixth said 23 service members have died since the war began on February 28th (although not every additional death has been established as directly caused by the conflict). Three U.S. contractors based in the region have also died.

It's no surprise there are discrepancies because the Trump/Vance administration has tried like hell to keep these numbers hidden. Which is just hideous. On September 2nd, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick claimed there had been no American deaths in the Iran war (he later claimed he meant there had been no deaths in Venezuela). The Pentagon keeps emphasizing that many of the injured troops "just" have/had "minor concussions." President Trump has constantly tried to minimize the deaths in Iran by comparing them with Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and Korea, even posting charts contrasting 18 U.S. deaths in Iran with the thousands killed in those much longer wars.

In perhaps the most hideous of the hideous, the Pentagon's official casualty counts suddenly fell from 18 dead to 14 on July 23rd, and the reported wounded count fell from 482 to 420. The Pentagon initially blamed the abrupt decline on a "temporary data disruption," but subsequently removed the four July deaths from the Iran-war tally altogether, classifying them – and hundreds of wounded troops – under the newly created category "Overseas Operations." The missing casualties were eventually restored to the Pentagon's overall accounting, but not to the Operation Epic Fury tally.

This fits a pattern. Even though, by their count, 808 U.S. soldiers had been killed or wounded/injured in Iran, on September 3rd Vice President JD Vance said he wouldn't call it a war at all: "I wouldn't call it a war. Right now, there is no active shooting." The very next day, President Trump called the Iran conflict "small potatoes:" "I call it a military conflict because it's small potatoes for us. It's not a big thing."

As for the toll on the Iranian people, although the exact number is uncertain, the best available evidence suggests that at least 3,600 people have been killed inside Iran since the U.S.-Israeli war began. This includes those killed in a devastating strike on the Shajarah Tayyebeh Girls' School in Minab, where at least 175 people were killed, most of them students.

The pain the strike on the school caused in Iran was already unbearable, but the American president blatantly lying about it made it so much worse – *for all of us*. An initial in-depth investigation by The New York Times – including analysis of old and new satellite imagery and verified videos – found that the school appeared to have been damaged by a precision strike that occurred at the same time as attacks on an adjacent naval base operated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. A video released after the Times' initial investigation shows a Tomahawk cruise missile striking the naval complex beside the school; although several U.S. allies possess or have ordered Tomahawks, the United States was the only participant in the conflict known to be using them. Additional photographs subsequently showed mangled missile fragments bearing serial numbers, manufacturers' names and other markings consistent with a U.S.-made Tomahawk cruise missile.

Reuters later reported that a preliminary U.S. military investigation pointed to American forces as the likely source of the strike, although the investigation had not yet reached a final conclusion. Gen. Dan Caine also confirmed that U.S. forces were conducting strikes in southern Iran at the time, and a map he displayed showing targets struck during the operation's first 100 hours included the Minab area.

Nevertheless – huge surprise – both President Trump and Pete Hegseth blamed Iran for the school strike before the Pentagon's investigation had reached a conclusion, with the U.S. president saying

that, based on what he had seen, he believed it had been caused by Iran's inaccurate munitions… of course, as usual, offering ZERO evidence for this claim. President Trump even kept saying things like Iran "also has some Tomahawks" – which was just another a bald-faced lie.

Finally, on March 11th, it was reported that the U.S. military's preliminary investigation concluded that U.S. forces were likely responsible for the Minab school strike, and subsequent reporting has revealed that the Pentagon's own inquiry uncovered serious failures in the intelligence and targeting process. Investigators found that a U.S. analyst had identified the building as a school years earlier, but the warning never made its way into the authoritative targeting database. Planners were also relying on years-old imagery and other outdated intelligence when the target was approved. An independent general submitted a more extensive investigation to U.S. Central Command in April, but months later the Pentagon still had not publicly released its findings or formally acknowledged responsibility for the strike.

And Donald Trump wonders why the Iranian people don't believe him when he claims to have their backs? On January 2, 2026 – as large-scale demonstrations, triggered by dire economic issues, raged in the streets of Iran – Donald Trump said the United States was "locked and loaded" to come to the "rescue" if the Iranian regime responded to widespread protests lethally.

Iran security services answered by slaughtering their own citizens. The Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), a U.S.-based human-rights organization focused on Iran, reports that the regime's sweeping crackdown on anti-government demonstrations resulted in at least 53,777 arrests and nearly 26,000 civilian injuries. HRANA has documented 7,007 deaths – including thousands of protesters and hundreds of children – while another 11,744 reported deaths remain under investigation.

On January 10th, President Trump warned the Iranian government it "better not start shooting" at protesters because "we'll start shooting, too." He continued: "If they start killing people like they have in the past, we'll be hitting them very hard where it hurts." Three days later, he made a direct appeal to the protesters, calling on them to defy efforts

to stop their demonstrations and encouraging them to take over state institutions. “HELP IS ON ITS WAY,” he posted on his Truth Social platform.

But help wasn’t on its way.

And yet he still expected them to just trust him. In the 8-minute video posted on his Truth Social that declared the United States had begun “major combat operations in Iran,” Donald Trump told the 92 million people in the world’s most combustible region that the future is “yours to take”: “To the great proud people of Iran, I say tonight that the hour of your freedom is at hand. … Now is the time to seize control of your destiny, and to unleash the prosperous and glorious future that is close within your reach. This is the moment for action. Do not let it pass.”

Yes, Iranians! All you have to do is emerge from your homes – dodging bombs and missiles, of course – be brave, rise up, and overthrow your government! Simple!

Never mind that you don’t have arms, you live in a police state, and you’ve heard all this from this American president before. I’m sure they seriously questioned – as I did – what would honestly happen if security forces started slaughtering people in the streets again. What would Donald J. Trump *really* do about it? Ground troops?

This is not theoretical; this is stone-cold reality. After the first attack, the intelligence branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) immediately started sending text messages to millions of Iranians, warning that street protests “will be considered an example of direct cooperation with the enemy.” An IRGC commander warned parents not to let their kids take to the streets: “If they show sympathy for the enemy, there is a shoot-to-kill order.”

Although they live under a brutally oppressive and mismanaged government, Iranians have witnessed the consequences of Western intervention across the region, where lofty promises of freedom and democracy have too often given way to chaos, civil war, or prolonged foreign occupation.

In Afghanistan, for example, American support for anti-Soviet mujahideen fighters through the 1980s, followed by years of civil war and neglect after the Soviet withdrawal, helped create the conditions in which the Taliban and transnational jihadist movements like al-Qaeda emerged – ultimately drawing the United States into another two decades of war after 9/11.

Then there is what happened in their own country in 1953, when the United States and Britain orchestrated a coup – codenamed Operation Ajax – that overthrew Iran's democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, and consolidated the power of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. This was long treated by Washington as an open secret rather than an admitted fact, until the CIA itself declassified documents in 2013 formally acknowledging its role in planning and executing the coup.

What followed was more than seven decades of accumulated grievances and retaliation: America's support for the Shah's increasingly repressive rule until he was overthrown by the Iranian people in 1979; Iranian revolutionaries seizing the U.S. Embassy and taking 66 Americans hostage, 52 of whom would remain captive for 444 days; Washington tilting toward Saddam Hussein during Iraq's devastating eight-year war against Iran, providing Baghdad with intelligence and other forms of assistance even as the Reagan administration secretly facilitated arms sales to Iran; Hezbollah and other Iran-backed militants carrying out devastating attacks against Americans in Lebanon, including the 1983 U.S. Embassy and Marine barracks bombings; the United States and Iran effectively fighting an undeclared naval war in the Persian Gulf, culminating in Operation Praying Mantis in 1988; and, less than three months later, the USS Vincennes shooting down Iran Air Flight 655 after mistaking the civilian Airbus for an Iranian F-14, killing all 290 people aboard.

Decades later, Iran would arm, train and fund militant groups that repeatedly attacked American forces in Iraq, with declassified U.S. military assessments attributing to the deaths of over 600 American service members between 2003 and 2011 to Iran and its proxies.

That's A LOT of history to add to President Trump's broken promises of early 2026. But nevertheless, almost seven months into the

war, he was still at it: “When are the Iranian people going to rise up and fight?” he asked on Truth Social.

By now, though, the Iranian people had seen their country blown to smithereens by the very man who claimed he wanted to help them. At the time of the April 7th “ceasefire,” The New York Times had independently verified damage to at least 22 schools and 17 health-care facilities – some directly hit and others damaged by strikes on nearby targets – reiterating that its findings represented only a fraction of the likely devastation to Iran’s civilian infrastructure. Iran’s Red Crescent Society reported a far greater toll, saying that at least 763 schools and 316 health-care facilities had been damaged or destroyed during the war.

Military strikes have also damaged many of Iran’s most cherished cultural treasures – losses that extend far beyond buildings themselves to sites deeply entwined with the country’s history and identity. Among them are Isfahan’s 17th-century Safavid-era Ali Qapu Palace and Chehel Sotoun palace and garden, as well as the ancient Jameh Mosque, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the great surviving monuments of Islamic architecture. The centuries-old Golestan Palace in Tehran – transformed into the royal residence and seat of power of the Qajar dynasty – was also damaged, as was the ancient Falak-ol-Aflak castle in Khorramabad. Iran’s Ministry of Cultural Heritage now says experts have documented damage to 149 historical monuments across 18 provinces and 29 cities.

Iran’s Ministry of Culture and Heritage confirmed it installed blue flags on all its cultural and heritage sites to signal to Israeli and U.S. jets that they were protected – which is international wartime protocol – but it didn’t seem to matter.

The iconic Azadi Sports Complex in Tehran – home to Iran’s national soccer stadium and the site of the 2025 match that clinched the country’s place in the World Cup – is among the sports and youth facilities badly damaged during the U.S.-Israeli assault. The complex also occupies an emotional place in Iran’s struggle for women’s rights. It was at Azadi Stadium that Sahar Khodayari, a young Iranian woman barred from attending men’s soccer matches, was arrested in 2019 after attempting to enter disguised as a man. Facing prosecution and fearing

that she would be imprisoned, Khodayari later set herself on fire outside a courthouse. She died from her injuries a week later. Known afterward as "Blue Girl," for the colors of her beloved Esteghlal soccer club, her death sparked outrage inside and outside Iran.

The Trump/Vance administration's foreign policy instincts are atrocious.

It's mindboggling that every single person in this country did not learn this lesson the first time around. The "peace deal" the first Trump administration signed with the Taliban may be the worst agreement in the history of agreements. He can blame President Biden all he wants – and without question Biden played a disastrous role in this story later on – but President Trump and President Trump alone capitulated to *every single one* of the Taliban's outrageous demands … to the point where, by the end of the "negotiations," the *Taliban* were giving *us* – the *United States of America* – orders, like we were their bitch.

In Donald Trump's illustrious tenure of being the president of the United States – somehow twice now – he has sold out our intelligence agencies in front of the entire world by siding with Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, Finland, and then compared them to Nazis; shared highly classified information with the Russian foreign minister and Russian ambassador in the White House; told the entire U.N. assembly that their countries were "going to hell;" and berated world leaders like Volodymyr Zelensky and Cyril Ramaphosa right in the Oval Office.

In addition to all the asinine things already mentioned in this chapter – from destructive trade wars to taking a wrecking ball to the European alliance and USAID to lording over the Western Hemisphere like mob bosses – the Trump/Vance administration's authoritarian, tough guy routine has done nothing more than alienate our allies and embolden our potential adversaries, handing authoritarians around the world – whether Iranian, Chinese, Turkish, Saudi, Russian, or North Korean – almost all of America's leverage without getting anything of

consequence in return. The president himself has heaped praise on autocrats from Egypt, the Philippines, Turkey and Kazakhstan, and had full-on bromances with Viktor Orbán, Rodrigo Duterte, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and, depending on his time of the month, Putin.

On that note, he has flipped and flopped several times between embracing/rebuking Russia and/or Ukraine at any given time – at one point even falsely accusing Ukraine of starting the war when the whole world knows it was Putin who ruthlessly and illegally sent his troops into sovereign territory on a murderous rampage.

As president of the United States, Donald Trump has abandoned both the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the incredibly brave men and women who risked their lives to serve alongside us in Afghanistan and has withdrawn from major international agreements like the Iranian nuclear deal, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Open Skies Treaty, the Paris Climate Accord, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, World Health Organization, and organizations within the United Nations system including its Human Rights Council, its Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, and its Relief and Works Agency.

People in the Trump/Vance administration would argue they have scored some foreign policy victories, but I disagree.

For example, President Trump claims that he has "ended" multiple long-running regional conflicts – or in his exact words, he has "won eight wars" – but the facts tell a different story. This is mainly because ending conflicts that have roots going back decades requires patient diplomacy, follow-through, and long-term commitment, not just flashy headlines and shameless self-congratulation.

Although Trump says he "ended" a "war" between Egypt and Ethiopia, the two countries were never at war. Plus, their long-running dispute over Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and Nile water rights remains unresolved. Previous negotiations have repeatedly stalled, including U.S.-facilitated talks during Trump's first term. In 2026, the Trump/Vance administration renewed its efforts to mediate between Cairo and Addis Ababa, but so far those efforts have produced no agreement.

The Donald also claims to have ended a "war" between Serbia and Kosovo, although the two have not been at war since 1999. Nor has the

Trump/Vance administration made progress toward resolving their long-running dispute (Kosovo considers itself an independent country, while Serbia considers Kosovo part of Serbia). In fact, in September 2025, the United States indefinitely suspended a planned Strategic Dialogue with Kosovo, accusing its government of taking actions that increased tensions and instability.

During Trump's first term, his administration did broker a 2020 economic-normalization agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, but much of that agreement was never implemented. The broader normalization process has also largely stalled, and despite renewed U.S. engagement with Serbia in 2026, relations between Belgrade and Pristina remain unresolved.

In May 2025, President Trump stuck his nose into the long-standing conflict between India and Pakistan after hostilities erupted following a terrorist attack in Indian-administered Kashmir. Although Pakistan publicly praised Trump for his role in bringing the fighting to an end, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government emphatically rejected Trump's repeated claims that the United States had mediated the ceasefire or that the prospect of a U.S. trade deal had persuaded the two countries to stop fighting (India maintains that the cessation of hostilities was negotiated directly between the Indian and Pakistani militaries).

Trump's repeated claims of credit became a significant source of friction between Washington and New Delhi and contributed to the deterioration of relations as U.S.-India trade negotiations collapsed later that summer. < Note: In February 2026, the U.S. and India reached a framework for an interim trade agreement and resumed negotiations toward a broader bilateral trade deal, but it's still not completed. >

In June 2025, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo signed a U.S.-brokered peace agreement aimed at ending decades of conflict in eastern Congo… but fighting continued, and days after the two countries reaffirmed the agreement at the White House in December, the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group seized the strategic city of Uvira.

Nevertheless, in his February 24, 2026 State of the Union address, President Trump claimed he had "ended" the war between "the Congo and Rwanda." Six days later, his own administration sanctioned the Rwandan military and four senior officers, saying thousands of Rwandan troops remained in eastern Congo actively fighting and supporting M23 in "blatant violation" of the peace agreement. Fighting continued into the summer, and although ceasefire monitors were finally deployed in August, M23 still controls substantial territory in eastern Congo and the peace process remains unresolved.

In August 2025, the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan initialed a peace treaty at the White House, while Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and President Ilham Aliyev signed a joint declaration committing their countries to peace. However, the two countries had already been moving steadily toward a settlement since Azerbaijan regained control of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023. However, more than a year later, the peace treaty itself has still not been formally signed or ratified, and several issues, including final border demarcation, remain unresolved.

On July 28, 2025, after five days of fighting along their border, Thailand and Cambodia agreed to an unconditional ceasefire – but the talks were hosted by Malaysia (to be fair, President Trump did pressure both governments, speaking with their leaders and threatening to halt U.S. tariff negotiations unless they stopped fighting). However, the agreement began unraveling within months, and Thailand suspended parts of a subsequent peace declaration in November after several of its soldiers were injured by a landmine.

When fighting erupted again in December, Trump claimed on December 13th that the two countries had agreed to stop, but Thai Prime Minister Charnvirakul immediately rejected that characterization and said military operations would continue. The fighting lasted another two weeks before Thailand and Cambodia signed a new ceasefire at a border checkpoint on December 27th. That ceasefire has largely held, but the underlying territorial dispute remains unresolved and tensions between the two countries remain high.

One very positive thing the Trump/Vance administration had a hand in was helping broker an exchange of Israeli hostages for

Palestinian prisoners in October 2025. The Israeli hostages coming home was amazing! But should Donald Trump and Jared Kushner be hailed as heroes of the Israeli Palestinian conflict? Not so much.

In fact, the war in Gaza between the State of Israel and Hamas is another example of something these guys could have possibly helped ward off years before (much like how the Iranian nuclear deal could have possibly prevented the current war).

The first Trump administration – mainly Jared – made a significant effort to establish formal diplomatic relations between Israel and several Arab states. The Abraham Accords, signed at the White House on September 15, 2020, normalized relations between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain, and Morocco followed in December. Sudan also agreed to pursue normalization, but the process was never completed as the country descended into civil war.

The idea behind the Abraham Accords was that economic, diplomatic and security cooperation could help overcome longstanding geopolitical divisions, while eventually fostering broader cultural and social ties.

On paper, the concept behind this endeavor is commendable, but the first Trump administration's blind spot was Palestine. The strategy behind the Abraham Accords seemed to be built around three thoughts: 1) the notion that Palestine was so weakened and marginalized that Israel could just bypass the conflict altogether, 2) the United States could weaken Palestine even further by withdrawing its humanitarian funding, which Donald Trump did in 2018 when he cut over $200 million in bilateral assistance to Palestine, as well as funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), a UN body that supported over 5 million Palestinian refugees, and 3) the Sunni Arab leaders in the region were sick of Palestinian leadership and, despite the suffering of the Palestinian people, were ready to do things differently.

In fact, Jared Kushner said as much in a 2021 Wall Street Journal article when he wrote, "One of the reasons the Arab-Israeli conflict persisted for so long was the myth that it could be solved only after Israel and the Palestinians resolved their differences. That was never true. The Abraham Accords exposed the conflict as nothing more than

a real-estate dispute between Israelis and Palestinians that need not hold up Israel's relations with the broader Arab world."

Good Lord. A real estate dispute? He cannot be serious with this. Does he not know ***anything*** about the centuries of complicated and heart-wrenching history that governs the Middle East?

The regional reaction to Israel's airstrikes in Gaza between May 11-15, 2021 – two months after Jared wrote those words – demonstrate perfectly how authentic, long-term normalization between these nations is virtually impossible without a credible Israeli commitment toward Palestinian statehood.

Not long after Israeli bombs, shells and missiles started raining down, many Arab countries quickly condemned Israel's role in the attacks. It probably didn't help that these Arab governments witnessed the Israelis' attack on the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, one of Islam's most sacred sites, during their holy month of Ramadan, no less.

The UAE Foreign Ministry issued a statement criticizing "acts of violence committed by right-wing extremist groups in the occupied East Jerusalem" and called on Israeli leadership to "assume responsibility toward de-escalation and putting an end to all aggressions and practices that perpetuate tension and hostility." The statement ended with the UAE urging "maximum self-restraint to avoid the region slipping into new levels of instability in a way that threatens peace."

Bahrain and others shared similar concerns, with the Saudi Arabia Foreign Ministry condemning "in the strongest terms the Israeli occupation's blatant assaults on the sanctity of the holy Aqsa Mosque, and on the security and safety of worshipers." They also called on leaders around the world to "hold the Israeli occupation responsible for this escalation, and to immediately stop its escalatory actions, which violate all international norms and laws."

An opinion piece by political science lecturer Talal Bannan, published in the Saudi newspaper Okaz, went further, calling Israel a "racist, hateful entity" that exists only "through aggression, racism and raping of land." Bannan went on to say that any Arab country that enters into an agreement with Israel "acquiesces to Israel's aggressive behavior."

This wouldn't seem like that big of a deal except that nothing gets printed in Saudi Arabia without the approval of the highest leaders in the kingdom.

Then came October 7, 2023.

On this day – the day of Shemini Atzeret, a Jewish holiday that closes the autumn thanksgiving festival of Sukkot – the militant Palestinian nationalist and Islamist movement Hamas led a coordinated attack on Israel by land, sea, and air from the Gaza Strip. The attack killed around 1,200 people, primarily Israeli citizens, making it the deadliest day for Israel since its independence. More than 250 people were taken hostage during the attack.

The aftermath of the October 7th attacks shows how the naïve decision to take Palestine off the table during the Abraham Accord negotiations came back to haunt *everyone*.

Although the Abraham Accords themselves have survived years of regional conflict, efforts to expand them have stalled, particularly with Saudi Arabia, which continues to insist that normalization with Israel must include a credible path toward Palestinian statehood. Tensions also elevated quickly when the leaders of Arab countries saw the way Israel was conducting its side of the war.

The heartbreaking images cascading out of Gaza certainly didn't help…. Palestinian mothers and fathers in unbearable pain, grieving over the bodies of their dead children. Children frantically crying and running aimlessly against the backdrop of bombed out, crumbling buildings. Nor did it help that Israel blatantly blocked humanitarian aid as Palestinians starved to death.

On September 19, 2024, in his version of a State of the Union, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said, "The kingdom will not cease its tireless efforts to establish an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and we affirm that the kingdom will not establish diplomatic relations with Israel without one. We thank all the countries that recognized the Palestinian state as an embodiment of international legitimacy, and we urge other countries to take similar steps."

Likewise, the UAE foreign minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed said his country would not support Israel in its "day after" plan in Gaza unless a Palestinian state is established: "The United Arab Emirates is not ready to support the day after the war in Gaza without the establishment of a Palestinian state."

Nevertheless, after President Trump greeted the Israeli hostages freed from Hamas captivity on October 13, 2025, he took a whirlwind victory lap – naturally – basking in applause at the dais of the Knesset, Israel's parliament, for his fervent support of Israel.

*** *Important Note* ***

Although this next section is at times critical of the country of Israel's current politics and leadership, I am wholeheartedly a supporter of the soul of Israel and its wonderful people. I have many Israeli friends and understand that the history of Israel is exceedingly complex.
This section brings me no joy. In fact, it's difficult for me to include.

On January 19, 2025 – the day before Donald Trump was sworn in for a second term – a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas went into effect… but the agreement soon began to unravel. Israel halted the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza on March 2nd, and on March 18th resumed large-scale airstrikes, killing more than 400 Palestinians in a single day. Netanyahu said Hamas had refused to release additional hostages and rejected proposals to extend the ceasefire, while Hamas accused Israel of deliberately overturning the original agreement.

Israel's Operation Gideon's Chariots was a major ground offensive intended to seize and hold much more of Gaza while concentrating its population into increasingly restricted areas. The plan was to control 75 percent of Gaza within two months, forcing the entire Gazan population into three zones (Gaza City, the central refugee camps, and the southwestern Mawasi coastline) by using U.S.-provided aerial bombs and bulldozers. *It's important to note that this was an offensive combat operation, not a security or defensive one.*

Israel's siege on Gaza halted all food, fuel, medicine, and other humanitarian aid, essentially using starvation as warfare – which is a war crime, plain and simple.

Listen up everyone: War is awful and people die. That's just the nature and reality of war. Combatants die and, sadly, innocent civilians sometimes get caught in the crossfire. The United States has certainly been involved in our share of these tragedies, including the one at the Shajarah Tayyebeh Girls' School and the one where a U.S. bomb missed a nearby target in Southern Iran, destroying a home hosting a wedding celebration – killing at least four civilians and injuring dozens more. Is it heartbreaking? Absolutely. That's why most of us hate war.

However, deliberately targeting innocent civilians is an entirely different matter. The Hamas attacks against Israel on October 7, 2023 were brutal and unacceptable and Israel has every right to defend itself against savage terrorism. But NO country, group or government – whether it be Hamas, Israel or the United States – has a right to disregard the established laws of war without severe consequences. The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their additional Protocols exist for a reason and they must be followed, regardless of how ruthless the enemy is.

Hamas fights dirty, no question. Hamas fighters use schools as shields; private homes to imprison hostages; and human beings as barricades to protect their underground military infrastructure. But they are far from the only terrorists who conduct business this way.

During the War on Terror, the United States had to deal with this reality constantly thanks to the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Why do you think we were in the Middle East for two decades? Why do you think our Special Forces had to practically go door-to-door, "kicking doors" in? Iraq is roughly the size of California and Afghanistan is smaller than Texas. Does anyone really believe we couldn't carpet bomb both in two days and be back home within the week? Why didn't we?

Answer: Civilians. At the time of the October 7th attacks, roughly 3.2 million Palestinians lived in the West Bank and another 2.2 million in the Gaza Strip. For Israeli political and military figures to claim – which they have – that they are justified in killing any Palestinian they come across because there are no innocent Palestinians – basically

saying that every single Palestinian, young or old, is an enemy combatant – is outrageous.

Many of the current leaders of Israel cannot deny this is their fundamental belief because they have made multiple public statements to this effect, including one made by President Isaac Herzog, who said that there is an "entire nation out there that is responsible. It is not true, this rhetoric about civilians who were not aware and not involved. It is absolutely not true." Tell us, President Herzog, how exactly were 6-month-old babies involved?

As Operation Gideon's Chariots escalated, the people of Gaza were starving to death – literally. Under the international rules of war, it was/is Israel's responsibility as the occupying power to properly coordinate food and medical distribution and protect food convoys. Period. End of story.

The exact opposite of this went on for over two months, until images of chaos, violence and mass starvation flooded the Internet and much of the world collectively put its foot down against the atrocities happening in Gaza.

It was too little, too late. After Israel ended its 11-week blockade, the U.S.- and Israeli-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation established just four distribution sites, mostly in southern Gaza and guarded by private American security contractors. The UN refused to participate, calling the system inadequate, dangerously militarized and incapable of safely feeding Gaza's population.

Conventional aid convoys were frequently overwhelmed by starving civilians and, in some cases, looted by armed gangs. Even more alarming were the repeated shootings of Palestinians attempting to obtain food. Hundreds were killed and thousands wounded near aid routes and distribution sites, with witnesses and UN officials repeatedly reporting Israeli forces opening fire on crowds of desperate civilians. < Israel disputed some of these accounts and maintained that its forces fired warning shots or responded to perceived threats. >

By August 2025, the UN made it official: Israel's actions had triggered a famine in the Gaza City region. Calling the famine "entirely man-made," the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) – the UN-backed initiative aimed at enhancing food security and nutrition

analysis – issued a report confirming this fact: “The time for debate and hesitation has passed, starvation is present and is rapidly spreading. There should be no doubt in anyone’s mind that an immediate, at-scale response is needed.” Without swift action, they concluded, “avoidable deaths will increase exponentially.” At this point, the Trump/Vance administration had been in power seven months.

By the time the Gaza “peace plan” was agreed to on October 9th – almost nine months after President Trump had been sworn in – Israel’s two-year ground and air campaign in the Gaza Strip had killed at least 67,194 Palestinians. Children accounted for roughly 30 percent of the dead. As of October 10th, Gaza health officials had identified 20,179 children among the 67,194 people then recorded as having been killed.

And even those staggering numbers did not represent the full human toll. They did not include, for example, the unknown number of people whose bodies remained buried beneath Gaza’s extensive rubble or were otherwise inaccessible to rescue crews. Independent research had already found evidence that deaths from traumatic injuries were substantially undercounted, although estimates of the true toll varied considerably.

Nor did the official war-death numbers include hundreds of deaths attributed to malnutrition. By October 7th, Gaza health authorities had recorded 461 malnutrition-related deaths, including 157 children.

< Another claim made by the Israeli government is that the Hamas-run Palestinian Ministry of Health has exaggerated Gaza’s death toll, but independent research suggests the opposite. The Ministry maintains detailed casualty records containing names, ages, sex and identification numbers, although thousands of missing or unidentified victims remain uncounted. A 2,000-household mortality survey led by researchers at Royal Holloway, University of London estimated that around 75,200 people were violently killed between October 2023 and January 2025 – about 35 percent ***more*** than the Ministry recorded for the same period. A separate study using a different statistical method estimated an undercount of about 39 percent. Although the studies didn’t distinguish civilians from combatants, the household survey found that 56 percent of those killed were women, children or people over 64. >

None of this should have come as a shock to anyone. Almost a year before, the International Criminal Court (ICC) had issued arrest warrants for Prime Minister Netanyahu and Israeli former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip. The ICC charges include claims of purposefully targeting medical facilities; deliberately restricting medical and humanitarian supplies; the alleged use of "starvation as a method of warfare;" and "intentionally directing an attack against the civilian population."

At the same time, the ICC also issued a warrant for the arrest of Muhammad Deif, Hamas' military chief, for war crimes and crimes against humanity that include murder; cruel treatment; extermination; taking hostages; torture; outrages upon personal dignity; and rape. The ICC had already issued arrest warrants for Yahya Sinwar and Ismail Haniyeh, two other Hamas leaders, but both men have been confirmed dead.

By June 2025, in an article he wrote for the Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was referring to the Netanyahu government as a "criminal gang," saying that what Israel was doing in Gaza was "a war of devastation: indiscriminate, limitless, cruel and criminal killing of civilians." He didn't stop there: "We're not doing this due to loss of control in any specific sector, not due to some disproportionate outburst by some soldiers in some unit. Rather, it's the result of government policy – knowingly, evilly, maliciously, irresponsibly dictated. Yes, Israel is committing war crimes."

< Olmert, who served as Prime Minister between 2006 and 2009, was a member of the conservative Likud Party (Netanyahu's party) before joining – and later leading – then leading the more centrist Kadima Party. >

Also in June, UN Humanitarian Chief Tom Fletcher said in an interview that he had started therapy after being in Gaza: "I've been to Darfur, I've been to Kupiansk on the Ukraine frontlines. I've driven up through Syria just after the fall of the Assad regime. I've just been in Kandahar, Kabul, Kunduz in Afghanistan. I was in Mandalay just after the earthquake. Nothing was as bad as going to Gaza… It is that smell

and sound of death on this scale, and trauma on this scale… you do carry that with you. I think about it every single day."

Although in that interview, Mr. Fletcher stopped short of calling what was happening in Gaza genocide, many experts had already determined that Israel's actions had gone beyond war crimes and crimes against humanity and had risen to that level (genocide was defined in 1948 by the United Nations as the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group").

The International Court of Justice (ICJ), the UN's highest court, has been considering a genocide case brought by South Africa against Israel since December 2023. South Africa alleges that Israel's actions in Gaza – including mass killings, forced displacement, destruction of homes and healthcare facilities, restrictions on humanitarian aid, and measures preventing births – were intended to destroy a substantial part of the Palestinian population. The ICJ hasn't ruled on whether Israel committed genocide, although it has issued several legally binding provisional measures ordering Israel to prevent acts prohibited by the Genocide Convention and address Gaza's humanitarian crisis.

Amnesty International issued a report in December 2024 that concluded Israel was committing genocide against Palestinians, documenting the killing of civilians; damage to and destruction of civilian infrastructure; forcible displacement; the obstruction or denial of life-saving goods and humanitarian aid; and the restriction of power supplies. It also assessed Israel's intent – an element that must be proven to establish genocide – by examining patterns of conduct and multiple statements made by Israeli leaders that appear to call for, or justify, genocidal acts.

Also in December, Moshe Ya'alon – Netanyahu's former defense minister and a highly decorated former Israeli officer and military Chief of Staff who served for three decades in the Israel Defense Forces, including in the elite Sayeret Matkal commando unit – accused Israel of "conquering," "annexing," and carrying out "ethnic cleansing" of Palestinians in northern Gaza, "basically cleaning the territory of Arabs." He warned that Israel was losing its way as a liberal democracy and was becoming a "corrupt and leprous fascist Messianic state."

By July 2025, two of the best-known Israeli human rights groups – B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights – were both saying Israel was committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. In its report, B'Tselem cited the killing of tens of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza; the razing of huge areas of Palestinian cities; the forced displacement of nearly all of Gaza's people; and the restriction of food and other vital supplies. In their view, these actions amounted to "coordinated action to intentionally destroy Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip… in other words: Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip."

That same month, Dr. Omer Bartov – a professor of Holocaust and genocide studies at Brown University and a man who lived the first half of his life in a Zionist home in Israel before later serving in the Israel Defense Forces as a soldier and officer – had come to the "inescapable conclusion" that Israel was "committing genocide against the Palestinian people," an admission that was a "painful conclusion to reach" and, in his words, "one that I resisted as long as I could."

Although a UN panel known as the *Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel* had previously found Israel had committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in its war with Hamas militants, in September 2025 the panel issued a report saying that Israel's actions in Gaza constituted genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention.

The report cited killing and causing bodily or mental harm; forced displacement; the destruction of cultural, religious and educational structures and facilities; siege, starvation and the blocking of humanitarian aid; targeting of the healthcare system; sexual and gender-based violence; and the direct targeting of children. The goal, the report concluded, was "to erase the Palestinian identity."

Like the Amnesty International report, the Commission assessed Israel's intent, referring to statements made by members of the Israeli government as well as the pattern of conduct of the Israeli authorities and security forces that were consistent with those statements. They found that "as early as October 7, 2023, Israeli officials made statements that indicated their intention to destroy Palestinians in Gaza

as a group. Palestinians were consistently dehumanized by Israeli officials. Furthermore, Israeli authorities made many statements that explicitly called for vengeance, destruction and annihilation."

Among many examples, Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that Israel was fighting "human animals" and Israel must "act accordingly." A recording of the former head of Israel's Military Intelligence, published by Israeli media, caught him saying that "the fact that 50,000 have already been killed in Gaza is necessary and required for future generations," adding that for every Israeli killed on October 7th, fifty Palestinians should die – and it makes no difference if they are children because "they need a Nakba < i.e., the Israeli ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Arabs > from time to time to feel the price."

Prime Minister Netanyahu made his intentions clear many times, including once when he urged Israelis to remember "what Amalek did to you," a phrase many people took as a reference to a biblical passage that demands Israelites "kill alike men and women, infants and sucklings" of their enemy.

In her March 2024 report, Anatomy of a Genocide, Francesca Albanese, the United Nations special rapporteur for the West Bank and Gaza, found "reasonable grounds to believe" that Israel's actions in Gaza met the threshold for genocide. In October 2025, she described the "ongoing genocide" as a "collective crime" enabled by other countries through military, economic and diplomatic support. In her March 2026 report, Torture and Genocide, Albanese went further, concluding that Israel's systematic torture of Palestinians had become a "structural feature" of the ongoing genocide. She cited not only abuse in detention – including beatings, sexual violence, starvation and lethal mistreatment – but also mass killings, forced displacement, deprivation and the destruction of conditions necessary for life.

Speaking as an American, one of the most concerning indictments of Israel's conduct came in October 2025, when The Washington Post reported that a classified U.S. State Department inspector general investigation had identified "many hundreds" of potential human-rights violations by Israeli military units in Gaza that could take the State Department years to review.

It was the first U.S. government report to acknowledge the scale of Israeli actions in Gaza potentially falling under the Leahy Laws, which prohibit U.S. security assistance to foreign military units credibly implicated in gross human-rights violations.

Unsurprisingly, this remains unresolved. In November 2025, eleven U.S. senators urged Secretary of State Marco Rubio to expedite the investigations, warning that Israel's unusually cumbersome vetting process could allow cases to drag on indefinitely. However, there is no public indication that the State Department has completed its review of the hundreds of cases or declared an Israeli military unit ineligible for assistance under the Leahy Laws.

Months before, ProPublica reported that, in 2024, then Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the Joe Biden administration delivered an explicit ultimatum to Israel, demanding the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) allow food and medicine into Gaza every day, giving them 30 days to comply. Although Netanyahu defied the demand – as he had multiple times in the months prior – the Biden administration just let it go and continued enabling him, vetoing United Nations Security Council resolutions calling for a cease-fire; attacking the International Criminal Court for not dropping its charges against Mr. Netanyahu; blaming Hamas for not accepting certain cease-fire terms that the Israelis were also rejecting; and continuing to send Israel a ton of weapons, ignoring U.S. policy and its own policies about supporting militaries credibly accused of human rights abuses.

This also should not come as a shock to anyone. It's no secret that Israel gets special treatment under U.S. law. This is not my opinion; it's a fact. For example, Israel enjoys a far different vetting process under the Leahy Laws than countries accused of similar allegations. The Israel Leahy Vetting Forum, as it is called, is a more personalized process than reviews for other countries and involves representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, the U.S. secretary of state, and even the Israeli government itself.

For decades, Israel has gotten special treatment in just about every way possible when it comes to the United States government.

There seem to be two main reasons for this. The first is that many Christians, particularly Christian Zionists and evangelical Christians,

believe that supporting Israel is a biblical responsibility that aligns believers with God's purposes. This belief is often rooted in God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." They interpret this passage as extending to Abraham's descendants and, ultimately, to the modern State of Israel, leading some believers to conclude that those who support Israel will receive God's blessing, while those who oppose it risk divine judgment.

The second – and much more consequential – reason for the special treatment is money. The pro-Israel lobby is the most powerful issue lobby in U.S. foreign affairs. Since 1998, the pro-Israel lobby has spent over 90 MILLION DOLLARS lobbying Congress, spending over $6 million in 2025 alone.

But that's child's play compared to the amount of money that goes directly to the political parties and candidates. Pro-Israel contributions to these totaled over 142 MILLION DOLLARS in the 2024 election cycle *alone*. This may come as a surprise, but Democrats received more money from pro-Israel sources than Republicans did. In fact, the top five pro-Israel recipients were Democrats.

For millions of reasons, lobbying and unlimited money in politics have become so detrimental to this nation that the way they currently function can no longer be tolerated (read more on p. 601). But…

Here is the Moment of Truth:

Israel could not have inflicted this level of pain and destruction on the Palestinian people without American money, weapons and political support.

Israel is by far the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. aid in the world. According to a study by Brown University's Costs of War Project and the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, by the time the Gaza "peace plan" was signed, the Biden and Trump/Vance administrations had provided at least *$21.7 billion* in military aid to Israel since the start of the war.

This doesn't include the additional tens of billions of dollars in arms sales that have been committed to for years to come, including the nearly $6.67 billion in weapons sales to Israel the Trump/Vance administration approved in January 2026; the $740 million armored vehicles sale also in January; and the $650 million worth of bombs the Trump/Vance administration sold them in March without the normal congressional review period.

The Trump/Vance administration's support of the government of Israel and Prime Minister Netanyahu didn't stop at just handing over tons of money. Since inauguration day, the administration has repeatedly imposed sanctions on officials of the International Criminal Court (ICC), largely in retaliation for the Court's investigations and proceedings involving alleged war crimes by Israel in Gaza.

The administration initially sanctioned ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan in February 2025, followed by four judges in June and two more judges and both deputy prosecutors in August. Additional judges were sanctioned in December 2025, and the administration expanded the sanctions again in August 2026 to include ICC President Tomoko Akane and a senior prosecutor. As of August 2026, nine of the ICC's eighteen judges, both deputy prosecutors, Prosecutor Karim Khan, and one other member of the prosecutor's office had been sanctioned by the United States.

< It's important to note that President Trump's beef with the ICC extends beyond Israel. It goes back to his first term, when, in March 2020, the ICC Appeals Chamber unanimously authorized an investigation into alleged crimes committed in Afghanistan since May 2003, including alleged crimes by the Taliban and other armed groups, Afghan government forces, and U.S. personnel. The Trump/Vance administration maintains that the ICC has no jurisdiction over American or Israeli officials because neither the United States nor Israel is a party to the Rome Statute, the treaty that established the Court. The ICC takes a different view: it maintains that it can prosecute nationals of non-member states for crimes allegedly committed on the territory of a state that has accepted the Court's jurisdiction. Afghanistan and the State of Palestine are both parties to the Rome Statute, giving the Court territorial jurisdiction, according to the ICC,

over qualifying crimes committed in Afghanistan and the Palestinian territories regardless of the alleged perpetrator's nationality. This matters because, although major countries including the United States, China and India are not parties to the Rome Statute, 125 countries are, and those states have obligations to cooperate with the Court, including with requests for the arrest and surrender of individuals subject to ICC warrants. >

Although there has been significant tension between Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu at times during the Iran war, Trump's defense and support of Netanyahu pre-war extended well beyond money and ICC sanctions. Despite the mounds of evidence suggesting Netanyahu violated the Geneva Convention, the laws of armed conflict, and the laws of humanitarian law, in his speech at Israel's parliament on October 13th, the U.S. president praised Netanyahu as "a man of exceptional courage and hailing the "victory" he had "won." He also recommended that Netanyahu be pardoned over criminal charges he faces in Israel before sending an official request to Israeli President Isaac Herzog in a formal letter.

< Netanyahu has been on trial in Israel since 2020 on charges of fraud, breach of trust and, in one case, bribery, stemming from three separate corruption cases. In Case 1000, prosecutors allege that Netanyahu and his wife received nearly 700,000 shekels – about $210,000 – worth of luxury gifts, including cigars and Champagne, from Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan and Australian billionaire James Packer, and that Netanyahu performed favors benefiting Milchan in return.

In Case 2000, Netanyahu was secretly recorded negotiating with Arnon Mozes, publisher of Yedioth Ahronoth, a newspaper that had long been critical of him. Prosecutors allege they discussed a deal in which Netanyahu would receive more favorable coverage in exchange for helping curb the growth of Yedioth's principal competitor, Israel Hayom – a newspaper founded and financed by Sheldon Adelson, the U.S. billionaire, major Republican donor and longtime Netanyahu supporter. The alleged deal was never implemented.

In Case 4000, the most serious, prosecutors allege that Netanyahu advanced regulatory decisions benefiting telecommunications giant

Bezeq and its controlling shareholder, Shaul Elovitch, in exchange for favorable coverage on the Bezeq-controlled news site Walla. It is the only case in which Netanyahu is charged with bribery as well as fraud and breach of trust.

In a huge coincidence, the legal proceedings have been repeatedly disrupted and delayed amid Israel's wars in Gaza and Iran. Netanyahu denies all the charges and has repeatedly denounced the prosecution as a… wait for it… politically motivated "witch hunt." >

After President Trump's speech at the Knesset, he continued his victory lap in the Egyptian seaside resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, where he met with other strongmen for "a very important signing," portraying the "Trump Declaration for Enduring Peace and Prosperity" as a major breakthrough in the decades-long search for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Although he said, "We're going to be signing a document that's going to spell out a lot of rules and regulations and lots of other things. It's very comprehensive," the document itself had very little substance. And, although they were the reason for the summit in the first place, neither Israel nor Hamas signed the Sharm el-Sheikh declaration or were even represented in any way.

In Egypt, Donald Trump joined Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the President of Egypt, who has been known to detain tens of thousands of political prisoners, including women, children, journalists, and human rights defenders; former Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who methodically shifted his country away from the traditions of liberal democracy by embracing far-right, nativist politics, spying on journalists and dissidents, bribing and threatening the media, stacking the judiciary with close allies, sabotaging free and fair elections, and centralizing power for himself and his Fidesz party by placing Hungary's three branches of government firmly under Fidesz's control; and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the president of Turkey, who has led his country straight into authoritarianism.

Also in attendance were Gulf Arab leaders who have invested heavily in the Trump family's business interests, including the Emir of Qatar, who gave Donald Trump the $400 million super jet Boeing 747-8 "palace in the sky." (more on all this on p. 490)

I'm sure Donald Trump was super excited to have them there so he could pitch his business partners on the new business opportunity he had announced eight months earlier.

In February, as he stood next to Benjamin Netanyahu in the White House for a joint news conference, the U.S. president proposed that the United States take over the Gaza Strip and turn it into the "Riviera of the Middle East" because it could be "so magnificent!"

To facilitate his plan, the Palestinians who lived there – roughly two million people – would be forced to leave, never to return. He claimed his idea to seize and develop Gaza had gotten "tremendous" support from the "highest of leadership" as a viable plan to bring peace to the Middle East, and described a permanent relocation to sites funded by "countries of interest with humanitarian hearts" – which, after President Trump threatened to cut off their U.S. aid if they refused to take Palestinians, we later learned were Egypt and Jordan (who both said no, by the way).

Even though countries in the Middle East – including key allies – overwhelming rejected President Trump's idea to forcibly displace Palestinians, Jared Kushner unveiled their vision for postwar Gaza in front of an audience of the World Economic Forum at Davos on January 22, 2026: "We have a masterplan… there is no Plan B."

Gaza would now be a "futuristic" high-tech metropolis with an airport, a port, and a "coastal tourism" zone that would run along the seafront – long enough for as many as 180 skyscrapers, many likely hotels. "New Rafah" would have more than 100,000 permanent housing units, along with over 200 schools and more than 75 medical facilities. "New Gaza" would be the center of industry, looking an awful lot like Doha and Dubai, with gleaming waterside apartments and office locations.

Kushner and his sidekick Steve Witkoff took their show on the road, pitching their "Project Sunrise" to U.S.-allied nations in the Arab and Muslim world in a 32-page PowerPoint presentation. < The Wall Street Journal reports that Jared was pulling double duty on his trips as one of the U.S. government's chief negotiators in the Middle East, also trying to raise more money for his private equity firm from governments in the region. >

If anyone is worried about the cost of Gaza's awesome make-over, they shouldn't be! The Trump/Vance administration has the perfect solution for that. This project would cost a total of $112.1 billion over ten years, and the United States will commit to being an "anchor," supporting almost $60 billion in grants and guarantees on debt, as well as commit to roughly 20 percent of reconstruction costs over ten years.

For his part, Benjamin Netanyahu has done even more to help lay the groundwork for this "magnificent" deal, taking steps to deepen Israeli control over both Gaza and the occupied West Bank.

In the West Bank – in a move widely considered a violation of the Oslo peace process Israel signed decades ago – Israel's security cabinet approved measures in February 2026 making it easier for Israeli settlers to purchase land while expanding Israeli authorities' enforcement powers and reducing some of the Palestinian Authority's powers.

And thanks to additional aggressive moves made by Netanyahu, Israel has also expanded the territory under its control in Gaza since the ceasefire. Israeli forces initially withdrew to the "Yellow Line" (a military deployment line that still left Israel controlling roughly 53 percent of the Gaza Strip) but subsequently pushed restrictions farther into Palestinian territory.

Reuters reported in July that Israeli forces had moved the concrete blocks marking the "Yellow Line" (the Israeli military's initial withdrawal/deployment line inside the Gaza Strip) deeper into Palestinian-controlled territory in several places, including around Gaza City, Deir al-Balah, Khan Younis and Rafah. Residents have been ordered to leave some of these newly encompassed areas.

The UN reported in June that Israel's newer "Orange Line" placed 64.9 percent of Gaza under tighter and more direct Israeli control. Netanyahu said in May that Israel intended to increase Israeli control to 70 percent.

Already, tens of thousands of Palestinians, along with schools, health facilities, food services and water infrastructure, were located between the Yellow and Orange Lines and under pressure to leave. Israeli demolitions and clearing have also continued in areas under its control, even though much of Gaza's agricultural land is also within this zone and now inaccessible to Palestinians.

This has gotten so bad that, on September 8, 2026, Britain announced a ban on trade in goods and services with Israeli settlements, while France and Canada announced similar measures and nine other countries backed the initiative. The governments cited accelerating settlement expansion and settler violence, which they believe are undermining the possibility of a future Palestinian state.

Meanwhile, as the eyes of the world turn to the war in Iran, Israel has continued military operations in Gaza despite the ceasefire. Although the fighting isn't as intense as during the pre-ceasefire war, airstrikes, shelling and shootings have continued. Gaza's Health Ministry says more than 1,250 Palestinians have been killed since the ceasefire (remember, it doesn't distinguish civilians from combatants in that figure).

On August 31, 2026, The New York Times reported that, increasingly, former Israeli generals, intelligence officials and prime ministers are accusing settlers in the West Bank of committing ethnic cleansing with government support. General Ben-Reuven – who survived the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, then went on to command a division in the West Bank and lead Israel's ground forces in the 2006 war against Hezbollah – told the NYT, with "his eyes welling with emotion": "What the settlers are doing here, is the real threat to Israel. This is more concerning to me than Iran, Gaza or Lebanon."

"Once a society behaves this way," Asaf Agmon, a retired Israeli Air Force general, said, "that society is doomed."

At the end of 2025, The Wall Street Journal reported that, in Gaza, "wintry weather worsened already-desperate conditions in the enclave, especially for the half of the population struggling to rebuild their lives from temporary shelters. Structures made out of bed sheets and clothing – assembled by displaced Palestinians who haven't received a proper tent – are disintegrating in the heavy rains and winds, leaving many out in the cold. Flooding is bringing raw sewage into the streets, as water-management and sanitation infrastructure is destroyed, and improvised latrines spill over."

"More than one million of the enclave's roughly two million residents are without adequate shelter, according to the United Nations. More than 850,000 people are living in some 750 displacement sites

that are at high risk of flooding, according to the UN, including along the seashore, where many pitched tents to avoid Israeli airstrikes during the fighting."

"Since a cease-fire went into effect in the strip in October, little progress has been made in clearing rubble, let alone reconstructing permanent homes. Much of Gaza remains in ruins after thousands of Israeli airstrikes, along with ground fighting and controlled demolitions, destroyed more than 123,000 buildings and left an additional 75,000 damaged, accounting for 81 percent of the structures in the enclave, according to the latest review of satellite images by the UN. First responders in Gaza are urging caution for Palestinians sheltering in damaged buildings, some of which they said have collapsed in the downpours."

"Aid groups said shelter supplies entering Gaza fall far short of what is needed to deal with the wintry weather. Part of the problem, they said, is that Israel considers many of the things aid groups would like to bring in to be dual-use items that could be repurposed for fighting or to make weapons. That means critical things such as prefabricated structures, tentpoles greater than a certain diameter used in more-robust tents, and heavy machinery to rebuild sanitation infrastructure aren't allowed into Gaza."

As rain pounded the cloth of her makeshift tent in central Gaza one night, Jihan Khalaf kept watch with a flashlight to ensure her three children didn't drown in their sleep. "There are pools of water everywhere, sewage overflowing," Khalaf, 29 years old, said. "We are always cold. And now my children are sick."

"My eldest daughter used to be a top student at school, and now she collects things from the ground to use them to light a fire," said Khalaf. "I cry when I see her."

It's time to choose. We can have any kind of country we want.

We Now Know

The Donald J. Trump era has been a super stressful time for many Americans. But I choose to look at it this way: Donald Trump and his ride or die mercenaries have done this country a favor. Love them or hate them, they have exposed every single weakness within our government and brought to the surface the deep fault lines that have threatened to destabilize this nation for decades.

But make no mistake, how we *respond* to the weaknesses and fault lines they uncovered is 100% up to us – *YOU* and *ME*. Are we going to dig deep and restore moral and legal restraint for the good of all OR continue down the now well-worn path of moral relativism, where we judge our choices, actions and behaviors not on whether they are fundamentally right or wrong, but on where they rank in relation to the behavior of others? In other words, are we going to lead one another to higher ground or all just devolve to the lowest common denominator?

It's like if we walked on the beach after a big storm and discovered tons of trash had washed up onto the sand. The storm itself is not our fault of course, but what happens next absolutely is. We can either clean the trash off the beach OR we can just leave it there to wash back into the ocean – where, multiplying under the cover of darkness, it accumulates and grows and becomes an even bigger mess.

Our problems weren't created overnight, and they weren't all created by Donald Trump. Pre-Donald, it was like this slow *drip, drip, drip*. We could feel in our bones that things were off but had a hard time identifying exactly what those things were. Most of us assumed a day of reckoning was coming eventually, and it most certainly was. The Donald Trump spectacle – which is both a symptom and a consequence of our severely broken politics – just accelerated the process.

Before, so many potential policy outcomes were purely theoretical. Across America, we settled in at dinner tables with our families or sat across from co-workers at lunch and argued (with little evidence other than our, obviously brilliant, gut feelings) about the size our federal government should be and the role it should play, or if trade wars really do pay off, or if $40 trillion in federal debt was really *that* big of a deal,

or if significant tax cuts for rich people and Wall Street really do, in fact, ignite the entire economy.

We debated the condition of our checks and balances and whether Congress had relinquished too much power to the executive branch. We discussed what would happen if we failed to see the warning signs of an international pandemic and, if a pandemic did indeed reach our shores, the role basic science should play… and for that matter, the role science should play in every aspect of our lives.

We innocently asked ourselves – in the naïve manner of people who are certain something like this could never happen to them – what would happen if our president, vice president, and members of the Cabinet started consolidating authority and amassing power by any means necessary, embracing fascist tendencies and making no secret of their autocratic aspirations – with the president going as far as calling for the "termination of all rules, regulations, and articles, even those found in the Constitution."

What would happen, we wondered, if these despotic strongmen wannabes trampled all over the First Amendment, doing everything under the sun to stifle free speech; curtail civil liberties; suppress inconvenient truths; control the news media; quash dissent; silence their political rivals; make political opposition more difficult; attack higher education; strongarm law firms and corporations; and politicize and weaponized the Justice Department to investigate and imprison people they perceived to have slighted them – to the point where Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski said, "We are all afraid. It's quite a statement. But we are in a time and a place where I certainly have not been here before. I'll tell you, I'm oftentimes very anxious myself about using my voice, because retaliation is real?"

What would happen, we asked ourselves, if our leaders turned ICE into an unconstrained paramilitary force or if they dispatched the U.S. military into American streets to incite fear and suppress opposition. What would happen if our president, vice president, and members of the Cabinet openly defied federal courts or habitually declared national "emergencies" on false pretenses or unconstitutionally bypassed Congress on everything from invading countries to dismantling congressionally authorized agencies like the Department of Education

and USAID or violated the Impoundment Control Act (which outlines a legal process for the president to request Congress cancel previously approved spending) by withholding funds authorized by Congress for everything from preschools to scientific research to emergency funding for federal programs that provide food, shelter, and temporary housing for Americans after disasters?

… or one where the president and his staff use their positions as a national extortion scam, taking their culture of corruption to Russia-level oligarchy proportions – unprecedently and unabashedly using the power and resources of the U.S. government to enrich themselves, their families, and their friends.

We probably *would* have asked ourselves, if we could have even imagined it, what it must be like to live in a country where the president called the press the enemy of the people; democratically held elections rigged; U.S. cities blood-soaked cesspools of blood; and the nation's capital a rat-infested, graffiti-infested shithole.

… or one where our commander-in-chief attacked Gold Star families and called our faithful military generals dopes and babies, suckers, and losers, or if he visited, alongside Retired Marine General John Kelly, the grave of 1st Lt. Robert Kelly – General Kelly's son who was killed in Afghanistan – and said to the eternally grieving father, "I don't get it. What was in it for them?"

We asked one another what it must be like to live in a country where the president, vice president and their charlatans seem to hate the very people they are meant to lead, vilifying marginalized groups and basically suggesting that any group other than white Christians are responsible for every single one of America's problems… then grossly rewriting history and posting memes that dehumanize everyone from gay people to immigrants, who they love to show comically shuffling, shackled, into "Alligator Alcatraz" – and, of course, the best post of all: the one where Donald Trump, with a crown on his head in the cockpit of a fighter jet, flies over America, dropping feces on it.

… or one where the secretary of defense announces the end of DEI programs by saying, "We are done with that shit" and, after Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro was captured, made the ever eloquent and highly mature comment, "He f'd around and found out;" where the vice

president calls an American on social media a "dipshit" and responds to a question asking if bombing boats in the Caribbean could be a war crime with, "I don't give a shit what you call it;" and the White House press secretary, calling a reporter a "far left hack" who asks "bullshit questions," responds to his very nonthreatening, responsible question about who planned a meeting between President Trump and Vladimir Putin with the very mature response "your mom did."

… or one where the president and vice president show a shocking level of disrespect for all women, with the vice president saying that women "choose a path to misery" when they decide not to have children and calling female opponents "a bunch of childless cat ladies" and the president saying, "I'm automatically attracted to beautiful women – I just start kissing them, it's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab 'em by the pu$$y." Then saying, as Donald Trump did to a contestant on Celebrity Apprentice, that it would be a "pretty picture to see her on her knees."

This, in addition to saying that "a little fight with the wife" should not be considered a crime – dismissing domestic violence as some sort of justified nuisance – and telling a female Bloomberg News reporter on Air Force One to be "Quiet! Quiet, Piggy;" saying a female New York Times reporter was "ugly inside and out;" and calling various women horseface, skank, lowlife, slob, ugly, degenerate, disgusting animal, or a dog who has the face of a pig.

… or one where, during a government shutdown, President Trump and his posse threw a "Great Gatsby"-themed Halloween party deemed "A Little Party Never Killed Nobody," complete with scantily clad women dancing for the crowd. This, on a night when thousands of Americans had not been paid for a month thanks to a shutdown and just hours before 42 million Americans lost their primary access to food.

Pre-Donald, our musings went beyond the domestic. We waxed poetic about America's role in the world. What would happen, for example, if the president of the United States blatantly sold out our intelligence agencies in front of the entire world by siding with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, Finland, then shared classified information with the Russian ambassador and foreign minister right in

the middle of the Oval Office… or likened the American intelligence agencies to Nazi Germany while, ironically, actual Nazi wannabes stormed the national Capitol.

… or if the president and the vice president of the United States heaped praise on autocrats from Egypt, the Philippines, Turkey and Kazakhstan, and had full-on bromances with Vladimir Putin, Viktor Orbán, Rodrigo Duterte, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Kim Jong-un.

We questioned – but only hypothetically because we thought it too unthinkable to even contemplate – what would happen if we suddenly abandoned the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), our loyal allies who served beside us in our fight against the Islamic State, or if two U.S. presidents blatantly reneged on our promise to protect the incredibly brave men and women who risked their lives to serve alongside us in Afghanistan, essentially signing many of their death certificates.

… or what we would feel like if the United States told members of NATO off right to their faces or if we withdrew from major global agreements or if we abruptly retreated from the entire world and started treating our most trusted allies like they were enemies – insulting them, bullying them, and threatening them in their own countries and even right in the Oval Office.

Before, we viewed topics like these as theoretical because, for the most part, we had never witnessed their real-life implications. But now, we have first-hand knowledge of the value and/or consequences of these scenarios because we have actually lived – and are once again living – through them. And we have the battle scars to prove it.

Some of the things mentioned above are *subjective* and, therefore, leave room for opinion. Things, for example, like the size our federal government should be and the role it should play, or whether we should or shouldn't withdraw from the entire world.

However, many of the things mentioned are *objective*. Meaning, we have the data necessary to accurately assess things like tax cuts and trade wars. We have provable outcomes and can clearly track the relationship between cause and effect. After all, numbers don't lie.

We now *know*.

What makes a great leader? Given our current crop, it's sometimes easy to forget the genuine characteristics. In late 1776, General George Washington and his army were seriously screwed. The American Revolution had taken a dreadful toll on what was, from the beginning, a ragtag army.

When Washington first took control earlier that year, it wasn't even an army at all. As Washington described it, he had more like the "raw materials" for an army with no name, no uniforms, no flag, no discipline, no military experience and 10,000 pounds of gunpowder. Made up of crude and tattered shelters, the filthy encampments were ravaged by dysentery, typhus and typhoid fever. The conditions were about as nasty as nasty can get.

Nevertheless, General Washington took command with "the look and bearing of a man accustomed to respect and to being obeyed. He was not austere. There was no hint of arrogance. 'Amiable' and 'modest' were words frequently used to describe him, and there was a softness in his eyes that people remembered." As Nathanael Greene – a major general of the Continental Army – explains it, when Washington arrived "joy was visible on every countenance, and it seemed as if the spirit of conquest breathed through the whole army."

But things went downhill, fast. Just months into his command, the Continental Army had suffered several agonizing losses and men were deserting by the hundreds. Those who stayed were sick, starving, exhausted and dispirited.

Many of Washington's troops and two of his closest confidants – Joseph Reed, his most trusted friend, and General Charles Lee, his second-in-command – had lost faith in him entirely. The effort of the rebels was all but lost. Then came the defining moment that proved we were destined to be a nation: The Battle of Trenton and Washington's night crossing of the Delaware.

On December 26, 1776, with his options running out and with just 2,400 men, General George Washington commanded his depleted

troops across the Delaware River north of Trenton, New Jersey in severely treacherous conditions.

Once across, he led the Continental Army against Hessian soldiers and captured almost their entire force. This essential American victory reignited the spirit of the rebels in the colonies and proved that victory was possible.

Many factors contributed to America's independence, but none were more profound than Washington's conviction, perseverance and leadership. Through times of immense despair and loneliness – "The reflection upon my situation and that of this army produces many an uneasy hour when all around me are wrapped in sleep. Few people know the predicament we are in." – Washington never lost faith. He also never forgot what was at stake: "The fate of unborn millions will now depend, under God, on the courage and conduct of this army."

True leaders inspire others to fight harder, reach higher, dream wider and feel deeper. Leaders bravely and without hesitation confront the concerns and challenges of those they lead and take them where they sometimes don't want to go, but to where they need to be.

True leaders don't watch polls or recklessly play only to their base. True leaders don't live and die by November elections and campaign contributions. True leaders don't surrender to party pressure or punt to political advisors and lobbyists. True leaders don't bully people, surround themselves with sycophants, or see themselves as idols to be worshipped.

In 1787, delegates from 12 states (Rhode Island said, "no thanks!") met for four sweltering months to write a document they entitled *The Constitution of the United States of America*.

The debate at the Convention was extensive and often heated given the vast differences in the philosophies and motivations of the men who were there, coupled with the significance of the issues being decided (proportional representation, how to elect the president, and the fate of slavery, just to name a few). In the end, regardless of how contentious the debate, 55 men listened, compromised and periodically changed their minds, and they eventually created one of the most powerful documents in world history.

Its first seven words say it all: *We the People of the United States*. We sometimes forget: The Constitution is a grant of power *by* the people to elected officers and representatives that work *for* the people. The theme throughout our founding document, and the point that is made the most explicit, is that the ultimate power resides ***with the people***. Any confusion on this point is absurd because it is undeniable.

But, as we know, with great power comes great responsibility. The brilliant architects of the U.S. Constitution gave ***every one of us*** a huge responsibility when they established America as a republic, and they made it clear that our duty extends far beyond stepping up to a ballot box every two or four years.

To refresh your memory, a *democracy* is defined as a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and is exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation, usually involving periodically free elections. These are obviously hallmarks of our governmental structure, but our system goes further. A *republic* is a government having a chief of state, where *supreme power* resides in a *body of citizens* entitled to vote. In a republic, the will of the people is exercised by elected officers and representatives *responsible to them*.

See how much control we are given in this setup?!? Power is exercised by elected officers and representatives *responsible to them*. Them being the *body of citizens* entitled to vote. That's us!! It's fascinating how easily we forget our tremendous responsibility in this.

As Benjamin Franklin left the Convention, a woman asked him, "Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?" He responded, "A republic, if you can keep it." 'Ol Benjy was so wise. Democratic republics aren't sustained by placing power in the hands of the people alone. Whether ours succeeds or fails will be determined by our commitment to active and informed participation.

How do you think George Washington and Benjamin Franklin would feel about our politics today? Or, let me put it this way: Does anyone really believe our founding fathers didn't anticipate an authoritarian-wannabe Trump/Vance administration? Or a gridlocked, dysfunctional highly-partisan Congress?

Of course they did! In fact, in his farewell address to the nation, President Washington said: "One of the expedients of party to acquire

influence within particular districts is to misrepresent the opinions and aims of other districts. You cannot shield yourselves too much against the jealousies and heartburnings which spring from these misrepresentations."

He further warned that political parties themselves "serve to organize faction, to give it an artificial and extraordinary force; to put, in the place of the delegated will of the nation, the will of a party" and – wait for it – "if these factions are tolerated, cunning, ambitious and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government."

They *knew*.

So, now that we *know*, what can we *do*?

As fabulous as America is – and it really is an extraordinary country – it's no wonder we are not operating at maximum capacity. Instead of recognizing the wisdom of The Butterfly Effect and approaching our policies comprehensively, our politicians act like they exist in total isolation from one another.

Their actions (and inactions) suggest they think our long-term economic health is separate and apart from our unstable entitlement programs, ridiculously convoluted tax code, schizophrenic immigration policy, non-evolving energy practices, the cost and quality of our health care, how effectively we run our government, suffocating debt, and severe inequality of both income and opportunity.

Evidently, they think our ability to preserve supremacy within the international power structure is separate and apart from the level of respect we have from the rest of the world, the status of our global alliances, the way we educate our children, our ability to harness exceptional talent, the way we treat the planet, our level of investment in research and development, and the condition of our infrastructure.

Worse, politicians from both major parties seem to think we don't even notice this is going on. They constantly underestimate the American people. They act as if we aren't smart, capable adults – like we can't comprehend the magnitude of our problems or handle the hard choices we must make to solve them. This is not only false…it's downright insulting.

Regardless of our political affiliation – if we still have any at all – We the People know it is impossible to safeguard our long-term economic health without a sensible plan to stabilize our entitlement programs; an uncomplicated tax code; a smart immigration policy; an evolving, self-reliant energy policy; affordable, high-quality health care; a government that runs like a well-oiled machine; manageable debt; and fair and equitable opportunities for every American.

We the People know it is impossible to retain our status as a superpower without conducting ourselves in a manner that deserves respect; unassailable relationships with our allies; properly educated children; next-level talent; a healthy planet; a strong commitment to innovative research and development; and modern, cutting-edge infrastructure.

We the People fully recognize that it's impossible to sustain freedom and liberty without sacrifice and that, thanks to decades of political incompetence and irresponsibility, the time has finally come to buckle down and get serious about protecting our future.

For politicians to view our challenges compartmentally – as opposed to comprehensively – is a lazy, irresponsible approach and does nothing more than waste precious time, as we are now so painfully aware.

Because there are so many problems to solve, the only plausible answer is to be boldly strategic in our attack. We can no longer expect half-measures and incremental ideas to work in systems that have all but collapsed. Instead, we need to embrace a full and fundamental restructuring.

As we begin to make revolutionary changes, it's essential that we always make today's decisions with tomorrow seared in our minds. Our best bet is to always keep our eyes firmly on the horizon and visualize

the future we want for our *shining city upon the hill,* not only in the 21st century, but far beyond.

A time will eventually come when Americans will demand better governance, and true transformation will begin. I say that time is now.

Even though at times it feels like things have completely unraveled in our country, to me it's a huge relief we are finally in this exact place – because now we can *finally* start turning this thing around.

For decades, our state of play has reminded me of the little old lady who was watching her soap opera one afternoon. Just at the juiciest part, the drama was interrupted by a breaking news story: *A car was going the wrong way down the interstate and driving into oncoming traffic*!

Knowing her husband frequently used that highway she called him to warn him of the danger. "Honey, be careful! There's a car going the wrong way down the interstate!" He replied, "Sweetheart, there's not just one car going the wrong way. There's a hundred!"

We have got to turn this thing around before we irreparably crash and burn.

Challenging authority is our right, our responsibility, our legacy. If our country is not going in the direction we want, all we have to do is step in and fix the madness ourselves. It's really that simple.

Our superpower as Americans is that we have the freedom and power to create a better future for ourselves without waiting for some piece of elusive legislation to pass. That we take that right for granted is a colossal understatement.

It feels like we anticipate someone more qualified or smarter or less busy than ourselves to do something about all of this. Many people are certainly eager to express their disapproval and complain about the problems, but often the person criticizing chooses to blame *someone else* or suggest *someone else* take action. Imagine the difference if we all reject finger pointing and the blame game and instead look inward, feel a compulsion to act, and introduce potential solutions into the political conversation.

We don't really have a choice because, I hate to break it to you, there is no one else to do it. No one is sequestered in a secret room somewhere trying to figure this mess out. At times we seem to have

this fantasy that somebody – anybody – is working on groundbreaking solutions for us, but they are not. It's *you* and *me*, my fellow Americans. That's it.

The exciting news is that once we take matters into our own hands, our future will be brighter than ever! The American spirit is unmatched, and we can achieve anything we put our minds to.

It's time to honestly question our commitment to the future of this nation. Deep down, do we *really* want to make the necessary changes or are we satisfied with accepting our political circus as some kind of perverse entertainment? Will our legacy be something we are proud of, or will we forever be known as the former superpower that recklessly relinquished our prominence because we lacked the will to protect it?

It is time to accept – once and for all – that the archaic two-party paradigm in this country has run its course. It's way (way) past time to shatter this debilitating dynamic forever.

The reason true change eludes us is that we always attempt it within the constraints of an irreparably broken system. The focus is always on tweaking different elements within the system instead of getting rid of the entire two-party system itself. This was never going to work because we are far beyond a small tweak here and there. We cannot vote our way out of this mess with our current two choices or within the toxic environment that has evolved around them.

Really think about it: If we just stick with the two major parties, overthrowing Congress at the voting booth is not only a fantasy it wouldn't work anyway. Let's say we replaced every single member of Congress. At this point, their replacements would be other Republicans and Democrats.

Clearly, there aren't 535 Abraham Lincolns running around in either party. But, even if both major parties had super deep benches filled with Lincolns, they would still be forced to operate within the

failed two-party setup – and we're all well aware that the destructive consequences of this dynamic get uglier and uglier by the day.

I'm pretty sure most of us believe this to be true, but we always get stumped by the million-dollar question: *How in the world do we do it*?

In truth, there is only one logical answer to this question: To truly disrupt the *game of politics*, we must fundamentally *change the way it is played*. And, realistically, there is only one way to change the way it is played: *Add more players to the game*.

The fact is that the Democratic and Republican Parties have had almost 200 years to get this right, yet things have progressively gotten worse. We cannot afford to waste any more time traveling the path of least resistance – and voting for the lesser of evils – simply because the two major parties, however wounded, believe they have the perpetual right to keep the playing field all to themselves.

They don't.

It's painfully obvious our fractured political system is not going to miraculously heal itself and, thanks in large part to our poisonous political environment, most of our leaders – who may otherwise be solid, decent people – are not going to suddenly mutate into brilliant problem-solvers. It just isn't going to happen. And every minute we buy into that fairytale we lose valuable time.

This may sound depressing, but it's actually liberating! To lose the delusion and accept the truth sets us free!

If you think I sound naïve, let me ask you: Why not? Why can't smart and empowered people unite to demand a larger voice in defining our future? We have nothing to lose and everything to gain because *the alternative is just not working.*

It's understandable that we "ordinary" Americans feel as powerless as David as we face the Goliath of special interest groups and national party affiliation, but there is strength in even relatively small numbers. Just consider the extraordinary power of special interest groups. They

have enormous influence in Washington and exert unparalleled control over our leaders.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is one of the most influential lobbying groups in Washington – and has had tremendous sway over our foreign policy, to say the least – but says it has just 6 million members nationwide. The National Education Association (NEA), one of the top influencers in the Democratic Party, has only 3 million members, but its efforts consistently obstruct a ton of educational proposals. The National Rifle Association (NRA) – still the undisputed master of the Republican Party – has less than 5 million members but blocks just about everything regarding gun control.

Hey, "ordinary" Americans, don't forget that there are 267 million adults in the United States. AIPAC's members are only 2.2 percent of the entire adult population. NEA members are only 1.1 percent and the NRA's members are only 1.9 percent.

I'm not completely delusional. I fully recognize the uphill battle we face. Without question, our current political system is designed to be an impenetrable fortress, purposefully constructed to protect the two-party system in every way. The Electoral College, ballot access and debate rules, and endless other hurdles combine to make the playing field extraordinarily inequitable for new players.

There is also little doubt that the Democratic and Republican parties will do everything possible to try to stop us because blowing up the two-party system threatens their very existence. It is in their best interests to keep us alienated from one another because when we finally join forces, their Machiavellian gig will be up. Our success is their worst nightmare because, when we prove that we are a force to be reckoned with, we will literally *change the way this country is run.*

BUT IT CAN BE DONE. This I know with zero doubt. There will always be people who fight to protect the status quo, but that's really not even an option anymore. Clearly things can't stay as they are, and we won't change things if we are not daring, bold and brave.

We can absolutely change our direction, and we will. Regardless of our individual beliefs, it's time we come together for positive progress. *We have been underestimated long enough*. Together we will overcome

the tremendous challenges we face and, channeling our very best angels, unleash the greatest version of both our country and ourselves.

The American people are the most dynamic and innovative people in the entire world. We are courageous, convicted and confident, and we possess a unique sense of assertiveness and adaptability. We have all the ingredients we need – audacity, unlimited talent and intelligence, unparalleled freedom of opportunity, and vast economic resources – to cultivate the strength and goodness of America that we all know exists but that, thanks to partisan politics, has been compromised.

1787 National Committee, Inc.

When I say we should "add more players to the game," I mean it. Hopefully, that will come in many forms, including independent candidates and new political parties.

That said, I am particularly excited to introduce you to one of those new players. 1787 National Committee is a new and improved brand of leadership that will never, as President Washington warned, "serve to organize faction, to give it an artificial and extraordinary force; to put, in the place of the delegated will of the nation, the will of a party."

Technically, 1787 is classified as a "political party" by the Federal Election Commission because we will "nominate qualified candidates for president and various congressional offices in numerous states." But I promise you, 1787 will *never* follow the old-school blueprint of being a political party. There is no preconceived agenda, no inflexible platform, and no misplaced loyalty to anyone, especially lobbyists and special interest groups. You don't even have to be an official member, and we will never, ever forget that we must consistently *earn* your vote never just come to *expect* it.

There are over 150 policy topics addressed on the 1787 website (www.1787forAmerica.org). When I initially started to work on 1787, I had this Pollyanna dream that we could all sit around a table – or, even better, in a beautiful rolling field, dressed in groovy dresses and daisy chains in our hair, sipping Rosé – and thoughtfully come up with solutions for our national challenges.

Knowing what I know now, I'm pretty sure that I was just trying to dodge the grind that is unavoidable when trying to make something like this work. Slowly, I started to understand that someone had to provide, at a minimum, a place to begin the conversation… or we would all just be sitting around holding empty wine glasses, staring at an empty white board in a field somewhere – which sounds super fun, but would probably not be very productive! :)

Because 1787 is brand new and trust in anything political is at an all-time low, I also knew simply announcing that we planned to change the world wasn't going to cut it with the American people… and it shouldn't. There is no way anyone can be expected to take this effort seriously unless and until the vision for 1787 is clearly laid out.

I also know that the work is far from done. Now that the groundwork has been laid, the goal is to gather as many good ideas as possible from as many people as possible, then create solutions that allow for a certain amount of flexibility so we can quickly respond to changes in the national condition, or when we all, together, discover a better way – a perpetual work in progress.

My hope is that seeing all these topics together in one place makes it easier for every American to work hard to prove these initial ideas wrong or at least offer recommendations they think may be better. That is the *very best* way to find the *very best* solutions. Please believe, I honestly don't care where the answers come from or what ideology they align with. I just want us to have the very best ones.

Will we agree on everything? Of course not, but that's the point. Walt Whitman said it best, "I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear." It's our variety of opinions and experiences that will stimulate colorful debate on our most challenging issues. It is only then that we can expect to discover sustainable solutions.

There will always be different points of view, but I think we'll be shocked by how straightforward the answers are when we shed ideological labels, drown out the noise of lobbyists and special interest groups, and are freed from the potential backlash of a hard-core base. In many cases, it literally comes down to just doing the math.

You have my word, 1787 is motivated by one thing and one thing only: *To cultivate the greatest version of the United States of America*.

Elections are meant to be a choice. This seems like a quaint idea because we have gotten so used to just voting for the least bad option.

But wouldn't it be amazing if – instead of our politics being reduced to a petty third-grade playground – everyone *interviewing* to be a leader of a city, county, state, or the entire country presented their vision for the future, along with realistic, tangible solutions… then each of us simply chose the vision and solutions we thought best? Doesn't that sound logical?

To me, it makes perfect sense that, since *We the People* hold *all* the power in our hands, we should demand that every single person running for office on any level do just that. That's why this book, the *Policy Guide,* and the 1787 website clearly lays out all those things.

You will find that 1787's vision and solutions are very different from those of Donald Trump and his ride or die militia. But here is the God's-honest truth: I believe that every single one of us has the right as Americans to choose the America we want.

I will never judge you if, at the end of the day, you choose an America more in their image than 1787's – because that would be *my* fault, not *yours*. It's not your responsibility to agree with me just because I'm cool (which, make no mistake, I most certainly am!). It's *my* job to convince *you* that the 1787 way is best.

You probably have football/baseball/basketball games to attend and your kid's science project to build, not to mention a job to get to. And hopefully on the weekends you have dinner with friends and family, or maybe even go to church (well, at least 20% of you still do!).

You did not choose a career in politics – most likely on purpose – so it's not your job to sit down for two hours every morning and read The Economist or reports from the National Intelligence Agencies and Federal Reserve or studies from the Government Accountability Office. In other words, you have a life.

I, on the other hand, have no husband, no kids, and, pathetically, *no* other life. Unlike you, I did choose to jump into the political fray. So, that's why it's *my* job to convince *you* that the 1787 way is best, and I know I will. To me, it's way more fun this way because preaching to the choir is the easy way out. It's not courageous, it's redundant.

Chapter Two

The Truth Will Set Us Free

Some Perspective on Our Political "Division"

It sometimes feels like things are severely split in our country right now. According to the media, social media, public polls, and even what we see with our own eyes, it appears Americans are more divided than ever before. There has even been talk of another "civil war," a thought that transformed from being *just talk* into *violent action* at the Capitol on January 6, 2021.

However, I don't believe the division is nearly as bad as it looks on paper. Okay, I get it. I'm fully aware that our politics – especially since Donald Trump burst onto the scene – has divided families, destroyed marriages, and decimated lifelong friendships and that stress caused by our politics has caused the mental health of many Americans to suffer.

I also know that our uber divided electorate has made our country a target of malicious online influence operations by our enemies and that some people are brazen bullies and complete jerks on social media. Heck, even a 9x6 piece of cloth used to cover one's face and taking an old man and a barrel off a restaurant logo caused ridiculously huge political uproars.

But I can say this with absolute certainty: The hateful posts, angry rants, and violent scenes that seem to dominate the media and social media are ***not*** a true reflection of America or Americans. When we are all our best selves, none of those ugly words and images show who we really are. Not even close.

Think about a day in your life. A typical day doesn't include your seeing people pushing, shoving, or yelling insults at one another in the grocery store or in the pick-up line at your kid's school. In fact, it's usually the exact opposite. We smile at one another. We help one other. We look out for one another. We visit the sick, we volunteer for good causes, we carry groceries for those who can't, we give rides to work, we help with one another's children.

We donate money, time, food, and free services to those affected by government shutdowns, international pandemics and wildfires. We are people who, in an emergency – without a moment's hesitation and with no assessment of skin color – reach our hands into dirty water in hurricane-battered Louisiana, Florida and North Carolina to lift fellow citizens in need, while others carry the oldest and youngest on their backs to safety. We lend blankets, warm clothes, and generators to those who have no water or power during an ice storm and invite complete strangers into our homes to provide comfort.

… and before we do any of these things for other people, we don't ask them who they voted for in the last election. Nope, we just do the nice thing. *This* is who we are. We are Americans, dammit! And we are truly wonderful people! So then, why do we feel like one half of America hates the other half? Why do we feel so attacked? Why do we feel so misunderstood? Why do we at times feel so hopeless?

There is just one answer, my fellow Americans: *Because we are being manipulated by outside forces*. Big time! This is not just a gut feeling. I can, and will, prove this in the following pages (plus suggest ways we can make it all better).

Because the outside manipulation is so severe – and bombards us from so many different directions – it is super important we keep a levelheaded, even-keeled perspective on our situation. If we don't, perpetual political division will eventually become a self-fulfilling prophecy that we cannot escape. Not to be overly dramatic, but I believe maintaining proper perspective is perhaps the only thing that can keep half of this country from saying "screw it" and just giving up on the other half.

Personally, I find it amazing we coexist as peacefully as we do. This country of over 342 million people represents a fabulous array of races, ethnicities, cultures, and religions. We are way – WAY! – more diverse than anywhere on the entire planet.

There are over 370 religious bodies (i.e., churches, sects and/or denominations) in the United States. There were five racial categories to choose from in the latest census, plus a sixth category called "Some Other Race." The Census Bureau codes 1,333 individual languages and

language groups in America, a number so large they have to collapse them into a more manageable 42.

340 million people… 370 religious bodies… over 5 races…1,333 different languages. That is *A LOT* of people and *A LOT* of diversity. Still, with that many people and that many differences, there are relatively few conflicts. The truth is we all live among one another in relative harmony. Every violent crime is tragic, but the percentage of our reported violent crimes to our population is 0.39 percent. Think about that: 0.39 percent. I find that extraordinary!

I know this may seem like a strange thing to say in the wake of mass shootings, conservative activist Charlie Kirk's murder, and an actual insurrection, but please hear me out on this because crime and violence are textbook examples of how those in power use scary topics to manipulate the American people – and if we don't keep the bigger picture in mind, they will succeed.

On September 27, 2025, the Trump/Vance administration declared they were ordering troops to Portland – calling the Oregon city "war ravaged" – and named Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland and Philadelphia as cities they also intended to target.

They did this even though violent crime in Portland decreased during the first half of 2025, including a 51 percent drop in homicides compared with the same period in 2024; Baltimore had the fewest homicides in the first half of 2025 than in any year since 1975; in August 2025 the Chicago Police Department reported a 23 percent decline in violent crime compared with the year before; homicides were down 32 percent last year in Oakland and dropped 21 percent in the first half of 2025 (equaling a 29 percent decrease in violent crime overall); Philadelphia is on track to have the fewest homicides it has had in almost 60 years; and the murder rate in Louisiana is almost four times higher than that of California (Louisiana had 19.3 homicide deaths per 100,000 people to California's 5.1).

Crime and violence are scary, no doubt. Although, in 2025, homicides were down 21 percent from 2024 and 44 percent from a peak in 2021 in 40 major cities, crime persists in many areas, causing plenty of Americans to feel unsafe.

Because people already feel vulnerable and afraid, crime and violence are the perfect topics to weaponize – a tactic the Trump/Vance administration has taken to an artform, portraying predominately Democratic cities and states as lawless, depraved, and out-of-control… expertly exploiting anger and fear to intensify the growing divide between progressives and conservatives.

Don't believe me? Then why did President Trump (who said "our once-great cities" have "blood-soaked streets" and that our "cities are rotting" and are "cesspools of blood") deploy National Guard troops from the red-states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia to patrol perfectly safe areas of Washington, D.C. (a place he characterizes as a "rat-infested, graffiti-infested shithole"), even though Memphis, Tennessee has a murder rate roughly twice as high as our nation's capital and cities in Texas, Ohio and Missouri also have higher rates of violent crime than Washington?

After many people made this exact point, President Trump announced that he would be sending the National Guard to Memphis after all. I guess he figured out that Memphis is actually the ideal place for him to stage the next act of his political drama since it has all the necessary ingredients: a majority black population, a black Democratic mayor, and is a blue city in a dark red state.

< Commercial Break: Creating crises out of thin air and abusing emergency powers in the name of cracking down on crime is not what healthy democracies do. It's what authoritarian autocrats like President Trump's new buddy President of El Salvador Nayib Bukele do. These guys turn the military on its own people to suppress dissent, empower corruption, and violate civil liberties in egregious ways.

That's why one of the most fundamental – and critical – hallmarks of American democracy is that the U.S. military cannot, except under very narrow exceptions, be deployed on our own soil (read more in the *Policy Guide*, p. 278).

Deploying federal troops to American cities for civilian law enforcement in response to completely fabricated "emergencies" is an outrageous violation of American democracy and the rule of law.

The actions of the Trump/Vance administration – which are being done against the wishes of state governors and without congressional authorization – corrodes civil liberties, destabilizes communities, stokes instability, escalates tensions, and erodes public trust. It is also highly damaging to our military, which has a long-standing history of being non-political and certainly non-partisan. Using the military as pawns in political games hurts morale and drives out experienced service members.

THIS CAN NOT BE NORMALIZED. Police states aren't created overnight. They are created by citizens almost sleepwalking into them by slowly and quietly conceding their freedoms.

Judges around the nation obviously get this. In a harsh ruling against the Trump/Vance administration, U.S. District Court Judge Charles Breyer pointed out that they are using "a top-down, systemic effort" to "create a national police force with the president as its chief."

Judge Breyer didn't stop there. He also said that Trump/Vance officials "knowingly" and "willingly" violated the Posse Comitatus Act when they sent National Guard troops and Marines to Los Angeles in June 2025.

Though the Trump/Vance administration claimed they federalized the California National Guard to "ostensibly quell a rebellion and ensure that federal immigration law was enforced," Judge Breyer made clear the evidence didn't support those claims in any way. After carefully reviewing the *evidence*, he concluded that "there was no rebellion, nor was civilian law enforcement unable to respond to the protests and enforce the law."

In Oregon, Judge Karin Immergut saw it much the same way. Judge Immergut eviscerated the Trump/Vance administration's claims, saying that there was "substantial evidence that protests at the Portland ICE facility were not significantly violent or disruptive in the days – or even weeks – leading up to the president's directive." She continued, "The President's determination was simply untethered to the facts."

Judge Immergut concluded with this: "This country has a long-standing and foundational tradition of resistance to government overreach, especially in the form of military intrusion into civil affairs.

… This historical tradition boils down to a simple proposition: This is a nation of Constitutional law, not martial law."

Over in Illinois, Judge April Perry made clear that the Trump/Vance administration had a "credibility" problem, as their "perception of events are simply unreliable."

"I have seen no credible evidence that there is danger of rebellion in the state of Illinois. Deportations are up. Arrests are up… the courthouse remains open and always has. Federal laws are being executed… there is no evidence that the president is unable, with the regular forces, to execute the laws of the United States." COMMERCIAL BREAK OVER! >

As President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance continue their *American cities have "blood-soaked streets" and are "rotting… cesspools of blood"* crusade, it's also important to remember that violent crime in America is concentrated among extremely small numbers of people. Research by the National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College found that 42 percent of homicides and 41 percent of nonfatal shootings are concentrated in groups representing less than 1 percent of a city's population.

Knowing these kinds of facts matter, A LOT. After all, how can you develop a successful strategy for fighting crime if you don't know who is committing the crime and how and where it is being committed? However, in the case of President Trump and Vice President Vance, facts don't matter one bit because making our streets safer is not their goal. Scaring people so they can control them is.

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The thought of being manipulated by the president, vice president, or anyone or anything else is disturbing, but the great news is that, now that we have identified the problem, we can fix it. There are several ways we can begin to fight back against this immediately.

The dragons that have exploited us can absolutely be slayed – not with lies, hateful words, vengeance or violence, but by remembering who we really are and shining light on THE TRUTH. Dr. Martin Luther King's words have never been truer:

"Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper
darkness to a night already devoid of stars.
Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.
Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

We *must* slay these dragons. Right now. As a nation – *one* nation – we must put a stop to this, because we cannot allow ourselves to be played any more than we already have been. We *cannot* let outside forces turn us into something we are *not*.

Now that we have established a rational perspective, we do need to discuss the political divide in this country – and the violence it can cause – because both are clearly deepening in some circles.

First, it's important to remember – and I only bring this up to help us maintain perspective – that political division and violence is not a new thing in our country. The 1960s were defined by events like the bombing of a Birmingham, Alabama church by the Ku Klux Klan that killed four young black girls, and the assassinations of Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Senator Robert F. Kennedy and President John F. Kennedy.

This continued into the 1970's with Alabama Governor and presidential nominee George Wallace getting shot and the murders of Harvey Milk, a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, and the mayor of San Francisco, George Moscone.

At the same time, protest bombings became routine, with over a dozen radical underground groups dedicated to overthrowing the government planting hundreds of bombs across America (these groups included the Weather Underground, the New World Liberation Front, and the Symbionese Liberation Army). Bombings became so common that, during an 18-month period during 1971 and 1972, the FBI reported 2,500 domestic bombings – an average of almost five a day.

Almost twenty-five years later, 168 people, including 19 children, were killed in Oklahoma City because Timothy McVeigh bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, which, to this day remains the deadliest act of domestic terrorism in U.S. history.

In addition to President Kennedy, three other U.S. presidents have been assassinated and a fifth, Ronald Reagan, was severely wounded in the attempt. Before the two assassination attempts on Donald Trump's life in 2024, there were attempts on the lives of Presidents Andrew Jackson, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Gerald Ford and George W. Bush.

So, sadly, political division and violence are not new. What is new, however, is that political *tribalism* (where people feel protective of their chosen group) has turned into political *sectarianism* (where one group hates the other group even more than they love their own). We have reached a place where many Americans now view their political opponents not as simply wrong or misguided but as an evil, existential threat to them and their very way of life.

In July 2025, a Wall Street Journal survey found that over 80 percent of Democrats and 80 percent of Republicans hold not only an unfavorable view of the opposing party but a "very unfavorable" view. This has shifted significantly from 15 years ago, when only 50 percent of Republicans and 40 percent of Democrats held "very negative" views of the opposing party.

The Pew Research Center revealed in March 2026 that Americans are more likely than people in 25 other countries surveyed to question the morality of their fellow countrymen: "In nearly all countries surveyed, more people say that others in their country have somewhat or very good morals than say their compatriots display somewhat or very bad levels of morality. The United States is the only place we surveyed where more adults describe the morality and ethics of others living in the country as bad (53%) than as good (47%)."

The Right and Left have moved far beyond believing that elections are just about policy positions. Instead, many see losing an election as losing the very essence of what they believe America should be. In 2022, NBC News asked Americans if the opposing party's agenda

would destroy the United States if it was carried out: 79 percent of Republicans and 81 percent of Democrats said yes.

< Even still, I stand by my assertion that this looks far worse on paper than it really is. >

Political sectarianism was on full display after the horrific murder of Charlie Kirk. As I scrolled down my Facebook feed, I felt like I was living on two different planets.

The most jarring thing about the people posting polar opposite positions was that none of them recognized *they were doing the exact same things they were accusing the other side of doing*. Somehow, both those on the Right and the Left feel like they are horribly mistreated victims – *of each another.* The hypocrisy, projection, and lack of self-awareness is just remarkable.

One of the most unsettling things coming from many conservatives was their inclination to refer to Mr. Kirk's alleged killer not as one man but as *they* and *them*, collectively referring to "The Left": *They* killed him; *they* are the reason he is dead; *they* must pay. A member of our tribe is dead because *they* are nasty and violent and wicked.

Unsurprisingly, this was immediately reenforced by practically every member of the Trump/Vance administration, who all quickly weaponized Mr. Kirk's death and turned a truly heartbreaking event into yet another way to manipulate the American people.

Within hours of the shooting – well before anyone had any solid facts – President Trump was already blaming the "radical left:" "violence and murder are the tragic consequence of demonizing those with whom you disagree day after day, year after year in the most hateful and despicable way possible. For years, those on the radical left have compared wonderful Americans like Charlie to Nazis and the world's worst mass murderers and criminals. This kind of rhetoric is directly responsible for the terrorism that we're seeing in our country today, and it must stop right now… radical left political violence has hurt too many innocent people and taken too many lives," – he said, without a hint of irony.

By the next day, he was saying things like, “We have radical left lunatics out there and we just have to beat the hell out of them.” Two days after, he downplayed violent actions by right-wing extremists while at the same time justifying them: “The radicals on the right oftentimes are radical because they don’t want to see crime. Worried about the border. They’re saying, ‘We don’t want these people coming in. We don’t want you burning our shopping centers. We don’t want you shooting our people in the middle of the street.’ The radicals on the left are the problem, and they’re vicious and they’re horrible and they’re politically savvy.”

Meanwhile, JD Vance and Stephen Miller, the president’s top policy advisor, were doing their part to vilify “the Left” as well. “This is not a both sides problem,” Vance said. “If both sides have a problem, then one side has a much bigger and malignant problem and that is the truth that must be told… While our side of the aisle certainly has its crazies, it is a statistical fact that most of the lunatics in American politics today are proud members of the far left.”

He later said, “We are working very hard to ensure that the funding networks for left-wing violence, that the radicalization networks for left-wing violence – that if you encourage or fund your fellow Americans or anybody else to commit acts of violence because you disagree with political speech, you are going to be treated like a terrorist organization and we are going to go after you.”

For his part, Miller demonized the Left’s “organized doxxing campaigns, the organized riots, the organized street violence, the organized campaigns of dehumanization, vilification, posting people’s addresses, combining that with messaging that’s designed to trigger, incite violence and the actual organized cells that carry out and facilitate the violence.” In his grand finale, he called the entire thing “a vast domestic terror movement.”

“With God as my witness,” he dramatically said, “We are going to use every resource we have at the Department of Justice, Homeland Security and throughout this government to identify, disrupt, dismantle and destroy these networks and make America safe again for the American people. It will happen, and we will do it in Charlie’s name.”

This hardcore rhetoric didn't start with Mr. Kirk's death. Weeks before, Miller had declared that the Democratic Party was "a domestic extremist organization" and then posted ominously on X that: "In recent days we have learned just how many Americans in positions of authority – child services, law clerks, hospital nurses, teachers, gov't workers, even DOD employees – have been deeply and violently radicalized."

… and just like that, you have the president of the United States, the vice president of the United States, and their top policy adviser calling their political opponents terrorists.

Those on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures weighed in as well. Rep. Derrick Van Orden (R-WI) posted on social media: "The left and their policies are leading America into a civil war. And they want it. Just like the democrat party wanted our 1st civil war. The gloves are off." Then another post: "May the mighty wrath of vengeance fall upon the Brown Shirts who are responsible for this." < the Brownshirts were the Nazi Party's paramilitary militia that used intimidation and violence to help Adolf Hitler gain power > Then this one: "The democratic Party has been fostering a 21st century Civil War. I would encourage them if you look at the results of the last one that they started."

Nick Freitas, a Republican Virginia state delegate, said: "I don't think they realize it yet, but murdering Charlie is going to be remembered as the day where we finally woke up to what this fight really is. It's not a civil dispute among fellow countrymen. It's a war between diametrically opposed worldviews which cannot peacefully coexist with one another. One side will win, and one side will lose."

At the same time, things were heating up throughout conservative media/social media. Fox News prime-time personality Jesse Watters said things like: "We're sick, we're sad, we're angry, and we're resolute, and we're going to avenge Charlie's death in the way Charlie would want it to be avenged… Whether we want to accept it or not, they are at war with us. And what are we going to do about it? How much political violence are we going to tolerate?"

Matt Walsh, a podcaster at the conservative media company The Daily Wire, made clear where he stood: "Charlie tried to have conversations with you on the Left, and you killed him for it. You're

killing us in our churches. You tried to kill our President. You celebrate Charlie's death. It's time for good to fight back against evil." He continued, "It's too late to turn the temperature down. This is not a time to hold hands. It's a time for justice. This is a time for good to fight back against evil. It is time for the righteous to prevail." He then went full DEFCON 1: "The entire Right has to band together… We are up against demonic forces from the pit of Hell… this is existential. A fight for our own existence and the existence of our country."

Steve Bannon – the former chief strategist to Donald Trump turned self-appointed MAGA overseer, strategist, and propagandist – declared, "We have to have steely resolve. Charlie Kirk is a casualty of war. We are at war in this country. We are." Elon Musk posted "the Left is the party of murder" and "if they won't leave us in peace, then our choice is to fight or die."

Laura Loomer, a far-right activist and close ally of Donald Trump, said, "The best way President Trump can reinforce Charlie's legacy is by cracking down on the Left with the full force of the government… We must shut these lunatic leftists down. Once and for all. The Left is a national security threat." Right-wing commentator and influencer Joey Mannarino posted, "Trump has to go full Bukele. < the president of El Salvador > Now. Fill the jails up with these terrorists." On Patriots.win, a website for "serious supporters of President Trump," posts went something like this: "Start the Democrat extinction event."

Conservative writer and activist Christopher Rufo posted: "The last time the radical Left orchestrated a wave of violence and terror, J Edgar Hoover shut it all down within a few years. It is time, within the confines of the law, to infiltrate, disrupt, arrest, and incarcerate all of those who are responsible for this chaos."

John Daniel Davidson, a senior editor at the conservative online magazine The Federalist, wrote, "The left is a violent revolutionary movement that wants all those who oppose it dead. It's incompatible with American constitutionalism. Charlie Kirk's assassination should confirm what we already should have known: we cannot share a country with the left."

Right-wing journalist and influencer Matt Forney called Mr. Kirk's murder "the American Reichstag fire," referring to the fire at the

German Parliament building in 1933 that the Nazi party used as an excuse to suspend constitutional protections and arrest political enemies. He didn't stop there: "It is time for a complete crackdown on the left. Every Democratic politician must be arrested and the party banned RICO. Every libtard commentator must be shut down. Stochastic terrorism. They caused this." He followed up with: "The left must pay. Ban the Democratic Party. Shut down CNN and MSNBC. Military tribunals. If you are to the left of Lindsay Graham, you belong in prison. YOU CAUSED THIS."

William Wolfe, the executive director of the Center for Baptist Leadership who was a senior official in the first Trump administration, posted, "The. Left. Must. Be. Destroyed." He added in another post, "The Democrats and the Left must be crushed. The goal for Republicans in the next ten years shouldn't just be to win elections, but to destroy the Democrat Party entirely and salt the earth underneath it."

What happened next was predictable. The intensity of the Right's reaction to Charlie Kirk's death gave the Trump/Vance administration the perfect excuse/cover to go into censorship overdrive, vowing to put the weight of the entire federal government behind a tyrannical crackdown on any communication they consider objectionable.

Right out of the gate – and making it all about himself, of course – President Trump threatened to revoke the licenses of broadcast television networks that are "against" him: "They give me only bad publicity, press. I mean, they're getting a license. I would think maybe their license should be taken away."

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Brendan Carr – saying that broadcasters are "entirely different than people that use other forms of communication" – claimed that "(broadcasters) have a license granted by us at the FCC that comes with it an obligation to operate in the public interest." He then said, "We at the FCC are going to enforce the public interest obligation. There are broadcasters out there that don't like it, they can turn in their license to the FCC. But that's our job. Again, we're making some progress now."

At this point, practically everyone in the Trump/Vance orbit – including Cabinet members and some members of Congress – piled on the *anti-free speech/hunt down the traitors* train.

U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi said, “There’s free speech and then there’s hate speech. We will absolutely target you, go after you, if you are targeting anyone with hate speech” – revealing that the chief law enforcement officer in the United States didn’t understand that, in America, there is no delineation between “free” speech and “hate” speech. She also claimed she has the authority to investigate businesses that refused to print memorial vigil posters for Mr. Kirk.

Political journalist Jonathan Karl asked President Trump what his reaction to Bondi’s statement was. He replied, “She’ll probably go after people like you, because you treat me so unfairly. You have a lot of hate in your heart.”

Over on Capitol Hill, Rep. Clay Higgins (R-LA) said he would use “Congressional authority and every influence with big tech platforms to mandate immediate ban for life of every post or commenter that belittled the assassination of Charlie Kirk. If they ran their mouth with their smartass hatred celebrating the heinous murder of that beautiful young man who dedicated his whole life to delivering respectful conservative truth into the hearts of liberal enclave universities, armed only with a Bible and a microphone and a Constitution… those profiles must come down.”

“So, I’m going to lean forward in this fight, demanding that big tech have zero tolerance for violent political hate content, the user to be banned from ALL PLATFORMS FOREVER. I’m also going after their business licenses and permitting, their businesses will be blacklisted aggressively, they should be kicked from every school, and their drivers licenses should be revoked. I’m basically going to cancel with extreme prejudice these evil, sick animals who celebrated Charlie Kirk’s assassination. I’m starting that today.”

And, of course, JD Vance had to make sure his puppeteer knew he was doing his part. Even though, early on, Vance scolded our European allies for allowing free speech to “retreat” across Europe – while, at the same time, assuring them that “under Donald Trump’s leadership, we may disagree with your views, but we will fight to defend your right to offer it in the public square, agree or disagree” – he said on Charlie Kirk’s podcast, which he hosted days after his death, that while “the First Amendment protects a lot of very ugly speech, “if you celebrate

… Charlie Kirk's death, you should not be protected from being fired for being a disgusting person. If you are a university professor who benefits from American tax dollars, you should not be celebrating Charlie Kirk's death and if you are, maybe you should lose your job or your university should, should face a loss of funding."

(This became yet another theme after Mr. Kirk's death. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth directed his staff to identify any members of the military who mocked, condoned or celebrated the assassination so that they could be punished, adding "We are tracking all these very closely – and will address, immediately. Completely unacceptable."

Vance also announced that the Trump/Vance administration would be going "after the NGO (non-governmental organization) network that foments, facilitates and engages in violence," suggesting the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Foundations, the nonprofit run by the billionaire investor and Democratic megadonor George Soros, would be great places to start.

This poor guy. I don't know where the conspiracy crazies got hold of his name, but for years George Soros – who was born in Hungary and lived through the Nazi occupation – has been one of their favorite villains. Sid Miller, the agriculture commissioner of the great state of Texas, seemed to speak for all of them when he said during the protests after George Floyd's death – with zero proof – "I have no doubt in my mind that George Soros is funding these so-called 'spontaneous' protests. Soros is pure evil and is hell-bent on destroying our country!"

The truth is that the Open Society Foundations is a network of several philanthropic entities, operating in offices in over a dozen countries, that has spent over $24 billion worldwide. In the early years, Soros funded scholarships in South Africa during apartheid, along with several democratization efforts in post-Soviet Europe. His early work in America focused on drug decriminalization and other criminal justice issues. The current president of the foundation is a former Human Rights Watch lawyer who researched sexual violence during the genocide in Rwanda. In 2024, the Open Society Foundations spent $242 million on various causes in the United States, focusing on what they characterize as "democracy-building efforts."

Many of the accusations against Mr. Soros from the far-right have been vile and unfounded. If you are wondering why they target him, the one and only Steve Bannon has your answer: "Soros is vilified because he is effective. I only hope one day I'm as effective as he has been – and as vilified." He finished his statement by saying that the pipe bomb that was delivered to Soro's New York home in October 2018 was "the admission ticket for playing in this arena."

Indeed, the only basis VP Vance offered for going after the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Foundations was an article in The Nation magazine titled "Charlie Kirk's Legacy Deserves No Mourning" that Vance thought tried to justify Kirk's death and incite violence against conservatives (his point was that, because these foundations financially support The Nation, they should be targeted).

Problem is, the president of The Nation said unequivocally that the magazine had never received funds from the Open Society Foundations and both the Open Society Foundations and the Ford Foundation said they do not currently fund The Nation (the Ford Foundation provided a single grant in 2019 for the Nation's internship program).

This proclamation from Vance was an obvious nod to Donald Trump's earlier assertion that his administration would "find each and every one of those who contributed to this atrocity and to other political violence, including the organizations that fund it and support it, as well as those who go after our judges, law enforcement officials and everyone else who brings order to our country."

The President of the United States even threatened to target George Soros under the *Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act* (RICO): "We're going to look into Soros because I think it's a RICO case against him and other people because this is more than protests. This is real agitation; this is riots on the street – and we're going to look into that."

As a result of the Right's George Soros fever dream, Open Society Foundations has had to repeatedly deny outlandish accusations for years, like this one in August 2025: "We do not pay people to protest or directly train or coordinate protestors. All Open Society grantees are required to comply with the law, and we expect our grantees to uphold our shared commitment to human rights, dignity, and nonviolence. The

Open Society Foundations oppose all forms of violence, including violent protests."

In September 2025, over 100 philanthropies and institutions – including the Ford Foundation and Open Society Foundations – issued a letter condemning "acts of political violence" and denounced the recent murders of Kirk and of Melissa Hortman in Minnesota, saying such acts "have no place in our democracy."

The letter also said, "Organizations should not be attacked for carrying out their missions or expressing their values in support of the communities they serve. We reject attempts to exploit political violence to mischaracterize our good work or restrict our fundamental freedoms, like freedom of speech and the freedom to give. Attempts to silence speech, criminalize opposing viewpoints, and misrepresent and limit charitable giving undermine our democracy and harm all Americans."

Even though President Trump promised to "immediately stop all government censorship and bring back free speech to America" during his second inaugural address – plus signed an Executive Order banning the government from "any conduct that would unconstitutionally abridge the free speech of any American citizen" – he and his administration have trampled all over the First Amendment and done everything under the sun to silence political rivals, quash any and all dissent, interfere and bully private enterprise into submission, and punish those they perceive to have slighted them in any way.

No one is safe when you have a leader of the free world that has – literally – the thinnest skin of anyone in American history. Seriously, I have never seen *anyone* who can dish it out but not be able to take it like this guy. It is truly a psychological case study.

President Trump suggested that Attorney General Bondi think about "bringing RICO cases" against protestors who dared shout "Free D.C." and "Trump is the Hitler of our time" outside a restaurant in Washington. He dismantled the blue tent that has stood for decades as a peace vigil across from the White House in Lafayette Park (this was America's longest continuous political protest, set up by anti-nuclear arms activist William Thomas on June 3, 1981 and maintained by other activists ever since).

He issued multiple Executive Orders – from the Oval Office, no less – against private law firms to punish them for representing clients in cases that were on the opposite side of his first administration and/or for having employed lawyers who were involved in investigations of him. His administration has – or has threatened to – cut off funding from U.S. universities that they deem are antisemitic or have engaged in ideological indoctrination.

One of these, the University of California Berkeley, sent an email to around 160 students, staff and faculty in September 2025 alerting them that their names and other pertinent information had been given to the Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights to comply with a federal investigation into alleged campus antisemitism. The email said that to comply with the investigation, Berkeley sent "comprehensive documents, including files and reports related to alleged antisemitic incidents." UCSF, UCLA, UC Davis and UC San Diego have also been targeted in Department of Education antisemitism inquiries.

In a September 20, 2025 post on Truth Social, President Trump reminded Pam Bondi that she had failed to bring criminal charges against his political adversaries – and he was *not pleased*: "Pam: I have reviewed over 30 statements and posts saying that, essentially, 'same old story as last time, all talk, no action.' Nothing is being done. What about Comey, Adam 'Shifty' Schiff, Leticia??? They're all guilty as hell, but nothing is going to be done… We can't delay any longer, it's killing our reputation and credibility. They impeached me twice, and indicted me (5 times!), OVER NOTHING. JUSTICE MUST BE SERVED, NOW!!!"

… and then suddenly… voilà! Five days later former FBI Director James Comey was indicted on two counts: for making a false statement and obstruction of a congressional proceeding (the charges stem from testimony he gave during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on September 30, 2020).

President Trump was ecstatic! "JUSTICE IN AMERICA! One of the worst human beings this Country has ever been exposed to is James Comey." … before saying that, although he didn't have a list of targets per se, he thinks "there will be others. I hope there will be others."

I guess interim U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia Lindsey Halligan decided she better get busy with Mr. Comey's case after what happened to career prosecutors Erik Siebert and Michele Beckwith.

Mr. Siebert, who *had* been the acting U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, was fired after he declined to bring charges against New York Attorney General Letitia James, one of Donald Trump's leading political nemesis. "I want him out," were the exact words the president used. After Siebert resigned – just in case there was any confusion – Trump clarified, "He didn't quit, I fired him!"

Ms. Beckwith – who, over a 15-year career has prosecuted transnational terrorists, sex traffickers and the Aryan brotherhood – was fired by President Trump less than six hours after, in her role as the acting U.S. attorney in Sacramento, she dared remind Gregory Bovino that a court order prevented him from arresting people without probable cause. Imagine her nerve!

< Gregory Bovino, who was then the Border Patrol chief in charge of Southern California immigration raids, is the same man that, later, got kicked out of Minneapolis in disgrace for aggressive and illegal deportation tactics and flat-out lying. >

For his part, Mr. Comey seemed unsurprised and unfazed: "My family and I have known for years that there are costs to standing up to Donald Trump, but we couldn't imagine ourselves living any other way. We will not live on our knees, and you shouldn't either. My heart is broken for the Department of Justice, but I have great confidence in the federal judicial system. I'm innocent, so let's have a trial and keep the faith."

< On November 24, 2025, a federal judge dismissed the criminal case against James Comey, ruling that Lindsey Halligan was illegally appointed. Comey's indictment was dismissed without prejudice, but the case also suffered from severe procedural issues. Not for nothing, but when she was hired by the Trump/Vance administration, Lindsey Halligan was a Florida insurance lawyer who had ZERO prosecutorial experience. She did, however, once compete in a Trump-owned beauty pageant. >

In January 2025, Meta (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Threads and WhatsApp) agreed to pay Donald Trump $25 million to settle a 2021 lawsuit he filed over the suspension of his Facebook and Instagram accounts after the January 6th insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

As if the money weren't enough, CEO Mark Zuckerberg threw in next-level boot licking, praising the Trump/Vance administration for its support of U.S. tech companies and "defending our values." The following month, X agreed to pay Donald Trump about $10 million to settle similar litigation and, in September 2025, Google-owned YouTube agreed to pay $24.5 million.

In December 2024, ABC News agreed to pay $15 million to Donald Trump's future presidential library and $1 million in legal fees to his attorneys to settle a defamation lawsuit The Donald brought against the network and its anchor George Stephanopoulos (in an interview with Rep. Nancy Mace (R-SC), Stephanopoulos claimed Trump had been "found liable for rape" and "defaming the victim of that rape" in the two civil lawsuits brought against him by E. Jean Carroll, even though neither verdict resulted in a finding of rape as defined under New York law).

Next up, in July 2025, CBS revealed it was ending The Late Show with Stephen Colbert for "economic reasons" (Colbert has been a vocal critic of Donald Trump & Co. for years). This came after CBS' parent company, Paramount Global, agreed to pay $16 million to settle a lawsuit with The Donald over a 60 Minutes interview that veteran correspondent Bill Whitaker conducted with former Vice President and then presidential nominee Kamala Harris (The Donald accused the show of deceptive editing and election interference).

The willingness of CBS to spend millions and millions of dollars to settle this likely winnable lawsuit seemed strange… until you found out that, after Paramount settled its lawsuit with Donald Trump, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) approved the sale of Paramount Global to Skydance Media – a deal worth about $8 billion.

Then, Disney pulled late-night host Jimmy Kimmel's show from the ABC lineup after he made comments about the killing of Charlie Kirk that many conservatives found offensive.

Without delay, FCC Chairman Brendan Carr suggested Kimmel should be suspended and said ominously, “We can do this the easy way or the hard way” – stoking the intensifying narrative that many corporations were shamelessly bowing to an administration that was hell-bent on censuring anyone who ran afoul of them in any way.

The Chairman of the FCC publicly putting his hand on the scale like this – which many people, including me, took as a threat – put Disney in a terribly tenuous position because they are in the ***business*** of ***business***.

It’s one thing if you are Bill Maher or Howard Stern and have provocative shows on HBO or SiriusXM, because those are paid subscription services. But ABC, CBS, Disney and Paramount depend on advertisers and local affiliate stations, and those advertisers and local affiliate stations are also in the ***business*** of ***business***.

In fact, during this time, Nexstar, the single largest owner of ABC-affiliated stations, was in the middle of a proposed $6.2 billion purchase of the media company Tegna that required FCC approval – giving them 6.2 billion reasons to bend the knee to the Trump/Vance administration. It may seem like they sold-out – and I guess they did – but there are certain realities Corporate America simply can’t ignore.

....especially when the Chairman of the FCC publicly remarks (wink wink, nudge nudge) on how much power affiliates have over ABC’s national programming, saying things like “it’s time for them to step up” and “these companies can find ways to change conduct to take action, frankly, on Kimmel, or there’s going to be additional work for the FCC ahead.”

With these words hanging over their heads like a noose, Nexstar unsurprisingly said it would no longer carry Jimmy Kimmel’s show, as did Sinclair Broadcast Group, which operates roughly 30 ABC stations. This, in turn, forced Disney’s hand.

The United States federal government putting these companies in this position is outrageous, Communist China-level stuff… and those in the Trump/Vance administration and their cronies didn’t even try to hide their strategy.

Hard-right podcaster Benny Johnson, whose show Chairman Carr made his threats (in my opinion) on, couldn’t hide his delight after

ABC pulled Jimmy's show: "This is what got Kimmel fired. Right here. It's called soft power. The Left uses it all the time. Thanks to President Trump, the Right has learned how to wield power as well." (more on this Benny character later)

As for the esteemed FCC Chairman, he made clear that he was just beginning: "We're not done yet," he said one day after ABC announced Kimmel's suspension, calling ABC's decision a "market correction."

Unfortunately for him, Kimmel's suspension didn't last long. Six days after it was announced, Disney brought Jimmy back to the ABC late-night lineup (initially, Sinclair Broadcast Group and Nexstar Media Group continued their boycott against the show but, days later, announced they too would resume airing it).

Donald Trump was FURIOUS! "(Kimmel) puts the Network in jeopardy by playing 99% positive Democrat GARBAGE. He is yet another arm of the DNC and, to the best of my knowledge, that would be a major Illegal Campaign Contribution. I think we're going to test ABC out on this. Let's see how we do. Last time I went after them, they gave me $16 Million Dollars. This one sounds even more lucrative. A true bunch of losers!"

To which Kimmel responded: "There's the threat again, this time straight from FCC-biscuit's mouth. Only Donald Trump would try to prove he wasn't threatening ABC by threatening ABC."

< Brendan Carr was at it again in March 2026 when – after sharing a Truth Social post by President Trump that criticized the news media for its coverage of the war with Iran, accusing them of wanting the U.S. to lose the war – he threatened to revoke broadcasters' licenses. >

THIS IS ALL UNACCEPTABLE. FULL STOP.

Every American must now come together to vigorously protect and defend the First Amendment as if our democracy depends on it – because it does.

The Trump/Vance administration and their authoritarian army have brought this nation dangerously close to the place we were when President Woodrow Wilson and the U.S. Department of Justice

instigated the Palmer Raids, a series of violent and abusive law-enforcement raids conducted during the Red Scare of 1919-20 to capture and arrest alleged socialists, anarchists, and communists – with usually NO EVIDENCE – and deport them from the country. Back then, most of the focus was on Italian and Eastern European Jewish immigrants who supposedly had "leftist" ties (again, there was usually *no evidence* of this). In the end, over 6,000 people were arrested across 36 cities, sparking race riots and two separate bombings.

This was followed by McCarthyism in the late 1940s through the 1950s, a disgraceful time in U.S. history when Wisconsin Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy alleged that hundreds of Communists had infiltrated the State Department and other federal agencies.

This nightmare finally ended during the Army-McCarthy hearings in 1954, when Boston lawyer Joseph Welch – who had been hired by the Army to defend it against these offensive Communist allegations – infamously said to McCarthy: "Until this moment, Senator, I think I never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness… You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency?"

Our First Amendment rights are *everything* and our defense of them must transcend the political quagmire we have gotten ourselves into. We cannot be like that frog in the pot who, because the temperature is raised ever so slowly, doesn't realize he is getting boiled to death until it's too late. If we allow *anyone* to weaken our rights in *any* way, that's the ball game. *Game over*.

As my hero, the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass said in his *Plea for Free Speech in Boston*: Free speech "of all rights, is the dread of tyrants. It is the right which they first of all strike down… Thrones, dominions, principalities and powers, founded in injustice and wrong are sure to tremble, if men are allowed to reason of righteousness, temperance, and of a judgment to come in their presence."

The Holocaust Encyclopedia paints an even clearer picture: "When the Nazis came to power in 1933, the German constitution guaranteed freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Through decrees and laws, the Nazis abolished these civil rights and destroyed German democracy. Starting in 1934, it was illegal to criticize the Nazi

government. Even telling a joke about Hitler was considered treachery. People in Nazi Germany could not say or write whatever they wanted."

FCC Chairman Brendan Carr acknowledged this himself when he said in 2019 that "outsourcing censorship to the government isn't just a bad idea, it's a violation of the First Amendment. So, I'm a no on that," and in 2023 when he said, "Free speech is the counterweight – it is the check on government control. That is why censorship is the authoritarian's dream." Oh, the irony.

Learn more about 1787's Plan of Action to protect free speech on p. 270 of the Policy Guide.

Listen, up. Even though conspiracy theories abound – naturally – Tyler Robinson has been accused of killing Charlie Kirk. That's it. Not *them* or *they*, he. One man… not everyone who voted for Kamala Harris in the 2024 election, one man.

Sadly, in a country of over 342 million people, there will be people who do bad things. There will be people who say bad things. There will be people who insult other people. There will be people who kill other people. But to equate the actions of one person to 75,017,613 people is beyond absurd.

… and suggesting loathsome words and deeds come only from "the Left" is flat out ridiculous. For President Trump to call out the "tragic consequences" of "demonizing those with whom you disagree, day after day, year after year, in the most hateful and despicable way possible" as if he doesn't engage in this very behavior multiple times A DAY is laughable.

Even at Charlie Kirk's memorial service, Trump said, "Charlie did not hate his opponents. He wanted the best for them. That's where I disagreed with Charlie. I hate my opponent and I don't want the best for them."

There is quite obviously plenty of blame to go around on all sides. For example, to spread conspiracy theories about – and make a joke of – the murder of a 31-year-old husband and father of two is as screwed up as doing it when an 82-year-old man is beaten with a hammer by a psycho with political grievances. Paul Pelosi – who is former speaker

of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy's husband – had not even gotten out of surgery to repair his fractured skull before Republicans started in.

Donald Trump mocked the attack at a California GOP convention in 2023, asking the crowd, "How's her husband doing, anybody know?" His son Don Jr. shared an image on social media of a hammer and a pair of underwear with the words "Got my Paul Pelosi Halloween costume ready."

Republican governor of Virginia Glenn Youngkin jokingly said at a campaign event that he was going to "send Nancy Pelosi back to be with (her husband) in California." Conservative radio host Larry Elder tweeted that Nancy Pelosi was weighing legislation to restrict "assault hammers." Rep. Clay Higgins (R-LA) – the same genius from earlier – claimed Pelosi's attacker was a "nudist hippie male prostitute" and Rep. Claudia Tenney (R-NY) tweeted "LOL" alongside a meme poking fun of the attack.

After Charlie Kirk's murder, those on the Right were quick to point out all the threatening or violent acts carried out by the people on the Left, including the time in 2016 when far-left protesters showed up at a neo-Nazi rally in Sacramento and at least eight people were injured; the shooting of Rep. Steve Scalise (R-LA) at a practice session for the annual Congressional Baseball Game in 2017; the time a self-identified Antifa supporter shot and killed Aaron "Jay" Danielson, a member of the far-right group Patriot Prayer; the armed man who planned to kill Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh in 2022; the shooting of two Israeli Embassy aides in May 2025; and the two school shooters who were transgender in Nashville and Minneapolis (even though, in these cases, the motives were determined to be fame, not political ideology).

But what about the man – who, in pictures taken from social media accounts, once wore a Pro-Trump shirt with the message 'Make Liberals Cry Again' – who rammed his car into a Mormon church in Grand Blanc, Michigan before setting it on fire and shooting at congregants less than three weeks after Charlie Kirk's murder? What about the right-wing antisemitic extremist who shot 11 worshippers at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018 during Shabbat morning services? Or

the one who killed a woman and injured three others, including the rabbi, at the Chabad of Poway synagogue in California in 2019?

What about the far-right white supremacist who shot and killed ten black people at the Tops Friendly Markets supermarket in Buffalo, New York in 2022? Then, just weeks later, the thirty-one white men from the right-wing extremist group Patriot Front who were arrested heading to the Pride in the Park Festival in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho with metal shields, smoke bombs and riot gear?

What about the three "Boogaloo Bois" who destroyed government and private property during protests in Las Vegas on May 30, 2020, and the time a man with neo-Nazi and white supremacist views killed eight people and injured seven more in a mass shooting at the Allen Premium Outlets in Allen, Texas in 2023?

What about the far-right extremist who fatally shot state Rep. Melissa Hortman and her husband and wounded state Sen. John Hoffman and his wife in Minnesota, and the 13 hard-right militants that plotted to kidnap Gretchen Whitmer, the Governor of Michigan?

What about January 6th – which one might even call a failed coup d'état (defined as a sudden, violent, and illegal seizure of power from a government) – when some from the Right violently tried to stop the constitutionally mandated congressional electoral vote count.

The fact is, by all accounts, violent far-right perpetrators like white supremacists and anti-government extremists have committed the most U.S. terrorist attacks in recent years – *by far*. While incidents are increasing from the Left, the numbers are not yet close to comparable (more on this later, including exact numbers and specific examples).

… and I seriously doubt the 77,302,580 people who voted for Donald Trump in 2024 would think it was fair if they were grouped together with those who committed any of the heinous acts mentioned above.

All that said, the Right/Left scorecard – and who did what, when – doesn't matter one bit at this point. I only bring these examples up because so many on the Right have the audacity to say violence is coming from just one side – which is just 100% false.

The bottom line is this ALL must stop. Immediately.

Let's start here: We're just not that different. Regardless of our personal views on political and social issues – and despite our race, religion or social class – we all want pretty much the same things for ourselves and our families. All of us simply want to live a happy, productive life. We want to earn a respectable living and be able to enjoy the social security we have contributed to. We want to properly educate our children and know they will always breathe clean air and have satisfactory health care. We want to spend quality time with our friends and family who unconditionally love us and want the very best for us. We want to feel safe from those abroad as well as with those who live among us.

At the end of the day, when you tune out all the manufactured noise, the tapestry that binds all Americans is tightly woven with the common threads of family, freedom, optimism and hope.

Regardless of what some toxic people want us to believe, the truth is that what creates a bond between us is far more powerful than *anything* that may separate us. The solid constitution of this country – established with a firm foundation *by* the Constitution – is unyielding. The hallmarks of the American experience are a commonality of virtue and decency that permeates throughout this country and an unrelenting faith that we *will* find our way.

Truth Matters

"Truthful lips endure forever,
but a lying tongue is but for a moment.
Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil,
but those who plan peace have joy."
Proverbs 12:19-20

Truth has taken a serious beating over the past few years, so much so that it sometimes feels like we were living in an episode of The Twilight Zone, where up is down, down is up, the sky is yellow, fire is blue – and it seems like some people have lost the ability to even know the difference.

Although there has always been an element of dishonesty in politics, many politicians have started to go way beyond little white lies told on the campaign trail. Many of the lies some have started to tell don't just target their opponents track record or enhance their own, they target reality itself.

To make matters far worse, there seem to be more people willing to relinquish the power of their paint-by-number belief systems to master manipulators who happily color in the blanks for them. As a result, truth has started to become whatever each person or group of people want it to be.

In other words, truth is becoming a
personal choice instead of a touchstone.

Whereas, in the good 'ol days when most of us let facts and reality determine our truth, there are now those who work it exactly backward – deciding first what they want the truth to be, then seeking out whatever post, tweet, conspiracy theory, or cable news host confirms it. This confirmation bias isn't hard to find if you're looking for it – regardless of how outlandish it may be – because in our daily lives, we absorb a dizzying kaleidoscope of data that bombards us from all directions.

Overwhelmed by this information onslaught, it's no wonder most people gravitate toward the sources they are most comfortable with on social media, newspapers, radio and television – which, through repetition and a total lack of dissent, ultimately combine to create an echo chamber that only amplifies and reenforces the original belief.

Operating in this manner may take less mental energy and its familiarity and consistency may provide temporary comfort, but it only serves to perpetuate our distrust of one another and deepen our political divide.

In a minute, I walk through five examples of times Donald Trump and his ride or die militia have tried to gaslight this country. I wrote most of these before Donald Trump's second inauguration and, in my heart, really hoped this time around might be different. In fact, I clung to that hope as long as I could. But it's not different. It's way worse.

Immediately after the inauguration, as I researched government data, it began to disappear… information I was using from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics one day was literally gone the next. Past and present statistics about crime, economy, climate, health… just gone.

Quickly, the Trump/Vance administration started burying facts that contradicted their false narratives. The New York Times reported that, within days, over 8,000 web pages across more than a dozen U.S. government websites had been taken down, including over 3,000 pages from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), many being research articles; over 3,000 pages from the Census Bureau, including research and documentation for data sets and surveys; over 1,000 pages from the Office of Justice Programs, including information about hate crimes; over 200 pages from Head Start; over 180 pages from the Department of Justice, including all state-level hate crime data; almost 150 pages from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, including helpline information; over 100 pages from the Food and Drug Administration; and almost 50 research papers from the Office of Scientific and Technical Information.

This has only gotten worse as time has passed. The Trump/Vance administration has cancelled annual reports like the Household Food Security report – which measures food insecurity across states and demographic groups and, in 2024, found around 18 million U.S.

households were food insecure at some time during 2023, a million more than the year before – and Global Trends, a report that U.S. intelligence officials publish every four years to forecast the potential challenges the United States may face in the coming decades. Reports in the past have predicted events that eventually happened, like new immigration patterns and the risk of a global pandemic.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Weather and Climate Disasters database has been discontinued, as has reporting for the Department of Homeland Security's Homeland Infrastructure Foundation-Level Data.

A September 2025 report from the National Institute of Justice regarding far-right and white supremacist violence was removed from the Department of Justice website; the CDC's National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System has been significantly downgraded; and multiple reports related to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change vanished. The gathering of Maternal and Infant Mortality Data, the Law Enforcement Misconduct Database, and the Missing/Murdered Indigenous Persons Report were also halted. Several agriculture reports have been nixed, including various county-level estimates.

In March 2026, the White House stopped issuing a federal security bulletin from the FBI and Department of Homeland Security that warned of heightened threats to the United States amid conflicts in Iran.

If they can't delete or suppress evidence and/or facts they find inconvenient – or fire the messengers, like they did with at least seventeen inspectors general, dozens of federal prosecutors, and Dr. Erika McEntarfer, the commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics who was fired for daring to release monthly jobs data that showed weak hiring – they just blatantly lie.

There have been plenty of fibs told about policy issues like tariffs and immigration – and those are detailed throughout this book – but these guys started lying from the jump… like the time Elon Musk stood in the Oval Office and told reporters that after a "cursory examination of Social Security, we've got people in there that are 150 years old. Now, do you know anyone who is 150?" – insinuating that 150-year-olds are claiming Social Security benefits. … a claim that actual tech

geniuses quickly dismissed as probably a data error in the agency's ancient COBOL coding language.

Of course, Elon could have put his mind at ease much earlier if he had calmed down long enough to read a July 2023 report from the Social Security Inspector General that found 98 percent of people in the database who are 100 years old or older are not receiving benefits and "have not had earnings reported to SSA in the past 50 years."

Or the time the White House press secretary announced, from the podium, that the administration had uncovered a USAID plan to spend $50 million to give condoms to Hamas (the money was actually for operating two field hospitals in Gaza that provided surgical care and emergency maternal and newborn care), or the time they said USAID had given the media company Politico $8 million (the number was actually $44,000, which was paid for subscriptions). Or the time the director of the Office of Management and Budget, Russell Vought, told members of Congress that the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) had spent $9.3 million "to advise Russian doctors on how to perform abortions and gender analysis." …a bald-faced lie.

Or the time Elon posted on X that "Reuters was paid millions of dollars by the US government for 'large scale social deception. They're a total scam. Just wow." Never mind that the contract in question was between the Defense Department and Thomson Reuters Special Services, not the news division; was a contract to defend against cyberattacks; and was *signed during Donald Trump's first term*. I guess Donald didn't know this when he used the contract as evidence of corrupt relationships between the "radical left" media and the "deep state," posting "GIVE BACK THE MONEY, NOW!"

In President Trump's 100-minute-long address to Congress on March 4, 2025, he misled, lied about, or just made-up things about the size of his popular vote; the number of people who illegally crossed the border and that "virtually all of them" were "murderers, drug dealers, gang members, and people from mental institutions and insane asylums;" that the Paris Climate Accord was costing us "trillions" of dollars;" that we spent $45 million for diversity, equity and inclusion scholarships in Burma; that we spent $20 million for the Arab Sesame Street in the Middle East; that hundreds of thousands of federal workers

weren't showing up to work; the number of people who died building the Panama Canal; his tax cuts resulting in the "most successful economy in the history of our country," a lie that's a lie two ways; and the amount of money we had given Ukraine. Plus, many more things.

It just goes on and on and on. In the first year of his second term alone, he claimed: there was no inflation (there was); that he would drive drug prices down by 1,500 percent (prices can't drop by more than 100 percent); that the price of gasoline had fallen to $1.99 a gallon in five states (at a time when it was over $3 a gallon in *every* state); that over 300,000 Americans died each year of drug overdoses (that was triple the number); that America is the only country in the world that uses mail-in voting (dozens of countries do); that, if his Big Beautiful Bill didn't pass, we would all get a 68 percent tax increase; that the U.S. has given Ukraine "$350 billion" in wartime aid (it was well less than half that number); and that Los Angeles now "had water" because he "turned the valve" to send it to them (which made no sense at all).

Perhaps the biggest whopper was that, simply because he was the president, businesses had invested $16 trillion in the United States since he returned to office – even though the entire U.S. economy was worth less than $30 trillion.

In President Trump's February 24, 2026 State of the Union Address – which lasted almost two hours – he continued many of the falsehoods listed above, adding: "incomes are rising fast, the roaring economy is roaring like never before" (nope); that he had "ended eight wars" (we already went over this one); plenty of new lies about election fraud, immigration, and tariffs; and that he "took prescription drugs from the highest price in the entire world to the lowest. The result is price differences of 300, 400, 500, 600% and more" (which, again, is impossible).

Like all masterful liars, Donald started laying the groundwork for his deceit early. Even before his 2016 presidential campaign officially began, he railed against the "Deep State" and started calling the MSM (a.k.a. "mainstream media") "fake news" and "enemy of the people." He repeated this over and over and over and over – incessantly – which is another mind trick used by skillful liars.

As a result, if I happen to mention to hardcore Trump supporters that The Washington Post reported their hero made 30,573 false or misleading claims during his first term as president – which they do, often accompanied by video evidence of him telling said falsehood – they will likely dismiss it out of hand because The Washington Post (pre-Jeff Bezos anyway) is obviously *The Devil*. It's absolute genius.

So, by the time he needed to tell a really big lie – like when he wanted to save face after he lawfully lost the 2020 presidential election – many of his supporters had lost all trust in the media, as well as the people who work in every level of government and the agencies and institutions they work for. Again, genius.

It was Machiavelli who said that "one who deceives will always find those who allow themselves to be deceived." But it was Voltaire who made the terrifying but brilliant observation: "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities."

As a civil society, we must get back to a place where we can, at a minimum, agree on a basic set of facts. Whatever we decide to *do* about that set of facts is an entirely different issue, but we must *start from a place of truth*. And make no mistake, there actually is still such a thing!

This was way easier back in the day, when families would sit together each night and watch Walter Cronkite, David Brinkley and Edward R. Murrow speak the truth, not as they individually viewed it, but as the way it actually *was*. People across the United States all heard the same facts. I'm not naïve enough to believe we will ever get back to that exact place, but there are many ways we can recapture its essence.

Deconstructing Our Haunted House

To successfully construct a new paradigm, we need to first deconstruct the old one and learn from the lessons it teaches.

Visualize America as a house. The construction of our house, like all houses, started with the foundation. Our foundation was designed to be eternally rock-solid by brilliant but flawed men in 1787… which is lucky for us because without a strong foundation the stability of our entire house would have been vulnerable from the very beginning.

The walls of our house were constructed with the durable planks of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Both our foundation and walls were built from a blueprint that envisioned the strongest, most resilient republic ever conceived.

By the beginning of the 20th-century our house was looking awesome! It was bright and shiny, much stronger and more expensive than all the other houses around the world, and, thanks to the wealth brought by oil, steel and industrial development, our house was carefully maintained. Electrical power provided light for our house; steam engines and railroads became its roadway; and farming, ranching and mining found fertile ground in its backyard.

Despite the economic shock of the Great Depression, after World War II our home's occupants became better educated, gainfully employed and more mobile. Unemployment plummeted, consumer demand exploded, and suburbs flourished. In fact, our house looked so perfect from the outside that very few guessed it would soon be in danger of slowly rotting from within.

But unfortunately, that is what slowly started to happen. Political scandals like Watergate and the Iran-Contra Affair – along with the corruption introduced by powerful lobbyists and well-financed special interests – began to erode the public's trust in its leaders and planted seeds of anger, disappointment and disrespect toward the White House, Congress, and other government institutions.

At the same time, the energy crisis in the 1970s, the savings and loans fiasco, and massive accounting scandals planted seeds of anger and animosity toward private enterprise, well before the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis solidified the outrage. The subprime bank bailout was particularly hard to swallow because the United States has consistently had the largest wealth divide between the rich and the poor for decades.

Meanwhile, moral catastrophes like the My Lai massacre, the Iraq invasion, Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, and Hurricane Katrina called into question our national core values and threatened our global image.

Overlaying all of this, the ghosts of our past remain active and destructive, especially for American Indians and black Americans. In truth, our house has been haunted for centuries. The scars branded as far back as Point Comfort, Virginia in 1619 and the massacres at the

Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811 remain painfully evident for many of these Americans. Generations of pervasive and persistent disparity and discrimination have taken an egregious toll on members of these communities, populations uniquely susceptible to the inequitable cycles of preceding generations.

It's in this weakened condition that our beloved house stood. With a damaged foundation and unstable walls, our house was already under threat of being reduced to kindling – just barely able to hold its own weight. But then…

Into this perfect storm walked Donald Trump…holding a match.

The Gaslighting of America: Three Examples

Gaslighting Example One: The Election Fraud Lie

"I pledge… that I will go out with my family, my friends – I'll do it any way. I don't care if I'm registered or not, I'm going to try and cheat like hell, like they do."

~ President Donald Trump, September 10, 2026 ~

It's the whopper of a lie that just *will not die*. Mainly because Donald Trump and his ride or die militia refuse to let it. Months into his second presidency, he was still referring to former President Joe Biden as "a guy that got in there with a fraudulent election," and saying things like "I knew the election was rigged and now we found that out definitively, as you can see." … which, of course, is patently untrue.

A New York Times analysis found that, in his second term, President Trump has used words like "rigged," "crooked," "stolen" and "fraudulent" to describe elections hundreds of times but, in the first two weeks of February 2026, he ramped up the rampage, using these words to characterize American elections 139 percent more often than in the months before.

In the weirdest of coincidences, this came after, in late 2025 and early 2026, Democrats outperformed Republicans in elections from New Jersey to Virginia – and even in Texas, where a Democrat won a special election for a Texas State Senate seat by 14 percentage points in a district Donald Trump had carried by 17 points in 2024.

Also in February, President Trump called for the Republican Party to "nationalize" voting in America, saying Republican officials should "take over" voting procedures in at least 15 states – all in the name of "election fraud." This caused such an outrage that the White House had

to immediately walk his comments back and fellow Republicans openly criticized the idea.

His comments came after FBI agents had already *seized* ballots and other voting records from the 2020 election from an election center in Fulton County, Georgia; he signed an executive order trying to make significant changes to the electoral process, including requiring documentary proof of citizenship and demanding that all mail ballots be received by the time polls close on Election Day; and his saying that we should probably just end the use of mail-in ballots and voting machines altogether. This was also after the president of the United States said that he regretted not dispatching the National Guard to *seize* voting machines after the 2020 election.

President Trump is also pushing Congress to pass his Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act which would require voters to show proof of citizenship when they register to vote. This doesn't sound too bad – – after all, the Pew Research Center found that 83 percent of Americans support voters being required to show a government-issued ID – – until you read the fine print.

The SAVE Act would require all American citizens registering to vote or updating their registration information to present documentary proof of citizenship in person. However, government-issued driver's licenses and military or tribal IDs do not satisfy the bill's requirements.

This means that a birth certificate or passport would be required… which is a huge problem because the Brennan Center for Justice says that 21.3 million voting-age citizens cannot quickly produce proof of citizenship. Around 11 percent of voting-age citizens of color lack ready access to these documents, compared to 8 percent of white citizens, and millions of women lack documentation that reflects their current legal name due to marriage or divorce.

It's no secret why Donald Trump is pushing so hard for this. He has long been obsessed – *obsessed* – with the falsehood that Democrats are carrying out a vast conspiracy to have undocumented immigrants vote to increase their party's turnout: "If Republicans don't get them out, you will never win another election as a Republican. It's crazy how you can get these people to vote. If we don't get them out, look, Republicans will never win another election," he said in February 2026.

But there is ZERO evidence that a consequential number of noncitizens have voted in ANY U.S. election. An audit by Georgia's secretary of state in 2024 found that just 20 of the 8.2 million people registered to vote in Georgia were not citizens, and only nine *had ever even voted.*

The Georgia State Election Board did find, however, that America PAC, a political action committee founded by Elon Musk, sent pre-filled absentee ballot applications to voters ahead of the 2024 election, a violation of a subsection of Georgia law 21-2-381.

In his hunt for "evidence," Donald Trump bullied Republican-led states to upload tens of millions of voter records through a federal immigration verification tool run by the Department of Homeland Security – but this too is not getting the results he hoped for.

As of mid-January 2026, with the investigation still underway, Matthew Tragesser, a spokesman for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, reported that, out of 49.5 million voter registrations that had been checked, DHS had referred only around 10,000 cases to Homeland Security Investigations for further investigation of non-citizenship – or around .02 percent of the list. And this miniscule number doesn't even indicate if these people even voted in the first place. Plus, several states have complained that the verification tool mistakenly flagged some people who are actually U.S. citizens, so even that 0.02 precent number is likely inflated.

In Louisiana, the DHS system found 403 noncitizens out of 3 million registered voters, or .01 percent. "I want to be clear: Noncitizens illegally registering or voting is not a systemic problem in Louisiana," said Republican Secretary of State Nancy Landry.

In any event, love him or hate him, you gotta hand it to him: Donald Trump has knocked his *election fraud* lie out of the park. This lie should go directly into the Lying Hall of Fame. Best. Executed. Lie. Ever!

Being a masterful liar, Donald started early, railing against the "Deep State" and calling the media "fake news" and "enemy of the people." So, by the time he needed to tell the Big Lie – meaning, when he wanted to save face after he lawfully lost the 2020 presidential election – many of his supporters had lost all trust in the media, as well

as the people who work in every level of government and the agencies and institutions they work for. It's genius.

But here is the truth about Donald & Co.'s claims about the 2020 election and widespread U.S. election fraud: They are, in fact, straight-up lies. The 2020 presidential election *was not rigged* and widespread voter fraud in the United States *does not exist*. Period. End of story.

This is not my opinion, it's a fact. There is overwhelming evidence to prove these claims untrue, and this proof doesn't just come from the evil mainstream media. It comes directly from in-depth investigations of past elections, election experts and officials from both parties, transcripts from multiple courts of law and state legislatures, and from the mouths of judges themselves – many of whom were appointed by none other than Donald J. Trump.

Even a firm hired by the 2020 Trump campaign to prove election fraud/voting irregularities happened found nothing. The Washington Post reports that, in the weeks after the 2020 election, the Trump campaign hired a company called East Bay Dispute and Advisory – a subsidiary of Berkeley Research Group – to analyze election results in six states.

The Berkeley Research Group describes itself as a global consulting firm that helps organizations advance in disputes and investigations, corporate finance, and performance improvement and advisory. Federal Election Commission (FEC) filings revealed the Trump campaign paid East Bay Dispute and Advisory over $600,000 by the end of 2020.

Unsurprisingly, the results of the group's "Project 2020" report were never released to the public because the firm could not prove anything that would have caused a change in the outcome of the 2020 election. However, the report ended up in the hands of the prosecutors investigating the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol then, in turn, into the hands of The Washington Post.

One source told the paper, "They looked at everything: change of addresses, illegal immigrants, ballot harvesting, people voting twice, machines being tampered with, ballots that were sent to vacant addresses that were returned and voted. Literally anything you could think of. Voter turnout anomalies, date of birth anomalies, whether

dead people voted. If there was anything under the sun that could be thought of, they looked at it."

"Just like any election," the source continued, "there are always errors, omissions and irregularities. It was nowhere close enough to what (the Trump campaign) wanted to prove, and it actually went in both directions."

The Project 2020 report undercuts what Trump and his team were repeatedly saying not only after the 2020 election but through the 2024 campaign. For example, in Donald's now infamous phone call on January 2, 2021 with Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, Trump claimed that thousands of dead people had voted in Georgia: "So dead people voted, and I think the number is close to 5,000 people. And they went to obituaries. They went to all sorts of methods to come up with an accurate number, and a minimum is close to about 5,000 voters."

However, the Project 2020 report, which is dated one day before the phone call, says that researchers at East Bay Dispute and Advisory had "high confidence" that there were only 9 dead voters in Fulton County, Georgia and that there was "potential statewide exposure" of just 23. < "Dead voters" means that ballots were cast in the name of a person that was dead on Election Day. But remember, there are instances when people vote early then, sadly, die.)

In Nevada, the dead voter "high confidence" number was 12 in Clark County, with the "high end potential exposure" of such votes being just 20 statewide. Although the Trump campaign was saying in court filings that they believed 42,284 people voted twice in Nevada – Trump lost the state by roughly 33,000 votes – the researchers reported that the "low end potential exposure" of double voters was 45 and the "high end potential exposure" was 9,063.

Other conservative politicians also investigated voter fraud in 2020. The Texas attorney general's office almost doubled the number of hours its staff spent on tracking down election fraud than they did in 2018. Even after 22,000 hours of probing, Attorney General Ken Paxton's office uncovered only 16 minor cases of voter fraud. All 16 cases involved people putting false addresses on their voter forms.

In reporting the story about the Texas attorney general's election integrity unit, The Houston Chronicle revealed that "in its 15 years in existence, the unit has prosecuted a few dozen cases in which offenders received jail time, none of them involving widespread fraud."

Joseph Fishkin, a professor of election law at the University of Texas who was quoted in the article, put it this way: "This is not the only voter fraud effort to pour in a lot of resources and end up with a relatively small number of cases found. Finding very few defendants, even if they can charge some with multiple offenses, is consistent with the possibility that there just isn't that much fraud to prosecute."

The Associated Press conducted one of the most comprehensive examinations of suspected voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election, a process that took months and encompassed more than 300 local election offices. The AP's review relied on information collected at the local level, where officials are required to reconcile their ballots and account for discrepancies, and includes a handful of separate cases cited by secretaries of state and state attorneys general.

The AP's analysis of "every potential case of voter fraud in the six battleground states disputed by former President Donald Trump found fewer than 475 – a number that would have made no difference in the 2020 presidential election." This represents just 0.15 percent of Joe Biden's victory margin in these battleground states (and remember, this assumes all the disputed ballots were cast for Biden, which they most definitely weren't).

The investigation also confirmed there was "no collusion intended to rig the voting. Virtually every case was based on an individual acting alone to cast additional ballots." For instance, officials in Wisconsin charged one woman with voter fraud when she allegedly tried to use her dead partner's name to vote. Michigan charged two people with fraud when they forged their daughters' names to get ballots. One man was charged in Pennsylvania for using his dead mother's name to vote for, you guessed it, Donald Trump. Wow, that's one hell of a conspiracy.

…. and all of this is just what happened in the 2020 election. You may remember that Donald Trump also claimed election fraud in the 2016 presidential election. Even though he won the 2016 election,

Donald Trump didn't like that he lost the popular vote by 2.8 million votes so, of course, it had to be fraud – which is a tricky thing to claim when you won the Electoral College and, therefore, the presidency.

Ironically, even as Donald Trump was claiming – with zero proof – that between 3 million and 5 million ballots were illegally cast in the 2016 election, his own lawyers were adamantly claiming in a Michigan courtroom that "all available evidence suggests that the 2016 general election was not tainted by fraud or mistake" as they fought to block a recount effort by Green Party candidate Jill Stein.

Likewise, in a court filing in Pennsylvania, legal representatives for Donald Trump and his campaign said, "There is no evidence – or even any allegation – that any tampering with Pennsylvania's voting systems actually occurred."

In this case, the Trump attorneys went further: "The absence of any evidence of tampering is no surprise. Before the election, Secretary of State Pedro Cortés assured Pennsylvanian voters that Pennsylvania's voting systems are 'secure,' and criticized contrary suggestions as 'not only wrong and uninformed, but also dangerous.'"

One of my favorite examples that proves the entire voter fraud ruse is complete b.s. is the fate of Donald Trump's Presidential Commission on Election Integrity, which he convened after the 2016 election. The Commission met just twice and never issued a report on its findings.

Maine's secretary of state who was initially appointed to the Commission, Democrat Matt Dunlap, told author David Daley, "It was a dishonest effort from the very beginning. It was never really meant to uncover anything. It was meant to backfill an unprovable thesis that there's voter fraud – then to issue a fake report justifying laws or executive orders that change the fundamental nature of how we run elections. I think that might have been the real danger that we averted."

It wasn't just Democrats who became disenchanted with the Commission. The effort got off to a rough start when Kris Kobach – the former secretary of state of Kansas and the vice chairman of the Commission (stay tuned for more on this genius) – demanded that state election officials give the Commission tons of voter data, to include Social Security numbers, party registration and voting history.

Understandably, this request didn't go down very well and most all the election officials involved seemingly felt the way Mississippi Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann, a Republican, did about the request: "They can go jump in the Gulf of Mexico."

In the end, a court order forced the Trump administration to turn over documents from the Commission to Matt Dunlap, who promptly posted them on a website. Analysis of the documents by the Associated Press led the news agency to say, "The now-disbanded voting integrity commission launched by the Trump administration uncovered no evidence to support claims of widespread voter fraud."

Naturally, Donald Trump also used his favorite go-to accusation in 2016, saying – surprise, surprise – thousands upon thousands of non-citizens voted… which was – surprise, surprise – completely untrue.

On January 27, 2019, Donald Trump tweeted: "58,000 non-citizens voted in Texas, with 95,000 non-citizens registered to vote. These numbers are just the tip of the iceberg. All over the country, especially in California, voter fraud is rampant. Must be stopped. Strong voter ID!" – a premise that Texas Attorney General Paxton was more than happy – surprise, surprise – to help promote.

The ***truth*** – which neither Donald Trump nor Ken Paxton bothered to ever retroactively clarify – is that, yes, the Texas Department of Public Safety did indeed flag 95,000 names of potential non-citizens who were possibly registered to vote. But *THEN*, Texas and its 254 counties began clearing names from that list as the citizenship status of people on the list were confirmed.

The Texas Tribune reported that, very quickly, "the number of registered voters flagged by the state began to plummet...Soon after, the citizenship review effort buckled, revealing itself as a ham-handed exercise that threatened to jeopardize the votes of thousands of legitimate voters across the state. The secretary of state's office eventually walked back its initial findings after embarrassing errors in the data revealed that tens of thousands of the voters the state flagged were citizens."

Things in Florida went about the same way when there was a similar accusation four years earlier. In 2012, there were reports that up to 200,000 registered voters in Florida may not have been U.S.

citizens. After a thorough investigation by then Governor Rick Scott, a Republican, the actual number turned out to be 207.

Six years later, the same Rick Scott, now running for the U.S. Senate, claimed that the votes from Broward County (a county in Florida that generally votes Democratic) were nefariously tainted. Once again, this was proven false. On May 21, 2020, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement released a report that found "no evidence of fraudulent intent" and "no evidence of fraudulent intent to use the altered forms by the Florida Democratic Party after more than a year-long investigation into alleged vote-by-mail fraud."

Another one of Donald Trump's favorite fraud accusations in 2016 was his claim that "thousands" of people were "brought in on buses" to New Hampshire from neighboring Massachusetts to "illegally" vote. After a months-long investigation by the New Hampshire Secretary of State and the state's Department of Justice, this was also proven false.

The Boston Globe reported that "the two state agencies found that among the approximately 743,000 voters who cast ballots in the 2016 general election, JUST FOUR appeared to have voted illegally, mostly out of confusion about where they were supposed to vote. For example, some said they were told to go to an incorrect location, others thought they were allowed to vote any place where they own property."

The Globe continued, "Of the 6,000 who registered to vote on Election Day and signed an affidavit swearing to be a state resident, just 66 in 15 communities did not ultimately have their identities verified. While the state could not confirm exactly why they couldn't contact those people, Associate Attorney General Anne Edwards cautioned: 'No one should reach any conclusion that an unlawful vote was cast, because we have not been able to identify these voters.'"

Let's now circle back to good 'ol Kris Kobach from Kansas, the genius from Donald Trump's Presidential Commission on Election Integrity. This is a guy who couldn't win his campaigns for governor or the U.S. Senate, even with the advantage of trying to cheat.

Kobach is super proud of the fact that changes he made in voter identification laws in Kansas when he was secretary of state – which were already some of the strictest in U.S. history – would probably, in his estimation, remove as many as 20,000 people from the voter rolls.

Problem is that, even after an extensive investigation by Kobach himself, he could only find 127 ineligible individuals who voted or tried to vote. In the end, Kobach obtained only 9 convictions and, as *NBC News* reports, "most were older individuals who had misunderstood their voting rights – and just one was a noncitizen." That's some impressive law enforcement there, buddy!

The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law says that "allegations of widespread voter fraud often prove greatly exaggerated. It is easy to grab headlines with a lurid claim ('tens of thousands may be voting illegally!'), but the follow-up – when any exists – is not usually deemed newsworthy. On closer examination, many of the claims of voter fraud amount to a great deal of smoke without much fire. The allegations simply do not pan out."

Research from Columbia University found that "voter fraud is extremely rare…if we use the same standards for judging voter fraud crime rates as we do for other crimes, we must conclude that the lack of evidence of arrests, indictments or convictions for any of the practices defined as voter fraud means very little fraud is being committed."

Rutgers University-Camden dug way back for their conclusion: "Are fraudulent voters undermining U.S. elections? The simple answer is no. Under Republican President George W. Bush, the U.S. Justice Department searched for voter fraud. But in the first three years of the program, just 26 people were convicted or pled guilty to illegal registration or voting. Out of 197,056,035 votes cast in the two federal elections held during that period, the rate of voter fraud was a minuscule 0.00000132 percent."

Even when super conservative media outlets and think tanks have looked closely at voter fraud, they have, like all the rest, found very little. The Heritage Foundation – whose stated mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies – has investigated fraudulent use of absentee ballots, ineligible voting, impersonation fraud at the polls, buying votes, ballot petition fraud, duplicate voting, false registrations, altering the vote count, and illegal assistance at the polls. The organization has discovered 1,619 proven instances of voter fraud nationwide – SINCE 1982!! That's well over FOUR DECADES ago!

Now that the Trump/Vance administration is in charge, surely they can prove their claims of widespread election fraud, yes? Nope. Although they have made finding election fraud a major Justice Department priority, particularly illegal voting by noncitizens, federal prosecutors have struggled to turn the administration's broader claims into criminal cases. Investigators have found some instances serious enough to bring charges – including 16 cases announced by DOJ in September – but other seemingly suspicious cases have fallen apart after investigators discovered registration mistakes, misunderstandings about eligibility or other innocent explanations. Prosecutors have also struggled in some cases to prove that an ineligible voter knowingly broke the law.

Even the cases DOJ has brought are individual cases scattered across different states and elections… certainly not evidence of widespread voter fraud. One defendant, for example, is alleged to have voted nine times between 2008 and 2024. In a separate September announcement, three other defendants were charged in an alleged California scheme involving fraudulent signatures for ballot petitions – not illegally casting votes.

†

Honestly – even though I'm about to give you even more proof that widespread election fraud didn't happen in 2020 – I shouldn't need to because the entire thing can be discredited by common sense alone.

For one, because our elections are highly decentralized, the United States doesn't have just one voting system, we have fifty-one. Actually, since counties usually fund and administer elections at the local level, we have thousands.

…and doesn't it strike you as odd that Donald and his buddies are *still* saying this, even though they control the White House and *both* houses of Congress… and that voter fraud *only* affected Donald Trump in 2020 but no other Republicans down ballot? Plus, the only states accused of massive fraud were the battleground states that Trump

thought he was going to win but ultimately lost? Would he really have us believe that the states he won are the *only ones* that miraculously experience no fraud. Come on now, people.

You may ask me, if The Washington Post is to be believed, Donald Trump has told tens of thousands of lies. So why, Emily, are you dedicating an entire section to this one?

Answer: Because this lie is wildly un-American and incredibly damaging. At its core, it's a dagger through the very heart of American democracy itself. Out of everything anyone in American politics has ever lied about, it is by far the most potentially destructive.

This is a lie that must be stopped.

Let's please, please, please take the advice of the eight prominent, lifelong conservatives – which include three retired federal judges, a former Solicitor General, a leading election lawyer, two former senators, and a longtime congressional staff chief – who released the report Lost, Not Stolen because they had "become deeply troubled by efforts to overturn or discredit the results of the 2020 presidential election."

Their warning was clear: "There is no principle of our republic more fundamental than the right of the people to elect our leaders and for their votes to be counted accurately. Efforts to thwart the people's choice are deeply undemocratic and unpatriotic. Claims that an election was stolen, or that the outcome resulted from fraud, are deadly serious and should be made only on the basis of real and powerful evidence. If the American people lose trust that our elections are free and fair, we will lose our democracy."

To put the controversy to rest once and for all, the group examined "every claim of fraud and miscount put forward by former President Trump and his advocates" and found that "Donald Trump and his supporters had failed to present evidence of fraud or inaccurate results significant enough to invalidate the results of the 2020 presidential election." In the end, their "conclusion was unequivocal: Joe Biden was the choice of a majority of the Electors, who themselves were the choice of the majority of voters in their states."

That said, Donald Trump and his allies had plenty of opportunities to plead their case, taking their 2020 voter-fraud allegations to courts in multiple states. Well over 60 cases were dismissed, and 86 judges on all levels of the court system – from the lowest levels to the U.S. Supreme Court – rejected this nonsense.

But pushback against the 2020 voter fraud claims started well before the first court appearance. Almost immediately after the first election fraud accusation, 59 of America's leading computer scientists and election security experts called Donald Trump's claims of voter fraud "unsubstantiated" and "technically incoherent."

These 59 people are not part of some conspiracy or members of some kind of "Deep State." They are experts from both political parties. In part, their letter said, "Anyone asserting that a U.S. election was 'rigged' is making an extraordinary claim, one that must be supported by persuasive and verifiable evidence." Without evidence, they say, the claims are "simply speculation."

In conclusion, they wrote, "To our collective knowledge, no credible evidence has been put forth that supports a conclusion that the 2020 election outcome in any state has been altered through technical compromise."

That was just the beginning of the pushback. After Donald Trump tweeted that voting machines made by Dominion Voting Systems "deleted 2.7 million Trump votes nationwide," the Election Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council (GCC) Executive Committee – which includes top officials from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, the National Association of Secretaries of State, National Association of State Election Directors, and members of the Election Infrastructure Sector Coordinating Council – released this statement:

"The November 3rd election was the most secure in American history. All of the states with close results in the 2020 presidential race have paper records of each vote, allowing the ability to go back and count each ballot if necessary. This is an added benefit for security and resilience. This process allows for the identification and correction of any mistakes or errors. There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised."

< Commercial Break: In March 2021, Dominion Voting Systems sued Fox News for defamation – to the tune of $1.6 billion – claiming the network spread disinformation about the company and its voting machines in the wake of the 2020 election.

In the initial complaint, Dominion's attorneys said: "The truth matters. Lies have consequences. Fox sold a false story of election fraud in order to serve its own commercial purposes, severely injuring Dominion in the process. If this case does not rise to the level of defamation by a broadcaster, then nothing does."

Thomas Clare, a Dominion attorney, added, "The best way to vindicate the truth is in the courts where there's cross-examination where we have the opportunity to take discovery, where there are rules, where evidence is required to be submitted. And that is the process that we are very much looking forward to in order to vindicate the company and to get the truth out there."

Boy was he right about that! Dominion's case against Fox News went to trial in the courtroom of Delaware Superior Court Judge Eric Davis on April 18, 2023. From the beginning, the case was limited because Judge Davis issued several pretrial rulings that strengthened Dominion's position. In one, he wrote that "the evidence does not support that Fox News Network conducted good-faith, disinterested reporting." In another, he wrote that the "evidence developed in this civil proceeding demonstrates that it is crystal clear that none of the statements relating to Dominion about the 2020 election are true" …both of which proved brutal against possible Fox defenses.

Even before opening statements began, Fox News agreed to pay Dominion Voting Systems $787.5 million, the largest monetary settlement ever disclosed in a U.S. defamation case.

But even more damaging to Fox and its chairman Rupert Murdoch were the hundreds of thousands of pages of internal emails, texts, and other communications that Fox was forced to give Dominion in the pretrial discovery process. The mountain of evidence provided showed that practically everyone at Fox, including Murdoch and high-level executives and producers, believed the claims of election fraud were false but allowed Fox hosts and guests to perpetuate them to maintain

its viewership. (there is much more on this – including parts of the official transcripts – in the Media section of this book)

Dominion *also* sued right-wing networks Newsmax and One America News Network (OAN) for similar claims. In August 2025, Dominion settled with Newsmax for $67 million. The OAN lawsuit is still pending. Additionally, former Dominion executive Eric Coomer sued Newsmax, OAN, and the "MyPillow Guy" Mike Lindell for defamation, saying the defendants had characterized him as a "traitor," a claim that had led to him receiving "multiple credible death threats." Coomer's case against Lindell went to trial in the summer of 2025, with a jury finding Lindell liable for defamation and ordering him to pay Coomer $2.3 million in damages. In August 2023, OAN reached a settlement with Coomer.

Dominion *also* sued former Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani for defamation, claiming over $1.3 billion in damages. Dominion CEO John Poulos explained this decision this way: "Rudy Giuliani actively propagated disinformation to purposefully mislead voters. Because Giuliani and others incessantly repeated the false claims about my company on a range of media platforms, some of our own family and friends are among the Americans who were duped." In September 2025, Dominion and Giuliani reached a confidential settlement.

Dominion *also* sued former Trump attorney Sidney Powell, former Overstock CEO Patrick Byrne, and Mike Lindell for defamation. On March 22, 2021, Powell – who once called the "stealing" of the 2020 election "the greatest crime of the century if not the life of the world" – petitioned a federal court to drop the case against her and, get this: In the filing to dismiss, her attorneys argued that "reasonable people would not accept [such statements she made against Dominion] as fact but view them only as claims that await testing by the courts through the adversary process." Essentially, her defense was that surely no one was stupid enough to believe a word she says. Dominion's lawsuits against Powell, Byrne and Lindell are ongoing.

Then there is Smartmatic USA Corporation, another election technology company that sued Newsmax and OAN for basically the same reasons Dominion did. Even though the facts of the Smartmatic case are like the ones in the Dominion case, Dominion's technology

was used in 24 states in the 2020 election while Smartmatic only provided election services for Los Angeles County. In the end, Smartmatic settled its cases with Newsmax and OAN through confidential settlements.

Smartmatic also sued Fox Corporation for defamation (focusing on hosts Maria Bartiromo, Lou Dobbs and Jeanine Pirro), plus Rudy, Sidney, and the My Pillow and Overstock guys. In September 2025, a judge ruled that Lindell defamed Smartmatic. All the other cases are still pending.

Regarding these cases, Smartmatic argues that Rudy and Sidney "created a story about Smartmatic" and that "Fox joined the conspiracy to defame and disparage Smartmatic and its election technology and software. The story turned neighbor against neighbor. The story led a mob to attack the U.S. Capitol."

In a statement, Smartmatic chief executive Antonio Mugica said, "Fox is responsible for this disinformation campaign, which has damaged democracy worldwide and irreparably harmed Smartmatic and other stakeholders who contribute to modern elections… Mr. Giuliani and Ms. Powell needed a platform to use to spread their story. They found a willing partner in Fox News."

In October 2025, the U.S. Department of Justice filed foreign bribery charges against Smartmatic. In March 2026, the company asked a judge to dismiss the case, alleging that the DOJ brought the case to further Donald Trump's baseless claims about the 2020 election, which amounts to vindictive and selective prosecution. Commercial Break Over! >

After the Election Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council (GCC) statement was released, Christopher Krebs, then the head of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) – a division of the Department of Homeland Security that helps states secure the voting process – went on to call the claims of election fraud "nonsense" and "farcical."

In an interview with 60 Minutes, Krebs reiterated that 95 percent of the ballots cast had paper records backing them up and, in states where there were hand recounts, the results were virtually the same as when the machine counted them. Although Donald Trump had already

fired Krebs (by Tweet) for saying the election fraud claims were "nonsense" and "farcical," after the 60 Minutes interview Trump attorney Joseph diGenova said on Newsmax that Krebs should be "drawn and quartered, taken out at dawn and shot."

Krebs sued the Trump campaign, diGenova, and Newsmax for defamation. According to the lawsuit, diGenova accused Krebs of, among other things, treason, leading to "an avalanche of despicably offensive and frighteningly threatening statements" against Krebs… to the point that one of Krebs' five young children said, "Daddy's going to get executed?" In April 2021, Krebs settled the lawsuit with diGenova.

< Sidebar: In April 2025, President Trump directed the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate Chris Krebs and revoked all of Krebs' remaining security clearances. During the announcement in the Oval Office, Trump called Krebs a "wiseguy," and said, "He came out right after the election, which was a rigged election, a badly rigged election… this guy Krebs was saying, 'Oh, the election was great, it was great."

The president also suspended any security clearances held by SentinelOne employees. SentinelOne is a prominent cybersecurity firm where Krebs served as chief intelligence and public policy officer (Krebs' company Krebs Stamos Group was sold to SentinelOne in 2023). >

On November 29, 2020, Donald Trump, in quite possibly the longest run-on sentence in history, said on Fox News that "(the election) is total fraud. And how the FBI and Department of Justice – I don't know – maybe they're involved, but how people are getting away with this stuff – it's unbelievable. … You would think, if you're in the FBI or Department of Justice, this is – this is the biggest thing you could be looking at. Where are they? I have not seen anything. … It's an embarrassment to our country."

But two days later, none other than the Trump administration's Attorney General Bill Barr – who long before had proven to be a Trump sycophant – reiterated that, although the Justice Department had followed-up on complaints of voter fraud, his department had not seen

"fraud on a scale that could have affected a different outcome in the election."

Barr continued, "There's been one assertion that would be systemic fraud and that would be the claim that machines were programmed essentially to skew the election results. And the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice have looked into that, and so far, we haven't seen anything to substantiate that."

Well over a year later, Barr went on to tell the House Oversight Committee investigating the January 6th Capitol attack that he told Donald Trump that his unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud were "bullshit," and that he "did not agree with the idea of saying the election was stolen." He closed by saying, "Frankly a year and a half later, I've seen nothing to change my mind on that."

Seven months after the election, the U.S. Justice Department released a treasure trove of emails to the House Oversight Committee. The emails detail how Donald Trump, his chief of staff Mark Meadows, and a few other minions relentlessly pressured the U.S. Justice Department to help overturn the legal election results. Meadows went as far as asking then-acting Attorney General Jeffery Rosen (Barr had resigned) to investigate already discredited conspiracy theories like the one claiming that someone in Italy somehow remotely changed the election results in America.

Mr. Rosen joined Bill Barr, acting Solicitor General Jeffrey Wall, and White House counsel Pat Cipollone in refusing to indulge Donald Trump's obsession on any level.

When it was clear that Mr. Rosen was not going to break the law for him, Donald Trump decided he would replace Rosen with one of his faithful worker bees, Jeffrey Clark – an idea that was squelched only when multiple senior Justice Department officials threatened to resign en masse. After Rosen forwarded Mark Meadows' email about the Italian nonsense to his acting deputy Richard Donoghue, Donoghue replied, "Pure insanity."

In October 2021, the Senate Judiciary Committee issued a report called *Subverting Justice: How the Former President and His Allies Pressured the Department of Justice (DOJ) to Overturn the 2020*

Election. The Republican ranking member of the Committee was Lindsey Graham, and other Republican members included Chuck Grassley, John Cornyn, Mike Lee, Ted Cruz, Josh Hawley, Tom Cotton John Kennedy, Thom Tillis and Marsha Blackburn.

Key findings of the Senate Judiciary Committee majority staff report included the following:

- President Trump repeatedly asked DOJ leadership to endorse his false claims that the election was stolen and to assist his efforts to overturn the election results.
- White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows asked Acting Attorney General Rosen to initiate election fraud investigations on multiple occasions, violating longstanding restrictions on White House-DOJ communications about specific law-enforcement matters.
- After personally meeting with Trump, Jeffrey Bossert Clark pushed Rosen and Donoghue to assist Trump's election subversion scheme – and told Rosen he would decline Trump's potential offer to install him as Acting Attorney General if Rosen agreed to aid that scheme.
- Trump allies with links to the "Stop the Steal" movement and the January 6 insurrection participated in the pressure campaign against DOJ.
- Trump forced the resignation of U.S. Attorney Byung Jin ("BJay") Pak, whom he believed was not doing enough to address false claims of election fraud in Georgia. Trump then went outside the line of succession when naming an Acting U.S. Attorney, bypassing First Assistant U.S. Attorney Kurt Erskine and instead appointing Bobby Christine because he believed Christine would "do something" about his election fraud claims.

- By pursuing false claims of election fraud before votes were certified, DOJ deviated from longstanding practice meant to avoid inserting DOJ itself as an issue in the election.

All this severely damage Donald Trump's voter fraud claims, but nowhere did the allegations fare worse than in American courts. Although *anyone* can say *anything* on cable television, social media or at a press conference (even if they eventually get sued), the standard of proof is a little different in a court of law, to say the least. Attorneys are bound by a strict code of professional responsibility, which includes *duty of candor* to the courts and the *duty to avoid frivolous claims*.

… which means lawyers can't just make stuff up, and they certainly can't lie to a judge… which means most all of them bolted from Team Trump almost immediately. Two large law firms withdrew as counsel only days after filing lawsuits. This led to several new lawyers joining the team, but they also resigned within days.

This exodus of qualified attorneys left as Trump's lawyers only the self-named "elite, strike force team" – which included Rudy Giuliani, Jenna Ellis and, for a while, the aforementioned kook Sidney Powell – whose collective conduct former Republican governor of New Jersey and then Trump ally Chris Christie called "a national embarrassment."

Christie didn't stop there: "This is outrageous conduct by any lawyer. They allege fraud outside the courtroom but when they go inside the courtroom, they don't plead fraud and they don't argue fraud. We cannot continue to act as if something happened here that didn't happen. You have an obligation to present the evidence. The evidence has not been presented…. as much as I'm a strong Republican – I love my party – it's the country that has to come first."

As we all know, you need a little something called evidence in a court of law. Unfortunately for Donald Trump and his attorneys, they had none. Zero. Nada. This led to humiliating moments for them.

One of the worst came two days after the election in Philadelphia. The Trump campaign filed an emergency petition to stop the vote count, claiming Republican observers had been unfairly banned from the room where votes were being counted.

Under intense questioning by Judge Paul S. Diamond, a U.S. District Judge appointed by President George W. Bush, Trump campaign attorney Jerome Marcus admitted that Republicans did, in fact, have a "nonzero number of people in the room," which is a ridiculous way to say there were, in fact, Republicans allowed in the room.

Seemingly annoyed and still unsatisfied with the answer, Judge Diamond then said: "I am asking you as a member of the bar of this court, are people representing Donald J. Trump for President, representing the plaintiff, in that room?" To which Marcus had to answer, "Yes." Judge Diamond then responded, "I'm sorry, then what's your problem?"

Elsewhere in Pennsylvania, the Trump legal team conceded in a joint stipulation of facts in Bucks County that the "petitioners do not allege, and there is no evidence, that any of the challenged ballots were cast by, or on behalf of, a deceased person." They also conceded there was no "fraud," "misconduct," or "impropriety" in connection with the ballots they were challenging.

Because the question was answered before the case even started, the Honorable Robert O. Baldi stopped the farce, saying: "The parties specifically stipulated in their comprehensive stipulation of facts that there exists no evidence of any fraud, misconduct, or any impropriety with respect to the challenged ballots. There is nothing in the record and nothing alleged that would lead to the conclusion that any of the challenged ballots were submitted by someone not qualified or entitled to vote in this election."

Judge James C. Crumlish III rejected a Trump campaign petition that aimed to invalidate nearly 8,349 mail-in ballots because the voter failed to enter certain information, such as their address.

During a hearing, Judge Crumlish asked Trump attorney Linda Kerns: "Would you agree with me that you are not proceeding based on allegations of fraud or misconduct; is that correct?" She answered, "I am not proceeding on those allegations," which led Judge Crumlish to rule that the Trump campaign was "not contending that there has been fraud, that there is evidence of fraud or that the ballots in question were not filled out by the elector in whose name the ballot was issued."

Rudy Giuliani was in Pennsylvania when he stood outside the now infamous Four Seasons Total Landscaping Company and said, “This is a gross miscarriage of the process that would assure that these ballots are not fraudulent. It’s a fraud, an absolute fraud.”

Then – I’m not making this up – he went right into a federal courtroom just days later and at first alleged “widespread, nationwide voter fraud” and that local election officials were part of a “little mafia,” but then admitted to U.S. District Judge Matthew W. Brann that “this is not a fraud case.”

< Commercial Break. I’d like to take this opportunity to thank Rudy for the comic relief he so selflessly provided us throughout this horrid episode in American history, including his Borat appearance and his (literal) hair dye meltdown.

It’s really a shame that he lost his New York law license thanks to his blatant lies about the 2020 election, plus was forced to file bankruptcy after a jury found him liable – to the tune of $148 million – for outrageously defaming Ruby Freeman and her daughter Shaye Moss, two innocent, hard-working Georgia election workers.

After Rudy loudly accused these two women of passing USB drives around when counting ballots “like vials of heroin or cocaine” – when Ruby was actually passing Shaye a mint – both women received threatening messages like “hope they lock you up and throw away the key, you disgusting b*tch traitor” and “pack your s–t. They are coming for you. I’m not far behind. I’m coming for you also. Trash will be taken to the street in bags.” They were both forced into hiding for their safety.

Boo-freak’n-hoo, Rudy. For the damage you tried so hard to inflict on America – as well as Americans like Ruby and Shaye – you deserve every single consequence that has come your way. Commercial Break Over! >

In yet another Pennsylvania courtroom, after repeatedly asking direct questions and not getting back direct answers, Judge Richard P. Haaz finally pointedly asked Trump attorney Jonathan Goldstein if he was accusing electors or the Board of the County of fraud.

Goldstein responded: “Your Honor, accusing people of fraud is a pretty big step. And it is rare that I call somebody a liar, and I am not calling the Board of the [Democratic National Committee] or anybody else involved in this a liar. Everybody is coming to this with good faith. The DNC is coming with good faith. We’re all just trying to get an election done. We think these were a mistake, but we think they are a fatal mistake, and these ballots ought not be counted.”

Judge Haaz then asked: “I am asking you a specific question, and I am looking for a specific answer. Are you claiming that there is any fraud in connection with these 592 disputed ballots?” Goldstein responded, “To my knowledge at present, no.” The judge again, “Are you claiming that there is any undue or improper influence upon the elector with respect to these 592 ballots?” Goldstein again responded, “To my knowledge at present, no.”

But Pennsylvania judges weren’t even close to being through. Judge Brann, a Republican and former member of the conservative Federalist Society, rejected a petition by the Trump campaign to block the certification of the state’s vote because certain counties allowed voters to correct errors on their ballots.

Judge Brann’s decision was 37-pages of scorched earth. Among other harsh words, Judge Brann said that the Trump campaign’s assertions “strained legal arguments without merit and speculative accusations.” He went on to say that “in the United States of America, this cannot justify the disenfranchisement of a single voter, let alone all the voters of its sixth most populated state.” But Judge Brann saved the best for last: “This claim, like Frankenstein’s Monster, has been haphazardly stitched together.”

Judge Stephanos Bibas of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit, who was appointed by Donald Trump, wrote for the unanimous majority after a complete rejection of an emergency injunction to overturn Pennsylvania’s vote certification: “Free, fair elections are the lifeblood of our democracy. Charges of unfairness are serious. But calling an election unfair does not make it so. Charges require specific allegations and then proof. We have neither here. Voters, not lawyers, choose the President. Ballots, not briefs, decide elections.”

At the end of November, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court unanimously dismissed a petition by the Trump campaign to invalidate over 2.5 million mail-in ballots. The decision said, in part, "The want of due diligence demonstrated in this matter is unmistakable," and admonished the campaign for a "complete failure to act with due diligence in commencing their factual constitutional challenge."

Of the case, Justice David N. Wecht said the Republicans "failed to allege that even a single mail-in ballot was fraudulently cast or counted…It is not our role to lend legitimacy to such transparent and untimely efforts to subvert the will of Pennsylvania voters. Courts should not decide elections when the will of the voters is clear." The ruling was dismissed with prejudice, meaning the Trump campaign is prohibited from ever filing another petition on the same claim.

The final nail in the Pennsylvania coffin was hammered when the U.S. Supreme Court denied a requested injunction in a one-sentence order, with no explanation and no noted dissenting votes.

But even a U.S. Supreme Court verdict didn't stop Donald Trump, who called the Republican speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Bryan Cutler, at least twice to see how Pennsylvania Republicans were going to "Stop the Steal" – to which Mr. Cutler made clear they had no power or intention to do so.

One last thing before we leave Pennsylvania. After the 2020 election, a letter carrier named Richard Hopkins told federal investigators that he heard his supervisors at the Erie post office discussing a plan to backdate mail-in ballots – a claim that Republicans naturally jumped on.

Even though the Erie postmaster immediately said the allegations were "100% false," Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) used Hopkins' statement as an example in a letter to the U.S. Justice Department demanding an investigation into the Pennsylvania election results. Donald Trump called Hopkins a "brave patriot" on Twitter.

Unfortunately for Lindsey and Donald, Hopkins recanted his claim rather quickly when he was questioned by the Postal Service's Office of Inspector General.

The Inspector General's final report said that Hopkins "revised his initial claims, eventually stating that he had not heard a conversation

about ballots at all – rather he saw the Postmaster and Supervisor having a discussion and assumed it was about fraudulent ballot backdating." Further, he "acknowledged that he had no evidence of any backdated presidential ballots and could not recall any specific words said by the postmaster or supervisor."

In the end, the Inspector General reached the conclusion that "both the interview of the Erie County Election Supervisor and the physical examination of ballots produced no evidence of any backdated presidential election ballots at the Erie, PA Post Office."

In Nevada, Trump ally and former Nevada lawmaker Sharron Angle petitioned the court to block vote certification in Clark County, where Las Vegas is located and by far the most populous county in the state. Angle essentially wanted to throw out the results of the entire election. After hearing the case, Judge Gloria Sturman wasn't having it: "How do you get to that's sufficient to throw out an entire election?"

Unsurprisingly, Judge Sturman denied the petition, calling the petition "a really extreme request" and saying that not only was there no evidence to support the charge of voter fraud, but that "as a matter of public policy, this is just a bad idea."

In another Nevada courtroom, District Judge James T. Russell dismissed all voter fraud claims made by the Trump campaign with prejudice, writing that the campaign "did not prove under any standard of proof that illegal votes were cast and counted, or legal votes were not counted at all, due to voter fraud, nor in an amount equal to or greater than" Joe Biden's margin of victory.

The judge also dismissed witness declarations that had been put into evidence by the Trump campaign, describing them as "self-serving statements of little or no evidentiary value."

In Wisconsin, U.S. District Court Judge Pamela Pepper wrote this in her opinion to dismiss a bid to overturn the election results: "Federal judges do not appoint the president in this country. One wonders why the plaintiffs came to federal court and asked a federal judge to do so."

The Wisconsin Supreme Court declined to hear the Trump campaign's case to challenge the election results in their state, saying it first had to be heard by lower courts. Conservative member Justice Brian Hagedorn wrote in the opinion, "We do well as a judicial body to

abide by time-tested judicial norms, even – and maybe especially – in high-profile cases. Following the law governing challenges to election results is no threat to the rule of law."

Justice Hagedorn continued, "It can be easy to blithely move on to the next case with a petition so obviously lacking, but this is sobering. The relief being sought by the petitioners is the most dramatic invocation of judicial power I have ever seen. Judicial acquiescence to such entreaties built on so flimsy a foundation would do indelible damage to every future election. This is a dangerous path we are being asked to tread."

Next, the Trump campaign filed a federal lawsuit in the state, asking that the lawsuit be "remanded" back to the state legislature, a request U.S. District Judge Brett H. Ludwig – who was appointed by Donald J. Trump himself – called "bizarre" and "very odd."

Judge Ludwig wrote, "This court has allowed the plaintiff the chance to make his case, and he has lost on the merits," then he threw the case right out… but not before he added: "This is an extraordinary case. A sitting president who did not prevail in his bid for re-election has asked for federal court help in setting aside the popular vote based on disputed election administration issues he plainly could have raised before the vote occurred." Judge Ludwig continued, "In his reply brief, plaintiff 'asks that the Rule of Law be followed.' It has been."

Things weren't going much better in Georgia, where another Trump ally brought a suit claiming that his company had uncovered evidence of inconsistencies in electronic voting machines. The judge, who was appointed by Donald Trump, finally got around to the million-dollar question: "I understand that's your argument, but what's your evidence?" Then he too threw the case right out.

Another Trump campaign attempt centered around a charge that 53 Georgia ballots were possibly backdated. Problem was, when the two people who could supposedly speak to this were called to testify, they both said they had no idea if the ballots were received after the deadline.

Superior Court Judge James Bass dismissed the case right then with one sentence: "I'm denying the request and dismissing the petition." Later, in his written opinion, Judge Bass was more

circumspect: “The Court finds that there is no evidence that the ballots referenced in the petition were received after 7:00 p.m. on election day, thereby making those ballots invalid. Additionally, there is no evidence that the Chatham County Board of Elections or the Chatham County Board of Registrars has failed to comply with the law.”

Eight months after the election – after three audits of the election results, including a hand recount – Georgia Superior Court Judge Brian Amero dismissed seven of the nine claims in one of the last remaining lawsuits, this one involving claim of fraudulent mail-in ballots in Fulton County. The other two counts were not dismissed because they sought records from Georgia’s open records law. This came as a blow to the plaintiffs, who had planned to inspect the ballots *with high-powered microscopes*.

At the same time, Donald Trump & Co. was instigating a ton of other shenanigans in Georgia. Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican who voted for Donald Trump, revealed he was being pressured by other Republicans, including Senator Lindsey Graham, to unethically intervene in the electoral process, and that he and his wife were receiving death threats (his wife, sexually explicit ones) – to the point that he had to enlist a security detail. One text sent to Raffensperger said, “You better not botch this recount. Your life depends on it.” In response, Raffensperger simply said, “Numbers don’t lie.”

Sufficiently fed-up and understandably furious, Gabriel Sterling, a top Georgia election official, held a press conference and said, “Someone’s going to get hurt, someone’s going to get shot, someone’s going to get killed. It’s not right.” Sterling used as an example “a 20-something tech in Gwinnett County” who had received “death threats and a noose put out saying he should be hung for treason because he was transferring a report on batches from an EMS (Enterprise Management System) to a county computer so he could read it.”

Sterling continued, “His family is getting harassed now. There’s a noose out there with his name on it. And it’s not right. I've got police protection outside my house. Fine. You know, I took a higher-profile job. I get it, the secretary ran for office; his wife knew that, too. This kid took a job. He just took a job, and it’s just wrong.”

Amid the chaos, Donald Trump called Georgia's governor, Republican Brian Kemp, and pressured him to call a special session of the legislature to override the state's election result and send an entirely new slate of electors to the Electoral College. < I literally cannot believe I am writing this about an American election. Honduras, maybe. Philippines, sure. But the United States of America? No way. It feels surreal. >

Thankfully, after the ballots had been counted ***three*** separate times, Governor Kemp certified his states election results, saying: "As governor, I have a solemn responsibility to follow the law, and that is what I will continue to do. We must all work together to ensure citizens have confidence in future elections in our state."

But wait! If poor Governor Kemp thought that formally certifying the results was going to get Georgia out of Donald's crosshairs, he was dead wrong. Weeks later – three days before the Electoral College was constitutionally required to meet, to be exact – Donald made his now infamous recorded phone call to Secretary of State Raffensperger, saying, "So look. All I want to do is this. I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have. Because we won the state."

A few minutes later, Donald Trump said again, "So what are we going to do here, folks? I only need 11,000 votes. Fellas, I need 11,000 votes. Give me a break."

In October 2021, the Brookings Institution released a report called *Fulton County, Georgia's Trump Investigation: An Analysis of the Reported Facts and Applicable Law*. The report said, in part, that "President Trump lost the 2020 election in Georgia by a margin of nearly 12,000 votes, and that outcome was confirmed and certified by the duly designated election officials in the state, with Republican Secretary of State Raffensperger and Republican Governor Kemp at the top of the process."

The report continued, "Notwithstanding the absence of any facts suggesting irregularity or any reason to question the result thus certified, the Georgia electoral process and vote count was subjected to sustained assault by the ex-president and his supporters."

The report set forth several civil and criminal charges that could be pursued because of Donald Trump's conduct, including "solicitation of

conduct by officials that would amount to election fraud; intentional interference with an election official's performance of election-related duties; and conspiracy, meaning an agreement among multiple people, to engage in electoral fraud."

"Other possible statutory violations include an array of general prohibitions not limited to conduct impacting on elections, but rather focused on more broadly applicable duties encompassing election misconduct of the kind here alleged, such as false statements in connections with official matters, attempts to influence government officials in improper ways, solicitation of action violative of public officer oaths, and several other provisions."

"Finally, it is possible, as mentioned in a public statement by the Fulton County District Attorney, that consideration might be given to action under the Georgia Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, since violation of a number of the statutes referenced above constitute predicate acts that are the essential building blocks in developing a prosecution under that statute."

In February 2021, the Fulton County District Attorney's Office launched an investigation into Donald Trump's conduct following the 2020 election (Atlanta is in Fulton County). The probe eventually led to a Special Purpose Grand Jury to investigate the former president and several of his allies. After interviewing 75 witnesses, the 23 members of the Grand Jury issued a report to the Fulton County DA's office, a portion of which was released to the public.

The report said, in part, "We find by a unanimous vote that no widespread fraud took place in the Georgia 2020 presidential election that could result in overturning that election." The report went on to say that a "majority of the Grand Jury believes that perjury may have been committed by one or more witnesses testifying before it." It concluded by recommending the District Attorney issue "appropriate indictments" for offences where the "evidence is compelling."

In August 2022, Fulton County District Attorney Fani T. indicted Donald Trump on racketeering, conspiracy and other charges. Eighteen Trump allies, including Rudy Giuliani and Mark Meadows, were also indicted for allegedly conspiring to overturn the 2020 election results. Prior to the 2024 election, 4 of the 18 co-defendants pled guilty to

misdemeanor charges in exchange for testifying against the 14 other defendants. The remining cases are now in limbo after Donald Trump won the presidency in 2024.

Meanwhile, in Arizona, the Trump campaign was claiming that Maricopa County poll workers had "overridden" ballots, essentially changing people's votes. However, Trump campaign attorney Kory Langhofer finally acknowledged that the case was "not a fraud case." He continued, "We are not alleging fraud in this lawsuit. We are not alleging anyone is stealing the election. It is not a stealing-the-election case." Langhofer also shut down the idea that a limited number of glitches in voting machines happened because of intentional fraud, saying they were "good-faith errors in operating machines."

After extreme pressure from the Trump campaign to disregard the popular vote and declare Trump the winner of Arizona's electoral votes, Rusty Bowers, the Republican speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives, finally had to make a definitive statement:

"As a conservative Republican, I don't like the results of the presidential election. I voted for President Trump and worked hard to reelect him. But I cannot and will not entertain a suggestion that we violate current law to change the outcome of a certified election."

The Republican-led Board of Supervisors in Maricopa County, Arizona – the second largest voting jurisdiction in the United States – voted unanimously to certify the county's election results, with the board chairman saying definitively there was no evidence of fraud or misconduct "and that is with a big zero."

But believe it or not, it didn't end there. Six months after the 2020 election, the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors was still dealing with the 2020 election. In late April 2021, Arizona Republicans hired a private company named Cyber Ninjas (seriously?) to start a hand recount of the almost 2.1 million ballots cast in Maricopa County.

This included the Cyber Ninjas using UV lights and microscopes to investigate whether the ballots were made of bamboo…which, of course, would prove that the ballots had been illegally smuggled into Arizona from Asia. (This story is 100% true, I promise. I could not possibly make this s#@# up. It would actually be funny if it wasn't undermining our democracy).

Weeks into the bogus recount, the four Republicans and one Democrat on the Board of Supervisors finally had enough. Calling the recount "a sham process," "circus," and "a grift disguised as an audit" in a letter to Arizona Senate President Karen Fann, the Board called for the "spectacle that is harming all of us" to end because "our state has become a laughingstock. Worse, this 'audit' is encouraging our citizens to distrust elections, which weakens our democratic republic."

They continued, "It is time to make a choice to defend the Constitution and the Republic. We stand united together to defend the Constitution and the Republic in our opposition to the Big Lie. We ask everyone to join us in standing for the truth."

In January 2022, the Maricopa County Elections Department released a report called *Correcting the Record: Maricopa County's In-Depth Analysis of the Senate Inquiry*. The report, in part, said: "The November 2020 General Election was administered with integrity and the results were accurate and reliable. This has been proven through statutorily required accuracy tests, court cases, hand counts performed by the political parties, and post-election audits."

The report continued, "After an in-depth analysis and review of the reports and presentations issued by the Senate's contractors, we determined that nearly every finding included faulty analysis, inaccurate claims, misleading conclusions, and a lack of understanding of federal and state election laws."

And then, "Our review of the claims made by Cyber Ninjas, CyFIR, EchoMail, and the Senate's Audit Liaisons, found: 1) 22 were misleading. The claims lead the reader to assume a conclusion that is not supported by the evidence, 2) 41 were inaccurate. The claims include flawed or misstated analysis, and 13 were false. The claims are demonstrably false and can be proven false using materials provided to the Senate."

The same day that *Correcting the Record* was released, a superior court judge declared Cyber Ninjas in contempt of court for not releasing their records to The Arizona Republic newspaper, which requested them under the Freedom of Information Act. The judge imposed a $50,000-a-day fine for every day the records were not

produced. Within the week, attorneys for the Cyber Ninjas reported the firm insolvent.

Finally, on August 1, 2022, Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich, a Republican, sent a letter to Arizona Senate President Karen Fann, also a Republican, that said his office was officially closing its criminal investigation into allegations that 282 dead people voted in the 2020 election. His letter said, in part: "After spending hundreds of hours reviewing these allegations, our investigators were able to determine that only ONE of the 282 individuals on the list was deceased at the time of the election."

He continued, "Once again, these claims were thoroughly investigated and resulted in only a handful of potential cases. Some were so absurd the names and birthdates didn't even match the deceased, and others included dates of death after the election." The allegations of "widespread deceased voters from the Senate Audit and other complaints … are insufficient and not corroborated."

Things in Michigan were downright painful to watch at times, and not just because armed, Trump-supporting, American-flag-waving protestors surrounded the home of Michigan's Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson when she was decorating for Christmas with her 4-year-old son.

One of the protesters at Benson's home, Genevieve Peters, said, "We are over here in the fricking dead of night, man. We are letting her know that we're not taking this bullshit election, we are not standing down, we are not giving up you are not going to take this election from a man that has earned it completely 100% by a freaking landslide. Let me tell you: This ain't over."

Early on, a Michigan Republican poll watcher reported that *someone* told her that *someone* had backdated mail-in ballots so they would be counted. While introducing this allegation in court, the attorney for Trump kept insisting this testimony was not hearsay (i.e., information that someone received from another person that can't be substantiated).

After going round and round about testimony that is the very definition of hearsay, Judge Cynthia D. Stephens was incredulous. She

not only declared the testimony hearsay, but she said it was "inadmissible hearsay within hearsay."

In another Michigan courtroom, Judge Timothy M. Kenny rejected the Trump campaign's effort to delay the certification of votes in Detroit, saying that allegations of misconduct were "not credible." "It would be an unprecedented exercise of judicial activism for this court to stop the certification process," not to mention it would "undermine faith in the electoral system." Judge Kenny also said in his ruling that one of the Republican affidavits in particular was "rife with speculation and guess-work about sinister motives."

In Wayne County, Michigan's largest, Donald Trump personally called a member of the board of canvassers who, after the call, tried to take back her vote to certify Joe Biden's victory (which is not possible). Donald then invited Michigan's Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey and House Speaker Lee Chatfield, both Republicans, to the White House for a chat.

One can only imagine the conversation that went on in that meeting but, nevertheless, afterward the Michigan legislators issued a joint statement saying: "We have not yet been made aware of any information that would change the outcome of the election in Michigan and as legislative leaders, we will follow the law and follow the normal process regarding Michigan's electors, just as we have said throughout this election."

"Michigan's certification process should be a deliberate process free from threats and intimidation. Allegations of fraudulent behavior should be taken seriously, thoroughly investigated, and if proven, prosecuted to the full extent of the law. And the candidates who win the most votes win elections and Michigan's electoral votes. These are simple truths that should provide confidence in our elections."

A spokesman for Michigan's secretary of state Jocelyn Benson concurred: "We have not seen any evidence of fraud or foul play in the actual administration of the election. What we have seen is that it was smooth, transparent, secure and accurate."

Michigan U.S. District Judge Linda V. Parker ordered sanctions against nine lawyers affiliated with Donald Trump's legal team, including Sidney Powell, who was ordered to pay a hefty fine for "a

historic and profound abuse of the judicial process." Judge Parker went on to say that the fine was an "appropriate sanction" that was "needed to deter Plaintiff's counsel and others from engaging in similar misconduct in the future."

She continued, "This case was never about fraud. It was about undermining the People's faith in our democracy and debasing the judicial process to do so." It is "one thing," she wrote, "to take on the charge of vindicating rights associated with an allegedly fraudulent election," but quite another to deceive "a federal court and the American people into believing those rights were infringed. This is what happened here."

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel agreed wholeheartedly with the ruling: "The awarding of fees further holds accountable the attorneys who worked to distort our democracy in favor of lining their own pockets. These attorneys demonstrated a flagrant disregard for the law and attempted to use the courts to further a false and destructive narrative."

In the end – eight months after the election – a Republican-led Michigan Senate Oversight Committee released a report putting voter fraud claims to rest for good.

The report said, in part: "This Committee found no evidence of widespread or systematic fraud in Michigan's prosecution of the 2020 election" and that citizens of Michigan should watch out for "those who have pushed demonstrably false theories for their own personal gain."

Committee Chairman, Republican Senator Edward McBroom, started his personal letter that accompanied the report this way: "When I agreed to begin investigating the election, rumors and uncertainty were rampant. Allegations of markers bleeding through ballots, voter intimidation, dead voters, mystery ballot dumps, foreign interference, and ballot harvesting were just a few of the issues during the first days following the November 2020 election. Emotions and confusion were running wild across the country. Fears and hopes were had by every person, including myself."

Then he made this extraordinary statement: "All politicians lie' is the popular axiom. Unfortunately, lies and deceit are not exclusive to politicians. Throughout our investigation, members have been actively

following and engaged with various persons and reports. We have collectively spent innumerable hours watching and listening and reading. Some of these people and reports are true. Unfortunately, many of them are not, either because of a misunderstanding or an outright deception. As is often the case, the truth is not as attractive or as immediately desirable as the lies and the lies contain elements of truth."

He then concluded with: "At this point, I feel confident to assert the results of the Michigan election are accurately represented by the certified and audited results. While the Committee was unable to exhaust every possibility, we were able to delve thoroughly into enough to reasonably reach this conclusion. The strongest conclusion comes in regard to Antrim County < note: this involved false claims about voting machines. > All compelling theories that sprang forth from the rumors surrounding Antrim County are diminished so significantly as for it to be a complete waste of time to consider them further."

Of course, none of this is to say there was *zero* fraud in the 2020 election. My favorite example is Donald Kirk Hartle of Las Vegas. Several days after the 2020 election, Mr. Hartle told a news crew that someone stole his dead wife's ballot!!! Oh No! He just couldn't imagine who would take "advantage of his grief." "That is pretty sickening to me, to be honest with you," he lamented.

Well, unfortunately for Donald Kirk Hartle, the Nevada attorney general's office investigated the matter and discovered that the thief was none other than Donald Kirk Hartle himself! Hartle has now pled guilty to one count of *Voting More Than Once at Same Election*, a category D felony.

Of the plea, Attorney General Aaron Ford issued a statement: "Though rare, voter fraud can undercut trust in our election system. This particular case of voter fraud was particularly egregious because the offender continually spread inaccurate information about our

elections despite being the source of fraud himself. I am glad to see Mr. Hartle being held accountable for his actions, and I want to stress that our office will pursue any credible allegations of voter fraud."

You can't possibly make this s#@# up.

Gaslighting Example Two:

Always Find a Boogeyman

Masterful liars need a boogeyman to deflect attention away from their deceit. This mind trick typically comes with a huge dose of projection: *I'm not lying, YOU ARE! I'm not a horrible person doing horrible things, YOU ARE! A few of my supporters aren't violent, racist lunatics, YOURS ARE!!*

Enter Antifa. The protests calling for an end to police brutality that took place after George Floyd's death in 2020 were largely peaceful. However, when violence and destruction did break out sporadically across America, many far right-wingers – including the president, the U.S. attorney general, multiple members of Congress, and conservative cable and social media channels – were quick to blame the antifascism activist movement Antifa… and that narrative spread like wildfire across social media.

U.S. Attorney General Bill Barr tried everything he could possibly think of to blame Antifa for the riots and looting that were periodically taking place across America. During one news conference, Barr said "we have evidence that Antifa and other similar extremist groups, as well as actors of a variety of different political persuasions have been involved in instigating and participating in the violent activity."

Barr also said, "I've talked to every police chief in every city where there has been major violence, and they all have identified Antifa as the ramrod for the violence. They are flying around the

country. We know people who are flying around the country… there is clearly some high degree of organization involved at some of these events and coordinated tactics that we are seeing. Some of it relates to Antifa, some of it relates to groups that act very much like Antifa."

President Trump jumped in and fanned the flames with tweets like "The FBI and Law Enforcement must focus their energy on ANTIFA and the Radical Left, those who have spent the summer trying to burn down poorly run Democrat Cities throughout the USA!"

And this one: "These are Biden fools. ANTIFA RADICALS. Get them FBI, and get them now!" And this one: "I look at (antifa) as a bunch of well funded ANARCHISTS & THUGS who are protected because the Comey/Mueller inspired FBI is simply unable, or unwilling, to find their funding source, and allows them to get away with "murder". LAW & ORDER!"

Donald's claims about Antifa went next level. He even publicly accused an elderly peaceful protester – who was shoved down to the ground by police in Buffalo, New York, fracturing his skull – of being part of Antifa, which proved to be a truly ludicrous claim.

But as hard as Bill Barr and Donald Trump tried, the facts – including those from their own Justice Department – just couldn't back them up… because here is the God's-honest truth about Antifa being behind any violence at those protests: *It just wasn't true*. Period. End of story.

By early June 2020, 51 people faced federal charges related to the riots/protests. Of those already formally charged, 20 alleged crimes involved arson; 16 involved the illegal possession of a firearm, and 8 involved inciting a riot, civil disorder and/or looting. Federal court records from the U.S. Justice Department (DOJ) at that time showed zero links between any serious federal crimes that had occurred and anti-fascist groups. Read this again: Zero.

By the end of September 2020 – after Barr had established a "task force" to counter "anti-government extremists" – over "300 individuals in 29 states and Washington, DC, had been charged for crimes committed adjacent to or under the guise of peaceful demonstrations since the end of May." Although a few of the defendants self-identified

as having far left and/or anti-government views, there was zero evidence that any of them had official ties to Antifa.

In fact, the only reference to any extremist group in federal court documents during that time involved men associated with a far-right, mostly white supremist group called boogaloo. The "Boogaloo Bois" (pronounced "boys") are a Hawaiian-shirt-wearing anti-government, anti-law enforcement gang who are convinced that the U.S. government is determined to take their guns away and that a second "civil war" is coming soon.

An intelligence bulletin distributed to police departments across the nation in early June 2020 – issued jointly by the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and the National Counterterrorism Center – warned: "Would-be domestic terrorists including militia extremists and groups who advocate a belief in the superiority of the white race have sought to bring about a second civil war, often referred to as a 'Boogaloo' by intentionally instigating violence at First Amendment-protected activities."

In June 2020, one man allegedly associated with the group, Air Force Staff Sergeant Steven Carrillo, faced federal charges of murder and attempted murder involving two federal security officers outside a courthouse in Oakland, California. Carrillo also faced state charges for murdering a Santa Cruz County sheriff's deputy and injuring several other law enforcement officers days later. Two years later, Steven Carrillo was sentenced to 41 years in prison for the crimes in Oakland and received a life sentence for the murder of Sgt. Damon Gutzwiller in Santa Cruz.

Three other self-identified Boogaloo Bois – all of whom have military backgrounds – were indicted by a federal grand jury during that time for conspiring to destroy government and private property during protests in Las Vegas on May 30, 2020. In a statement, the DOJ said the men "possessed Molotov cocktails to throw at police in downtown Las Vegas." They also faced state charges in Nevada, including charges of terrorism.

In September 2023, one of the men, former Navy enlistee Stephen "Kiwi" Parshall, was sentenced to life for assisting, soliciting or conspiring to commit an act of terrorism as part of a guilty plea

agreement. Six months earlier, he received 33 years in prison after pleading guilty to sexually abusing a young girl. Parshall abused the victim for years, beginning when she was younger than 10. These guys are real winners. No word yet on the cases against the other two men, Andrew Lynam and William L. Loomis.

Although there was one incident in Austin where a group that burglarized a Target store was initially identified as being affiliated with Antifa, people with confirmed links to the movement adamantly denied these people's affiliation, as did at least one of the defendant's attorneys.

As for those police chiefs and other officials around the country who Bill Barr claimed blamed Antifa for being the "ramrod for the violence?" When asked directly about Antifa and/or other specific groups…

- Josh Rubenstein, the public information director for the Los Angeles Police Department, said, "We saw no organized effort of Antifa here in Los Angeles."
- Medaria Arradondo, the Minneapolis chief of police, said: "As I sit here today, I have not received any sort of official information identifying any of the groups."
- The Sturgis, South Dakota Police Chief Geody VanDewater, said: "As far as we know (the protesters) were just local citizens from Rapid City and not affiliated with Antifa."
- Dermot Shea, New York City's police commissioner, said that most of the people arrested at the riots/protests were people who lived in New York and were simply taking advantage of the chaos to commit crimes. He made clear they were not driven by political ideology. John Miller, a New York City police official, confirmed this, saying the crimes were committed by "regular criminal groups."
- A spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's office in Portland told Reuters that his office had "not alleged defendant affiliation with any specific groups or ideologies in cases stemming from

Portland protests" and that their cases "focus purely on the criminal conduct alleged."

- Jill Sanborn, assistant director for the FBI's counterterrorism division, said "Most of what we're seeing is just that opportunistic individual that's taking advantage of the peaceful protests, almost as cover as a way to conduct their criminal behavior."
- "It's a wide range of criminal activity," said Calvin Shivers, assistant director of the FBI's criminal investigative division. Shivers added that his unit had "not seen concerted or organized efforts" beyond instances of rival gang members.

Looking back, the police brutality protests were just Round One. Round Two came months later, after the 2020 presidential election. True to form, before the Capitol riots even ended on January 6th, right-wingers were back at it, saying that Antifa was the real monster wreaking havoc at the U.S. Capitol, and were "masquerading as Trump supporters" – as Republican Representative Matt Gaetz put it that afternoon, from the U.S. House floor no less.

"I don't know if the reports are true," Gaetz hedged but continued anyway, "but The Washington Times has just reported some pretty compelling evidence from a facial recognition company that some of the people who breached the Capitol today were not Trump supporters, they were masquerading as Trump supporters, and in fact were members of the violent terrorist group Antifa."

Televangelist Mark Burns – who was described by Time magazine as "Donald Trump's Top Pastor" during the 2016 election; offered the benediction on the first day of the 2016 Republican National Convention; and who Donald Trump endorsed for a South Carolina congressional seat in the 2024 election – tweeted a photo of the widely-recognized QAnon devotee and Trump loyalist Jake Angeli (a.k.a. the "Q Shaman"…yes, the genius in the face paint, furs and horned headdress getup), along with the caption, "This is NOT a Trump supporter...This is a staged #Antifa attack." (QAnon is the preposterous

conspiracy theory group that believes Donald Trump is saving America from a cabal of Satan worshipers and child sex traffickers.)

Republican Representative Paul Gosar said, "This has all the hallmarks of Antifa provocation," and Republican Representative Mo Brooks chimed in later that night, saying "There is some indication that fascist Antifa elements were involved, that they embedded themselves in the Trump protests."

Conservative radio talk show host Todd Herman, who happened to be the guest host on Rush Limbaugh's radio show on January 6th, referenced a tweet from another conservative radio guy Michael D. Brown that said: "Antifa or BLM or other insurgents could be doing it disguised as Trump supporters. Come on, man, have you never heard of psyops?" Then, Herman said to Limbaugh's millions and millions of listeners: "It's probably not Trump supporters who would do that. Antifa, BLM, that's what they do. Right?"

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton retweeted conservative writer Paul Sperry's tweet that said, "Breaking: Former FBI agent on the ground at U.S. Capitol just texted me and confirmed that at least 1 busload of Antifa thugs infiltrated peaceful Trump demonstrators as part of a false Trump flag ops," with Paxton adding his own caption, "These are not Trump supporters."

The *busload of Antifa thugs* reference resembled a conspiracy theory Donald Trump had pushed months earlier in an interview with conservative Fox television host Laura Ingraham. That day, Trump said – with no evidence – that people were being brought in to Charlotte, NC specifically to disrupt the Republican National Convention: "We had somebody get on a plane from a certain city this weekend, and in the plane it was almost completely loaded with thugs, wearing these dark uniforms, black uniforms, with gear and this and that."

Although he stopped short of naming Antifa, Trump's claims echoed ones that had been tearing through social media at the time, declaring Antifa was infiltrating American cities for the sole purpose of violence and destruction. One post, for example, warned that "at least a dozen males got off the plane in Boise from Seattle, dressed head to toe in black," and warned locals to "be ready for attacks downtown and

residential areas." It also said that at least one of the guys had "a tattoo that said Antifa America on his arm."

The night of January 6th, Ingraham spent most of her show suggesting to her audience that the Trump protesters had somehow been infiltrated by Antifa. By way of evidence, she said she knew this to be true because she had never once seen protesters wearing helmets and knee pads at Trump rallies.

But here is the truth about Antifa being behind or even remotely involved with the attack on the United States Capitol on January 6th: *It's just not true*. Period. End of story.

.... a fact that the FBI made clear within two days of the riots, saying there was "no indication" that Antifa was involved in any way with the destruction at the U.S. Capitol.

Two months later, former FBI Director Christopher Wray reiterated this fact when he testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee: "We have not, to date, seen any evidence of anarchist violent extremists or people subscribing to Antifa in connection with the 6th." When asked again if it were possible that Antifa members were impersonating Trump supporters that day, Director Wray again said, "We have not seen evidence of that at this stage. We have not seen any evidence of that."

I recognize that some conservatives don't trust the FBI and/or Christopher Wray so, for those of you who don't, please at least believe the court records of people who were originally accused of being Antifa but who were really diehard Trump supporters – who, before being granted clemency by Donald Trump, were charged and sentenced for their violent actions on January 6th.

The examples are endless, but let's start with these. On January 6th and for months after, a photo circulated showing two men dressed in black, smashing a window near the lower west tunnel of the U.S. Capitol. Multiple people repeatedly claimed the two men were Antifa, with one captioning it, "Suspected ANTIFA trying to break windows at the Capitol." As the incident was taking place in real-time, one person was captured on video yelling at the two men, saying "Boo, Antifa!" "No Antifa! No Antifa! No Antifa! Antifa are breaking the windows!"

But the truth is both men were avid Trump supports. One of the men, William Lewis, was finally arrested in November 2023 on felony charges of assaulting officers and civil disorder. Authorities say Lewis, wearing black and using "what appeared to be a baton," smashed in the Capitol window and sprayed wasp and hornet spray at officers three different times that day. In June 2024, Lewis pleaded guilty to a felony charge of assaulting, resisting, or impeding certain officers.

The other man in the photo is Jonathan Munafo. Jonathan was known as one of Trump's "Front Row Joes" for his tradition of camping out at Trump rallies around the country for days on end to get a front row seat to see his hero. Munafo was not only charged with civil disorder for smashing the Capitol window with a metal flagpole, but also for assaulting D.C. Police Officer Neil McAllister, then stealing his riot shield.

Jonathan Munafo was sentenced to 33 months in prison for his actions that day plus, in a separate case, sentenced to 24 months in Michigan for making "profane threats of violence" in over 100 calls to a Michigan non-emergency dispatch center.

Yet another man accused of being Antifa but who was really a diehard Trump supporter – one who arrived in Washington, D.C. on a *Hippies 4 Trump* bus that was covered in Trump-inspired graffiti – is Paul Orta. Paul was spotted at the Capitol ripping down fencing and metal bike racks, yelling things like, "We're taking that s--- today!" In October 2024, he was sentenced to six months in prison after pleading guilty to a felony charge of obstruction of law enforcement during a civil disorder.

A masked man who jumped through a broken window and kicked open a fire door at the Capitol was initially accused of being Antifa but has since been identified as Trump supporter Edward Kelley. Kelley, an anti-abortion activist, was recognized thanks to his sweatshirt that read TCAPP ("The Church at Planned Parenthood").

In November 2024, Kelley was convicted of eight misdemeanors and three felonies for his actions at the Capitol, including civil disorder, destruction of government property, and assaulting, resisting, or impeding certain officers. But these were the least of Kelley's legal problems. Also in November 2024, he was found guilty on three

additional charges: conspiracy to murder employees of the United States; solicitation to commit a crime of violence; and influencing or retaliating against federal officials by threat.

Although Kelley initially pleaded not guilty to these charges, his co-defendant in the case, Austin Carter, admitted to authorities that he and Kelley "unlawfully and knowingly combined, conspired, and agreed" to "murder employees of the Federal Bureau of Investigation," a plot that aimed to kill as many as 37 law enforcement personnel.

Perhaps the most famous video circulated by those trying to blame Antifa for the January 6th attack is one that shows several rioters at the Capitol trying to stop a man they insist is Antifa (even though he is wearing a green helmet with a Trump sticker on it) from breaking a Capitol window. Unfortunately for them, the man has now been identified as a Trump supporter who was charged with threatening a Democratic official in his home state, and who even appeared to give his name to a photographer at the Capitol.

One of the men trying to stop the man from smashing the window was Ed Badalian, a Trump supporter who traveled to Washington, D.C. to "arrest the traitors" with his friend Danny "DJ" Rodriguez, the man who was eventually sentenced to over 12 years in prison for attacking D.C. police officer Mike Fanone with a stun gun.

Mr. Badalian was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of conspiracy to commit an offense against the U.S., obstruction of an official proceeding and an additional misdemeanor count. At his sentencing, U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson observed that Badalian "can't let go of the false story of bringing down Antifa."

After saying – in apparent frustration for being constantly interrupted – that it was "tempting" to lock him up for the full ten years the prosecutors were asking for, Judge Jackson told Badalian, "You are a legend in your own mind. A hero in your own head."

This seems to be a theme among some Trump supporters who were at the Capitol that day. Andrew Taake pleaded guilty to attacking law enforcement officials with bear spray and a metal whip, but continued to claim Antifa "incited" the violence and that a majority of "the people attacking police" were Antifa – even though he *himself* was one of the people who attacked police.

Because of all the false Antifa talk on conservative media and social media, many Trump supporters came to Washington, D.C. expecting to find Antifa sympathizers all over the place. Former West Virginia Councilman Eric Barber, who was sentenced to 45 days in prison for breaching the Capitol, told the FBI, "I was going to be super hard and go punch an Antifa terrorist in the face. And I end up being the terrorist. Plot twist, huh?"

Don't get me wrong, plenty of people who *NO ONE* would *EVER* mistake for Antifa were also at the U.S. Capitol that day. Far-right groups showed up ready for battle, and several had the intention of kidnapping and/or killing the vice president of the United States and other members of the U.S. Congress.

The Proud Boys were there. In fact, Proud Boy Dominic Pezzola, appropriately known as "Spaz," was one of the first to breach the Capitol building. The Proud Boys are a far-right nationalist group dedicated to "reinstating a spirit of Western chauvinism" in America. Before the Capitol riots, one of its leaders, Joe Biggs, wrote: "Every law maker who breaks their own stupid F---ing laws should be dragged out of office and hung."

Followers of the Three Percenters and the Oath Keepers certainly wouldn't have missed the fun! The Three Percenters are a right-wing paramilitary-style outfit that named themselves for the three percent of the American population that fought the British Army in the Revolution. The Oath Keepers are a far-right militia-style group, largely made up of former law enforcement and military veterans. At the time, the FBI said the Oath Keepers "believe that the federal government has been co-opted by a shadowy conspiracy that is trying to strip American citizens of their rights."

In the weeks before January 6th, Stewart Rhodes, the founder and leader of the Oath Keepers, assured people that the group would provide security in Washington, with "some of our most skilled special warfare veterans standing by armed, just outside D.C."

As the big day drew closer, the group encouraged people to join "President Trump's fight to defeat the enemies foreign and domestic who are attempting a coup…prepare yourselves for whatever may

come. Prepare your mind, body, and spirit for battle, and above all else, prepare to STAND!"

Almost a year to the day – January 13, 2022 – eleven Americans were charged with seditious conspiracy for their actions surrounding January 6th, including Stewart Rhodes.

Six months later, five members of the Proud Boys, including its former national chairman Henry "Enrique" Tarrio, were also charged with seditious conspiracy. Of the charges, Assistant U.S. Attorney Erik Kenerson explained that "the defendants' actions showed planning, determination, and coordination."

On May 4, 2023, after deliberating for seven days, a jury found Tarrio and three other Proud Boy leaders – Ethan Nordean, Joe Biggs and Zachary Rehl – guilty on 31 of 46 counts. The jury returned not-guilty verdicts on 5 counts and deadlocked on 10 others. Nordean received an 18-year prison sentence for his role in the January 6th insurrection, Joe Biggs 17 years, and Rehl 15 years. Tarrio was sentenced to 22 years.

You'll be relieved to know that "Spaz" was acquitted of seditious conspiracy, though he was convicted of multiple other serious felonies – ultimately landing him a 10-year prison term.

At least four men who self-identify as Three Percenters were charged with conspiracy. On March 8, 2022, Texas Three Percenter Guy Reffitt was the first person to be convicted for crimes committed at the U.S. Capitol. He was convicted of five felony offenses, including obstruction of Congress, interfering with police, and bringing a firearm to a riot. He was also convicted of threatening his son, a teenager who turned his dad in to the FBI. Reffitt received seven years in prison.

At the sentencing, U.S. District Judge Dabney L. Friedrich, appointed by Donald Trump, denounced the actions at the Capitol, making it clear that while everyone has the right to peacefully protest, people do not have the right to "storm the Capitol, carrying firearms, trespass, refuse law enforcement commands or to resort to violence." What Reffitt and others did that day "is the antithesis of patriotism. Not only are they not patriots, they are a direct threat to our democracy, and will be punished as such."

In addition to Stewart Rhodes, eight other Oath Keepers were charged with crimes from that day. At Rhodes' trial, a former member of the Oath Keepers Jason Dolan testified that the group was ready to stop the certification of the 2020 election "by any means necessary." He confirmed the group had stashed weapons in Virginia. "My thinking was you would have portions of federal government that would side with President Trump and parts that would side with President Biden."

Mr. Dolan continued, "I wanted them to hear and feel the anger, the frustration, the rage that I felt. I felt they were betraying the country and I wanted them to know that and to stop doing it."

Another former Oath Keeper Graydon Young testified that he truly thought the assault on the Capitol was going to start a revolution: "I felt like it was a 'Bastille-type' moment in history, like in the French Revolution. I guess I was acting like a traitor, someone acting against my own government."

In the end, a federal jury found four people who were with the Oath Keepers at the Capitol that day – Sandra Parker, Laura Steele, Connie Meggs and William Isaacs – guilty of conspiracy to obstruct the work of Congress, along with several other charges including destruction of government property and conspiracy to prevent members of Congress from discharging their duties.

Rhodes and fellow Oath Keeper Kelly Meggs were convicted of seditious conspiracy, and Stewart, Meggs and three other Oath Keepers were found guilty of obstructing Congress.

Judge Amit Mehta handed Stewart Rhodes an 18-year prison sentence, complete with a domestic terrorism enhancement. During sentencing, Judge Mehta said, "I dare say, Mr. Rhodes – and I never have said this to anyone I have sentenced – you pose an ongoing threat and peril to our democracy and the fabric of this country." He continued:

"A seditious conspiracy, when you take those two concepts and put it together, is among the most serious crimes an American can commit. It is an offense against the government to use force. It is an offense against the people of our country.

It is a series of acts in which you and others committed to use force, including potentially with weapons, against the government of

the United States as it transitioned from one president to another. And what was the motive? You didn't like the new guy.

Let me be clear about one thing to you, Mr. Rhodes, and anybody who else that is listening. In this country we don't paint with a broad brush, and shame on you if you do. Just because somebody supports the former president, it doesn't mean they are a white supremacist, a white nationalist. It just means they voted for the other guy.

What we absolutely cannot have is a group of citizens who – because they did not like the outcome of an election, who did not believe the law was followed as it should be – foment revolution.

It would be one thing, Mr. Rhodes, if after January 6 you had looked at what happened that day and said … that was not a good day for our democracy. But you celebrated it, you thought it was a good thing. Even as you have been incarcerated you have continued to allude to violence as an acceptable means to address grievances."

In June 2024, when Donald Trump was running for re-election, Reuters reported this: "A dark SUV cruised past former President Donald Trump's supporters near his Bedminster golf club in New Jersey on a windy April afternoon. Billowing from the vehicle were three flags: one for the Trump campaign, two others with the initials "PB" – the insignia of the far-right Proud Boys movement."

"Through the open windows, three Proud Boys flashed the "OK" sign with their hands, a gesture often associated with white supremacy and the far right. Trump's fans cheered. Four men dressed in the signature black-and-yellow shirts of the Proud Boys spilled out of the SUV and began glad-handing the crowd like homecoming heroes."

"The Proud Boys are back. Four years after the failed effort to overturn Trump's 2020 electoral defeat, the violent all-male extremist group that led the storming of Congress on Jan. 6, 2021, is rebuilding and regaining strength as Trump campaigns to return to the White House."

But seven months *after* Donald Trump did, in fact, return – and after, on his first day back in the Oval Office, he granted clemency to every single one of the almost 1,600 Capitol rioters, including those who committed assault against law enforcement and those who were

convicted of sedition – far right-wing extremist groups were being relatively quiet.

Why? Enrique Tarrio, who was still affiliated with the Proud Boys, explained it this way: "Things we were doing and talking about in 2017 that were taboo, they're no longer taboo – they're mainstream now. Honestly, what do we have to complain about these days?"

Without question, the right-wing gaslight onslaught before, during, and after the 2020 protests and presidential election – and the Capitol assault on January 6th – worked like a charm. So much so that, even though 7 in 10 Americans didn't believe the 2020 election was "stolen" from Donald Trump three years after the election, 57 percent of Republicans still believed President Biden's election was illegitimate, compared with 2 percent of Democrats and 32 percent of independents.

A poll conducted weeks after the Capitol attacks by the American Enterprise Institute revealed that half of the Republicans polled said that it was "mostly or completely accurate" to say that Antifa "was mostly responsible for the violence that happened in the riots at the U.S. Capitol."

It's no secret why they think that. According to Zignal Labs – a media intelligence software service company – the Antifa narrative appeared 8,700 times throughout social media, cable television and Internet news outlets between the hour of 4pm and 5pm on January 6th alone. One tweet that said "remember, Antifa openly planned to dress as Trump supporters and cause chaos today" received 41,100 likes and shares. On January 6th and 7th, the *MAGA didn't storm the Capitol, Antifa did* theory was mentioned 411,099 times on social media, cable news, and online websites.

The afternoon of January 6th, the conservative news outlet The Washington Times published a story saying that XRVision, a facial recognition company, had identified Antifa members at the U.S. Capitol. This is the story that Matt Gaetz referenced on the House floor.

However, XRVision quickly issued a statement clarifying that its software *did not* identify Antifa members but *did* identify members of neo-Nazi organizations and at least one QAnon supporter. Naturally, Matt Gaetz never corrected his earlier statement.

The XRVision statement said, in part: "Our attorney is in contact with The Washington Times and has instructed them to 'Cease and Desist' from any claims regarding sourcing of XRVision analytics, to retract the current claims, and publish an apology."

Even though The Washington Times removed the story less than 24-hours after it was initially posted, the damage was done. Before it was taken down, the story received 360,000 likes and shares on Facebook alone.

It certainly didn't help matters that white supremacist groups were posing as Antifa groups – both during the 2020 protests and during the Capitol riots on January 6th – to stir the already boiling pot. For example, a white nationalist group named Identity Evropa started multiple Twitter accounts during the summer of 2020, claiming to be national Antifa organizations. These fake accounts repeatedly incited violence in the name of Antifa and the Black Lives Matter movement.

Twitter finally shut down the sham accounts, but the damage, once again, had been done. According to Zignal Labs, within two days of Identity Evropa's bogus accounts releasing tweets intended to stoke violence, Antifa had been mentioned nearly 300,000 times. The next day, Antifa was mentioned almost 1.5 million times. That's an increase of 1,200,000 million. In *one* day.

Others were doing similar things. Perhaps the best illustration of just how crazy and convoluted this got is Adam Rahuba. In 2020, Adam was a food-delivery driver and DJ who lived on his friend's sofa.

At the time, Adam was a self-described "democratic socialist" and Bernie Sanders supporter who took homegrown trolling to an entirely new level – targeting conservative extremists, commentators, and media outlets. Most of Adam's hoaxes incorporated something having to do with MAGA supporters, using Antifa as bait.

For example, he once created a meme that showed photos of the crowd at a Trump rally that said, "Know any MAGA parents? Child Services will investigate any anonymous claim even without proof.

Child Service agents tend to be liberal" – insinuating that people on the far-left were going to unlawfully take the children of Trump supporters away from their families.

Patrick Howley, founder and former editor in chief of the far-right Big League Politics website, retweeted the post to his 42,000 Twitter followers, adding, "Self-identified ANTIFA operatives are filing false reports on Trump-supporting parents. Lots of sources say this is happening – don't let them say this was a joke." Which, of course, was exactly what it was.

For a July 4th ruse, Adam announced that Antifa was having a flag burning "to peacefully protest for abolishing police nationwide." The event was to take place at the Gettysburg Cemetery in Gettysburg, PA.

The Fox News website reported "possible disruptive or even violent actions by the militant left-wing group Antifa at Gettysburg National Park," and conservative media outlet Breitbart News also reported on the story: "Should members of the Antifa movement carry out their plan to desecrate the graves of soldiers who fell at Gettysburg, they will join the Taliban, ISIS, and Turkish Islamists who have launched a campaign to destroy historic sites and desecrate graves of their enemies."

Before Adam announced the "Antifa-organized" July 4th flag-burning event, he published an Internet phone number to make it even more fun. The Washington Post published several of the recorded messages he received: "Y'all going to get to real ….surprised in Gettysburg. I cannot wait to participate, you n------loving f---s." Plus, "I hope someone shoots every one of you motherf-----s. I pray to God in heaven for someone to shoot everyone involved in that event."

Sixteen local and federal law enforcement groups were activated to help monitor the fake event. They all gathered at a local middle school that had been turned into an actual command center. There were 100 Pennsylvania state troopers, mounted officers, and a helicopter.

Hundreds of armed counter protesters, including militiamen and white supremacist groups, showed up to stop the supposed flag-burning madness. When the Antifa crazies never showed up – because, of course, there never really were Antifa crazies coming to this event in the first place – the counter protesters felt victorious, with many

believing their very presence at the event frightened the Antifa flag burners away.

According to Adam, he does this just to screw with people for his own amusement, calling his hijinks "performance art." He told The Washington Post, "I've found myself very annoyed with the rise of right-wing populism. So, I thought I'd do my own thing to push back against them. The message here was that any idiot on the Internet can get a bunch of people to show up at a Union cemetery with a bunch of Confederate flags and Nazi tattoos on their necks that just make them look foolish."

This tactic quickly became a trend among the Gen Z set. For example, in 2017 billboards saying "Birds Aren't Real" started to pop up in several major American cities. Birds Aren't Real followers had a strong presence on social media, plenty of merchandise for sale, and had even protested outside the Twitter headquarters, demanding that the company change its logo (which, of course, was a bird).

On the surface, the Birds Aren't Real people – and its leader, then twenty-three-year-old Peter McIndoe – seemingly believed that regular 'ol birds were drones the U.S. government used to spy on the American people. However, behind the scenes, the movement freely admitted that it was nothing more than a parody, created to shine a light on the absurdity of modern-day misinformation and conspiracy theories.

Claire Chronis, a Birds Aren't Real organizer from Pittsburgh, put it this way: "It's a way to combat troubles in the world that you don't really have other ways of combating. My favorite way to describe the organization is fighting lunacy with lunacy."

It appears we reached Round Three of Donald Trump v. Antifa on September 27, 2025, the day President Trump said he was directing the Pentagon to send troops to Portland, Oregon because the city was "under siege from attack by antifa." Essentially, there had been protesters outside a Portland Immigration and Customs Enforcement

(ICE) facility for over 100 days and he didn't like it – so it was the perfect time to bring back his old nemesis.

Tricia McLaughlin, then the assistant secretary for Public Affairs at the Department of Homeland Security, portrayed the protests as "weeks of violent riots at ICE facilities," which was a blatant mischaracterization of what was happening.

In truth – despite a couple of heated incidents between protesters and counterprotesters – the protests had been largely peaceful.

In fact, federal officers described the scene outside the ICE facility on September 25th this way: "The demonstrator count peaked at approximately 20. The group exhibited low energy throughout the day into the evening."

And on September 26th this way: "Protesters vocally expressed their opposition outside the facility, but no individuals engaged in behavior that prompted intervention from law enforcement."

Internal reports from the week before President Trump ordered troops into Portland show that the only activity involved things like protesters standing in front of cars on the road; playing loud music; "flipping a bird," and a woman using chalk to write on a wall.

Caroline Turco, a lawyer for the city, put it this way to a judge: "We ultimately have a perception versus reality problem. The president's perception is that it's 'World War II out there.' The reality is this is a beautiful city and with a sophisticated police force that can handle the situation."

This was when federal judge Karin Immergut, whom I mentioned earlier, eviscerated the Trump/Vance administration's claims, saying that there was "substantial evidence that protests at the Portland ICE facility were not significantly violent or disruptive in the days – or even weeks – leading up to the president's directive." She continued, "The President's determination was simply untethered to the facts."

The protesters themselves certainly took issue with the Trump/ Vance administration's portrayal of the protests. Dina – the wife of a veteran, a deacon at an area church, and a protest organizer – said she was there because she regarded the deployment of the guard to U.S. cities as a "moral injury" to her husband saying, "We are not going to stand for people following illegal orders." She believes that Ms.

McLaughlin framing the protests as violent "perpetuates the Trump administration's posturing about how we are dangerous protesters."

"We are not," she clarified. "We are average, everyday citizens who are tired of the illegal actions of this administration, and we are out here protesting well within our constitutional rights."

The week before his Portland troop announcement, President Trump signed an Executive Order targeting "Antifa," posting on social media: "I am pleased to inform our many U.S.A. Patriots that I am designating ANTIFA, A SICK, DANGEROUS, RADICAL LEFT DISASTER, AS A MAJOR TERRORIST ORGANIZATION. I will also be strongly recommending that those funding ANTIFA be thoroughly investigated in accordance with the highest legal standards and practices."

However, there are two major problems with his order. First, it describes Antifa as a "domestic terrorist organization," a designation that does not exist under U.S. law. Although federal law gives the government the authority to designate overseas groups as "foreign terrorist organizations," the United States doesn't have an equivalent domestic terrorism law.

The second problem may be an even bigger one. Antifa is not an actual organization at all. There is no leader, no list of members, no bank accounts. Although there are organized, localized chapters – like NYC Antifa and Anti-Fascist Sacramento – Antifa is not some sort of colossal, looming presence that has designated leadership and a hierarchical structure. In fact, lack of structure is something they take pride in. Antifa is more of what some people call an "affinity group."

Former FBI Director Wray underscored this distinction when he told members of the U.S. Congress, under oath, that while Antifa is certainly the "real thing" and that the FBI had led "any number of properly predicated investigations into what we would describe as violent anarchist extremists," what people refer to as Antifa "is not a group or an organization. It's a movement or an ideology."

He continued, "Trying to put a lot of these things into nice, neat, clean buckets is a bit of a challenge, because one of the things that we see more and more in the counterterrorism spaces is people who assemble together in some kind of mishmash… a bunch of different

ideologies. Almost like a salad bar of ideologies, a little bit of this, a little bit of that."

Typically, the main thing that antifascism activists have in common is their distaste for anything racist, alt-right or, of course, fascist, and they generally show up when there are big gatherings of white nationalists. For the most part, antifascism activists send out "calls for action" and then like-minded people just show up.

To refresh your memory, the term *fascism* was created by Benito Mussolini, the Prime Minister of Italy from 1922 until 1943 and the man who established the first one-party fascist state in the world. Mussolini intended for fascism to be a form of authoritarian ultra-nationalism with the hallmarks of dictatorial leadership and the aggressive silencing of all kinds of opposition.

Fascism, as defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica, is a "political ideology and mass movement that dominated many parts of central, southern, and eastern Europe between 1919 and 1945 and that also had adherents in western Europe, the United States, South Africa, Japan, Latin America, and the Middle East."

Essentially, in its purest form, antifascism is literally *an opposition to fascism*.

< One of the more fascinating things about the word "fascist" in today's charged up political environment is that both those on the Right and Left use it to insult their opponents. Its use is all over the map: Charlie Kirk's killer inscribed, "Hey fascist! Catch!" on the bullet that killed him; those on the Left use it to insult Donald Trump, at times comparing him to the most famous fascists; and Donald Trump used it to insult Kamala Harris – "We have a fascist person running who's incompetent. She's a Marxist, communist, fascist, socialist." >

So now, just by reading a little more about what antifascism and Antifa actually are, you can probably guess that the last thing they want is to be somehow linked to an organized political party. But that's exactly what Donald Trump, Bill Barr and their allies from conservative media outlets tried desperately to get people to believe back in 2020 and are trying to get people to believe now.

Beginning in 2020, they all worked hard to conflate Antifa with the Democratic Party, which – although many people associated with

Antifa generally support causes considered to be more left-wing like communism, anarchism and socialism – is pure fiction.

At one point, President Trump even flat out said, "In my book, it's virtually part of (the Democratic) campaign, Antifa." Bill Barr told Mark Levin that, with Antifa, the United States is grappling with a new form of "urban guerrilla warfare" driven by the Left's "lust for power."

They also worked hard to merge Antifa and the Black Lives Matter movement in an obvious attempt to position Antifa as a "black" organization… the perfect dog whistle for the racists in their ranks… but, again, is pure fiction.

It's not hard to understand why they tried this last one. Antifa is the perfect boogeyman for white supremacist groups and their champions to use, because the entire storyline feeds directly into the false narrative that already plays loudly in their heads: Antifa people, who are "probably black," are crazies from the radical left who defend the wicked Black Lives Matter zealots. They are scary terrorists who are devoted to the Democratic Party and fight for their Socialist agenda, and are funded by people like the evil George Soros, blah blah blah…

I don't bring any of this up to defend Antifa, or to suggest that groups and individuals associated with Antifa are never violent or destructive. They most certainly can be.

In June 2016, Antifa and other protesters showed up at a neo-Nazi rally in Sacramento, California. In the end, at least eight people – including Antifa activists – were injured, including five who were stabbed.

In 2017, Antifa members confronted alt-right protestors at the University of California, Berkeley, using bricks, pipes, hammers and homemade incendiary devices. In Charlottesville, Virginia that same year, Antifa activists confronted alt-right demonstrators with clubs, shields, fists, chemical irritants, and balloons filled with paint and ink.

Some Antifa extremists have gone rogue and taken independent action. In July 2019, a self-proclaimed Antifa supporter attacked a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility in Tacoma, Washington with an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle and attempted to ignite a 500-gallon propane tank. He was killed by police.

Between 1994 and 2020, far right and white supremacist groups were found to be responsible for at least 329 murders, according to a database administered by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a bipartisan, nonprofit policy research organization. During that time, Antifa and other anti-fascists groups were not found to be responsible for any.

Unfortunately, that streak ended on August 29, 2020, when a self-identified Antifa supporter shot and killed Aaron "Jay" Danielson, a member of the far-right group Patriot Prayer. Again, the killer was later killed by federal agents.

< Note: More recently, there have been serious criminal cases involving defendants the Justice Department describes as affiliated with Antifa – although the defendants dispute that characterization.

In March 2026, a federal jury in Texas convicted nine defendants in connection with a 2025 attack outside the Prairieland ICE Detention Center. One was convicted of attempted murder for shooting a police officer; others were convicted of crimes including providing material support to terrorists, rioting and explosives-related offenses. Seven additional defendants had already pleaded guilty to providing material support to terrorists.

DOJ called them members of a "North Texas Antifa Cell," but defense attorneys denied that affiliation, arguing that Antifa is a decentralized movement rather than an organization their clients belonged to.

Separately, 15 members and associates of Direct Action Minnesota – which prosecutors say has ties to local Antifa groups – were charged in June with conspiring to impede or injure federal officers. Those defendants have been charged, not convicted, and the alleged Antifa affiliation is disputed. >

I only bring all this up for three reasons:

1. To show the real-world consequences of getting basic facts wrong.
2. So that we never allow *anyone* to distract us from our real challenges with false narratives. These issues are difficult enough to solve without having to plow through thorns of deceit.
3. So that we can begin to recognize the methods and strategies people use to try to manipulate and exploit us.

It's always better to know *exactly* who the enemy is, because then you know *exactly* who and what you are fighting against. As Sun Tzu said in The Art of War, "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles."

This cannot be said enough: The truth is that Antifa activists were not the ones inciting violence and mayhem during the social justice protests or at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th. *Far-right extremists and white nationalist groups were.* We cannot allow *anyone* to *ever* take the heat off these groups. They are incredibly dangerous and destructive to this nation, not just in terms of violent physical threats, but because of the division and hate they fuel.

Learn more about 1787's Plan of Action for Domestic Terrorism on p. 396 of the Policy Guide.

At the risk of sounding super annoying, I'm going to put my management consultant hat on and tell you about this thing called the *Theory of Constraints*. Essentially, the Theory of Constraints says that it's critical to first identity the factors (i.e., constraints) that keep us from achieving an objective, then systematically remove or improve those constraints until they no longer limit us from achieving that goal.

It's important to keep in mind that if we identify the wrong constraint and work on *that* instead of the *actual* constraint, we could likely make the entire situation worse.

Take Jack, for instance. Jack owns a car dealership and sells lots and lots of cars, but he never seems to have enough money to pay his bills at the end of the month. The only thing he can think of is that he must not be selling enough cars. He needs to sell even more!!

So, Jack orders twice the number of cars as usual from his wholesale car suppliers and announces a contest among his salespeople to motivate them to sell every single one of them. Jack's salespeople do great! They sell every car on the lot!! However, in the weeks following the contest, Jack had even less money in the bank than he did before.

What Jack failed to realize is that he identified the wrong constraint. The problem was never that Jack was selling too few cars. The problem was that he had to pay his wholesale car suppliers for the cars *before* he actually sold them to his customers. In other words, the terms of Jack's Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivable were not aligned correctly, and *that* was the constraint. Since Jack's problem was cash flow, it was made far worse when he ordered even more cars because now, he owed *even more* money upfront.

The Theory of Constraints can be instructive in many areas of public policy, but it's especially important in this discussion because we're not talking about cars, we're talking about what could be life and death. We cannot allow *anyone* to highjack the domestic terrorism debate or try to gaslight us into misidentifying the real problem. If we do, January 6th will be just the beginning of our troubles.

This is not the first time far-right extremist groups have been protected by a misidentified constraint. For decades, the government and law enforcement agencies didn't give the rising threat of these groups the attention it demanded, focusing instead on Islamic extremists.

… and then people exploited it. For example, in a 2017 interview, British-Hungarian-American hard-right radio personality turned White House Deputy Assistant to President Trump Sebastian Gorka, said there "had never been a serious attack or a serious plot (in the United States) that was unconnected from ISIS or al-Qaeda."

When, in response, someone cited the Oklahoma City bombing – where Timothy McVeigh, a white man, killed 168 people at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in 1995, a horrific crime that remains the

deadliest act of domestic terrorism in American history – Gorka responded, "It's this constant 'Oh, it's the white man. It's the white supremacists. That's the problem.' No, it isn't."

His wife Katharine then chimed in and said that the threat of domestic terrorism would be solved if the United States simply closed "radical mosques" and barred Al Jazeera from broadcasting.

This is gaslighting at its finest. In truth, analysis by the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security at Duke University for the timeframe 2001-2020 found that "the number of fatalities caused by acts of violent extremism by Muslim-Americans in *19 years* was about the same as the number of murders that took place *every three days* in the United States."

Between 2021 and 2023, the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) Center on Extremism "tracked only six Islamist-related terror incidents in the U.S., compared to 30 incidents with far-right perpetrators within that same timeframe. During these years, U.S. authorities still regularly made arrests linked to Islamist extremism, but most of these involved people providing material support, such as money, to terrorist groups abroad, or attempting to travel outside the U.S. to join such groups."

The next year, they reported that "all the extremist-related murders in 2024 were committed by right-wing extremists of various kinds, with eight of the 13 killings involving white supremacists and the remaining five having connections to far-right anti-government extremists."

In a September 11, 2025 report, Alex Nowrasteh, the vice president for economic and social policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute, found that, since January 1, 2020, terrorist attacks accounted for about 0.07 percent of all homicides on U.S. soil: "Right-wing terrorists accounted for over half of those murders, Islamists for 21 percent, left-wingers for 22 percent, and 1 percent had unknown or other motivations."

< The percentage of murders committed by Islamist extremists jumped considerably between 2024 and the beginning of 2025 because of the deadly vehicular terrorist attack in New Orleans on New Year's Day 2025, an attack that killed fourteen people. This was the first mass

killing incident by an Islamist extremist since an attack that killed eight people with a truck on a bike path in Manhattan on Halloween 2017. >

It's important we keep an eye on this narrative, because Sebastian Gorka and his hardcore views are back on the scene. He is now Deputy Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Counterterrorism in the Trump/Vance Administration's National Security Council. When announcing Gorka's new appointment, Donald Trump described him as a "tireless advocate for the America First Agenda and the MAGA Movement."

Just so you know, Sebastian showed up to President Trump's first inaugural ball wearing the honorary medal of Vitezi Rend, a Hungarian nationalist organization that the U.S. State Department listed as a group of "organizations under the direction of the Nazi government of Germany" during World War II.

He denies ever being a member of the group and that he only wears the medal to honor his late father, but NBC News traveled to Hungary to investigate the matter and spoke to several members who proudly reported that Gorka was a well-known member of the group.

Andras Heisler, the Hungarian vice-president of the New York-based World Jewish Congress, told the journalists that wearing the medal wasn't "a good message for a democratic society" because members of Vitezi Rend were "likely complicit in the murder of some of the hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews toward the end of World War II."

The Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect, an American civil-rights group, put it less delicately: "How many ducks in the Trump White House must walk, talk and quack antisemitically before our country wakes up and sees the greater problem? Who among us wears a medal of a Nazi-sympathetic organization to remember loved ones?"

Trying to protect far-right extremist groups by randomly throwing out baseless claims about ISIS or al-Qaeda is just one angle these guys try. Throughout the years, many courageous people tried hard to raise the alarm regarding these groups, but their efforts were at best ignored and at worst sabotaged.

In 2009 – during the Obama administration – Daryl Johnson, a senior analyst for domestic terrorism at the U.S. Department of

Homeland Security, wrote a private intelligence report specifically for members of law enforcement. However, conservative media outlets leaked Johnson's report, causing a huge uproar because Johnson dared to use the term "right-wing extremism." His report also warned that American military veterans could be prime targets for domestic extremist recruitment.

Republicans went berserk, demanding an apology on behalf of veterans and demanding Johnson be fired. Following the firestorm, then DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano apologized for elements of the report, then withdrew it altogether. Within a year, Johnson's entire department was dismantled and work on the threat of domestic terrorism came to a screeching halt.

Toward the end of the Obama administration, however, the Department of Homeland Security awarded grants to groups that countered violent extremism – like those that helped people who wanted to leave neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups or tried to prevent Americans from embracing these groups in the first place. But at the very beginning of the first Trump administration those grants were cancelled.

As a result of years of turning a blind eye, white supremacy – as terrorism scholar John Horgan, a Distinguished University Professor of Psychology at Georgia State University put it – became "far more dispersed and deeply ingrained ideology in Western society." Over the long-term, he fears "it will be far harder to defeat than jihadism."

This is super frustrating – and completely preventable – because the evidence has been there for anyone to see… if they *cared to* or, more accurately, if they *wanted* to. Even though people tried hard to squash all this, there was still plenty of evidence that made it to the light of day. People in the first Trump administration who didn't see it were either acting incompetently or just flat out didn't want to.

† In 2017, in a bulletin titled *White Supremacists Extremism Poses Persistent Threat of Lethal Violence*, the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI admitted far-right extremists, particularly white supremacists, were indeed a huge problem.

That was a start but, still, in March 2020, DOJ Inspector General Michael Horowitz issued a report that said the FBI had "not taken sufficient action" in regard to 'homegrown violent extremists.' Nearly 40 percent of counterterrorism assessments went unaddressed for 18 months after deficiencies were known to the FBI."

His report continued, "Since September 11, 2001, homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) have carried out over 20 attacks in the United States, some of which occurred after the FBI closed a counterterrorism investigation or assessment on the individual." Between 2009 and 2017 "at least six attacks committed in the United States were by individuals who the FBI had previously assessed or investigated."

† In September 2020, FBI Director Wray told Congress, under oath: "Within the domestic terrorism bucket, the category as a whole, racially motivated violent extremism is, I think, the biggest bucket within that larger group. And within the racially motivated violent extremist bucket, people subscribing to some kind of white supremacist-type ideology is certainly the biggest chunk of that."

† The following month, the FBI charged six people affiliated with two white supremacist, neo-Nazi groups – named Atomwaffen Division and The Base – for a thwarted plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Federal prosecutors also charged 13 people for plotting to start a "civil war" with the purpose of overthrowing the U.S. government.

† Also in September 2020, acting deputy secretary of the Department of Homeland Security in the first Trump administration Ken Cuccinelli told Congress, "When white supremacists act as terrorists, more people per incident are killed," and then his boss, acting director of the Department of Homeland Security Chad Wolf, told members of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee that white supremacists presented "the most persistent and lethal threat when we talk about domestic violent extremists."

- That same month, The Wall Street Journal reported that: "White supremacists were responsible for the most ideologically inspired extremist homicides in recent years, overtaking salafist and jihadist killings in the U.S., according to the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino."

- In its annual report for 2020 titled *2020 Trends in Terrorism: From ISIS Fragmentation to Lone-Actor Attacks*, the United States Institute of Peace – a federal institution founded by Congress, tasked with promoting conflict resolution and prevention worldwide – said this:

  "The last few years have seen a dramatic increase in the threat presented by the far right. There has been a 250 percent increase in far-right terrorist incidents since 2014. In Western countries, far-right extremism now accounts for 46 percent of attacks and 82 percent of deaths from terrorist attacks."

  The rise in far-right terrorism is part of a broader rise in political violence (including violent demonstrations and riots) in the West. This rise in political violence doesn't happen in a vacuum but is rather symptomatic of wider trends. Increasing political polarization and indications of the increased acceptability of political violence across the political spectrum in the United States present a foreboding picture of the future."

  Unless these trends are addressed, and efforts to remedy the social and political cleavages that have fueled their rise, they could lay the foundations for a further increase in political violence around the globe, particularly if coupled with the continued politicization and mainstreaming of far-right extremist views."

The most heartbreaking part of this threat not being taken as seriously as it should have is that, if it had been, people in law enforcement on all levels may have paid more attention to intel they received before January 6th, greatly diminishing the insurrection if not stopping it altogether.

A 2023 report by the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee's majority staff, titled *Planned in*

Plain Sight, said that, even though FBI agents were being briefed about potential violence planned for January 6th – like information they received on December 26, 2000 that warned there were people coming to the Capitol whose "plan is to literally kill people" – many didn't believe the warnings because they "were biased toward discounting the possibility of such an unprecedented event."

As Senator Gary Peters (D-MI), the chairman of the committee, put it, "The failure was largely a failure of imagination, to see threats that the Capitol could be breached as credible, despite the fact that the threats were shared publicly and in such high volume and in a variety of ways. These agencies repeatedly downplayed the threat and failed to sound the alarm."

The report found that the FBI and DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis "failed to fully and accurately assess the severity of the threat identified by that intelligence, and formally disseminate guidance to their law enforcement partners with sufficient urgency and alarm to enable those partners to prepare for the violence that ultimately occurred on January 6th."

The report highlighted the many different types of warnings the FBI received, from nongovernmental organizations that track extremist activity online *to* the public *to* its own field offices. The warnings included a situational information report from the FBI's Norfolk office one day before the assault that relayed there was "an online thread that discussed specific calls for violence, stating 'Be ready to fight. Congress needs to hear glass breaking, doors being kicked in, and blood from their BLM and Pantifa < a derogatory term for Antifa > slave soldiers being spilled. Get violent. Stop calling this a march, or rally, or a protest. Go there ready for war. We get our President or we die. NOTHING else will achieve this goal."

There was also a notice from the New Orleans field office that warned of an armed, Quick Reaction Force that had been formed in Northern Virginia. This report – which was also sent to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the Department of Homeland Security; the U.S. Justice Department; the National Security Agency; and the U.S. State Department – cautioned that these militia members planned to bring "mace, flashlights, body armor, and head

protection," since they were "aware of the prohibition on firearms in Washington, District of Columbia."

In December 2024, Inspector General Michael Horowitz of the U.S. Justice Department released report titled *A Review of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Handling of Its Confidential Human Sources and Intelligence Collection Efforts in the Lead Up to the January 6, 2021 Electoral Certification.*

His investigation found that, "while the FBI undertook significant efforts to identify domestic terrorism subjects who planned to travel to the Capital region on January 6 and to prepare to support its law enforcement partners on January 6 if needed, the FBI did not take a step that could have helped the FBI and its law enforcement partners with their preparations in advance of January 6."

He continued, "Specifically, the FBI did not canvass its field offices in advance of January 6, 2021, to identify any intelligence, including [informant] reporting, about potential threats to the January 6 Electoral Certification."

This ended up being a major issue because, at the time, the FBI had at least four informants providing information on the Proud Boys and their leader, Enrique Tarrio. Although what is referred to in the report as "Field Office 4" had an informant that was "well placed with excellent access," a critical piece of information the informant provided – that the Proud Boys had been instructed to "face the full force of their defense and attacks which could lead to death...we will be the heavy weight line and shield wall breakers to allow our main forces in" – the field agent in Field Office 4 simply documented the report without circulating it among the other field offices.

< Note: Since January 6th, there has been a conspiracy theory championed by Donald Trump and his allies that claims the FBI "secretly placed" 274 agents into the crowd of rioters who stormed the Capitol to intentionally incite chaos.

The inspector general's report refutes this, saying they "found no evidence in the materials we reviewed or the testimony we received showing or suggesting that the FBI had undercover employees in the various protest crowds, or at the Capitol, on January 6."

Some FBI informants went to Washington, D.C. that day, but not at the request of the agency. Of the 26 FBI informants that were in Washington that day, "four entered the Capitol during the riot; an additional 13 entered the restricted area around the Capitol, which was a security perimeter established in preparation for the January 6 Electoral Certification; and nine neither entered a restricted area nor entered the Capitol or otherwise engaged in illegal activity."

In a shocking move, even Kash Patel – the uber-MAGA loyalist and current director of the FBI who once shamelessly spread this ridiculous FBI conspiracy theory, saying "strange agitators" at the Capitol had "stirred up the crowd to breach the Capitol beforehand," and that "all the signs of a cover-up are on full display" – eventually publicly rejected it. >

Now that we are *finally* paying attention… thank God… we can't let up on domestic terrorism because the threats persist from the Right and are growing from the Left.

As I've repeatedly made clear, violence from the far-right has been the most problematic for quite some time. A 2024 report from the National Institute of Justice – the research, evaluation, and technology agency of the U.S. Department of Justice – summed it up this way: "Militant, nationalistic, white supremacist violent extremism has increased in the United States. In fact, the number of far-right attacks continues to outpace all other types of terrorism and domestic violent extremism. Since 1990, far-right extremists have committed far more ideologically motivated homicides than far-left or radical Islamist extremists." < Just FYI, the Trump/Vance administration removed this report from all federal websites after Charlie Kirk's murder – surprise, surprise – so it wouldn't contradict *the violence is coming only from the Left* b.s. narrative. >

According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, between January 1994 and May 2020, "right-wing terrorists perpetrated the majority – 57 percent – of all attacks and plots during this period, particularly those who were white supremacists, anti-government extremists, and involuntary celibates (or incels). In comparison, left-wing extremists orchestrated 25 percent of the incidents during this

period, followed by 15 percent from religious terrorists, 3 percent from ethno-nationalists, and 0.7 percent from terrorists with other motives."

A 2021 analysis of the Center's data by The Washington Post revealed that: "Domestic terrorism incidents have soared to new highs in the United States, driven chiefly by white-supremacist, anti-Muslim and anti-government extremists on the far right. The surge reflects a growing threat from homegrown terrorism not seen in a quarter-century, with right-wing extremist attacks and plots greatly eclipsing those from the far left."

That said, the Center's 2024 Global Terrorism Threat Assessment included the growing threat from the Left. It reiterated, once again, that "violent far-right perpetrators, such as white supremacists, anti-government extremists and violent misogynists, have committed the most U.S. terrorist attacks in recent years." But this time added, "Violent far-left perpetrators such as antifascist extremists, anarchists and violent environmentalists have also orchestrated a growing percentage of terrorist attacks."

The threat extends to every aspect of our lives. In the Department of Homeland Security's 2025 Homeland Threat Assessment, the agency warns: "Over the last year, violent actors with a range of motivations and some domestic violent extremism (DVEs), particularly racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists driven by a belief in the superiority of the white race and accelerationism, have encouraged sabotage or attacks against the energy, communications, and healthcare and public health (HPH) sectors, as well as other critical infrastructure sectors."

Plus, a new concern is rapidly developing. A report released by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in March 2021 said that "[Domestic Violent Extremist] attackers often radicalize independently by consuming violent extremist material online and mobilize without direction from a violent extremist organization, making detection and disruption difficult."

The report underscored that white supremacists have "the most persistent and concerning transnational connections because individuals with similar ideological beliefs exist outside of the United States." It also revealed that some white supremacists had already "traveled

abroad to network with like-minded individuals," and warned that these groups may get "escalating support from persons in the United States or abroad."

Underscoring the point, the Center for Strategic and International Studies' 2024 Global Terrorism Threat Assessment warns: "The emergence of the United States as an exporter of violent extremism will reshape the terrorist landscape, not only in North America but also farther abroad."

Beyond all this, one of the most important reasons we can't let up is the fact that – as Daryl Johnson warned in 2009 and the FBI's Counterterrorism Policy Directive and Policy Guide finally confirmed – "domestic terrorism investigations focused on militia extremists, white supremacist extremists, and sovereign citizen extremists often have identified active links to law enforcement officers."

In fact, at least 81 active-duty U.S. military and U.S. veterans faced charges because of the U.S. Capitol riot. These included people like former FBI official and Navy intelligence officer Thomas Caldwell, who gave military-style advice and organized training sessions for the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and Three Percenters. Caldwell even started a "death list" of his enemies, saying he would get rid of them by "killing them, shooting them, and mutilating their corpses to use them as shields."

… and people like retired Lieutenant Colonel Larry Brock, Jr. an Air Force Academy graduate and combat veteran, who, after the election, told his Facebook audience that the United States was "now under occupation by a hostile governing force." He went on to say that he saw "no distinction between a group of Americans seizing power and governing with complete disregard to the Constitution and an invading force of Chinese communists accomplishing the same objective." He vowed to protect America "against all enemies foreign and domestic."

Reveal from The Center for Investigative Reporting found, in an investigation that led to over 50 internal departmental investigations, that "hundreds of active-duty and retired law enforcement officers from across the United States are members of Confederate, anti-Islam, misogynistic or anti-government militia groups on Facebook… Almost

150 of the officers they found are involved with violent anti-government groups such as the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters."

As reported jointly by Buzz Feed and Injustice Watch, The Plain View Project – launched by Philadelphia lawyer Emily Baker-White – "examined the accounts of about 2,900 officers from eight departments across the country and an additional 600 retired officers from those same departments. She compiled posts that represented troubling conduct in a database that is replete with racist imagery and memes, and in some cases long, vitriolic exchanges involving multiple officers."

"The project sought to compile posts, comments, and other public activity that could undermine public trust in the police and reinforce the views of critics, especially in minority communities, that the police are not there to protect them. Of the pages of officers whom the Plain View researchers could positively identify, about 1 in 5 of the current officers, and 2 in 5 of the retired officers, made public posts or comments that met that threshold – typically by displaying bias, applauding violence, scoffing at due process, or using dehumanizing language. The officers mocked Mexicans, women, and black people, celebrated the Confederate flag, and showed a man wearing a kaffiyeh scarf in the crosshairs of a gun."

And, lest we forget, yet another reason we can't let up is that many of the players from 2020 – like Donald Trump and Sebastian Gorka – are now back in charge, supercharged.

This, along with all the new guys. In his book, American Crusade, U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth wrote that, if a Democrat won the 2024 election, there would be "irreconcilable differences between the Left and the Right in America leading to perpetual conflict that cannot be resolved through the political process."

Among the consequences of a Democratic win would be that "America will decline and die. A national divorce will ensue. Outnumbered freedom lovers will fight back… the military and police, both bastions of freedom-loving patriots, will be forced to make a choice. It will not be good. Yes, there will be some form of civil war. It's a horrific scenario that nobody wants but would be difficult to avoid."

Please, please, please never forget that those words were written by the United States Secretary of Defense.

Gaslighting Example Three: The Total Distortion of Economic Accomplishments

The misinformation spread about the economic performance of Donald Trump's first presidential administration drives me bananas. Most politicians – and don't kid yourself Republicans, Donald Trump IS most certainly a politician – stretch the truth to a certain degree, but this guy takes it to an artform.

Obviously, political dishonesty did not start with Donald Trump. In politics, deceit is called "spin," which makes it seem more harmless than it really is. But spin is not harmless. It's propaganda. Spin is not excusable just because it's come to be expected in American politics. In truth, it's just another lie.

The false narrative about Donald Trump's economic record drives me nuts for three reasons: 1) It's just flat wrong for people with power and a platform – whether it be the White House briefing room, a campaign debate, or a cable news channel – to bald-face lie to the American people and not be held accountable for it; 2) Americans did not have accurate information when they went to the polls in 2024 (which is actually the responsibility/fault of the opposing campaign, but that's a gripe for another day); and 3) We have to start operating from a place of truth.

Please, America. Let's please at least agree on *that*. I know I sound like a broken record, but as a civil society we ***must*** get back to a place where we can, at a minimum, agree on a basic set of facts. Whatever we decide to ***do*** about that set of facts is an entirely different issue, but we must ***start from a place of truth***.

To hear Donald Trump, his posse, and Fox News tell it, during the first Trump administration the U.S. economy was stronger than ever before. Best! Economy! Ever!

During the first go-round, President Trump and his parrots were constantly saying things like, “In many ways this is the greatest economy in the HISTORY of America” and “It’s said now that our economy is the strongest it’s ever been in the history of our country, and you just have to take a look at the numbers” and “We have the best economy the country’s ever had and it’s getting better.” …and this false narrative continued through the 2024 campaign.

In their 2016 fairytale, Donald Trump, the genius financial mastermind, inherited a wrecked economy in recession. Even though Satan himself, President Barack Obama, had run the economy into the ground, Donald John Trump miraculously turned it around! Bigly!

This is just not true. I’m sorry, Republicans, but it’s just not. In fact, the economy looked more like it was being run by a guy whose companies have filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection six different times – especially if you factor in what happened with Covid-19.

Although the United States was in the depths of the Great Recession when Barack Obama took office, we pulled out of it by June 2009, five months after he was inaugurated.

Conversely, the U.S. plowed right into a recession in February 2020, three years *after* Donald Trump took office. This recession – the worst since the Great Depression – ended 128 months of economic expansion, the longest uninterrupted run in U.S. history.

The truth is this: The economy that Donald Trump inherited had already been expanding for more than seven years. Unemployment had fallen to less than 5 percent, employers had been adding jobs for years, and output and incomes were growing.

< Note: I’m going to leave 2020 out of this entire discussion because, thanks to the pandemic, the entire year is an outlier. This is a really nice thing for me to do because, as you can imagine, including 2020 would make things look infinitely worse for DJT. >

None of this is my opinion. Everything I say here is backed up by facts released by the United States government… a government that Donald Trump has already run for six years, by the way.

I’m certain The Donald will claim this is all *Fake News*! But if he does, he will just be admitting that he is a terrible executive because, if these numbers that came straight from the United States government

during his time in office are inaccurate, that happened on *his* watch. He loses either way.

Although, come to think of it, maybe he did learn something in his first term because these types of underperforming but accurate numbers are the very reason he has fired, or tried to fire, any person in his second administration who dared release them – including Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Commissioner Erika McEntarfer. He later nominated E.J. Antoni, a longtime critic of BLS methodology, to replace her – big surprise. Antoni had questioned the reliability of the agency's monthly employment estimates and even suggested temporarily suspending the monthly jobs report (Trump ultimately withdrew Antoni's nomination in September 2025). Now, the Trump/Vance administration is reportedly trying to create a report that questions *all* BLS jobs data, past and present. Again, big surprise.

When he fired McEntarfer, President Trump said that "important numbers like this must be fair and accurate, they can't be manipulated for political purposes." … which, of course, is exactly what he is doing.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measures the total value of all final goods and services produced in the United States. According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), nominal U.S. GDP grew from roughly $14.478 trillion in 2009, the year President Obama took office, to $21.54 trillion in 2019 – an increase of nearly 50 percent.

GDP is an interesting number to look at, but the GDP *growth rate* (i.e., the percent change from the preceding period in real Gross Domestic Product) is maybe a better indicator of the nation's overall economic health because it measures how *fast* the economy is growing.

During the first three years of Donald Trump's first presidency, real GDP grew 2.5 percent in 2017, 3.0 percent in 2018, and 2.6 percent in 2019. < Again, I'm excluding 2020. >

By this measure, year-over-year economic growth during President Trump's first three years – an average of about 2.7 percent – was just a little higher than during President Obama's final three years, when growth averaged about 2.4 percent.

Annual GDP growth is important, but quarterly growth can provide a more detailed picture. During Donald Trump's first three years in

office, real GDP growth exceeded 3 percent in five quarters, reaching 3.2 percent, 4.6 percent, 3.3 percent, 3.4 percent, and 4.8 percent.

During President Obama's first term, real GDP growth exceeded 3 percent in five quarters: 4.4 percent, 3.9 percent, 3.1 percent, 4.6 percent, and 3.4 percent. Growth exceeded *4 percent twice*. During Obama's second term, real GDP growth exceeded 3 percent in six quarters: 4.0 percent, 3.5 percent, 3.5 percent, 5.3 percent, 5.0 percent, and 3.6 percent. Growth reached at least *5 percent twice*.

To put Donald Trump's first-term economic performance into broader historical perspective, consider annual real GDP growth during previous presidencies:

- During John F. Kennedy's shortened presidency, annual real GDP growth reached 6.1 percent and 4.4 percent.
- During Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency, growth reached 5.8 percent, 6.5 percent, 6.6 percent, and 4.9 percent.
- During Richard Nixon's presidency, growth reached 3.1 percent, 3.3 percent, 5.3 percent, and 5.6 percent.
- During Gerald Ford's shortened presidency, growth reached 5.4 percent.
- During Jimmy Carter's presidency, growth reached 4.6 percent, 5.5 percent, and 3.2 percent.
- During the Reagan administration, annual real GDP growth exceeded 3 percent in six of eight years. Four of those years exceeded 4 percent, and growth reached 7.2 percent in 1984.
- During George H.W. Bush's presidency, annual growth exceeded 3 percent in two calendar years, reaching 3.7 percent in 1989 and 3.5 percent in 1992.
- During the Clinton administration, annual growth exceeded 3 percent in six of eight years. It reached 4 percent or higher in five of those years.

† During George W. Bush's presidency, annual growth exceeded 3 percent twice, reaching 3.8 percent in 2004 and 3.5 percent in 2005.

Okay, I have never used the word "percent" so much in my life, but I just wanted to show you that Donald Trump's GDP numbers don't even come close to being The! Best! Ever!

And it's important to remember that Donald's relatively modest growth occurred despite significant fiscal stimulus. Congress enacted sweeping tax cuts in 2017, followed by major increases in federal spending in 2018. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) concluded that these policies boosted economic growth in the short term… yet annual real GDP growth during his first three years *still* averaged only about 2.7 percent. (more on this in Chapter Three)

Next up, the stock market. Throughout his presidency, Donald loved to hype the hot stock market. Best! Stock Market! Ever!

My belief is that, while presidential policies and political events can certainly create short-term waves in the stock market – and some policies can have significant longer-term effects on particular industries – in the long run, stock market performance has little to do with who happens to be sitting in the White House.

That said, based on the way he's always running his mouth about it, Donald sure doesn't seem to share my belief. So, in that spirit: I hate to break it to him, but stock market returns during his first term ranked 10th when compared to other presidents. Yes, 10th.

An analysis by MeasuringWorth revealed Donald Trump's first-term stock market performance ranked 10th among presidential terms since 1900. Measuring the Dow Jones Industrial Average from inauguration to inauguration, the market grew at an annualized rate of 11.99 percent during Trump's first term.

That put him behind the terms of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge, Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan's second term, Barack Obama's first term, Dwight Eisenhower's first term, the Harding/ Coolidge term, Harry Truman, and Woodrow Wilson's first term.

During the 2020 presidential election, Donald loved to say things like "if [Biden] is elected, the market will crash;" that a Biden

presidency would be the "biggest single headwind [to the stock market];" and, in a tweet, "If you want your 401k's and stocks, which are getting close to an all-time high (NASDAQ is already there), to disintegrate and disappear, vote for the Radical Left Do Nothing Democrats and Corrupt Joe Biden."

However, from the 2020 election through President Biden's inauguration, the S&P 500 rose more than 14 percent – more than twice the roughly 6 percent gain during the comparable period following Donald Trump's election four years earlier. In fact, the election-to-inauguration gain was the strongest for an incoming president since Herbert Hoover.

The market continued to climb in 2021. That year, the S&P 500 gained 26.9 percent, the Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 18.7 percent, and the Nasdaq Composite gained 21.4 percent. Including dividends, the S&P 500's total return was approximately 28.7 percent.

Ironically – even though they aren't necessarily responsible for it – the stock market usually does much better under Democratic presidents. I know this is counterintuitive given what the two parties supposedly represent, but it's true. According to an analysis by CFRA Research, from 1945 through 2020 the S&P 500 gained an average of 11.2 percent annually under Democratic presidents, compared with 6.9 percent under Republican presidents.

Next up, jobs. Until Covid-19 hit, Donald Trump loved to talk about how many jobs he was creating. The! Best! Jobs! Ever!

The economy did add millions of jobs during Trump's first three years in office. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' current data, nonfarm payroll employment increased by approximately 2.1 million in 2017, 2.3 million in 2018, and 2 million in 2019.

But job growth was stronger during each of President Obama's final three years in office. Approximately 3 million jobs were added in 2014, 2.7 million in 2015, and 2.3 million in 2016.

Altogether, about 8 million jobs were added during Obama's final three years, compared with about 6.4 million during Trump's first three – a difference of roughly 1.65 million jobs. Put another way, the economy added an average of about 223,000 jobs per month during

Obama's final three years, compared with about 177,000 per month during Trump's first three.

The Biden years produced much larger raw employment gains. From January 2021 to January 2025, nonfarm payroll employment increased by approximately 15.4 million jobs – an average of roughly 321,000 per month. But remember, Biden took office while the economy was still recovering from the enormous job losses caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, so a substantial portion of those gains represented the restoration of jobs lost during the pandemic rather than entirely new employment above the pre-pandemic peak. Even so, employment eventually moved well beyond its pre-pandemic level.

Incidentally, much has been said about the low unemployment rate during Donald Trump's tenure. It's true that unemployment fell to 3.5 percent in 2019 – the lowest level in nearly fifty years. But Trump inherited a rate of just 4.7 percent, down from 10 percent in 2009 after years of steady decline. Covid-19 abruptly reversed that progress. When President Biden took office in January 2021, unemployment stood at 6.4 percent. It subsequently fell to 3.4 percent in 2023 – slightly below Trump's pre-pandemic low and the lowest rate since 1969 – before rising to 4 percent by January 2025.

Also, a quick word about Donald Trump's claims of working "miracles" in the manufacturing sector during his first term as president. This is just not true.

During his failed 2020 reelection campaign, he told the crowd at a Michigan rally, "You better vote for me, I got you so many damn car plants. And we're going to bring you a lot more!" Nope. Michigan's manufacturing sector lost 66,500 workers from July 2019 to 2020 alone. As you can see from the dates, this was already happening *before* the pandemic.

On the 2020 campaign trail in Ohio, Donald said, "Over the last six months, we've witnessed one manufacturing miracle after another." Nope. Ohio's manufacturing sector lost 48,000 workers from July 2019 to 2020. Even before the pandemic, manufacturing nationwide was struggling. Manufacturing output declined in both the first and second quarters of 2019 and fell 1.3 percent for the year.

The PMI, or the Purchasing Managers' Index – the most common way to measure the health of manufacturing – plummeted. In December 2019, another popular gauge of the manufacturing sector's health – a survey of purchasing managers from the Institute for Supply Management – fell to its lowest level since the Great Recession.

But more important than numbers on a page, there is also real-world examples. One must look no further than the 100-foot-tall glass sphere in the middle of Mount Pleasant, Wisconsin for proof of Donald Trump's failure to deliver on the dazzling manufacturing promises he boisterously made.

In 2017, the Taiwanese manufacturer announced plans for a $10 billion manufacturing complex that was eventually supposed to employ 13,000 people.

Local and state governments ultimately spent hundreds of millions of dollars acquiring land and building infrastructure for the project. By 2023, Mount Pleasant was carrying debt equal to roughly 570 percent of its annual revenue. As a bonus, around 100 homeowners were forced to move to make way for the project, some under the threat of eminent domain.

But far from the "Eighth Wonder of the World" – which is what Donald called it as he stood (with big shovel in hand) beside Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and Foxconn's chairman at the groundbreaking – by the end of 2024, Wisconsin officials had verified 1,242 Foxconn jobs and about $717 million in eligible investment – a fraction of the original commitment.

< For a while, the glass globe was advertised as a place that could be rented for private events and banquets, but in 2025 Foxconn announced a $569 million expansion in that could bring its Wisconsin workforce to more than 2,600 by the end of 2029. Microsoft has also taken over portions of the land originally intended for Foxconn and is developing a multibillion-dollar AI data-center campus there. >

That's some project, Donny boy!

The Culprits

So, how does this happen? How do lies and conspiracy theories become someone's truth? And, more importantly, what can we do about it? There are many ways this nonsense spreads, but the main two ways are media and social media.

Social Media

For two decades, as our politics fractured and misinformation flourished, multiple social media networks emerged to provide a lightning-fast pathway for even the most asinine propaganda to spread. *This super-spreader superhighway changed everything*.

As we saw with the false Antifa narratives that shot through social media during the protests after the murder of George Floyd and on January 6th – which proved that social media is unrelenting even on our darkest days – social media has enabled widespread deceit to infect the bloodstream of American society, poisoning our politics and enabling pathological collective delusions that are shared by millions of people on obscure conspiracy theory platforms as well as mainstream networks like TikTok, X, Instagram, Facebook and all the rest.

From the racial justice protests in 2020 to misinformation about Covid-19 to the tragic death of Charlie Kirk, instead of bringing the country together amid chaos and grief, social media firms enabled what is the equivalent of bomb-throwing. Instead of promoting productive public discourse, they allowed hundreds of false, inflammatory posts to metastasize.

Read more on this and learn about 1787's Plan of Action for Social Media on p. 295 of the Policy Guide.

The Media

To me, a free and trustworthy press is *everything*. I deeply believe media has the power to significantly contribute to the health of our democracy and, without honest journalism, democracy's very survival would be at risk.

Investigating and reporting instances of corruption, fraud, social injustices, misconduct and abuse of power by individuals, corporations, and/or governments is invaluable to the public interest – and many journalists knock it out of the park.

There was Vice News' reporting on white supremacist groups during and after the Charlottesville domestic terrorist attack and Buzz Feed's heartbreaking coverage of China's internment of the Uyghurs.

The Washington Post did a deep dive into the Pandora Papers, which uncovered a massive offshore financial system used to hide money and shield corrupt and criminal behavior, and incredible reporting by The New York Times revealed how the United States tried to hide an airstrike in Syria that killed dozens of civilians.

After examining tens of thousands of cryptocurrency transactions, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists – a collaboration of more than 100 journalists from 38 news outlets – found that at least $28 billion tied to hackers, thieves and extortionists has flowed into crypto exchanges over the last two years. Time after time, groups tied to illicit activity moved money onto the world's largest exchanges, where they can convert U.S. dollars or euros into Bitcoin, Ether and other digital coins.

ProPublica – an independent, nonprofit newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest – reported on child separation at the border during the first Trump administration, which included audio tapes of hysterical children detained by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and have been keeping track of how many legal U.S. citizens are being held by U.S. immigration officials during the Trump/Vance administration, including American children who have cancer. ProPublica's 2021 "Secret IRS Files" investigation was explosive, to say the least (more about this story later).

ProPublica also published an exposé on Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas' close – and, in my opinion, highly inappropriate – relationship with a GOP megadonor, which we'll also talk about later. Incidentally, the Clarence Thomas article *really* ticked off some conservatives, to the point where Fox News now sometimes refers to ProPublica as a "left-wing nonprofit," which they are not. They are just really, *really* good and good journalism often ticks people off.

All that said, there is something that has been bothering me since Donald Trump descended that escalator in Trump Tower to announce his first run for the presidency. I hate to join the negative chorus against the media in any way, but it's true there are elements of it that have gotten sideways.

In my mind, there were two huge things that happened at almost the same time – and they collided into one another causing a perfectly awful storm. As Donald came down that escalator – upending our politics and much of our culture – media was already going through an extremely difficult transition. Because the Internet had given anyone and everyone access to a public platform, it had already cut deeply into traditional newsrooms.

Journalists were at risk of losing their jobs and, to keep them, clicks, likes, and being first seemed to become the overriding goals. This new reality created new motivations for journalists. For example, a decade ago, I would never know what my favorite newspaper reporter looked like. Even today, The Economist doesn't include the name of the person who writes each article.

But now, you see print journalists everywhere, especially on cable news (and am I crazy or does it seem like they also have brand new gym memberships and stylists?!?). Many of them have published books which, much like their television appearances, usually reveal if they are "Team Red" or "Team Blue" – then their bylines show up in The New York Times or Washington Post, in what should be straightforward, unbiased articles.

This new dual role is hard for the American public to reconcile (or trust) because, once we know a reporter's personal political views, proclivities and biases, it's exceedingly difficult for us to believe they can simply switch those off every time their hands hit a keyboard or

camera lights come on. We're suspicious because we all know the limitations of being human.

We also know that just-the-facts new stories don't get the same number of clicks and likes that salacious ones do. Buy any reporter a shot or two of tequila and I bet anything most would admit that, while at times incredibly frustrating and utterly exhausting, Donald J. Trump has been, on balance, a huge windfall for their careers.

Listen, I get it. American journalists are asked to achieve one of the trickiest balancing acts in the world, especially during a time when the U.S. president calls them "fake news," "the enemy of the state;" and "seditious, perhaps even treasonous;" threatens to throw them in jail; kicks them out of the White House and Pentagon; and actively tells his followers on television, social media, and in person at political rallies to attack them mentally and physically.

He just never stops. In August 2025, he posted on Truth Social: "Despite a very high popularity and, according to many, among the greatest 8 months in Presidential History, ABC & NBC FAKE NEWS, two of the worst and most biased networks in history, give me 97% BAD STORIES. IF THAT IS THE CASE, THEY ARE SIMPLY AN ARM OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY AND SHOULD, ACCORDING TO MANY, HAVE THEIR LICENSES REVOKED BY THE FCC. I would be totally in favor of that because they are so biased and untruthful, an actual threat to our Democracy!!!"

In December 2025 he posted, "I actually believe it's seditious, perhaps even treasonous, for The New York Times, and others, to consistently do FAKE reports in order to libel and demean 'THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.' They are true Enemies of the People, and we should do something about it."

In September, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced that the Defense Department would now demand a "pledge" from Pentagon reporters to not publish any information – even unclassified and non-sensitive information – unless it is "approved for public release by an appropriate authorizing official." If they refuse, they will lose their access to the Pentagon and all U.S. military facilities.

This provoked harsh responses even from Republicans. Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE), who is a former Air Force brigadier general, posted:

"This is so dumb that I have a hard time believing it is true. We don't want a bunch of Pravda newspapers only touting the Government's official position," referencing the Russian broadsheet newspaper that was the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. "A free press makes our country better. This sounds like more amateur hour."

< Sidebar: After Hegseth threw down the gauntlet, most military journalists refused to sign the Defense Department's new restrictive press policy and turned in their credentials, ending over eighty years of on-site Pentagon news coverage by major news organizations (most of which had reported about D-Day in 1944 live from the building).

In the weeks following, only 26 people from 18 outlets agreed to the new rules. These include One America News (OAN), Federalist, Epoch Times, Real America's Voice, Gateway Pundit, Post Millennial, Human Events, National Pulse, RedState, Washington Reporter, Turning Point USA's Frontlines, Tim Pool's Timcast, and MyPillow guy Mike Lindell's streaming service – almost all of which are right-wing media and influencers. That said, other conservative outlets – including Newsmax, the Washington Times, the Washington Examiner, and the Daily Caller – declined to sign. >

In the first months of his second term, President Trump barred the Associated Press, Reuters and Bloomberg News, among others, from the White House while inviting in a correspondent from Russian state media and very MAGA-friendly podcasters and correspondents.

These include one from One America News – who told Trump that foreign leaders had "praised" his "courage and conviction," then asked him what gave him "the moral courage" to start talks with Putin about Ukraine – and one from Real America's Voice, who accused Volodymyr Zelensky during that despicable Oval Office meeting of "not respecting the office," asking him: "Why don't you wear a suit?""

Also among the group that is welcomed with open arms into the White House is Jack Posobiec, who helped spread the "Pizzagate" conspiracy theory and said publicly in 2024 that his goal was to "overthrow" democracy; Julie Kelly, who was instrumental in starting the *January 6th was an inside job* conspiracy theory; and Tim Pool who, along with Benny Johnson and Dave Rubin (all right-wing social

media influencers), was a well-paid mouthpiece for Tenet Media – an outfit that federal investigators and prosecutors now say was "a $10 million scheme to create and distribute content to U.S. audiences with hidden Russian government messaging" in order to "sow division and trick Americans into unwittingly consuming foreign propaganda" in an "attack on our democracy."

According to the indictment, Dave Rubin received a $100,000 signing bonus, plus $400,000 a month, to produce four videos a week for Tenet's YouTube channel and Tim Pool was paid $100,000 per video, which he produced weekly. Tim Pool, Dave Rubin and Benny Johnson have said they were unwitting "victims" of the alleged scheme and have not been charged with any crimes.

Fair enough, but let's examine Benny Johnson a little closer. One day after President Trump announced he was taking over Washington, D.C.'s police department and activating the National Guard to "reduce crime," White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt called on Benny first in the press briefing.

Saying claims that D.C. was not dangerous were "lies" – and thanking Leavitt for "making this city safe, because no parent should have to go through what my family went through" – Johnson launched into a story about how he had recorded murders on a security camera outside his home and how his "house was set ablaze in an arson." < On Truth Social, he had gone even further, posting edited footage from the said camera, writing: "Here's a mass shooting and murder in my front lawn, followed by my house being set on fire with my wife and infant child inside." >

Problem is, The New York Times discovered through records from the D.C. police and fire departments that – although the D.C. police did investigate a shooting on the Johnson's block in October 2020, where three people were sent to hospitals with non-life-threatening injuries – no one has been murdered on that block since 2017… and his home was never on fire.

Truth is clearly not Mr. Johnson's strong suit. In 2014, he was fired from BuzzFeed News after they found instances of plagiarism in 41 of his articles. Then, while at the Independent Journal Review, a conservative news site, he was accused of plagiarism again three years

later – then suspended and demoted after publishing an article that falsely implied that a trip to Hawaii that former President Obama had taken was somehow linked to a federal judge's unfavorable ruling on President Trump's first-term travel ban. Later that year, Johnson had to retract an article that included social media posts that were falsely attributed to the Antifa movement.

After reviewing Johnson's YouTube channel, Media Matters – a progressive media watchdog and research center – discovered the channel has a history of pushing election misinformation, bigotry, and extreme conspiracy theories. For example, they found that at least 38 videos posted between May and August 2024 pushed election misinformation, receiving a combined 7.6 million+ views.

Johnson's channel has also claimed – without evidence – that former President Joe Biden "believes in child sacrifice;" that the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse in Baltimore was an intentional terror attack; that the 2023 East Palestine, Ohio, train derailment was "leftist ecological and racial terrorism" against an "almost entirely white community;" and that "the modern transgender ideology movement" is now "radicalizing activists into terrorists."

This is a guy Karoline Leavitt sees fit to call on first in White House press briefings? Are you okay with that?

Make no mistake, calling on people like Benny is no mistake … and it's not like Donald Trump & Co. are even trying to keep their propaganda strategy a secret. A deputy assistant to the president who runs his digital team said that, when it comes to critics, the goal is not to "reframe the narrative" but to completely drown them out, providing "pushback in the harshest, most forceful way possible." White House communications director Steven Cheung posted on X that their goal is "FULL SPECTRUM DOMINANCE."

What I just described is *part* of what I believe to be the perfectly awful storm I mentioned earlier. But so is this…

On January 23, 2021, Roy Peter Clark – a senior scholar and vice president of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, a nonprofit journalism school that owns the Tampa Bay Times and operates PolitiFact – wrote an article in response to the January 6th attack on the

U.S. Capitol. Actually, he wrote an article about *another* article written in The Washington Post about the attack on the Capitol.

Naturally, I quickly went to the article he referenced, which was published on January 6th, and found most of the writing in the front-page piece perfectly appropriate: "With poles bearing blue Trump flags, the mob bashed through Capitol doors and windows, forcing their way past police officers unprepared for the onslaught. Lawmakers were evacuated shortly before an armed standoff at the House doors. The woman who was shot by a police officer was rushed to an ambulance, police said, and later died. Canisters of tear gas were fired across the rotunda's white marble floor, and on the steps outside the building, rioters flew Confederate flags."

No problem here, the journalists were simply reporting exactly what we all saw with our own eyes – nothing more, nothing less (with the possible exception of saying police officers were "unprepared for the onslaught," which seems a bit more like commentary).

However, in other parts of the article, words used to describe the Capitol attack included "attempted coup," "saboteurs," and the phrase "much of it incited by the president's incendiary language." Of The Washington Post article, Mr. Clark said, "I am astonished by the way the lead was written, and by an epiphany: Language that pushes the boundaries of traditional neutrality can be used in a responsible news report."

I could not disagree more with this statement.

In all honesty, his words really scare me. It is *imperative* that news coverage be 100% neutral, with the goal of nothing beyond presenting raw, vetted facts. The *reader* must then be *trusted* to make an independent, informed decision based on facts and facts alone. Please believe me when I say this is not a thread we should pull on.

The words/phrases "attempted coup," "saboteurs," and "much of it incited by the president's incendiary language" *do not* belong in a Washington Post front-page news story, *at least not on the very day of the event when emotions are high, information is still being gathered,*

and investigations hadn't even started. At that early juncture, they belong in its opinions and editorials section – if even there.

Unfortunately, this very thing has happened A LOT since Donald Trump came down that escalator. From the beginning, many journalists have fallen right into his trap, chasing every distraction he throws down and giving him the oxygen he so desperately craves.

During his first term especially, some in the media seemed to calculate that, since Donald Trump was such a "danger" to this country, they had the responsibility to fight back with anything and everything they had at their disposal – even if it meant sacrificing a few basic journalism rules here and there. Hey, desperate times call for desperate measures, right?

Wrong. That's nothing more than misguided justification. Two wrongs *do not* make a right.

In his article, Mr. Clark also referenced another author, Samuel Hayakawa, who wrote Language in Thought and Action. In this seminal book, Hayakawa argues that reporters should avoid "loaded" language and always understand that it is not their job to declare something *good* or *bad.* Hayakawa warns that straightforward reporting is the only remedy for malicious propaganda which, around the time of his writing, had been widely disseminated by the Nazis.

He is so right. *The only thing more dangerous than brazen lies told by a destructive leader is overcompensating for it – somehow convincing oneself that the actions of this person are so terrible that it gives everyone else permission to abandon their own moral principles.*

This part of the perfectly awful storm is a *MAJOR* problem, especially on cable news. One of my favorite things to do is switch back and forth between MSNBC (which recently changed its name to MS NOW) and Fox News when big news stories break. Based on this unscientific experiment, I can personally attest to the fact that, depending on the cable news channel they watch, Americans are living on *two completely different planets*. The last thing we need is for this phenomenon to spread beyond cable.

Let's use Fox News as an example because we know for a fact they blatantly mislead and manipulated their audience for years. The hundreds of thousands of pages of internal emails, texts, and other communications that Fox News was forced to provide during the defamation lawsuit brought against them by Dominion Voting Systems proves this beyond a shadow of a doubt.

In the years *before* the 2020 election, then chairman and CEO of Fox News Roger Ailes and its owner Rupert Murdoch had an uncanny read on what Fox's audience wanted to hear and worked tirelessly to give them what they wanted, irrespective of journalistic integrity. But *after* the election, it became clear there was a high cost to doing business this way. In the process of providing its viewers exactly what they wanted to hear for all those years, Fox inadvertently handed all editorial decisions to them, essentially letting the tail wag the dog.

This business model worked fine when the stakes were relatively low, but in the weeks after the 2020 election – when the stakes couldn't have been higher – Fox's chickens came home to roost. Rupert Murdoch and Fox News had a choice to make: Should they stick to reporting the truth and risk losing some of their audience to new players like Newsmax, or follow some of their audience down a rabbit hole of election lies and conspiracy theories?

They made the wrong choice. As Fox host s#@# stirrers and executives from the top down privately scoffed at – and denounced – the election fraud claims being made by Donald Trump and his clown show surrogates, their airwaves shamelessly perpetuated falsehoods and conspiracy theories for nothing more than ratings.

I hope these people have done some serious soul searching since then. What good are high ratings when you sell your country out? What exactly *is* the price for your soul?

Thankfully for us but unfortunately for them, Fox News' insidious and duplicitous behavior was all revealed in black and white thanks to Dominion Voting Systems' defamation lawsuit (the one where Fox had to pay Dominion $1.6 billion for spreading disinformation about them). God bless you, Dominion! You did your country a tremendous service.

Here are some highlights from the mountains of Fox documents:

- Despite what they were saying on air, behind the scenes many people at Fox were disparaging of Donald Trump, to put it mildly:

  - Almost a week after the attack on the Capitol, former speaker of the U.S. House and Fox Corp. board member Paul Ryan emailed Rupert Murdoch an article called The Alternate Reality Machine. The article, which appeared on the conservative website The Dispatch, touched on how Fox News and other conservative media circulated misinformation about the Capitol riot. Murdoch responded to Ryan, "Wake-up call for Hannity, who has been privately disgusted by Trump for weeks, but was scared to lose viewers!"
  - In an email on November 19, 2020, Murdoch says of Donald Trump: "The real danger is what he might do as president. Apparently not sleeping and bouncing off walls! Don't know about Melania but kids no help." In the same email, he writes that Donald Trump and Rudy Giuliani both appear to be going "increasingly mad."
  - In an email to Fox News Media CEO Suzanne Scott on January 21, 2021, Murdoch wrote: "Maybe Sean (Hannity) and Laura (Ingraham) went too far. All very well for Sean to tell you he was in despair about Trump, but what did he tell his viewers?"

- The person at Fox who seemed to hate Donald Trump the most was none other than Tucker Carlson who, in public, was the biggest kiss-ass on the entire network.

  - In texts to members of his staff on January 4, 2021, Carlson wrote: "We are very, very close to being able to ignore Trump most nights. I truly can't wait. I hate him passionately. We're

all pretending we've got a lot to show for it, because admitting what a disaster it's been is too tough to digest. But come on. There really isn't an upside to Trump."

- On November 10, 2020, in a text exchange with a member of his staff regarding the news that Trump wasn't attending the inauguration of Joe Biden, Carlson wrote: "I'd heard that about the inauguration. Hard to believe. So destructive. It's disgusting. I'm trying to look away."

- On November 6, 2020, Carlson had this text exchange with his producer Alex Pfeiffer:

  Pfeiffer: Trump has a pretty low rate at success in his business ventures.
  Carlson: That's for sure. All of them fail. What he's good at is destroying things. He's the undisputed world champion of that.

- On January 7, 2021, they had another text exchange:

  Carlson: Trump has two weeks left. Once he's out, he becomes incalculably less powerful, even in the minds of his supporters.
  Carlson: He's a demonic force, a destroyer. But he's not going to destroy us. I've been thinking about this every day for four years.
  Pfeiffer: You're right. I don't want to let him destroy me either. [REDACTED]. The Trump anger spiral is vicious.
  Carlson: That's for sure. Deadly. It almost consumed me in November when Sidney Powell attacked us. It was very difficult to regain emotional control, but I knew I had to. We've got two weeks left. We can do this.

- Fox News hosts and executives knew full well the claims of election fraud being pushed by Donald Trump and his surrogates were false but broadcast them anyway.

  - In his January 2023 deposition, Rupert Murdoch said, "I would have liked us to be stronger in denouncing it, in hindsight."
  - Also in his deposition, Murdoch said he thought Donald Trump was a sore loser and, when asked if he believed there was "massive fraud," he replied, "No. I have never even studied it."
  - On November 7, 2020, Tucker Carlson told his producer Alex Pfeiffer that "the software shit is absurd." The next day he wrote, "I dont think there is evidence of voter fraud that swung the election."
  - On November 18, 2020, in a text exchange between Fox News hosts Laura Ingraham and Tucker Carlson, Tucker said to Laura: "Sidney Powell is lying by the way. I caught her. It's insane." To which Laura replied, "Sidney is a complete nut. No one will work with her. Ditto with Rudy."
  - In yet another text exchange between Laura Ingraham and Tucker Carlson, from November 22, 2020, they had this to say:

    Carlson: I had to try to make the WH disavow her, which they obviously should have done long before.
    Ingraham: No serious lawyer could believe what they were saying.
    Carlson: But they said nothing in public. Pretty disgusting. And now Trump, I learned this morning, is sitting back and letting them lose the senate. He doesn't care. I care.

- In an email to Fox producers on November 21, 2020, Fox Corp Senior Vice President Raj Shah called Sidney Powell's election fraud claims "totally insane" and "just MIND BLOWINGLY NUTS."
- Referring to Fox host Maria Bartiromo on November 8, 2020, Fox executive Gary Schreier wrote, "The problem is she has gop conspiracy theorists in her ear and they use her for their message sometimes."
- On November 19th, after Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell's off-the-chain news conference, Fox executive Ron Mitchell wrote, sarcastically: "Will you be mentioning the international crime conspiracy to steal the election featuring Soros, Maduro, Chavez, Antifa, Cuba, and China?" He continued by saying "those clowns put us" in "an awkward place where we're going to need to thread the needle."

◆ Fox's motivation for allowing misinformation on its airwaves is crystal clear:

- When asked in his deposition why he did not want to "antagonize" Donald Trump after the 2020 election, Murdoch replied, "He had a very large following. They were probably mostly viewers of Fox, so it would have been stupid."
- After the election, a Fox producer wrote to colleagues, "Don't know how closely you've looked at our charts this week, but audience much more interested in voter irregularities than Covid-19 hypocrisy or race/Obama book tour."
- On November 9th, Fox News host Dana Perino texted Republican strategist Colin Reed: "… but there is this RAGING issue about fox losing tons of viewers and many watching – get this – newsmax! Our viewers are so mad

about the election calls (as if our calls would have been any different. It's just votes!)"

- Five days after the election, Suzanne Scott forwarded a message from Rupert Murdoch that showed concern for Fox's ratings. Scott told Fox News President Jay Wallace that Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch were "expecting" certain things. For one, "audiences don't want to see too much of the Mayor Pete's (referring to now Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg) and Coons (referring to Democratic Senator Christopher A. Coons) etc in the news hours. Need to be careful about bookings next 2 months-especially in news hours."
- On November 10th, Fox News president Jay Wallace texted, "The Newsmax surge is a bit troubling." It is "truly an alternative universe when you watch, but it can't be ignored."
- On November 18th, after discovering that Newsmax was pushing conspiracy theories, Fox executive Ron Mitchell wrote, "This type of conspiratorial reporting might be exactly what the disgruntled FNC viewer is looking for."
- In a moment of rare self-reflection, Fox News senior vice president Bill Sammon wrote, "It's remarkable how weak ratings" make "good journalists do bad things."

- Even when some people at Fox tried to do the right thing, they were condemned for it:

  - On November 9th, Fox host Neil Cavuto cut away from a White House press conference led by Kayleigh McEnany after she claimed that Democrats took certain positions on voting issues because they were "welcoming fraud" and "illegal voting." "Whoa, whoa, whoa," Cavuto told his audience. "Unless she has more details to back that up, I can't in good countenance continue showing you this. I want to make sure

that maybe they do have something to back that up."

Afterward, members of Fox News executive Raj Shah's staff notified senior leadership that Cavuto's behavior amounted to a "Brand Threat."

† After Giuliani and Powell's November 19th news conference, Fox reporter Kristin Fisher said on-air, "So much of what he said was simply not true or has already been thrown out in court." She also pointed out that much of what Trump lawyers were saying in court did not align with the falsehoods that were being said in public, and that Trump's team had failed repeatedly to provide any evidence.

Although every word she spoke was true, Fisher recounted that she was reprimanded by her boss Bryan Boughton, who "emphasized that higher-ups at Fox News were also unhappy with it" and that she "needed to do a better job of – this is a quote – 'respecting our audience.'"

† In the days following the election, Fox News reporter Jacqui Heinrich wrote on Twitter that "top election infrastructure officials" confirmed that "there is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised," mentioning by name Fox News host Sean Hannity and Fox Business host Lou Dobbs.

In a text among Tucker Carlson, Laura Ingraham, and Sean Hannity, Carlson told Hannity he should have Heinrich fired: "Seriously...What the fuck?" I'm actually shocked... It needs to stop immediately, like tonight. It's measurably hurting the company. The stock price is down. Not a joke."

Carlson then told the group that he "just went crazy on" Executive Vice President Meade Cooper "over it." Hannity replied that he had already spoken to CEO Suzanne Scott, and then later texted, "I just dropped a bomb." For her part, Scott said in a message to Fox News President Jay Wallace and Irena Briganti, Fox News Senior Executive Vice President of Corporate Communications, that Heinrich "has serious nerve

doing this and if this gets picked up, viewers are going to be further disgusted."

- The absurd notion that Fox News is "fair & balanced" has finally been laid to rest for good:

  - Before the election, Rupert Murdoch gave Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner "confidential information" about Joe Biden's advertisements "along with debate strategy" – essentially giving Kushner "a preview of Biden's ads before they were public."

  - In an email from Rupert Murdoch to former editor of the New York Post Col Allan in September 2020, Murdoch lamented, "How can anyone vote for Biden?" Allen replied that Biden's "only hope is to stay in his basement and not face serious questions." Murdoch answered, "Just made sure Fox banging on about these issues. If the audience talks the theme will spread."
  - In his deposition, Rupert Murdoch acknowledged, "We were worried that Mr. Trump would lose the election and what Mr. Biden may do."

    - On November 7th, after Fox's decision desk called Arizona for Joe Biden, Rupert Murdoch said that that he hoped Trump would still win the state, writing he was "still praying for Az to prove them wrong."
    - On election night, in a message between CEO Suzanne Scott and Fox Corporation CEO Lachlan Murdoch, Scott mentioned that Donald Trump could very well win the election, even with losing a historic percentage of the popular vote. Murdoch replied, "If that happens, god willing, we will have to defend the electoral college

aggressively." Murdoch later wrote, "Momentum in Pennsylvania looks good" then "Trump now ahead in Wisconsin!" then "Trump ahead in popular vote so far! Amazing."

- On October 27, just days before the election, Rupert Murdoch asked Fox News CEO Suzanne Scott to have Sean Hannity say "something supportive" about Republican Senator Lindsey Graham after Fox host Lou Dobbs was critical of the Senator. "Could Sean say something supportive? We can't lose the Senate if at all possible." Scott replied that Graham "got a lot of time" when he was on Hannity's show the night before" and she had "addressed the Dobbs outburst."

- After Trump lost the election, Rupert Murdoch told Suzanne Scott to "concentrate on Georgia" since Georgia would decide which party ultimately controlled the U.S. Senate. He told her that they should be "helping any way we can."

Obviously, this is all incredibly damaging to Fox News' credibility and should have been eye-opening for – and insulting to – Fox's audience. But once again, here we are in the same old catch-22: Fox's audience wasn't insulted *BECAUSE* they didn't hear about it *BECAUSE* Fox and most other conservative media outlets didn't cover the story.

According to a March 3, 2023 analysis by The New York Times:

"On 26 of the most popular conservative television news networks, radio shows, podcasts and websites, only four – National Review, Townhall, The Federalist and Breitbart News – have mentioned the private messages from Fox News hosts that disparaged election fraud claims since February 16, when the first batch of court filings were released publicly.

The majority – 18 in all, including Fox News itself – did not cover the lawsuit at all with their own staff (some of those 18 published wire stories originally written by The Associated Press or other services.)

Four outlets mentioned the lawsuit in some way, but did not mention the comments from Fox News hosts. One of those, The Gateway Pundit, published three articles that included additional unfounded allegations about Dominion, including a suggestion that security vulnerabilities at one election site using Dominion machines could have led to some fraud, despite no evidence that votes were mismanaged."

In fact, within the first two weeks of the release of the treasure trove of Fox's private messages, the only time the Dominion lawsuit was mentioned at all on Fox News was when the host of MediaBuzz Howard Kurtz told his viewers, "I believe I should be covering it. But the company has decided as part of the organization being sued, I can't talk about it or write about it, at least for now. I strongly disagree with that decision, but as an employee I have to abide by it."

This is just vile conduct. How could people at Fox blatantly mislead their audience, who obviously trusted them and relied on them for THE TRUTH. I honestly don't know how they slept at night.

One of the most damaging examples of Fox News' duplicitous behavior happened on January 6th – as the Capitol assault was happening and then after it ended – when Fox hosts sent concerned text messages to Donald Trump's chief of staff Mark Meadows, then went on television and told their audience something completely different.

The evening of January 6th, Fox hosts repeatedly told their viewers that what happened at the Capitol wasn't really *that* bad, or was caused by Antifa of course, or that it was a "false flag" operation conceived and carried out by the United States government. They said things like "many riots in American history, including the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, were far worse than this" (Laura Ingraham), or "(the rioters) don't look like terrorists. They look like tourists" (Tucker Carlson).

On her show, Laura Ingraham told viewers that Trump supporters had virtually nothing to do with the mayhem: "From a chaotic

Washington tonight, earlier today the Capitol was under siege by people who can only be described as antithetical to the MAGA movement," and then perpetuated the *this is all Antifa* b.s. that we covered earlier.

However, behind the scenes that day, Ingraham texted to Trump's chief of staff things like: "Mark, the president needs to tell people in the Capitol to go home. This is hurting all of us. He is destroying his legacy."

During the day, Sean Hannity also texted Mark Meadows: "Can he make a statement? Ask people to leave the Capitol." However, on his show that evening, he tried hard to distract his audience with shiny objects: "Our election, frankly, was a train wreck." Then quickly followed up with an impressive pivot: "So how were officials not prepared? We got to answer that question. How did they allow the Capitol building to be breached in what seemed like less than a few minutes?"

One of the worst offenders that day was Tucker Carlson, who just continued to sling outright lies and propaganda about the January 6th insurrection, which included producing and airing a "documentary" in early November 2021 called Patriot Purge, which claimed that January 6th was a "false flag" operation carried out by the U.S. government to target Trump supporters. The film's trailer billed it as "the true story behind 1/6" and "the War on Terror 2.0 and the plot against the people." To my knowledge, he still hasn't corrected this. : (

In Tucker's own words, "January 6 is being used as a pretext to strip millions of Americans – disfavored Americans – of their core constitutional rights." Then he said: "The helicopters have left Afghanistan, and now they've landed here at home." Then this: "Our conclusion? The U.S. government has in fact launched a new war on terror. But it's not against al-Qaida, it's against American citizens." Oh, for the love of #@^%.

As a result of Carlson's propaganda, two longtime Fox News conservative contributors, Jonah Goldberg and Stephen Hayes, quit in protest, calling the film "totally outrageous" and saying that it "will lead to violence." Chris Wallace, the longtime Fox News anchor, resigned from the network after 18 years. Although he didn't specify

the film as a specific reason for his exit, we do know that he raised significant concerns with the Fox News brass.

Then, in February 2023, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy gave Carlson exclusive access to over 44,000 hours of Capitol surveillance footage from January 6th. The evening Tucker started showing the videos to his audience, he opened the show by repeating that the "2020 election was a grave betrayal of American democracy given the facts that have since emerged about that election. No honest person can deny it." He went on to say, predictably, that most people who stormed the Capitol were not insurrectionists at all, but merely "orderly and meek" sightseers.

Much of the footage he chose to show focused on Jacob Chansley (a.k.a. the "QAnon Shaman"), who was not difficult to pick out of the crowd since he was wearing that horned hat and animal fur getup. The cherry-picked footage showed Chansley calmly walking around the building, sometimes near police officers – somehow forgetting to mention that Chansley pled guilty to a felony charge of obstructing an official proceeding and was sentenced to 41 months in prison.

The very thought that an American – *any* American – would knowingly push these blatant lies is horrifying. But it is reprehensible for a network who claims to traffic in "news" to allow it.

James Murdoch, the younger son of Fox Corp. owner Rupert, said it best: "The damage is profound. The sacking of the Capitol is proof positive that what we thought was dangerous is indeed very much so. Those outlets that propagate lies to their audience have unleashed insidious and uncontrollable forces that will be with us for years."

< Note: James left his position as chief executive officer of 21st Century Fox in 2019, then resigned from the board of News Corp in July 2020 because of disagreements with its editorial content and strategic direction. He and other members of the Murdoch family have been involved in a court case in which James, his sister Elisabeth, and half-sister Prudence were challenging Rupert's bid to amend the family trust to ensure that the eldest son Lachlan retained control of News Corp and Fox Corp. In the end, Rupert and Lachlan bought the other three siblings out – ensuring that both companies will stay true to their deep conservative identity. >

Unfortunately, the misinformation onslaught from conservative media during that time went beyond Fox News and its sycophant anchors. On December 9, 2020 – a month after the election and less than a month before the Capitol attacks – the late Rush Limbaugh told his audience of over 15 million people listening on roughly 600 radio stations across the nation: "I actually think that we're trending toward secession. I am not advocating it, have not advocated it, never have advocated it, and probably wouldn't," but liberals use "force and intimidation and bullying tactics to get people who disagree with them to shut up."

On December 16th, Rush said that Joe Biden "didn't win this thing fair and square, and we are not going to be docile like we've been in the past and go away and wait till the next election." He continued, "Seventy-four-plus million Americans are not going to shut up, and you tell them that their views don't matter? You do not know what you're creating. You do not know the enemy you are manufacturing."

Two days before the Capitol assault, radio host Glenn Beck told his 10.5 million listeners that it was "time to fight." "It is time to rip and claw and rake," he said. "It is time to go to war, as the left went to war four years ago."

In his Christmas broadcast, Mark Levin told his equally large radio audience that stealing elections was "becoming the norm for the Democrat Party" and that they needed to "crush them, crush them. We need to kick their ass." Meanwhile, broadcasting from Cincinnati two days before the attack, Bill Cunningham told his listeners that he would "never surrender and collapse and act as if it's OK when hundreds of thousands have voted illegally."

A day before the Capitol attacks, Dan Bongino told his audience that Democrats "rigged the rules to make sure that any potential outcome would go their way." In fact, former police officer, Secret Service agent, and three-time failed congressional candidate Bongino was one of the most prolific voices of election fraud. In the two weeks before and two weeks after the 2020 election, Bongino's posts were among the day's ten most shared on Facebook at least 63 times. That's way better than even Trump did!

Okay, I know this all sounds spine-chilling and a bit depressing, but I have a message for all the *actual* reporters and journalists out there: Don't lose heart! There are many worthwhile paths you can travel in your career, from being a traditional news reporter to being an opinion writer or cable commentator. But it's super important you choose one or another because the lines get too blurry otherwise. You must choose because *we obviously need you, badly*.

If you're wondering why you should be worried about all this, then just listen to what Peter Pomerantsev has to say. Peter was born in the Soviet Union (Ukraine) then moved to London then moved back to Russia, where he became involved in Russian television production (he is now a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Global Affairs at the London School of Economics and an associate editor at Coda Media).

In his production job in Russia, he experienced first-hand how state propaganda is spread. Speaking to The Washington Post in March 2021 about Fox News and how the channel reminds him of Russia, he said, "It's the same game. It's the same rhetorical tactics, the same intellectual tactics, the same psychological tactics." Uh oh.

In an article he wrote, Peter uses Sean Hannity as an example of Russian-style propaganda, which he calls the "dirtiest art form":

> "The typical Hannity monologue rises in a series of rhetorical questions until it topples over the edge of sense. On March 27, 2017, for example, a two-minute-long series of questions attacked rival network CBS's objectivity by asking whether its presenters ever questioned their criticism of George W. Bush, whether they spiked stories which made Obama look bad, whether they had investigated Obama's ties to a former terrorist, his commitment to American-hating 'black liberation theology' or recorded Obama's economic failings (here Hannity showed a list of stats on the screen, too briefly to read fully).

Had CBS, Hannity went on, listed all the laws Hillary Clinton violated when she used a private email server as Secretary of State? Exposed every one of her lies about the death of U.S. diplomats in Benghazi? Explored how media colluded with the Clinton campaign? Questioned how much time they had given to the 'conspiracy theory' that Trump's campaign colluded with Russia?

The effect of such a long list, where some of the charges are serious, others spurious, many debatable, and none explored, is to leave the mind exhausted and confused. The semantic patterns reinforce Hannity's main message: That we live in a world where there is no epistemological certainty anymore. For anyone familiar with Russian media this radical relativism is something very familiar."

Perhaps the best example of these warped mind games is the way conservative media weaponizes language to enflame its viewers. This not only deepens the division in this country, but it also prevents us from having constructive conversations about really important issues.

I recognize it may feel like I'm picking on conservative media but, even though both sides do this to a certain degree, right-wingers are the ones who have turned this tactic into a true artform. It would be impressive if it wasn't seriously damaging our country.

That they do this – on purpose – is not my opinion, it's a fact. I haven't cracked some secret code or anything … many of them openly admit this is their strategy. For example, conservative writer and activist Christopher Rufo laid out (on Twitter, in detail) his and his buddies' plan for metastasizing the concept of *critical race theory*.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines critical race theory (CRT) as "an intellectual movement and loosely organized framework of legal analysis based on the premise that race is not a natural, biologically grounded feature of physically distinct subgroups of human beings but a socially constructed, culturally invented category that is used to oppress and exploit people of color. Critical race theorists hold that the law and legal institutions in the United States are inherently racist insofar as they function to create and maintain social, economic, and

political inequalities between whites and non-whites, especially African Americans."

Before we go any further, let me be clear: I am not defending critical race theory. In fact, my point here has nothing to do with the virtues or inadequacies of critical race theory at all.

My point is that we cannot let a few rhetorical snipers at Fox News and other conservative media outlets – together with Republican politicians – highjack then pervert our national conversations, especially those about race, which is one of the most important conversations the current residents of this nation will ever have.

We are *finally* getting somewhere on this topic, America (which is probably why the snipers are freaking out.) If we allow antagonists to disrupt our progress, we will forfeit the best chance we have had in decades of developing an honest, productive path forward.

Because levelheaded conversations about things like race are so central to our national growth, I believe it's super important that we recognize how these guys try to derail them. We cannot allow this one small group of people to preemptively define what these conversations look like for everyone – because I promise you, they will define the entire thing to their sole advantage.

Here is Christopher Rufo's tweet:

> "We have successfully frozen their brand – 'critical race theory' – into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions. We will eventually turn it toxic, as we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category.
>
> The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think 'critical race theory.' We have decodified the term and will recodify it to annex the entire range of cultural constructions that are unpopular with Americans."

Really think about what he is publicly admitting in that tweet. He is essentially explaining to all of us that his grand plan is to weaponize the phrase "critical race theory" to the point that it becomes an all-encompassing catch phrase for *anything* having to do with race and

culture that *he* doesn't like. This effectively makes the concept of CRT a giant blank screen that *anyone* can project *anything* they want onto, regardless of how untrue, inflammatory, or damaging it may be.

I've got to hand it to these guys, they have absolutely no problem saying the quiet part out loud.

This is happening in real time. Since these guys have been using CRT as a grenade in their fabricated culture war, practically every racial complexity in this country, however innocuous, has been pulled into the vortex of the CRT tornado, creating a distorted narrative that is quickly spinning out of control.

So far, at least 20 Republican-led state legislatures have banned the teaching of "critical race theory" – as defined by *them* – in schools, and many others are trying hard to do the same. In fact, there has been no ban attempted in only seven states.

To reiterate – because I know the snipers will try everything under the sun to frame me as Ms. Critical Race Theory – I'm not advocating for "critical race theory" to be taught in public schools. *I am warning about the broad way it is being defined*.

The rules and definitions of "critical race theory" vary from state to state, but most reflect the sentiment of the member of Utah's state school board who declared that phrases like *systemic racism*, *social justice*, *restorative justice, white privilege*, *conscious/unconscious bias,* and even the word *diversity* are just "euphamisms" (ironically, she misspelled the word) for "critical race theory."

Let's illustrate my point by using an example from your new favorite author… me!!

Throughout this book, I address several social justice issues – and, no, Utah school board lady who can't spell, I don't use the term "social justice" as a euphemism for critical race theory. I use the term based on its official definitions: 1) the fair treatment and equitable status of all individuals and social groups within a state or society, and 2) referring to social, political, and economic institutions, laws, or policies that collectively afford such fairness and equity. Now, that doesn't sound so scary, does it?

Here's what I've written about redlining:

"Beginning in the 1930s, as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) created loan programs that lowered down payment requirements and extended the term of home loans from 5 to 30 years – all to make home ownership accessible to more Americans.

That sounds like a nice thing to do! Well, not so fast. To help banks decide who should get loans, the government-run Home Owners' Loan Corporation created a system for appraising neighborhoods, a practice now commonly referred to as "redlining." Essentially, the U.S. government created color-coded maps, assigning green for "good" neighborhoods and red for "bad" neighborhoods (literally drawing red lines around what they considered "bad" neighborhoods, hence the name).

Pretty much across the board, neighborhoods considered to be "black" were given the worst grade (D) and the classification of red, which deemed them "hazardous" places to underwrite mortgages. The official explanation given for this was that "colored infiltration" was "a definite adverse influence on neighborhood desirability."

Predictably, since people couldn't get financing for homes in these neighborhoods, they declined quickly and substantially as businesses left, segregation and discrimination deepened, and predatory lending and slumlords thrived.

As a result, in large cities, black Americans were now confined almost exclusively to the "inner city" – where housing developments were often the only housing option – and soon freeways bypassed them altogether. Black Americans in rural areas fared no better as they were now relegated to the "wrong" side of town, or tracks as it were.

The very (very) few black Americans who did obtain financing saw their property values plummet as most white Americans refused to buy in what was now firmly labeled "black" neighborhoods.

Redlining was devastating for black Americans. Between 1934 and 1962, the federal government backed $120 billion worth of home loans. *Over 98 percent of the loans went to white people.*

This is a mind-blowing number, but old-school redlining cut far deeper than black people just not getting to own a house ninety years ago. In truth, redlining was one of the very first bricks in the wall that

makes it difficult for many black Americans to fully participate in American capitalism to this day."

Although I'd bet everything I have that Christopher, Sean, Tucker, Ted, and the 20 Republican-led state legislatures that have banned the teaching of "critical race theory" would disagree, *this is not an example of critical race theory*. Rather, it's simple, *straight up cause and effect*.

Anyone in this country who is naïve (or willingly blind) enough to believe that there are zero instances of black people getting screwed by public policy over the years is out of their mind. From the jump, many U.S. policy decisions – made both intentionally and unintentionally – initiated and perpetuated pervasive division and inequality. They just did. This is not my opinion. It's a well-documented fact.

Numbers don't lie. All you have to do is read the astonishingly unequal statistics in this book and the *Policy Guide* to know extreme inequities still exist.

Please take special notice of this: When I wrote about the causes and effects of redlining, did I ever insinuate – as Sean Hannity accuses *everyone* who dares speak about racial issues of thinking – that "white people are collectively all guilty of racism from birth just because they're white?" Did I ever suggest that "America is fundamentally and irredeemably racist" (Senator Ted Cruz)? Did I ever imply that "every white child and family today is invariably complicit" (Damon Linker)? Nope. Never. And I honestly don't feel that way.

But, again, here's the problem: I guarantee the snipers will try to bend my words to fit their "critical race theory" narrative as a way of minimizing the impact of what I'm saying. As a result, many in their audiences will pre-judge my words and approach them with phrases like "civilization-ending poison," "anti-American belief structure," and "race hate" firmly burned into their brains.

That is the trap that the snipers have set.

… and they are relentless. The crazy part is that we can literally see Christopher Rufo's tweet playing out right before our very eyes.

< Note: When you read the next few paragraphs, remember his words: "The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the

newspaper and immediately think 'critical race theory.' We have decodified the term and will recodify it to annex the entire range of cultural constructions that are unpopular with Americans." >

Sean Hannity on Fox News: "Now, let's look at this critical race theory debate in the country. Now, this anti-American belief structure that is rooted in Marxism, it claims that white people are collectively all guilty of racism from birth just because they're white." Then, Sean expertly links "critical race theory" to Democrats: "Democrats want to teach this to every student in every school in America. They want them to learn this radical ideology from an early age."

When he was still on Fox, Tucker Carlson – hot off pushing his white nationalist conspiracy theory about "replacement" politics (i.e., the idea that Democrats are plotting to replace the white American electorate with "more obedient voters from the third world") – told his audience, "In schools they are teaching this. Race hate. The question is, and this is the question that we should be meditating on day in and day out, is how do we get out of this vortex, this cycle, before it's too late? How do we save this country before we become Rwanda?"

Rwanda? Really? Well, that certainly escalated quickly. Just as a reminder, the Rwanda genocide took the lives of hundreds of thousands of people who were part of the country's minority ethnic group.

This is also the guy who said "critical race theory" – as he defines it, of course – is "civilization-ending poison," and we will never know how rampant these teachings are across our schools until "we finally get cameras in the classroom… to oversee the people teaching your children, forming their minds."

Never one to be left out of the fun, Michael Savage at Newsmax chimed in: "Now they're beating up white children in schoolrooms … attacks on white people is exactly what was done to the Jews in Germany in the '30s. Don't fall for this garbage. This is the road to the death camps." Ahhh… playing the *beating up white children* and *Nazi* cards. Of course. But really? "Death camps?" That's where Michael Savage sees this going?

Others claimed, falsely, that the Black Lives Matter movement was founded solely on critical race theory and that every single violent act

that took place during the 2020 protests after George Floyd's death were fueled 100% by CRT.

All this begs the question: Why now? The concept of critical race theory has been around for over four decades. What's with the timing? Why all the sudden – before, during and after one of the most heated presidential elections in modern history – was "critical race theory" being mentioned on Fox News A LOT?

< Sidebar: The Washington Post reported that the term "critical race theory" was mentioned just 132 times on Fox News in all of 2020. However, in the first six months of 2021, CRT was mentioned 1,860 times. On one Tuesday in June, "it was mentioned 48 times on shows across the network's lineup." >

What's with the timing? Easy answer: At a time when randomly screaming *Build that Wall, Stop the Steal*, and *Lock Her Up* had become tiresome, the snipers needed a new divisive, manipulative topic to fuel their culture war. Basically, *they need a new boogeyman*.

These are not harmless games being played. Unfortunately, the evidence suggests the snipers are getting exactly the results they want.

Across America, school boards and concerned citizens angrily and divisively debate "critical race theory" – along with the newest race-bait buzz-initials that have gotten sucked into the CRT vortex, DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) – often with meetings erupting into shouting matches and even physical violence.

NBC News reported a story about an incident in Southlake, Texas, a predominately white suburb of Dallas, Texas that has stellar schools and, at the time, an average household income of $230,000 and an average home price of $650,000. Two-thirds of the Southlake votes in the 2020 election were cast for Donald Trump.

In 2018, a video of "several white high school students laughing as they filmed themselves shouting the n-word at a party" went viral because one of those in attendance posted it on Snapchat.

Sadly, this behavior came as no surprise to a nurse and mother of five named Robin Cornish, who is black. After all, "this was the city where, on the day after Rosa Parks died in 2005, elementary school children told her four oldest kids 'now you have to sit in the back of the bus.' It's where a sixth-grade boy once joked with her son: 'How do you get a black out of a tree? You cut the rope.'"

"It's where, weeks after her husband (former offensive lineman for the Dallas Cowboys, Frank) died suddenly in 2008, a white boy on the football team told her son, 'Your mom is only voting for Obama because your dad is dead and she's going to need welfare.'"

What happened next was entirely predictable. When the video was first discovered, the school district facilitated listening sessions and – after two more instances, one being another racially charged video and the other involving spray-paint and racists slurs – established a "diversity council" to create a plan for greater inclusivity.

The diversity council's Cultural Competence Action Plan – a plan one member of the council described as "just a basic plan of human decency, empathy, kindness, inclusion and understanding about other cultures" – was released almost two years after the original video went viral. The plan required "diversity and inclusion training for all students as part of the K-12 curriculum, while amending the student code of conduct to specifically prohibit acts of discrimination, referred to in the document as 'microaggressions.'"

Well, needless to say, triggered white parents went nuts, with some "denouncing the diversity plan as 'Marxist' and 'leftist indoctrination' designed to 'fix a problem that doesn't exist.' The opponents said they, too, wanted all students to feel safe, but they argued that the district's plan would instead create 'diversity police' and amounted to 'reverse racism' against white children." One father, who is white, said he was all for exposing kids to different cultures but believed this plan would "teach students 'how to be a victim' and force them to adopt 'a liberal ideology.'"

Naturally, gay and transgender people got pulled into the debate. "Several parents said the plan would infringe on their Christian values by teaching children about issues affecting gay and transgender classmates." Others "warned that the board had awoken Southlake's

'silent majority'" – which I think is always a hilarious thing to hear from certain conservatives because there is nothing silent about them.

Remember when Christopher Rufo came right out and said that he and his buddies were going to "steadily drive up negative perceptions" and "annex the entire range of cultural constructions that are unpopular with Americans" until they "eventually turn it toxic?"

Episodes like the one in Southlake are heartbreaking. Let's please, please, *please* not let them do this to us! We are better than this.

Christopher Rufo bluntly revealed his strategy of weaponizing "critical race theory," but he stopped short of admitting to what I believe is his ultimate goal: A complete rewrite of history.

We already covered the Republican attempt to drastically revise the atrocities of January 6th, but their plan goes way deeper than that… and their targets mainly involve the revision of history and impact of "woke" issues like sexism, Indigenous persecution, gay rights and climate change.

…but nothing comes close to their obsession with whitewashing the lives of black people.

The Trump/Vance administration and other conservatives are not only working to keep the facts of things like slavery out of our schools, but they are also trying to keep them out of our national park sites and museums. They claim they are doing this because, as Donald Trump put it, these places focus too much on "how bad slavery was":

"The Smithsonian is OUT OF CONTROL, where everything discussed is how horrible our Country is, how bad Slavery was, and how unaccomplished the downtrodden have been – Nothing about Success, nothing about Brightness, nothing about the Future. This Country cannot be WOKE, because WOKE IS BROKE. We have the 'HOTTEST' Country in the World, and we want people to talk about it, including in our Museums."

To that end, President Trump issued an executive order in March 2025 called *Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History* aimed at cleansing federal parks and museums of displays that cast U.S. history "in a negative light." Two months later, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum followed that up with his own order to remove information at the 433 U.S. National Park Service installations "that inappropriately disparage Americans past or living."

So far, the removals at the national parks include signs that refer to slavery, the detention of Japanese Americans during World War II, and conflicts with Native Americans.

Among the things removed was a photograph housed at the Fort Pulaski National Monument in Georgia that is widely considered to be one of the most iconic images in American history.

The photo known as "The Scourged Back" was from a series of images shot in 1863 of a former slave who escaped John and Bridget Lyons' Louisiana plantation and found safety at a Union encampment in Baton Rouge.

In the photo, the man known as Peter (sometimes Gordon) was photographed shirtless by two traveling photographers during a medical exam, exposing to the camera a crisscross of jagged welts and scars that weaved from his buttocks to his shoulders – seared there by the whip that tore through his naked back by the plantation's overseer, Artayou Carrier (Peter recounted that his last beating was so revolting that John Lyons actually fired Carrier).

The white soldiers at the camp were appalled by the state of Peter's back but the black men barely flinched: "It sent a thrill of horror to every white person present, but the few blacks who were waiting paid but little attention to the sad spectacle, such terrible scenes being painfully familiar to them all."

Peter's photo spread like wildfire though the nation via newspapers and cartes-de-visite (small-sized photos mounted on a thick card that were then traded among friends and families). Even for those who had personally witnessed the brutality of slavery, this singular image was shocking. For those who hadn't fully understood the horrors, it was a game-changer.

J.W. Mercer, a Union Army surgeon in Louisiana, wrote this on the back of a carte-de-visite he sent to L.B. Marsh, a colonel in the Union Army: "I have found a large number of the four hundred or so contrabands [people who had escaped slavery and were now protected by the Union Army] examined by me to be as badly lacerated as the specimen represented in the enclosed photograph."

When Peter reached the Union encampment with two of his fellow slaves – three had left with him but one was murdered by the slave hunters that were pursuing them with bloodhounds – they immediately enlisted. It was reported that in July 1863, Sergeant Peter courageously fought in an attack on Port Hudson – as a Union soldier in General Benjamin F. Butler's Louisiana Native Guards, a regiment made up exclusively of free black men.

The very idea that people are trying to erase the basic truths of the American story is terrifying. *Of course* we want to celebrate, in the words of Donald Trump, the "Success" and "Brightness" of America, but we can't truly appreciate those parts if we don't fully understand the hard parts. Bad things happened. Pain was inflicted. Mistakes were made. Acknowledging this doesn't diminish the American story; *it deepens it.* Remembering the bad things doesn't hold us hostage to them; it *liberates* us from them.

The scars on Peter's back are only part of his story. His legacy is not one of a victim. It's one of a hero. A hero who had the remarkable resilience to move beyond unimaginable pain and suffering and fight valiantly to ensure that his experience never happened to anyone again. Peter *is* the American story.

So, where do we go from here?

Before anything else, we must get religious *and* political agendas *out* of our public schools. Like, *yesterday*. I write about the religion side of this equation in Chapter Three, but the political side is just as important.

Teachers are incredibly influential in kid's lives. As such, just as they should not know what faith their public-school teacher subscribes to, they should also not know what political party their teacher is

associated with or, God forbid, who they voted for. A public-school teacher has no more business hanging a Black Lives Matter banner in his/her classroom than wearing a MAGA hat while at school.

Does that mean that Black Lives Matter and MAGA should never be discussed in public schools, or used as student-chosen topics for research papers or projects? Of course not!

Kids aren't stupid. They live in the real world just like the rest of us and should be given the space to express themselves on their journey to becoming well-rounded, knowledgeable, and discerning citizens. After all, isn't that what school is for?

It most certainly is, but you wouldn't know it based on what's happening in Tennessee, where teachers are prohibited from teaching anything that may cause students to "feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or another form of psychological distress solely because of the individual's race or sex" or anything that can lead to "division between, or resentment of, a race, sex, religion, creed, nonviolent political affiliation, social class or class of people."

First of all, this is hysterically hypocritical of conservatives. Aren't they the very ones who say "liberal" schools are churning out a bunch of "snowflakes?"

But beyond that, what does the language in the Tennessee bill even mean? I mean, come on. It's highly possible that the Holocaust may evoke unique feelings of "anguish" for Jewish students, but does that mean it shouldn't be taught in public schools? Should slavery not be taught simply because white students may "feel discomfort" by the fact that *some* white people once did really horrible things to black people?

The Holocaust and slavery are not revisionist history. *They both happened*. Period. And there is absolutely *no way* that slavery – and the extremely difficult decades that followed for black Americans – have *no effect* on some of our current day challenges. Republicans can pass all the legislation they want, but they cannot change this fact.

Also, Republicans, you should remember, as W.E.B. DuBois' put it, that changing "history into propaganda" cuts both ways. Just as you don't want narratives like the 1619 Project taught in schools, other people don't want the Trump administration's 1776 Report – which

committed to the "restoration of American education," whatever that means – taught in schools.

As Republicans fight to keep certain racial themes *out* of schools, I'm just as concerned about the racial propaganda that is already *in* schools – falsehoods like the Lost Cause ridiculousness, a narrative that tries to rewrite history and say that the Civil War had nothing to do with the enslavement of black people at all; rather it was about the moral and just goals of gaining economic prosperity, "state's rights," and preserving the "Southern way of life." It's almost impossible to fathom, but the Lost Cause is still included in some textbooks in the South.

< Sidebar: To those who try to defend the Lost Cause nonsense on ANY level, you can just save it. There is *zero* question that the reason the South fought the Civil War was to preserve slave labor. One must look no further than Confederate Vice President Alexander Hamilton Stephen's Cornerstone Speech, given in 1861, for confirmation of this: "Our new government is founded upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition." >

Is the *truth* about why the Civil War was fought disturbing? Of course it is! It's appalling. But it is, in fact, *the truth*! Just because we acknowledge that some white people did something bad in the past in no way suggests that *every* white person alive today is racist or that *every* white person alive today should feel guilty about transgressions perpetrated by their ancestors. And guess what? No one is trying to "take away" Christmas either. Calm down, white people.

I'm also concerned that certain proven historical events are, for whatever reason, still being *left out* of public schools. I'm not talking about sweeping, possibly controversial racial narratives; I'm talking about *proven* historical events.

The fact that this remains a problem became clear to me in May of 2021 when I watched the coverage of the 100-year anniversary of the Tulsa Massacre. Imagine my surprise to learn there *even was* a Tulsa Massacre, or something known as "Black Wall Street" since – despite having gone to three private universities and having read a ton about social justice issues – I had never heard one thing about either of them.

Regardless of where we each come down on critical race theory, or DEI, or whatever else, surely we can all agree that we can't just jump from the dock at Point Comfort where enslaved Africans first got off boats right to the Civil Rights Act, skipping over the sometimes painful but ***documented*** historical ***facts*** in between.

As the critical race theory debate went from simmering hot to fully enflamed in 2021, I often thought back to the day I went to the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. (a part of the Smithsonian Institution) with seven white, black, and Hispanic 17 and 18-year-old girls.

This museum is stunning in every way. It's aesthetically beautiful, but that pales in comparison to the power of its message. The exhibits are no frills and just present the facts in a very straightforward, non-manipulative way. Early on, I noticed that, although our group had stayed together in the other D.C. museums we had visited on the trip, each of us had broken off from the others and were absorbing this museum independent of one another.

After, we shared our thoughts about the experience. The highly intelligent and elegant way these girls analyzed and expressed what they had learned about the past and how they feel it relates to the present and future was incredible. Regardless of the color of their skin, each of their analysis and insight was as impressive as it was inspiring.

Our kids don't need us to explain the complicated and at times hypocritical nature of our Founding Fathers and other historical figures like President Abraham Lincoln; they can read the actual words of these men and evaluate their legacies for themselves.

Our kids don't need our running commentary on how the horrors of slavery relate, or don't relate, to the racial inequities that exist today; they can absorb the stories and interpret modern-day statistics with their own brains. Our kids don't need us to supply them with, as Justice Thurgood Marshall once put it, a "sensitive understanding of the Constitution's inherent defects and its promising evolution." They can read and study the Constitution and decide for themselves how they feel about those things.

But to properly assess them, our kids must have access to ALL the FACTS. History teaches by example, provides a compass for the future,

and, more important than anything, helps us not repeat the mistakes of the past.

If we focus on presenting our kids proven historical facts in an untainted, straightforward, and honest way, they will have all the tools they need to deconstruct, interpret, and critique the information they are given – and be fully capable of connecting the dots all on their own.

If We're Not Careful, Where Can This Lead?

Angry, disillusioned Americans crash through security barricades, climb scaffolding, and scale walls to breach the United States Capitol. A furious and frantic mob shatter windows, splinter doors, and carry tasers, guns, baseball bats, tear gas, truncheons, zip-tie handcuffs, and American flags with sharpened poles.

Members of the United States Congress, elected by *We the People*, crouch behind benches and lock themselves in bathrooms, terrified for their lives. The Vice President of the United States and his family hide in a closet while trying to coordinate some sort of rescue. Enraged men pull a journalist down a flight of stairs, past graffiti that says, "Murder the Media," then throws him over a ledge, screaming "We'll f---ing kill you."

Flags portray Donald Trump as Rambo and others have him astride a Tyrannosaurus rex, carrying a rocket-propelled grenade launcher. Flags honor QAnon, with the favored abbreviation "WWG1WGA" (Where We Go One, We Go All).

Inflammatory flags reach as far as the eye can see. Confederate battle flags and American flags with stars replaced by the Roman numeral III, a symbol of the Three Percenters. Green-and-white flags of Kekistan, an alt-right fictional god of chaos and darkness. Flags with Nazi imagery and flags with the skull-like symbol of the Punisher.

Nooses, crusader crosses, fur and horns, and Pepe the Frog masks illuminate the scene. Chants of *Stop the Steal* and *Trust the Plan*; patches that read Oath Keepers and Zombie Outbreak Response Team; Camp Auschwitz sweatshirts; and t-shirts that say MAGA Civil War, Jan. 6, 2021, RWDS (Right-Wing Death Squad), and 6MWE (Six

Million Wasn't Enough), referring to the number of Jews murdered in the Holocaust, pretty much tell the story.

One protester died from a gunshot and over 140 law enforcement officers were injured. Four officers on duty that day died by suicide in the seven months after the attacks. As The New York Times describes, "The victims who suffered the worst violence were the police officers protecting the Capitol. Patrick McCaughey, one of the rioters, pinned a Metropolitan Police officer, Daniel Hodges, with a stolen riot shield. Steven Cappuccio, another attacker, used Officer Hodges' own baton to beat him, leaving him to scream through bloodied teeth. David Dempsey discharged a stream of pepper spray that burned the lungs, throat, eyes and face of Detective Phuson Nguyen. Julian Khater shot pepper spray into the face of the Capitol Police officer Brian D. Sicknick, who suffered a series of strokes hours later and died."

Over half of the nearly 1,600 defendants pled guilty and 200 more were outright convicted. Sentences ranged from days in jail for misdemeanors to twenty-two years for seditious conspiracy. The total cost of that day and its repercussions are estimated to be over $2.7 billion.

These are words that, if I lived a million years, I never thought I'd write, but there is no other way to say it: A United States president tried to overthrow a democratically held, perfectly legal election.

He tried to overthrow it in the courts. He tried to overthrow it by sweet talking, shaming and threatening members of the Electoral College. He tried to overthrow it by submitting fake electors. He tried to overthrow it by harassing and bullying election officials, Department of Justice employees, members of Congress, state legislators and governors. And, in the big finale, he tried to overthrow it by inciting his devoted followers to stop the constitutionally mandated congressional electoral vote count.

One might even call Donald Trump and his supporters' actions a failed coup d'état (i.e., defined as a sudden, violent, and illegal seizure of power from a government).

Republicans may think my likening the events surrounding January 6th to a coup is hyperbolic – and that I'm being overly dramatic – but am I? Seriously, just stop and really think about this for a second.

"Seditious conspiracy," as defined by the U.S. criminal code is an effort by two or more people to "conspire to overthrow, put down, or to destroy by force the government of the United States, or to levy war against them, or to oppose by force the authority thereof, or by force to prevent, hinder or delay the execution of any law of the United States, or by force to seize, take or possess any property of the United States contrary to the authority thereof."

That was exactly what many of those people at the U.S. Capitol were trying to do that day. It is critically important we do not reduce what went down on January 6th to nothing more than "free speech." Many people that showed up that day were actively trying to prevent our government from functioning, by *preventing, hindering, and delaying the execution of a law of the United States*.

As United States District Judge Timothy Kelly, who was appointed by President Trump, said of the Proud Boys: "No matter defendants' political motivations or any political message they wished to express, this alleged conduct is simply not protected by the First Amendment. Defendants are not, as they argue, charged with anything like burning flags, wearing black armbands, or participating in mere sit-ins or protests."

We cannot allow people to rewrite history, and they are trying hard to. In the years after the insurrection, Donald Trump and his sycophants went into overdrive trying to flip the script of that day.

Convicted rioters suddenly became patriotic martyrs, political prisoners, and even "hostages." One of the darkest days in American history suddenly became, in Donald Trump's words, "a day of love." The song Justice for All, performed by the newly formed J6 Prison Choir, featured Donald Trump reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Just weeks before his second inauguration, President-elect Trump's spokeswomen Karoline Leavitt issued a statement to all the "political losers" that said, "the mainstream media still refuses to report the truth about what happened that day. The American people did not fall for the Left's fear mongering over January 6th."

In the most dramatic act of his made-for-television re-write, just hours after being sworn in a second time, President Trump granted clemency to all the nearly 1,600 people charge or convicted in

connection with that horrific day. John Kinsman, a Proud Boy who served four years in prison, seemed to speak for all of them when he said, "This is leaps and bounds better than I could have hoped."

In the most vindictive act of his rewrite, Donald forced the United States Justice Department to fire or demote over two dozen prosecutors who were assigned to hold the rioters accountable. In other words, he fired them *for doing their jobs*.

This rewriting of history is absurd, and insulting. The attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6th – and the events leading up to it – were seditious (i.e., conduct or speech inciting people to rebel against the authority of a state). As Americans, it's super hard for us to wrap our minds around this, but the assault on the Capitol was an insurrection (i.e., a violent uprising against an authority or government). When you look at the evidence, listen to their words, and see the images, there is really no doubt about it.

The nearly 1,600 people charged with various crimes from that fateful day must take personal responsibility for their own actions. But many people present that day were nothing more than chess pieces in a game they didn't know they were playing. As U.S. District Judge Amit B. Mehta said to a man named John Lolos as he was sentencing him to jail for entering the Capitol that day, "I think you are a pawn. You are a pawn in a game that's played and directed by people *who should know better*."

As Judge Mehta so perfectly put it, "People like Mr. Lolos were told lies, falsehoods, told the election was stolen when it really wasn't."

Although the attack on the Capitol was obviously planned and groups like the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys coordinated in the weeks before the attack, there is no denying that President Donald Trump played a major role, both before and on January 6th. The causation is clear: *But for* Donald Trump, the revolt on January 6th *would not* have happened.

If you really think about it, he had been grooming his army of insurrectionists for years. It started in earnest the minute he descended that escalator: The incendiary language, the constant undermining of the media and government institutions, the subtle racist undertones and the not-so-subtle nod to white supremacists – to the point where, after

the domestic terrorist event in Charlottesville, former KKK leader David Duke gushed on Twitter: "Thank you President Trump for your honesty & courage to tell the truth about #Charlottesville & condemn the leftist terrorists in BLM/Antifa."

As a result, the treasonous events on January 6th couldn't come fast enough for the Proud Boys, Three Percenters, Oath Keepers, and other anti-government militias and far-right extremists, plus QAnon whackos and other violent conspiracy theorists who had been waiting for this "storm" for years. None of them could believe their luck! Finally, there was someone in power who validated their delusions.

Once forced to hide in the darkest corners of the Internet, Donald Trump gave these people permission. He gave them legitimacy. He gave them cover. He gave them *orders*: Stand back and stand by you very fine, very special people…we love you… "Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!"

The morning of January 6th, Donald was on a roll: Remember, Joe Biden is being controlled by "people in dark shadows" so "we're going to have to fight much harder…You have to show strength, and you have to be strong…When you catch somebody in a fraud, you are allowed to go by very different rules…We will never give up. We will never concede. It doesn't happen. You don't concede when there's theft involved…Our country has had enough…We will not take it anymore, and that is what this is all about."

If we don't fight "you will have an illegitimate president. That is what you will have, and we can't let that happen. These are the facts that you won't hear from the fake news media. It's all part of the suppression effort. They don't want to talk about it; We fight like hell, and if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore." "It's just bullshit." "Bullshit! Bullshit!" repeated his adoring crowd. Then the chants turned to "Invade the Capitol."

That morning, the defeated president's incendiary, inflammatory language reflected the exact same themes his little army had been hearing from him for years… and they answered the call, some well before that fateful day.

In May 2020, Couy Griffin, a New Mexico county commissioner who also led the group Cowboys for Trump, said on a video, "The only

good Democrat is a dead Democrat." Naturally, Donald Trump wasted no time promoting the video adding, "Thank you Cowboys. See you in New Mexico!"

Later that month, Mr. Griffin told The Daily Beast that Democratic governors who shut down their states because of the coronavirus could be guilty of treason and could get the death penalty: "You get to pick your poison: You either go before a firing squad, or you get the end of the rope." When the reporter asked Mr. Griffin if violence may be necessary, he said, "I'll tell you what, partner, as far as I'm concerned, there's not an option that's not on the table."

A bodybuilder and self-proclaimed "dating coach" named Samuel Fisher, who went by the name Brad Holiday online, posted that "at 1 when congress certifies the election …Trump just needs to fire the bat signal…deputize patriots…and then the pain comes."

Samuel/Brad was arrested with over 1,000 rounds of ammunition, a tactical vest plus another vest with ballistic plates and a knife, two machetes, a shotgun, and, of course, a copy of the Daily News with Donald Trump's face on the cover and an American flag. He was sentenced to three and a half years in prison (but, of course, was then pardoned). At his sentencing, Mr. Fisher told the court, "I know what I did was wrong and I accept that my actions have consequences."

In the days after Donald lost the election, one of the leaders of the Oath Keepers, the convicted Stewart Rhodes (whose sentence was commuted, of course, by Donald Trump), said the group was ready for a "bloody fight." Another one of their leaders, Thomas Edward Caldwell, said, "This kettle is set to boil. It begins for real Jan 5 and 6 on Washington D.C. when we mobilize in the streets. Let them try to certify some crud on capitol hill with a million or more patriots in the streets."

At one point, a QAnon supporter tweeted: "It was a rigged election but they were busted. Sting of the Century! Justice is coming!" Naturally, Donald Trump quickly retweeted the message.

An FBI situation report, released on January 5th, warned that: "An online thread discussed specific calls for violence to include stating 'Be ready to fight. Congress needs to hear glass breaking, doors being kicked in, and blood from their BLM and Antifa slave soldiers being

spilled. Get violent. Stop calling this a march, or rally, or a protest. Go there ready for war. We get our President or we die. NOTHING else will achieve this goal.'"

The FBI also found social media posts directing people to the multiple rally points across the country: "MAGA Cavalry to Connect Patriot Caravans to Stop the Steal in D.C." There were maps of the U.S. Capitol building showing how the various tunnels were connected. The maps had the heading: "CREATE PERIMETER."

On the day of the assault, inside the Senate chamber, one devout Trump follower said, "While we're here, we might as well set up a government." Another one reminded his fellow insurgents, "You are executing citizen's arrest. Arrest this assembly; we have probable cause for acts of treason, election fraud."

Two ladies in red MAGA hats, Dawn Bancroft and Diana Santos-Smith, recorded a video for Bancroft's children documenting their big day which was later confiscated by the FBI: "We broke into the Capitol …We got inside, we did our part."

But Ms. Bancroft wasn't finished. "We were looking for Nancy to shoot her in the friggin' brain, but we didn't find her." …thereby admitting to threatening the life of the fourth highest ranking person in the United States government. On tape.

On January 7th, the day after the Capitol riot, Couy Griffin of New Mexico reappeared on video, saying of Joe Biden's inauguration: "We could have a Second Amendment rally on those same steps that we had that rally yesterday. You know, and if we do, then it's going to be a sad day, because there's going to be blood running out of that building."

If you are not convinced that Donald Trump's words incited the riot at the U.S. Capitol – both before and on January 6th – just ask the very people whom he incited.

The leader of the Florida Oath Keepers Kelly Meggs made it clear he was answering his hero's call when he posted on Facebook, "He called us all to Capitol and wants us to make it wild!!! Sir yes Sir!!! Gentlemen we are heading to DC."

Oath Keeper Jessica Watkins sent messages in advance of the 6th that said, "Trump wants all able bodied patriots to come" and "if Trump activates the Insurrection Act, I'd hate to miss it." The day of

the assault, Jessica – dressed, as the rest of her group was, in tactical gear including bulletproof vests and helmets – posted a message that said, "Trump's been trying to drain the swamp with a straw. We just brought a shop vac."

Incidentally, this is also the gal that said, "If (Biden) is (sworn in), our way of life as we know it is over. Our Republic would be over. Then it is our duty as Americans to fight, kill and die for our rights…If Biden get the steal, none of us have a chance in my mind. We already have our neck in the noose. They just haven't kicked the chair yet."

QAnon loyalist Kenneth Grayson said, "I'm there for the greatest celebration of all time after Pence leads the Senate flip!! OR IM THERE IF TRUMP TELLS US TO STORM THE FUKIN CAPITAL IMA DO THAT THEN!"

Throughout the Capitol that day, insurrectionists can be heard on camera yelling at law enforcement, things like: "Our president wants us here; Stand down. You're outnumbered. There's a f---ing million of us out there, and we are listening to Trump – your boss; We wait and take orders from our president; We were invited here by the President of the United States…"

Interestingly enough, many of these Donald Trump loyalists were pretty quick to throw him right under the bus once they got arrested. For instance, Jessica Watkins' attorney wasted no time in saying that Jessica was there that day "not to overthrow the government, but to support what she believed to be the lawful government. She fell prey to the false and inflammatory claims of the former president, his supporters, and the right-wing media."

Dominic Pezzola, a once proud Proud Boy, said that, despite all appearances, he had "honorable intentions" that day and was only "protecting his country." However, he "now realizes he was duped into these mistaken beliefs" and "is consumed with guilt."

There are plenty of others who are complicit in this attempted hostile takeover, including the eight Republican senators and 139 Republican members of the House of Representatives who, on January 6th during the Electoral College vote count, introduced or voted for at least one of the objections that were based on false allegations of election fraud … as are Donald Trump's laughable attorneys, members

of his White House staff, and anyone else who amplified his election fraud lies – particularly conservative media outlets.

< As I write this, it is still shocking to me that ***any*** American would jeopardize our country in this way. All of this feels almost like an out-of-body experience. It still makes me really, really, really sad. >

The most important reason we cannot allow people to rewrite the events of January 6, 2021 is that it absolutely, positively ***cannot*** happen again. In Russia, Hungary, Poland, Turkey and the Philippines, populist leaders have made lying and corruption an artform. Because these countries don't have strong, independent legal systems and autonomous news media outlets, the lies of these leaders know no bounds.

Thank God we do have these guardrails, and more. The United States was protected from this assault on our democracy by honorable judges, heroic election officials, steadfast state legislatures, and the brave American citizens who remained faithful to the constitutionally mandated Electoral College process. *God Bless Them All*.

But still, this feels way too close for comfort. In their outstanding book How Democracies Die, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, both Harvard professors, warn:

"During the Cold War, coup d'état accounted for nearly three out of every four democratic breakdowns. Democracies in Argentina, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Thailand, Turkey, and Uruguay all died this way. More recently, military coups toppled Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi in 2013 and Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra in 2014. In all these cases, democracy dissolved in spectacular fashion, through military power and coercion."

"But there is another way to break a democracy. It is less dramatic but equally destructive. Democracies may die at the hands not of generals but of elected leaders – presidents or prime ministers who subvert the very process that brought them to power. Some of these leaders dismantle democracy quickly, as Hitler did in the wake of the 1933 Reichstag fire in Germany. More often, though, democracies erode slowly, in barely visible steps."

On February 1, 2021, Myanmar's military (a.k.a. the Tatmadaw) declared a state of emergency and took control of the country – in what amounted to a military coup.

The Myanmar (Burma) military detained the head of state Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders of the National League for Democracy, who had been reelected by a landslide in November 2020, in only the second democratically held election since the country moved to a democracy from almost fifty years of military rule.

The military announced that power would be transferred to the commander in chief, Min Aung Hlaing, then handed to Myint Swe, the military-backed vice president. The violence escalated. In late March 2021, security forces killed over 100, including seven children.

What reason did the Myanmar military give for this coup d'état? Well, election fraud, of course! The fact that the country's election commission continued to insist there was no evidence to support this claim didn't seem to matter one bit.

Meanwhile, before the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, there had been four democratically held presidential elections in the two decades since the United States arrived on the scene. Three of the four were disputed.

On March 9, 2020, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah both took the oath of office as the rightful president of Afghanistan – at the exact same time. The incumbent, Ghani, was declared the rightful winner of the election, but Abdullah insisted that the election was…wait for it… stolen! Incredibly, the media dutifully did the split screen thing as both men simultaneously gave their acceptance speeches.

As this was taking place, rockets rained down over the presidential palace in Kabul. I can practically hear Abdullah's people shouting…

أوقف السرقة
(this means "Stop the Steal" in Arabic)

Really, America? We were, at least on this one day in January, in the same place as Myanmar was? And Afghanistan? …which, as a reminder, has now been taken over by terrorists. Really? This is what we're gonna do now?

I'm not overreacting. Who among us cannot picture Donald Trump staging that split screen acceptance speech deal? And we may have seen just that if he had lost the 2024 election.

If you *do* happen to think I'm overreacting, just listen to leaders from around the world – many of whom know a thing or two about rebellions – who spoke out during that time. (shout out to Axios for compiling these):

- European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell Fontelles: "In the eyes of the world, American democracy tonight appears under siege. This is an unseen assault on U.S. democracy, its institutions and the rule of law. This is not America. The election results of 3 November must be fully respected."
- German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas: The enemies of democracy will find out about these incredible images #WashingtonDC looking forward. Insurgent words turn into violent acts – on the steps of the Reichstag, and now in the #Capitol. The disdain for democratic institutions is devastating. (translated)
- German Chancellor Angela Merkel: "These images made me furious and also sad, and I'm quite sure I feel like most friends of the United States, like millions of people who admire America's democratic tradition. And I regret very much that President Trump since November has not conceded his defeat, and not yesterday either."
- French President Emmanuel Macron: "When, in one of the world's oldest democracies, supporters of an outgoing president take up arms to challenge the legitimate results of an election, that one idea – that of 'one person, one vote' – is undermined."
- United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson: "Disgraceful scenes in U.S. Congress. The United States stands for democracy around the world and it is now vital that there should be a peaceful and orderly transfer of power."

- Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau: “Canadians are deeply disturbed and saddened by the attack on democracy in the United States, our closest ally and neighbor. Violence will never succeed in overruling the will of the people. Democracy in the U.S. must be upheld – and it will be.”
- NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg: “Shocking scenes in Washington, D.C. The outcome of this democratic election must be respected.”
- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi: “Distressed to see news about rioting and violence in Washington DC. Orderly and peaceful transfer of power must continue. The democratic process cannot be allowed to be subverted through unlawful protests.”
- Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba: “Concerning scenes in Washington, D.C. I’m confident American democracy will overcome this challenge. The rule of law & democratic procedures need to be restored as soon as possible. This is important not only for the U.S., but for Ukraine and the entire democratic world as well.”
- Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte: “Horrible images from Washington D.C. Dear [Donald Trump], recognize [Joe Biden] as the next president today.”
- Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte: “I am following what is happening in #Washington with great concern. Violence is incompatible with the exercise of democratic rights and freedoms. I am confident in the strength and robustness of the institutions of the United States.”
- First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon: “The scenes from the Capitol are utterly horrifying. Solidarity with those in [the United States] on the side of democracy and the peaceful and constitutional transfer of power. Shame on those who have incited this attack on democracy.”

† Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg: "Unbelievable scenes from Washington D.C. This is a totally unacceptable attack on democracy. A heavy responsibility now rests on President Trump to put a stop to this."

This is so embarrassing. But even worse were the delighted, almost gleeful, reactions from people who don't want us to succeed in the first place. For example, Jürgen Elsässer, the editor of a German far-right magazine, gleefully said, "We were following it like a soccer match."

A Russian foreign ministry spokesman said, "The events in Washington show that the U.S. electoral process is archaic, does not meet modern standards, and is prone to violations," while the president of Zimbabwe said the riot "showed that the U.S. has no moral right to punish another nation under the guise of upholding democracy."

… and it's not like we weren't warned, America. The annual report from Freedom House – a U.S. government-funded nonprofit non-governmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom and human rights – called Freedom in the World evaluates the state of freedom in 210 countries/territories. Each country/territory is assigned between 0 and 4 points on a series of 25 indicators, for an aggregate score of up to 100.

In 2018, the theme of the report was Democracy in Crisis, and it said, "Political rights and civil liberties around the world deteriorated to their lowest point in more than a decade in 2017, extending a period characterized by emboldened autocrats, beleaguered democracies, and the United States' withdrawal from its leadership role in the global struggle for human freedom."

The report continued, "A long list of troubling developments around the world contributed to the global decline in 2017, but perhaps most striking was the accelerating withdrawal of the United States from its historical commitment to promoting and supporting democracy."

That year, we received a score of 86 out of 100, which was well below France, Germany and the United Kingdom. This represented an 8-point drop since our score of 94 in 2009.

In 2019, the theme of the report was Democracy in Retreat, and it said,

"The great challenges facing U.S. democracy did not commence with the inauguration of President Donald Trump. Intensifying political polarization, declining economic mobility, the outsized influence of special interests, and the diminished influence of fact-based reporting in favor of bellicose partisan media were all problems afflicting the health of American democracy well before 2017."

"Previous presidents have contributed to the pressure on our system by infringing on the rights of American citizens. Surveillance programs such as the bulk collection of communications metadata, initially undertaken by the George W. Bush administration, and the Obama administration's overzealous crackdown on press leaks are two cases in point."

"At the midpoint of his term, however, there remains little question that President Trump exerts an influence on American politics that is straining our core values and testing the stability of our constitutional system. No president in living memory has shown less respect for its tenets, norms, and principles. Trump has assailed essential institutions and traditions including the separation of powers, a free press, an independent judiciary, the impartial delivery of justice, safeguards against corruption, and most disturbingly, the legitimacy of elections. Congress, a coequal branch of government, has too frequently failed to push back against these attacks with meaningful oversight and other defenses." Yet again we received a score of 86.

The 2020 report, called A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy, was perhaps the most depressing of all. We again received a score of 86, which was below Italy, Greece, Slovakia, Latvia and Mauritius (a country in East Africa). This one said:

"Democracy and pluralism are under assault. Dictators are toiling to stamp out the last vestiges of domestic dissent and spread their harmful influence to new corners of the world. At the same time, many freely elected leaders are dramatically narrowing their concerns to a blinkered interpretation of the national interest. In fact, such leaders – including the chief executives of the United States and India, the world's two largest democracies – are increasingly willing to break

down institutional safeguards and disregard the rights of critics and minorities as they pursue their populist agendas. As a result of these and other trends, Freedom House found that 2019 was the 14th consecutive year of decline in global freedom."

"Those in the United States and elsewhere who doubt the value of a foreign policy designed to advance human freedom should realize that no one's rights are safe when tyranny is allowed to go unchecked. History has shown that the chaotic effects of authoritarian misrule abroad are not confined by national borders, and that authoritarian powers will seek to expand their control by subverting the democratic sovereignty of other states. The same is true in domestic affairs: attacks on the rights of specific groups or individuals in a given country ultimately imperil the liberty of the entire society."

In the 2021 report, Democracy Under Siege, we finally broke our three-year-in-a-row score of 86, but unfortunately not in the right direction. In 2021, we received a score of 83. I take back what I said a second ago. *This* was by far the most depressing assessment:

"The final weeks of the Trump presidency featured unprecedented attacks on one of the world's most visible and influential democracies. After four years of condoning and indeed pardoning official malfeasance, ducking accountability for his own transgressions, and encouraging racist and right-wing extremists, the outgoing president openly strove to illegally overturn his loss at the polls, culminating in his incitement of an armed mob to disrupt Congress's certification of the results. Trump's actions went unchecked by most lawmakers from his own party, with a stunning silence that undermined basic democratic tenets."

"Only a serious and sustained reform effort can repair the damage done during the Trump era to the perception and reality of basic rights and freedoms in the United States. The year leading up to the assault on the Capitol was fraught with other episodes that threw the country into the global spotlight in a new way. The politically distorted health recommendations, partisan infighting, shockingly high and racially disparate coronavirus death rates, and police violence against protesters advocating for racial justice over the summer all underscored the

United States' systemic dysfunctions and made American democracy appear fundamentally unstable."

"Even before 2020, Trump had presided over an accelerating decline in U.S. freedom scores, driven in part by corruption and conflicts of interest in the administration, resistance to transparency efforts, and harsh and haphazard policies on immigration and asylum that made the country an outlier among its Group of Seven peers."

"But President Trump's attempt to overturn the will of the American voters was arguably the most destructive act of his time in office. His drumbeat of claims – without evidence – that the electoral system was ridden by fraud sowed doubt among a significant portion of the population, despite what election security officials eventually praised as the most secure vote in US history. Nationally elected officials from his party backed these claims, striking at the foundations of democracy and threatening the orderly transfer of power."

"The exposure of U.S. democracy's vulnerabilities has grave implications for the cause of global freedom. Rulers and propagandists in authoritarian states have always pointed to America's domestic flaws to deflect attention from their own abuses, but the events of the past year will give them ample new fodder for this tactic, and the evidence they cite will remain in the world's collective memory for a long time to come."

After a four-year break from Donald Trump, the 2025 Freedom in the World report now seems prophetic:

"One pivotal country to watch will be the United States… During the campaign, Trump made a number of promises with regard to domestic and foreign policy that could substantially impact freedoms at home and abroad. He warned that he would prosecute his political opponents and reduce the independence of institutions – including federal law enforcement agencies, the civil service, and the media – that have traditionally protected the rule of law, ensured transparency, and served as beneficial checks on presidential discretion… Both democratic and autocratic countries look to the United States to justify their own actions, so the course charted by President Trump over the next four years will have global reverberations."

The 2026 report, titled The Growing Shadow of Autocracy, says, “In the United States, the decline in freedom stemmed from a combination of long-term patterns and recent developments. There was an intensification of chronic partisan gridlock and dysfunction in Congress, including a funding impasse that culminated in the longest government shutdown in US history. The growing legislative paralysis was accompanied by a parallel escalation in the executive branch’s assertions of unilateral authority. Separately, a multiyear rise in threats and reprisals for political speech as well as government efforts to punish nonviolent expression by noncitizens produced a chilling effect on personal expression more broadly. The new presidential administration also disregarded conflicts of interest and weakened both anticorruption safeguards and enforcement practices.” We lost three more points, for a net loss of 12 points over the last 20 years.

Chapter Three

For Policy Geeks Like Me

Finding Balance on a Tightrope

Not to make this all about me, but a little about me. If a butterfly in Africa had flapped its wings a second earlier, I might be in the United States Congress.

After finishing graduate school in July 2003, I officially launched a congressional campaign in the great state of Texas. You might wonder whether it was wise to start with such a high office my first time out, but I never really considered any other level (this is a major clue into my personality!).

By nature, I'm an optimistic person. From a very early age, when people insisted our political system was hopeless, I would fight them until the bitter end… and I knew for a fact that my phenomenal congressional campaign was exactly what was needed to save it. I remember thinking that when Americans got a taste of me, they would follow me like the second coming of Lincoln, Roosevelt and Reagan, or, in the case of Texans, Sam Houston, Davy Crockett and Robert Earl Keen. Besides, at the time I really didn't have anything better to do.

From the beginning, with the energy of the innocent, I was undaunted, enthusiastically speaking at fire departments, pie suppers, political forums, and every kind of fair, festival and fiesta imaginable. This was not difficult given that East Texas can find any reason for events that involve funnel cake.

I was on the Kiwanis, Rotary and Lions Club circuit, went to church five times every Sunday, and ate six times a day. I even entered a homemade float in five Christmas parades where amazingly supportive family members marched down brightly lit streets, throwing candy canes with my picture plastered to them. Believe me, dignity goes on hiatus during a political campaign. These were the honeymoon days… before reality dawned.

Although Jim Turner – the Democratic incumbent for the Texas 2nd congressional district and my original opponent in the election – seemed to be an upstanding family man, it was obvious (to me anyway) that things were oppressively stagnant and new blood was overdue.

This may sound like political b.s., but my main motivation was an overwhelming desire to be a voice for the people who never seem to be heard. Aren't I just wonderful?

Because I had lived outside East Texas for several years, I had absolutely no idea how I would be received upon my return. I anticipated many thinking I was too young, too blonde or just flat too Union. After all, I had lived in Massachusetts, for goodness' sake! For many East Texans, living even a short time in the state that spawned the Kennedy clan would contaminate me for life. Twenty-five years in Texas could not possibly vaccinate me from their Yankee, liberal ways!

Another indictment I expected, and indeed heard many times throughout the campaign, was "carpetbagger," meaning that I had moved into the community just to run for office. This annoyed me tremendously. Seriously, most people saying this had moved to Lufkin from Des Moines two years earlier. Take it from me, if you survive being born, raised, and educated in East Texas, it's only fair that you have membership for life. :)

Despite the initial uncertainty, the positive reception I received from most everyone meant the world to me and is something I will never forget

< To ensure full disclosure, I ran on the Republican ticket in the 2004 election, but I'm not a Republican and never have been. I have never been a Democrat either – which, since I'm starting an entirely new political party, should be pretty obvious by now! >

Republicans in the 2nd district were thrilled to have me, mainly because they hadn't had a serious Republican candidate in years. They were so excited they sometimes forgot to ask what I actually stood for, which after what you have read so far, I'm sure you recognize as a huge relief for me and borrowed time for my campaign.

Although my age and hair color did not necessarily deter people – though I must confess, I did have my hairdresser put in lowlights for a

few months – the Harvard thing did rub some people the wrong way. This controversy was brought to my attention by a group of ladies having lunch at high noon at a busy restaurant on the Jasper square.

I had returned to my hometown in full anticipation of a ticker-tape parade or, at a minimum, a "Jasper: Home of Emily Mathews" welcome sign. After all, people, I was running for Congress! Can you believe what I've made of myself?

< Have I mentioned that I was born and raised in Jasper, Texas? Yes, *that* Jasper, the town with the devastating distinction of three white supremacists dragging James Byrd, a black man, behind their truck and to his death in 1998. You can literally see his grave from my childhood window. But we'll come back to this later. >

What I got instead was, "You went to Harvard," one particularly austere lady stated with dismay in the middle of the very crowded parlor (and not in her inside voice). "That just turns me off. Why couldn't you stay home and go to school around here?" To which I quickly replied, "Did someone tell you Harvard? They meant Stephen F. Austin State, the 'Harvard of the South'." It never came up again, so I guess she spread it around.

This is probably a good spot to describe the general scene I encountered at these "First Tuesday of the Month Meeting of the (insert county name) Republicans" meetings, though I doubt I'm a talented enough writer to accurately capture the true essence of them. These gatherings should really be in one of those *100 Things You Must Do Before You Die* books.

You must first understand that for dyed-in-the-wool Republicans in East Texas – and I know and <u>LOVE</u> many, especially those in my family! – these meetings are second in importance only to church services.

It's serious business and the agenda rarely wavers from its order: anti-abortion petition, anti-gay marriage petition, anti-prayer in school ban petition and last, but certainly the most fun, Democrat-bashing (which, because it's encouraged at any point during the meeting, doesn't really have a set place on the program).

The focal point of the room – generally located in a courthouse basement, bank community room or, of course, a church – is the table

that holds the food which: 1) is flanked by the United States flag on the left and the Texas flag on the right; 2) is draped with a plastic red, white and blue tablecloth decorated with stars and stripes; and 3) holds the pimento cheese sandwiches, the potato salad, and the sugar cookies that have been covered with red, white and blue sprinkles. Even before the prayer or the pledge, the participants of the meeting go through that table like Grant through Richmond.

Sometimes these meetings get really entertaining, mainly because they become contentious in some way. Once there was almost a fistfight when one local treasurer suggested that the monthly meeting be moved from the Mexican restaurant to the fish place since, being a buffet, a tip would no longer be required.

Another fun night was an election bake sale, a popular event highlighted by an auction of each candidate's "homemade" baked goods. Thank goodness for my precious grandmother who armed me with three pecan pies and a pound cake that killed.

This night, one of the candidates for sheriff accused his opponent of killing his dog with a shotgun and another announced that the incumbent's son was the biggest drug dealer in the entire county. Both revelations caused the entire crowd to erupt in – depending on their take on the situation – fierce applause, feigned disbelief, or obvious delight that they were finally going to see some action.

Although this was infinitely more entertaining than Grandpa Joe reading the entire Declaration of Independence – which we had endured the previous week – there were two additional components of the meeting that upped the ante: 1) There was a full bar set up in the back (an interesting but, as far as I was concerned, very welcomed development given that this was a dry county), and 2) Several of those attending were carrying a variety of weapons, which included an exposed machete strapped to one of the candidate's legs.

To be fair, this particular individual was questioned about the machete when he arrived, but he assured everyone that, although it had been dark for nearly two hours, he had come straight to the meeting from clearing brush. Everyone seemed content with that answer until his eighth Johnnie Walker on the rocks happened to coincide with that nasty little accusation about the dog.

So, hopefully you have a visual of the scene unfolding at one of those meetings with the angry people saying racist things. As I outlined my brilliant plans for infrastructure and national security, a KKK fossil < I'm not just arbitrarily accusing him of this; I was good friends with his daughter growing up and he was *actually in* the KKK > stood up and made the most disgusting, bigoted comments imaginable.

As one who doesn't sugarcoat hideous behavior for fear of enabling it, I originally had the entire statement written here. But in the end, I couldn't stomach the thought of seeing it in print.

After his moment of glory and amid the appreciative high-fives of his fellow wannabe Klansmen, he heroically sauntered to the plastic tablecloth-covered food table and filled his plastic plate with plastic tasting green bean casserole (okay, that last one was harsh).

Somewhat recovered from the meeting of the plantation brotherhood, I bravely forged onward. At the time, the Texas 2nd district was composed of 19 counties. You may remember this as the district of Congressman Charlie Wilson who, in one of the largest CIA covert operations in history, armed half of Afghanistan to help defeat the Soviets in the 1980s.

He was also a player. If you have read or seen Charlie Wilson's War and therefore know the dirt, Charlie's onetime girlfriend and Playboy cover girl is my fourth cousin, but that's a story for another time.

The fact that "Good-Time Charlie" had been the congressman for this district was a source of immense comfort to me. Although I was nervous about some of the skeletons in my closet, nothing I had done compared with driving drunk and leaving the scene of an accident I caused or snorting cocaine with strippers in a hot tub in Vegas (or I guess I should say, nothing that I can remember or there is photographic evidence of). Heck, if these constituents forgave Charlie for all of that while he was *in* Congress, they may at least consider giving me a pass on Harvard and other such indiscretions.

I never got the chance to find out. Eight weeks before the 2004 primary election, after campaigning for months in the 2nd district, I suddenly found myself – thanks to a nasty redistricting campaign by the

Texas Republicans – in a newly scrambled 1st district with only three of my original 19 counties going with me.

The 2004 Texas redistricting battle was horrifying to watch. The stories that spewed from my great state warmed my heart with pride: legislative sessions erupted into fistfights, multiple lawsuits tied-up every level of the court system, and Republicans atrociously abused their power while Democrats shamelessly fled to other states to avoid a final vote. In a dazzling display of failed leadership, Governor Rick Perry called three special legislative sessions – each at an astronomical cost to the state – to help his fellow Republicans manipulate the new map (don't even get me started on this guy).

One of the many lawsuits that challenged the Texas Republicans' redistricting plan was eventually heard by the U.S. Supreme Court and, despite overruling one of the districts as racial gerrymandering, the conservative-leaning court upheld the redistricting as Constitutional…a decision that is perplexing given that the Republican's new map was as convoluted as an inkblot in the Rorschach test.

< Read more about my disdain for redistricting/gerrymandering on p. 602 >.

Most of the members of the 2003 Texas Legislature should be seriously ashamed and owe every Texan an apology – as well as you, for that matter, since America missed out on my being a member of Congress – for their dereliction of duty. I guess I shouldn't be surprised. This is, after all, the state that unanimously passed a motion to commemorate the "heroic actions" of the Boston Strangler, a motion that a jokester member of the state legislature introduced to prove that his colleagues continually passed legislation without even reading it.

Although the Republicans' new map killed any chance I had to win, this part of the campaign was a complete blast. Freed by the absolute certainty of defeat, I could say anything I dang well pleased, and being in Congress was becoming less and less appealing anyway.

The day of the election dawned and, predictably, I got my be-hind kicked. Louie Gohmert (yes, you read that right) won the primary and went on to win the general election against Democrat Max Sandlin who had represented the original 1st district for four terms).

My congressional campaign was one of the best times of my life. Sure, I experienced first-hand all that is wrong with our political system. But I also had a unique opportunity to see everything that is right with this country, and it is *truly magnificent*.

I know commercials with politicians shaking hands, kissing babies and eating at diners ten times a day seem cheesy, but it really was an honor to meet so many amazing people and talk with them about their hopes and dreams for the future (okay, I can practically hear *The Battle Hymn* of *the Republic* playing in the background, so I'll stop now).

The campaign experience was even more special because it was in East Texas, back where it all started for me. In my teenage years, I loved me some Ronald Reagan! In high school, I regarded the conservative trinity of small government, low taxes and less regulation as the answer to *everything*.

Now, if you had asked me *why* I believed these things, I would not have had the first clue. Since I had engaged in zero research, I believed these things probably for the same reason I eat mustard on my hamburgers and order my steak medium well: Because my dad did.

Over time, common sense waged war with some of these beliefs – if not always with the belief itself, then certainly with the inflexibility.

How, I wondered, can low taxes *always* be the right thing in a dynamic economy? After all, if we cut government spending at the expense of investing in our future, won't our national growth slow and our infrastructure eventually fall apart? If we slash social safety nets, won't income inequality just get worse? If we always put the needs of the individual over the needs of the collective, won't we enable a severely divided society that will ultimately sabotage civil civilization?

My questions were bipartisan. But if we don't curb spending, won't we soon face massive debt and a monumental deficit? If we implement too many financial regulations, won't we potentially choke the free market and stifle economic growth? If we expand the federal government too much, won't we end up with a runaway budget and paralyzed bureaucracy?

And then it hit me: The only way to operate at the most optimal level is to reject the liberal's fallacy that the government is *always* our savior and Wall Street is *always* the enemy and the conservative's

fallacy that individualism, tax cuts and smaller government are *always* the miraculous solutions to everything.

A mature democracy demands a robust and thriving private sector *and* a strong and stable government, working together to stimulate the economy, promote innovative development, and enrich the public interest.

In other words, it's all about *balance*. As we work to find a healthy balance, we need to move past three debilitating misconceptions.

The first misconception is that clear, intelligent solutions to our challenges don't exist. This is categorically false. Exhaustive research conducted by think tanks, colleges and universities, nonprofits, private foundations, and even our federal government directly address our policy challenges.

Many questions have been answered on someone else's dime, but politicians have very little incentive to acknowledge or accept them. After all, it would be political suicide if Democrats learned of overwhelming evidence that proves school vouchers work, or for Republicans to be faced with data that unequivocally supports a public option in health care (by the way, I only use these examples to make my point – neither of these are a good idea!). They have way too much to lose because they have way too many people to repay.

In truth, I think we will be shocked by how straightforward the answers are when we drown out the noise of special interest groups, ideological labels, and the paralyzing backlash of a hard-core base.

The second misconception is that, because there have historically been only two major political parties, there are only two distinctive – but extremely divergent – options, and we are required by some invisible law to strictly adhere to one of their outdated, one-size-fits-all bullet point platforms.

No. Just no. No. No. No. There is *no way* to craft intelligent policy when your solutions are confined to these absurdly constricting labels. It's wildly irresponsible to address dynamic policy issues with boilerplate solutions.

Leo Tolstoy said, "The most difficult subjects can be explained to the most slow-witted man if he has not formed any idea of them already; but the simplest thing cannot be made clear to the most

intelligent man if he is firmly persuaded that he knows already, without a shadow of doubt, what is laid before him."

The third debilitating misconception is the delusion that we can have our cake and eat it too. Although it would be fantastic to solve our problems with little effort or send the bill to someone else, those are unrealistic fantasies.

Unfortunately, we don't live in the Candyland board game. Don't get me wrong, I desperately wish we did.

I wish that we could all sit in a colorful field of Pixy Stixs, singing Kumbaya and licking lollypop flowers under a marshmallow sky filled with Skittle rainbows.

Little elves, who make delicious cookies, live in sugarplum trees that will never be harvested; you really do get $200 every time you pass Go; and an extraordinarily handsome prince will gallop in to gently kiss the sleeping princess, saving her from a lifetime of kissing good for nothing frogs (okay, that last one sounds bitter).

The words war, inflation, deficit, terrorism, and Jeffrey Epstein are banned, and never again are we forced to eat all our vegetables because there really aren't kids starving in Africa after all. We breathe air as pure as those oxygen bars in L.A., while we drive our environmentally responsible Hummers as oil gushes from our unpolluted earth like a chocolate fountain.

We not only have free tuition but get paid to go to college, are given a comprehensive and universal health care plan for our birthdays, and get a bright and shiny national infrastructure for Christmas. The Oompa-Loompas at Treasury will print money 24/7 to pay for our goodies and we are taxed only 2% of our earnings thanks to several permanent tax cuts. Oh, happy day!!

We know better. We know that it's impossible to sustain freedom and liberty without sacrifice. To abandon this basic truth will only create a deeper hole for all of us. You know what they say when you're digging yourself further into a hole don't you? Stop digging!

It's All About the Benjamins
America's Economic State of Play

The U.S. economy is slowing. In the second quarter of 2026, real GDP grew at an annual rate of just 1.5 percent, down from 2.1 percent in the first quarter and well below the 2.8 percent growth the economy recorded during President Biden's final full year in office.

We have a $1.8 trillion deficit (nearly 6 percent of GDP) and so much debt ($40 trillion) that it exceeds 100% of our entire GDP. Donald Trump is now solely responsible for roughly 29 percent – $11.8 trillion – of America's debt between his two terms, while all the other 45 presidents combined are responsible for the other $28.3 trillion.

According to Fortune magazine, the U.S. Treasury borrowed $155 billion *every single month* during the first nine months of this fiscal year and is now paying $24 billion *a week* in interest on its debts. Net interest is expected to exceed $1.1 trillion this fiscal year – more than the defense budget – and more than double to $2.1 trillion by 2036. Only Social Security consumes a larger portion of the federal budget than net interest.

And it's just getting worse. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects that the annual federal deficit will climb from $1.9 trillion in 2026 to $3.1 trillion by 2036 and the federal debt held by the public will reach 120 percent of GDP by 2036… far exceeding the previous record reached in the aftermath of World War II.

By the summer of 2026, inflation was again outpacing wage growth. In July, wages rose 3.2 percent from a year earlier, while consumer prices rose 3.4 percent. Wage growth slowed further to 3.1 percent in August.

While the U.S. labor market remains in reasonably good shape by some key metrics – – the economy continued adding jobs through August 2026, and the unemployment rate fell from 4.2 percent in June to 4.1 percent in August – – finding a new job has become increasingly difficult for many unemployed Americans. In August, 27 percent of those unemployed had been out of work for six months or longer, near its highest level since the job market was recovering from the Covid-19

shock. That's around 1.9 million Americans who had been without work for at least 27 weeks.

By the end of 2025, electricity prices were rising far faster than inflation, increasing 6.7 percent from a year earlier. During the first half of 2026, average residential electricity prices were 7.4 percent higher than a year earlier. As bills climbed, so did shutoffs. Nearly 14 million households have fallen behind on utility bills, and residential disconnections increased in most states. Rising fuel costs and growing electricity demand are likely to put further pressure on bills.

The squeeze just goes on and on. The average premium for a benchmark health insurance plan on the ACA marketplaces has risen 26 percent from 2025 to 2026, and the number of uninsured Americans is rising. The average rate on a 30-year fixed mortgage climbed to 6.71 percent in early September 2026, its highest level since June 2025.

At the end of 2025, Americans were already paying roughly 24 percent more for goods and services than at the end of 2020, and that was before the war with Iran upended global energy markets. Inflation jumped from 2.4 percent in February to 3.3 percent in March, 3.8 percent in April and 4.2 percent in May, when gasoline prices were more than 40 percent higher than a year earlier. Prices at American pumps were nearly a dollar higher by Labor Day 2026 than the year before… and were the highest Labor Day gasoline price on record. Diesel prices also reached a record national average of $5.85 per gallon in early September.

And it's important to remember that inflation surged even after, for much of 2025, large retailers tried to avoid raising prices by absorbing at least some of the higher costs caused by the Trump/Vance administration's tariffs. However, by the end of the year, companies were warning they would be increasingly passing those higher costs through to consumers.

This was bad news because consumers were already spending far less… and that was before the war with Iran. By April 2026, the University of Michigan's consumer-sentiment index had plunged to 49.8, near its historic lows, falling again to 51.7 in August – 11 percent lower than a year earlier.

Indeed, the divide between the wealthy and lower-income households is never starker than when you look at who is spending money today. In 2025, the top 10 percent of earners accounted for an estimated 49 percent of consumer spending, up from 36 percent three decades earlier. By early 2026, the top 20 percent of households accounted for nearly 60 percent of personal outlays, while spending among the bottom 80 percent failed to keep pace with inflation.

While it's true Americans across-the-board spent more during the 2025 holiday season, many increasingly relied on debt to do it. Buy now, pay later (BNPL) borrowing has grown about 20 percent a year since 2021, reaching an estimated $70 billion in transactions in 2025. By 2026, 47 percent of BNPL users reported making at least one late payment in the previous year, up from 41 percent in 2025 and 34 percent in 2024. More than half said they needed BNPL loans to make ends meet.

In fact, America's total credit-card balance reached $1.25 trillion in the first quarter of 2026, the highest first-quarter balance since the Fed began recording the measure in 1999. In the second quarter, the balance reached $1.26 trillion. Nearly 13 percent of balances were at least 90 days delinquent, only slightly below the 15-year high reached earlier in the year. Meanwhile, average credit-card interest rates remain near 21 percent – up from roughly 14.5 percent in early 2022 – putting additional strain on borrowers.

Other signs of financial strain are showing. The share of subprime auto loans at least 60 days past due hit a record 6.9 percent in early 2026. Repossessions have also risen sharply as borrowers struggle with high vehicle prices, interest rates and monthly payments.

Thanks to tariffs, inflation, supply chain disruptions, and broader economic uncertainty, small businesses have faced considerable pressure. In August, 62 percent of small-business owners reported some supply-chain disruption, while inflation was cited as a top concern. This matters because America's 36.2 million small businesses account for 43.5 percent of GDP and employ 62.3 million people – nearly 46 percent of private-sector workers. Over the long run, they have generated about 60 percent of net new jobs.

Small businesses aren't the only ones struggling. U.S. corporate bankruptcies surged in 2025 to levels not seen since the aftermath of the Financial Crisis as businesses dealt with high interest rates, inflation, tariffs and supply-chain pressures. And the trend continues. Around 27,000 business bankruptcies were filed in the 12 months ending June 2026, up 17 percent from a year earlier. Industrials and consumer-facing companies have been among the hardest hit.

Meanwhile, more red flags are waving in global bond markets, as investors worry about mounting government debt, deficits and inflation. In August 2026, the yield on 30-year U.S. Treasurys climbed above 5.3 percent, its highest level since 2007, and remained near multi-decade highs in early September. Higher Treasury yields ripple through the economy, putting upward pressure on mortgages, auto loans and business borrowing costs.

President Trump keeps touting the stock market as proof that the economy is strong. Over the summer he said things like "we've had 80 days where the stock market hit all-time highs" and called it the "the hottest stock market in history," and, at the September Republican "convention" before the midterms, he repeatedly said, "Our stock market hit records."

Ironically, this is the part that should worry us the most. It's true that corporate earnings growth is strong, but the multiple that investors are paying for those earnings is now two and a half times greater than the historical average. This signals to me that the market may be acting irrationally, allowing fantasy to outweigh smart business sense.

Just look back at 2025. In many ways, the economic data from 2025 is contradictory. Less than one week apart in December, one government report showed job growth contracting and unemployment rising and another showed the economy expanding at a robust 4.4 percent annual rate in the third quarter (helped greatly by wealthy Americans spending lots of money; the U.S. spending big on our military; and outrageous spending on A.I. infrastructure).

And despite trade wars, gutted immigration, and other policies pushed on America by the Trump/Vance administration – the negative consequences of which were already showing up big time on so-called "Main Street" – Wall Street just kept humming along, breaking record

after record in 2025. Even after some late-year wobbles, the S&P 500 finished 2025 up 16.4 percent – or nearly 18 percent including dividends.

But this is where it goes from concerning to downright chilling. When you look closer, much of the strength in the stock market has been tied to the artificial-intelligence boom. In fact, A.I. has become so economically significant that it increasingly skews the headline numbers – affecting everything from stock-market performance and corporate profits to trade, investment, and even the pace and composition of U.S. economic growth.

By 2025, hundreds of billions of dollars a year were pouring into A.I. – from chips and software to massive data centers and the power infrastructure needed to run them. Federal Reserve researchers estimate that A.I.-related investment categories accounted for roughly 39 percent of U.S. economic growth during the first nine months of 2025… an even greater contribution than comparable technology investment made during the dot-com boom.

For much of 2025, the seven technology giants known as "The Magnificent Seven" – Alphabet (Google), Amazon, Apple, Meta, Microsoft, Nvidia, and Tesla – represented more than a third of the S&P 500's value.

BUT, if you set everything A.I.-related aside, the stock market in 2025 was relatively weak as tariffs and economic uncertainty had already led to both declining sales and investment. The Russell 2000, an index that tracks roughly 2,000 smaller U.S. companies, fell nearly 5 percent in the one-month period ending November 21, 2025.

This, of course, leads to the inevitable question: *What if the A.I. boom goes away*?

Although plenty of investors continue to pour billions into A.I. – some estimates say 3 percent of our GDP by 2027 – there are signs the A.I. craze may have already started to slowly unravel. In the end, only Alphabet and Nvidia outperformed the S&P 500 in 2025, and at the beginning of 2026, five of the "Magnificent Seven" stocks were performing worse than the broader market benchmarks, signaling that

the group of technology giants that had dominated Wall Street in previous years was beginning to fracture.

This trend has continued. By July 2026, five of the seven were still trailing the S&P 500, while the group substantially underperformed the broader market. The companies increasingly stopped trading as a unified bloc, leading major investors and analysts to question – and in some cases explicitly declare an end to – the "Magnificent Seven" as a meaningful description of stock-market leadership.

Consumers and the American people also have a vote. Many companies across America are rebelling against high prices and are starting to use lower-priced A.I. models. Then there are the data centers. The United States already has more than 3,000 operational data centers, with another 1,500+ in development – Americans are increasingly pushing back against them.

Communities are quickly realizing that these data centers greatly impact their existing infrastructure, electricity demands, utility rates, water consumption, air and water quality… basically, their overall quality of life and well-being.

The worst part may be the noise pollution, which is intense. Imagine a constant low-frequency vibration that feels like you're standing in a nightclub right between the band's subwoofer and bass drum. People unfortunate enough to experience this nightmare report chronic sleep deprivation, headaches, internal ear pressure, and increased anxiety.

The public backlash against data centers has gotten so intense that, in 2025, local opposition blocked or delayed at least 48 data-center projects worth $156 billion. In just the first three months of 2026, at least 75 projects worth another $130 billion were blocked or delayed. By summer, polling showed that seven in ten Americans opposed having a data center built in their own community.

As a result of all these things, many people think we could be in yet another speculative financial bubble (think: dotcom in the late 90s/2000 and U.S. housing in 2007-8). There are several parallels, the number one being the insane level of extravagant investment in A.I. by a plethora of enamored investors that seems to be completely detached

from the amount of profit A.I. can plausibly generate – the hallmark of a bubble.

Another hallmark is that this binge is fueled by massive debt, which usually doesn't end well… and the ATM machine ain't slowing down. Morgan Stanley estimates that capital spending by the five largest A.I. "hyperscalers" – Alphabet (Google), Amazon, Meta Platforms, Microsoft, and Oracle – will reach around $800 billion in 2026 and an astonishing $1.2 trillion in 2027. The $1.2 trillion figure is especially instructive because Morgan Stanley's estimate was only about $450 billion for 2027 a year earlier… meaning its forecast nearly tripled in roughly a year.

In October 2024, OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, raised $6.6 billion at a valuation of $157 billion – at the time one of the largest venture-capital rounds ever. That sounds like a lot of dough, but it's even crazier when you hear that the investors had been told that OpenAI could *lose* $44 billion over the following five years. At the time, JPMorgan estimated that the tech industry would have to generate $650 billion in revenue every single year for A.I. investments forecast through 2030 to earn even a modest 10 percent return. Uh oh.

And that was only the beginning. In 2025, OpenAI raised another $40 billion at a $300 billion valuation. Then, in early 2026, investors committed a staggering $122 billion more, valuing the still-unprofitable company at $852 billion. OpenAI's revenues were growing just as spectacularly – reaching an annualized rate of more than $40 billion by August 2026 – but so were the enormous costs of the computing infrastructure required to build and operate its AI systems.

… and people are catching on. At the end of 2025, CoreWeave – an A.I. cloud-computing company backed by Nvidia and major investors—lost $33 billion in market value, or 46 percent, in just six weeks. There were several reasons for this, including a failed acquisition, data-center construction delays, and concerns about its enormous debt and spending, but one of the main reasons was that prominent short-seller Jim Chanos, famous for predicting the collapse of Enron, started publicly questioning CoreWeave's business model.

CoreWeave recovered substantially in 2026 as revenues surged, but concerns persisted: the company continued losing hundreds of

millions of dollars while spending tens of billions on A.I. infrastructure, and the cost of insuring its debt against default rose to unusually high levels… all while Chanos continued publicly criticizing the company.

These signs are something we can't ignore. We already had a wake-up call in January 2025, when America was blindsided by the Chinese scrappy startup DeepSeek's latest A.I. model. Although the tech itself was comparable to models recently released by U.S. companies, it appeared to require far fewer cutting-edge computing resources than many in Silicon Valley had assumed necessary…. and, in the blink of an eye, DeepSeek-R1 challenged the assumption that the United States was the dominant, undisputed force in A.I.

DeepSeek-R1 triggered a financial panic, erasing a trillion dollars of market value in a single day. The day before its release, Nvidia – the dominant computational chip dealer for the A.I. boom – was the most valuable company in the world. In the days after the release, it lost $593 billion of value, a loss greater than the entire market cap of ExxonMobil and the worst day for any stock in history. (Note: That said, in July 2025, Nvidia became the first public company worth $4 trillion and, three months later, the first to reach $5 trillion).

DeepSeek-R1 stoked fear from Wall Street to Silicon Valley, and it signaled to the entire world that the battle between the United States and China for tech supremacy had only just begun.

The battle lines were reset once again in June 2026, when it was announced that Z.ai, a Chinese start-up, released a model called GLM-5.2 that matched the performance of the powerful Mythos model in certain cybersecurity scenarios – putting Chinese companies neck and neck with America's Anthropic, one of the most advanced A.I. laboratories on the planet.

The following month, yet another Chinese start-up, Moonshot AI, released Kimi K3 – a model, its developers claim, that is now the world's largest open-source A.I. system and performs as well as leading models from OpenAI and Anthropic on several key tasks.

Indeed, according to Vals AI, a company that evaluates the performance of A.I. models, Kimi K3 performs just below Anthropic's Fable 5 model and outperforms OpenAI's flagship GPT-5.6 Sol model.

The AI benchmarking site Artificial Analysis ranks Kimi K3 third for intelligence, behind Anthropic's Claude Fable 5 and OpenAI's GPT-5.6 Sol. U.S. stocks immediately dropped on the news of both of these latest developments, as investors sold shares of American chipmaking companies Nvidia, Intel and Micron Technology.

Does no one in Washington understand the wise saying *make hay while the sun shines*?

America's fiscal course is unsustainable, and we all know it. Year after year our spending has increased while our revenues have fallen short. But instead of tackling this shortfall head-on and jeopardizing their re-election bids, our leaders have chosen to borrow enormous amounts of money to cover it.

In July 2019, the U.S. economic expansion that began in June 2009 entered its 11th year, becoming the longest on record. According to The Wall Street Journal, "more than 20 million jobs had been created so far in the expansion that started in mid-2009, and the net worth of American households – the value of assets such as stocks and housing minus debts such as mortgages and credit cards – had increased by $47 trillion."

Unemployment was low and job creation seemed solid. In fact, the labor market had experienced an astonishing recovery from the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis. In July 2019, the seasonally adjusted official unemployment rate was 3.7 percent.

Although there is debate among economists about what the magic unemployment target should be, there is little question this is a great number. Some would even say we were at or near full employment – a point at which nearly everyone willing and able to work at prevailing wages could find a job without generating unsustainable inflationary pressures. By many measures, the U.S. economy looked strong.

Obviously, while we were fortunate enough to be in an expansion, the smart, responsible course of action would have been to keep it

going for as long as possible, using those critical years to solidify our financial stability; spend money on investment in our future through intelligent infrastructure projects and cutting-edge research and development; and finally tackle the root causes of the financial Apocalypse that has been bearing down on us for years (a.k.a. Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid).

This would have been a smart move in any case, but particularly since we didn't know how long the economic expansion was going to last. After all, the American economy looked great *before* the financial crisis also, to the point where practically no one saw it coming. Meaning, everything was great – *until it wasn't*.

But typically, that's not what happened. Although the yearly budget deficit fell under President Obama – largely because of the economy's recovery from the 2007–2009 Financial Crisis and the winding down of emergency measures enacted in response to it – deficits would have fallen even more without the expensive legislative initiatives he enacted. In the end, Obama added roughly $5 trillion in deficits over the 2009-19 period (it's important to note that $4 trillion of this was a tax-cut extension that had wide bipartisan support).

Then came Donald Trump. The first Trump administration and its enablers in Congress drowned us in debt, passed extremely expensive tax cuts, started trade wars, restricted legal immigration, and allowed our workforce to remain in denial and ill-prepared for the harsh realities of the 21st century workplace. Then, to follow that up, the Biden administration continued to spend money like drunken sailors (more specific details on all this in a minute).

The actions taken by the administrations of both President Trump and President Biden were incredibly reckless and devastating for our long-term economic outlook… and I'm going to prove it to you in the following pages, with facts, not just from the media, but straight from the United States government.

Let's take a closer look at the three financial bombs that started ticking loudly during the first Trump presidency, then continued to tick through Biden's, and that are unfortunately still ticking today.

Red Flags & Ticking Time Bombs

Financial Bomb One:

A Growth Strategy of Tax Cuts & Deregulation Alone

*** Don't let the title of this section fool you! Any negative talk about "a growth strategy of tax cuts and deregulation alone" in no way means that the better way is massive tax-and-spending, which is even worse. More on this this later. ***

During the first Trump presidency, he and the Republicans took America straight down the ineffective road of encouraging domestic investment through nothing more than tax cuts and less regulation – even though history pretty much tells us these things (by themselves) don't work if your main goal is to encourage economic growth.

< Note: Even though deregulation was supposedly part of Trump's strategy, in a report called The Deregulation Deception, the Penn Program on Regulation revealed his actual success in that endeavor was way overblown. Read more on p. 175 of the *Policy Guide*. >

Now listen, I'm not saying there is never a time and place for tax cuts. There certainly can be. But tax cuts made absolutely ZERO sense for an economy that had been on a healthy trajectory in terms of stable growth and falling unemployment for over eight years. Essentially, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 (TCJA) – the law that congressional Republicans passed and then President Trump signed on December 22, 2017 – acted as a fiscal stimulus when we didn't need one.

This was a double-whammy because, not only was it clear from the jump that the Republican tax cuts were going to cost this nation a fortune, but the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco made clear at the time that "many recent studies have found that fiscal stimulus has a smaller impact when the economy is strong, implying that the near-

term boost to GDP growth could be two-thirds or less of that from previous tax cuts."

The Feds warning proved 100% correct. After experiencing a two-quarter "sugar high," GDP growth fell to the same average growth rate as before the tax cut. The growth rate increased from 2.2 percent in 2017 to 2.9 percent in 2018 but fell back down to 2.3 percent in 2019. Hardly a bonanza. < In 2020, the growth rate fell to -3.5 percent, but I'm leaving 2020 out of this discussion because, thanks to the pandemic, the entire year is an outlier. >

The Republican fantasy about relying on tax cuts and deregulation to encourage growth goes something like this: Cutting corporate taxes and rich people's taxes, together with minimizing regulation, will give corporations and rich people the chance to create so many fabulous opportunities that the benefits will "trickle down" to everyone else and the economy will flourish beyond anyone's wildest dreams!!!

Obviously, a tax cut means that less money is being collected by the federal government, but many Republicans believe that this tangible loss is more than compensated for by the level of economic growth that the tax cuts will surely bring.

They believe this fairytale because four decades ago, President Ronald Reagan unleashed "Reaganomics" the moment he signed the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981.

But what these Republicans seem to forget is that, although the U.S. economy did indeed experience a boost during this time period – including a net gain of 2 million jobs per year during President Reagan's two terms (which, incidentally, is less than the 2.6 million jobs per year under President Jimmy Carter) – it was more a combined function of the Paul Volcker-led Federal Reserve's significant interest rate cuts and increased spending for defense and construction projects.

They also forget that, when President Reagan became the 40th U.S. president, the economy was in recession, interest rates were 19 percent, unemployment was in the double digits, and inflation was almost 10 percent (which are all reasons why the Federal Reserve's interest rate cuts made such a huge impact). Also, the top marginal income tax rate was 70 percent.

All of us not named Elizabeth Warren, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, or Bernie Sanders can probably agree that a top marginal income tax rate of 70 percent was waaaaay too high and, at the time, substantial reform of the tax code was long overdue.

To that end, the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 reduced the marginal tax rate from 70 percent to 50 percent. From the beginning, President Reagan and his team recognized the tax cuts would not pay for themselves, but they anticipated spending cuts would help balance everything out. Typically, the spending cuts never came.

But even back then – with an economy that had negative markers across the board – this strategy didn't work as advertised. Soon after the 1981 tax cut, federal revenues dropped like a rock and the federal deficit blew out, making it clear the tax reduction was too aggressive.

Even so, five years later, President Reagan signed the Tax Reform Act of 1986, bipartisan legislation with the stated goal of "fairness, simplicity and economic growth." This law reduced the marginal income tax rate from 50 percent to 28 percent and reduced the corporate tax rate from 46 percent to 34 percent.

But this didn't really have an impact either. As Bruce Bartlett – a domestic policy adviser to President Reagan and one of the architects of the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 – explains:

"Today, Republicans extol the virtues of lowering marginal tax rates, citing as their model the Tax Reform Act of 1986, which lowered the top individual income tax rate to just 28 percent from 50 percent, and the corporate tax rate to 34 percent from 46 percent. What follows, they said, would be an economic boon.

Indeed, textbook tax theory says that lowering marginal tax rates while holding revenue constant unambiguously raises growth. But *there is no evidence showing a boost in growth from the 1986 act.* The economy remained on the same track, with huge stock market crashes – 1987's 'Black Monday,' 1989's Friday the 13th 'mini-crash' and a recession beginning in 1990. Real wages fell.

Strenuous efforts by economists to find any growth effect from the 1986 act have failed to find much. The most thorough analysis, by economists Alan Auerbach and Joel Slemrod, found only a shifting of

income due to tax reform, no growth effects: 'The aggregate values of labor supply and saving apparently responded very little,' they concluded."

Here is more of what Auerbach and Slemrod had to say:

"Of course, saying that a decade of analysis has not taught us much about whether the Tax Reform Act of 1986 was a good idea is not at all the same as saying it was not in fact a good idea. We think it was.

The theoretical case remains valid for a tax system with a broad and clean base which minimizes the reward to tax-driven economic activity. Advocates of this kind of tax system will, however, be frustrated that a retrospective analysis of the most comprehensive attempt in history to achieve this goal *offers little hard evidence of the fruits of this effort."*

In the end, President Reagan and Congress had to *raise* taxes in 1982 (a rollback of some of the 1981 tax cuts), 1983 (a payroll tax on Social Security and Medicare), 1984 (a closure of tax loopholes) and 1987 (a closure of more loopholes and an extension of a telephone excise tax). President George H.W. Bush was forced to raise taxes again in 1990 – violating his "read my lips, no new taxes" campaign pledge, a reversal that contributed to his political difficulties in the 1992 election – as was President Bill Clinton in 1993.

So – after all the smoke cleared – the tax legislation passed in 1982 and 1984 "constituted the biggest tax *increase* ever enacted during peacetime." Tax historian Joseph Thorndike explained it this way, "Reagan was certainly a tax cutter legislatively, emotionally and ideologically. But for a variety of political reasons, it was hard for him to ignore the cost of his tax cuts."

… which is why, in his farewell address to the nation, President Reagan said, "I've been asked if I have any regrets. Well, I do. The deficit is one."

All that said, it probably made sense to give this a shot back in 1981, given the dire state of the economy and before we had actual

evidence of its possible ineffectiveness. But why in the world did Republicans try it after they should have known better?

Listen, I try hard to always be positive. I try hard to give people the benefit of the doubt, and to not point fingers and constantly play the blame game. But there are times when there is simply no option but to call people out: The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 was outrageous in its irresponsibility.

Again, I'm not saying there is never a time and place for tax cuts. There certainly can be. But this tax cut was one of the largest financial heists in American history – the crazies officially took over the asylum and they had your checkbook. Once again, a Republican-led Congress passed a tax bill that ensured the wealthiest Americans and already majorly flush corporations won. Bigly.

… which is fine if that's what you want to do. But at least be man enough to be honest with the "forgotten men and women," as you call them, who fervently believe in you and count on you to tell them the truth.

This is what truly makes my blood boil about Donald Trump. Over and over and over, he just bald face lies to the very people who have never wavered in their loyalty to him. Millions of Americans root for him and trust him – still – and he repays them by blatantly lying to their faces. It's just not right.

Here are Donald Trump's Claims Before the 2017 Tax Bill Passed:

- DJT on September 28, 2015, at a news conference: "[The tax bill] is going to cost me a fortune."
- DJT on May 7, 2016, on Meet the Press: "For the wealthy, I think, frankly, it's going to go up. And you know what? It really should go up."
- DJT on September 13, 2017, at a meeting with members of Congress: "The rich will not be gaining at all with this plan. I think the wealthy will be pretty much where they are.... If they have to go higher, they'll go higher, frankly."

- DJT on September 29, 2017 at an event for small businesses: "By eliminating the tax breaks and special interest loopholes that primarily benefit the wealthy, our framework ensures that the benefits of tax reform go to the middle class, not the highest earners."
- DJT on November 29, 2017, at a speech in St. Charles, Missouri: "[The tax cuts] are not good for me. Me, it's not so – I have some very wealthy friends. Not so happy with me, but that's OK. You know, I keep hearing Schumer: 'This is for the wealthy.' Well, if it is, my friends don't know about it."
- DJT on November 29, 2017, at the same speech in St. Charles, Missouri: "Our focus is on helping the folks who work in the mailrooms and the machine shops of America. The plumbers, the carpenters, the cops, the teachers, the truck drivers, the pipe fitters. The people that like me best."
- DJT on December 16, 2017, at the White House: [The tax cuts] are "one of the great Christmas gifts to middle-income people."

Every single one of these statements was complete b.s. The truth is that wealthy Americans got a windfall from the tax bill – and were going to from the very beginning, a fact Donald Trump acknowledged when he walked into dinner at Mar-a-Lago after the bill passed and said to the entire room, "You all just got a lot richer."

This was on top of the fact that Donald Trump's claims about what would happen to household incomes were also complete b.s.

- DJT on October 11, 2017, at a speech in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (but he also said it a zillion times elsewhere): Speaking to hundreds of truck drivers, he said that the average American family would get "a $4,000 pay raise." He also said that his wealthy friends told him they don't want anything from the tax bill, and that he should just "give it to the middle class."

† 2018 Economic Report from the President: "The corporate tax changes alone are expected to increase annual income for families by an average of $4,000."

Here's the truth: The U.S. Joint Economic Committee (JEC) – one of four joint committees of the U.S. Congress, this one responsible for reporting the current economic condition of the country – found that, "Annual household income growth in the first year the tax cuts took effect lagged far behind the previous three years. It grew only $550 in 2018, compared to $850 in 2017, $1,900 in 2016 and $2,900 in 2015. The growth curve of real median income became flatter."

The Wall Street Journal reported it this way on September 10, 2019 (remember, the tax cuts went into effect on January 1, 2018): "American incomes remained essentially flat in 2018 after three straight years of growth… in recent weeks, the government has revised downward its estimates for job gains, economic output and corporate profits at various points in time since early last year."

Grrrr… see, this is the kind of ^#*@ I'm talking about. Okay, back to tax rates. The U.S. Joint Economic Committee reported this in 2020: "The personal income tax cuts were heavily weighted to the very wealthy, with the top 1 percent of households – those with average incomes of almost $2 million – projected to receive an average tax break of nearly $50,000 in 2020. Their tax cuts alone are worth more than the entire average annual income of households in the bottom 40 percent."

This is certainly not me with a pitchfork, gunning for rich people. In fact, I think we need to cut rich people some slack. It seems like lately they have been demonized for things that are realistically not their fault. I get that many Americans are frustrated, especially now, but taking it out on rich people seems petty, bitter and jealous, and that's just not the American way.

Personally, I know some super uber duper rich people. Several of them are jerks, but most are some of the greatest people I have ever known.

Two jerks in particular come to mind – one is a guy I went to college with who is now a millionaire several times over, and the other

is now a billionaire I worked with at the very beginning of my career. I knew them both when they were practically eating beanie weenies out of a can and guess what!?! They were total jerks back then too (although, to be fair, slimy, cold beanie weenies don't bring out the best in people).

I also know a lot of people who are not super uber duper rich and guess what!?! Several of them are jerks, but most are some of the greatest people I have ever known.

It's not difficult to see why super uber duper rich people are sometimes villainized in today's America. For one thing – although it's an entirely unfair thought – it's easy to believe that it's impossible for someone to make that much money without some sort of moral deficiency or shady behavior.

Plus, it's not easy to reconcile social justice and capitalism. On one hand, you have the promise of the American Dream, where every American can achieve success and prosperity, regardless of their originating circumstances. On the other hand, you have statistics that reveal a shocking level of income inequality in America.

It can also be maddening when money seems to make life so much easier, at least in the short-term, for people who do bad things (à la Jeffrey Epstein) or super entitled things (college admissions bribery scandal).

Listen, I have seen people born in the most devastating conditions imaginable work four jobs just to pay the bare minimum of their bills. I have also seen plenty of people raised with a ton of money and opportunity who have crashed and burned.

However – from my experience and with minor exceptions – this last group seems to miraculously rebound virtually unscathed from their mistakes and bad decisions. Redemption seems to come much easier when you can afford rehab and qualified attorneys. It's funny how prosperity can hide a multitude of sins.

But these are separate issues that seem to get unfairly wound up in one another. The truth is that most wealthy Americans not only greatly enhance our society and democracy, but they are also incredible public relations ambassadors for the United States on a global scale. As a nation, many of them make us *all* look good.

All in, Americans donated a record $617.2 billion to charity in 2025 alone.

That number is enormous. It's a shame there is no line item for this on the U.S. Balance Sheet because it's nearly impossible to quantify exactly how much this generosity boosts the entire American economy – but there is no question it has a significant impact.

One question I've heard repeatedly, asked in response to these huge donations, is: While the generosity is greatly appreciated, why do we live in a country where this is even possible? How can these people even have that much money to give when many others can't even put food on their table?

Again, I understand the frustration behind this question, especially these days, and we really dig into this and other social justice issues later in this book. But for now, maybe we should show a little more gratitude.

Rich people also spend lots of money, which, although not to the degree advertised by the Republicans, does indeed help spark economic growth. The top 10 percent of U.S. households account for 49.7 percent of all spending. Moody's Analytics estimates that this spending alone is responsible for around one-third of our gross domestic product.

But this is not to say that rich people don't need to pay their fair share because they certainly do. In 2021, ProPublica published a special report based on "troves" of federal tax documents involving thousands of the wealthiest Americans – including President Trump – over a fifteen-year period. < The documents were leaked to ProPublica and The New York Times by Charles Littlejohn, an IRS contractor. Littlejohn was sentenced to 5 years in prison after pleading guilty to one count of unauthorized disclosure of tax returns and return information. >

In what the president of ProPublica Richard Tofel called "the most important story we have ever published," the investigation revealed:

"In 2007, Jeff Bezos, then a multibillionaire and now the world's richest man, did not pay a penny in federal income taxes. He achieved the feat again in 2011. In 2018, Tesla founder Elon Musk, the second-richest person in the world, also paid no federal income taxes. Michael

Bloomberg managed to do the same in recent years. Billionaire investor Carl Icahn did it twice. George Soros paid no federal income tax three years in a row."

In their words, ProPublica's investigation "demolishes the cornerstone myth of the American tax system: that everyone pays their fair share and the richest Americans pay the most. The IRS records show that the wealthiest can – perfectly legally – pay income taxes that are only a tiny fraction of the hundreds of millions, if not billions, their fortunes grow each year."

< Sidebar: That said, The Wall Street Journal reported that "figures for 2021 show that the top 1 percent of Americans reported 26.3 percent of the country's adjusted gross income, while paying 45.8 percent of total income taxes… the top 10 percent of earners in 2021 provided 75.8 percent of the revenue." >

But regardless, if the uber rich don't pay their fair share that's technically not their fault. As Warren Buffett said in a 2011 article titled Stop Coddling the Super-Rich:

"Our leaders have asked for 'shared sacrifice.' But when they did the asking, they spared me. I checked with my mega-rich friends to learn what pain they were expecting. They, too, were left untouched. While the poor and middle-class fight for us in Afghanistan, and while most Americans struggle to make ends meet, we mega-rich continue to get our extraordinary tax breaks.

Some of us are investment managers who earn billions from our daily labors but are allowed to classify our income as 'carried interest,' thereby getting a bargain 15 percent tax rate. Others own stock index futures for 10 minutes and have 60 percent of their gain taxed at 15 percent, as if they'd been long-term investors.

These and other blessings are showered upon us by legislators in Washington who feel compelled to protect us, much as if we were spotted owls or some other endangered species. It's nice to have friends in high places."

That's a pretty solid point, don't ya think?

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 was the most significant change in the U.S. tax code since Ronald Reagan's Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 1986.

For one, the legislation cut the federal corporate income tax rate from 35 percent to 21 percent. Without question, some sort of corporate tax reform was needed because, for decades, it had been ridiculously complicated and inefficient, and had incentivized corporations to borrow too much money, leave money in overseas subsidiaries, and/or potentially move operations overseas altogether.

Plus, the statutory tax rate was much higher than in other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) economies. < Note: Even though the statutory tax rate was higher on paper, relentless lobbying efforts, complex deductions, and loopholes brought the effective marginal tax rate closer to our international competition, but that only caused even greater confusion and inconsistency. >

Although we needed corporate reform, the 2017 Republican bill went way too far. Analysis by The New York Times discovered that "in the 2017 fiscal year, FedEx owed more than $1.5 billion in taxes. The next year, it owed nothing... FedEx reaped big savings (from the tax cut), bringing its effective tax rate from 34 percent in fiscal year 2017 to less than zero in fiscal year 2018, meaning that, overall, the government technically owed *it* money."

A study by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy revealed that, in 2020, 55 corporations had zero federal tax liability on over $40 billion in profits. Zero. These companies included Nike, Dish Network, and FedEx. Not only did these companies not have to pay federal income taxes, but they *received* tax rebates of $3.5 billion, giving them an effective tax rate of roughly negative 9 percent.

As of April 2021, twenty-six of these companies had paid zero federal income tax on over $77 billion in profits since the Republican

tax cut. Yet they had *received* almost $5 billion in rebates, making their effective three-year tax rate negative 6 percent.

Here's more of what they found in their analysis:

- The 342 companies included in the study paid an average effective income tax rate of just 14.1 percent during this five-year period, almost a third less than the statutory rate of 21 percent. Nearly a quarter of the corporations in this study (87 companies) paid effective tax rates in the single digits or less during this five-year period.
- Of these, 55 (16 percent of the total 342 companies) paid effective rates of less than 5 percent. This is particularly striking given that all these companies were profitable for at least five years consecutively. Companies paying less than 5 percent include T-Mobile, DISH Network, Netflix, General Motors, AT&T, Bank of America, Citigroup, FedEx, Molson Coors, Nike, and many others.
- Twenty-three corporations paid zero federal tax over the five-year period despite being profitable in every single year. And 109 corporations paid zero federal tax in at least one of the five years.
- At the other end of the spectrum, 50 corporations paid effective tax rates of more than 21 percent, but most of these companies were also the beneficiaries of large tax breaks because they were paying taxes from previous years that they delayed using depreciation breaks.

This is probably not as bad as it sounds because surely FedEx, for example, expanded payroll and increased investment in new equipment and other assets in the years after its big windfall (or, as Alan Graf, FedEx's chief financial officer, called it, a "mighty fine Christmas gift"), right!?!

Nope. The New York Times reported that "the company spent less in the 2018 fiscal year than it had projected in December 2017, before the tax law passed. It spent even less in 2019. Much of its savings

had gone to reward shareholders: FedEx spent more than $2 billion on stock buybacks and dividend increases in the 2019 fiscal year, up from $1.6 billion in 2018, and more than double the amount the company spent on buybacks and dividends in fiscal year 2017."

In fact, its analysis of data compiled by Capital IQ "showed no statistically meaningful relationship between the size of the tax cut that companies and industries received and the investments they made. If anything, the companies that received the biggest tax cuts increased their capital investment by less, on average, than companies that got smaller cuts."

"FedEx's use of its tax savings is representative of corporate America. [As of November 2019,] companies had already saved upward of $100 billion more on their taxes than analysts predicted when the law was passed. Companies that make up the S&P 500 index had an average effective tax rate of 18.1 percent in 2018, down from 25.9 percent in 2016, according to an analysis of securities filings. More than 200 of those companies saw their effective tax rates fall by 10 points or more. Nearly three dozen, including FedEx, saw their tax rates fall to zero or reported that tax authorities owed them money.

From the first quarter of 2018, when the law fully took effect, companies have spent nearly three times as much on additional dividends and stock buybacks, which boost a company's stock price and market value than on increased investment."

In January 2020, the U.S. Joint Economic Committee reported that: "Since the enactment of the tax cuts, growth of business investment has averaged just 3.5 percent, substantially below the 4.6 percent average growth of the previous seven quarters. Although there was a slight bump in business investment in the first two quarters after the tax cuts took effect, it subsequently fell below its long-term trend and has contracted in the most recent quarters."

The Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland baked this up, reporting that business investment grew more slowly after the tax reform than before it: "The average quarterly growth rate of business investment

was 2.8 percent in 2018–2019, lower than the rates in 2016–2017 (4.0 percent), 2013–2017 (3.9 percent), or 2010–2017 (5.5 percent). Even taking into account that other economic factors, such as changes in trade policy and a global economic slowdown, may have held investment down, these data suggest that the stimulus provided by the tax reform was not large."

This should have come as no surprise to anyone because, even before the 2017 tax law passed, major companies including Cisco, Pfizer, and even Coca-Cola made it clear that they would use any new windfall not for investment, but to buy back stocks – which passes any gains to their shareholders and executives, not employees. No "trickle-down" happening here, boys!

< Sidebar: In a stock buyback (a.k.a. share repurchase), a company buys back its own shares from the marketplace. They do this, in part, to reduce the number of shares that are available on the open market, which ultimately increases the value of those shares (i.e., supply and demand). Buybacks can also increase equity value, make a company look more financially sound, and allow a way for money to be returned to investors.

This buyback strategy is dubious, to say the least (and that's being generous). For one, there is a massive conflict-of-interest because the executives of these companies have millions and millions of incentives to buy back stock, regardless of whether its best for their companies.

Robert J. Jackson Jr., a former commissioner of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission appointed by Donald Trump, put it this way at the time: "There is clear evidence that a substantial number of corporate executives today use buybacks as a chance to cash out the shares of the company they received as executive pay. We give stock to corporate managers to convince them to create the kind of long-term value that benefits American companies and the workers and communities they serve. Instead, what we are seeing is that executives are using buybacks as a chance to cash out their compensation at investor expense." >

To be fair, companies were honest about their intentions from the start. In fact, at a meeting of The Wall Street Journal CEO Council in November 2017, the CEOs in attendance were asked to raise their

hands if they intended to use their new fortune for investment. Gary Cohn, the former COO of Goldman Sachs who at the time was Donald Trump's top economic adviser, seemed perplexed that very few hands were raised. "Why aren't the other hands up?" he asked.

This didn't get any better as time went on. The Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta periodically surveys business executives. According to the results of their survey after the 2017 tax bill passed, "roughly two-thirds of respondents indicated that tax reform hadn't enticed them into changing their investment plans for 2018."

The survey also asked the respondents about their investment plans for 2019: "The results were not statistically different from their 2018 response. Roughly three-quarters of firms didn't plan to change their capital expenditure plans in 2019 as a result of the [tax cuts]."

As promised, buybacks soared. According to the S&P Dow Jones, "In Q4 2018, S&P 500 stock buybacks, or share repurchases, set a fourth consecutive record of $223 billion. This displaced the previous record of $203.8 billion, set during Q3 2018 and is a 62.8 percent increase from the $137 billion reported for Q4 2017. For the year 2018, buybacks set an annual (and 12-month) record of $806.4 billion, up 55.3 percent from the prior year's $519.4 billion, and up 36.9 percent from the prior annual record set in 2007, of $589.1 billion."

The following year, they reported that: "Buybacks for the full year 2019 were $728.7 billion." In the 4th Quarter of 2019, Apple continued to lead, spending $22.1 billion – up from last quarter's $17.6 billion, and ranking as the 3rd highest expenditure historically."

A paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) revealed that "the average annual inflation-adjusted amount paid out through dividends and repurchases by public industrial firms was more than three times larger from 2000 to 2019 than from 1971 to 1999."

What's really infuriating is that many of the companies that benefited mightily from the 2017 corporate tax cut – only to buy back shares – went crawling to the federal government (i.e. YOU and ME) for help during the Covid-19 economic crisis just a couple of years later – crying poor, with their hand firmly out.

After telling his investors, "I don't think we're ever going to lose money again" after their big tax cut windfall, American Airlines CEO

Doug Parker happily and without hesitation accepted a large chunk of the $54 billion that the U.S. government (i.e. YOU and ME) gave the airline industry during the Covid-19 crisis. It's just ridiculous we put up with this.

When you hear these facts, it's hard to deny that the 2017 Republican tax cuts cost far too much for far too little. By passing this law, the first Trump administration and congressional Republicans sold most Americans out. Straight up. Worse, it's not like they didn't know they were selling Americans a bill of goods. Not only did they have history as a guide but, even at the time, plenty of people were waving huge red flags. They *knew*.

A report from the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center said, "The new tax law will raise deficits and make the distribution of after-tax income more unequal." The Penn Wharton Budget Model was more specific: "The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 increases debt by between $1.9 trillion to $2.2 trillion over the next decade."

The Republicans went ahead and did this, even though the United States had been losing substantial revenue from tax breaks for the wealthy for years. A 2018 report from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy revealed that "since 2000, tax cuts had reduced federal revenue by trillions of dollars and disproportionately benefited well-off households."

The report continued, "From 2001 through 2018, significant federal tax changes have reduced revenue by $5.1 trillion, with nearly two-thirds of that flowing to the richest fifth of Americans. The cumulative impact on the deficit during this period is $5.9 trillion, including interest payments. By the end of 2025, the tally of tax cuts will grow to $10.6 trillion. Nearly $2 trillion of this amount will have gone to the richest 1 percent. By then, the total impact on the deficit will be $13.6 trillion, including interest payments."

The researchers also point out that their "analysis does not include hundreds of billions of dollars in so-called tax cut 'extenders' for corporations and other businesses that Congress has periodically enacted under each administration."

Congressional Republicans and President Trump clearly knew in 2017 that their promises would not be kept. They just didn't care. As usual, they just sold us out to lobbyists.

Corporations, trade associations and special interest groups spent $9.6 million to lobby Congress on issues related to taxes in the first three quarters of 2017 alone. But the fourth quarter said *hold my beer*. In that one quarter alone, the National Association of Realtors spent $22.2 million, the Business Roundtable spent $17.3 million, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce spent $16.8 million.

Public Citizen, a nonprofit consumer rights advocacy group and think tank, found that "6,243 lobbyists were listed on lobbying disclosure forms as working on issues involving the word 'tax' through the first three quarters of 2017. That is equal to 57 percent of the nearly 11,000 people who have reported engaging in any domestic lobbying activities at all in 2017. Put another way, this equals more than 11 lobbyists for every member of Congress."

Obviously, when that many hands are in the cookie jar, the cookies are going to be badly crumbled. So, did corporations get their money's worth from all this lobbying? You betcha!

Poor Corporate America didn't feel they got quite enough breaks in the 2017 tax bill, so they continued their lobbying efforts full blast even after it passed. And boy, did that work out for them! In fact, their lobbyists worked so hard that large companies got even *more* tax breaks in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Yes, you read that correctly.

Big business – and wealthy Americans – got an additional $174 billion in tax relief in the initial economic rescue package. These breaks included increasing the amount of deductions companies could take on the interest of their debt, allowing net operating losses to reduce tax liabilities, and another slash in capital gains taxes (which could be applied retroactively, for up to two years! Yay!).

And then there is this: Another New York Times analysis found that "through a series of obscure regulations, the U.S. Treasury carved out exceptions to [the CARES Act] that meant many leading American and foreign companies would owe little or nothing in new taxes on offshore profits, according to a review of the Treasury's rules,

government lobbying records, and interviews with federal policy-makers and tax experts. Companies were effectively let off the hook for tens if not hundreds of billions of taxes that they would have been required to pay… One of the most effective campaigns, with the greatest financial consequence, was led by a small group of large foreign banks, including Credit Suisse and Barclays."

So, let me get this straight. These banks didn't like paying taxes for some odd reason, so Donald Trump's then Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin unilaterally decided to exempt them from paying them? Where can you and I sign up for that deal?

The New York Times again: "Officials at the Joint Committee on Taxation have calculated that the exemptions for international banks could reduce (their tax burden) by up to $50 billion."

Set aside for a moment that the U.S. Treasury in no way has the unilateral power to do something like this – making this whole move unconstitutional – but I wonder why was Steven Mnuchin so hell-bent on protecting foreign banks?

The answer to that question came on February 23, 2021, when The Washington Post revealed Steven Mnuchin was starting an investment fund with the intention of raising money from Persian Gulf sovereign wealth funds and other international sources. As a matter of fact, when the Capitol riots broke out on January 6th, Mnuchin was out of the country on a "diplomatic" trip to the Middle East and Africa – a trip paid for by American taxpayers – meeting with Egypt, Israel, Qatar, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia.

Just one day after leaving government, Mnuchin filed paperwork in Delaware to start his new firm. These guys have some nerve.

Financial Bomb Two: Out-of-Control Spending

The decision to add hundreds of billions of dollars to the federal budget just after the Republicans rammed through their very costly 2017 tax cuts is just mind-boggling in its irresponsibility.

Within two months of the signing of the tax law, Congress passed two temporary funding measures, the second of which raised the debt ceiling as well as the spending caps that were placed on military and domestic spending during the Obama presidency (the spending caps were increased by around $300 billion).

Then, one month later, Congress approved a 2,232-page $1.3 trillion appropriations bill, which covered federal funding for only *six months*.

Of the bill, Senator Ben Sasse (R-NE) said, "Every Republican would vote against this disgusting pork bill if a Democrat were president. This spending kegger is a wildly irresponsible use of the taxpayers' money, and the president should not sign it." Just hours before the bill passed, Representative Jim McGovern, (D-MA) said, "In all honesty, none of us know what is actually in this bill."

But wait! There's more! In August 2019, Congress and the Trump administration followed this up with a two-year budget agreement allowing roughly $2.7 trillion in discretionary spending for fiscal years 2020 and 2021 – about $320 billion above the existing spending caps – and suspending the debt ceiling through July 31, 2021. This was the fourth time Congress had voted to ignore the spending limits established by the 2011 Budget Control Act.

Obviously, we have to fund the federal government, but the $2.7 trillion budget agreement did not actually appropriate that money to federal agencies. Yep, funding for *that* was finally passed on December 19, 2019 – after, of course, Congress was forced to pass two stop gap spending bills to avoid government shutdowns.

Then came President Joe Biden. During Biden's one term in office, he approved $4.7 trillion in net new ten-year debt through legislation and executive actions. Which all now leads us to ….

Financial Bomb Three:
Our Astronomical Debt & Deficit

Together, Bomb #1 and Bomb #2 drastically widened our deficit and blew our debt out of the water.

In the end, President Trump approved legislation and executive actions during his first term that added an estimated $8.4 trillion to the debt over ten years. That equals around $25,400 for *every single American*. Then came President Joe Biden's $4.7 trillion.

Less than one year after the 2017 Republican tax bill passed, the U.S. Treasury Department reported that the federal budget deficit – the difference between government spending and tax revenue – increased by 17 percent (to $779 billion) from FY2017 to FY2018.

A study by the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a nonprofit think tank that advocates for a lower federal budget deficit, found that "234 percent of the increase in deficits, or $264 billion, was due to legislation enacted by Congress. The largest portion was the tax law, estimated to cost $164 billion in FY2018, followed by the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 which was estimated to cost $68 billion in 2018."

The next year, Treasury reported that the deficit had grown to $984 billion from FY2018 to FY2019, a 26 percent increase.

Then, of course, came Covid-19. In FY2020, the U.S. budget deficit tripled to a record $3.1 trillion. According to The Wall Street Journal, "As a share of economic output, the budget gap in fiscal year 2020 hit roughly 16.1 percent, the largest since 1945, when the country was financing massive military operations to help end World War II."

In FY2021, the federal budget deficit totaled almost $2.8 trillion. This was roughly $360 billion less than the 2020 deficit, but still nearly triple the 2019 deficit. It was also the second largest as a percentage of GDP since 1945, only behind 2020. In FY2022, the federal budget deficit totaled around $1.4 trillion; the FY2023 deficit totaled nearly $1.7 trillion; and in both FY2024 and FY2025, the deficit hovered around $1.8 trillion.

Meanwhile, right before the pandemic, our gross federal debt was $22.7 trillion (tip: think of the federal debt as the accumulation of our past deficits.) By September 2020, the Congressional Budget Office said that debt held by the public was projected to reach 98 percent of GDP, its highest level since shortly after World War II. (Spoiler Alert: That's not good). By the end of that year, our national debt had increased to $26.9 trillion.

At the end of 2021, our federal debt was $28.4 trillion and by the end of 2022, that number hit $30.9 trillion. By September 2023, the national debt had risen to $33.17 trillion and by the end of the year, December 2025, it was approaching $39 trillion. *That equals $112,000 for every single American*. Interest expenses for the debt are now over $1 trillion *every year*.

And now, the Republicans have done it again – and it's even worse this time. On July 4, 2025, President Trump signed into law an expansive, almost 900-page policy bill with 309 provisions.

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act reduces federal revenues by about $4.5 trillion over the next decade while reducing direct spending by about $1.1 trillion, including roughly $887 billion in savings from changes to Medicaid. At the same time, the law provides around $350 billion in additional funding for defense, homeland security, and immigration enforcement, including substantial new funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The cost of this albatross is astronomical and will push our national debt to unprecedented levels. According to the Congressional Budget Office, it increases the federal deficit by $3.4 trillion over the next decade (actually, $4.1 trillion when you include interest). The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget estimates that this number could increase to $5.5 trillion if temporary provisions in the bill are extended, driving our debt held by the public to around 130 percent of GDP by 2034.

It goes without saying this greatly exacerbates our already perilous financial path and vastly increases the risk of a full-blown debt crisis. Not only does this legislation add trillions of dollars to our national debt, but it also reduces the amount of our tax revenue for decades.

What makes this even more frustrating is that, although the bill supposedly cuts federal spending by $1.3 trillion over a decade – with the largest cuts being to Medicaid and the clean energy subsidies from the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act – these cuts don't make any meaningful reduction to our federal debt because of the federal debt the bill creates.

Worse, it substantially increases our debt and deficit without providing any meaningful boost to economic growth. The White House Council of Economic Advisers declared that, thanks to the One Big Beautiful Bill, growth could reach 4.9 percent in 2028; there will be "$8.5 to $11.1 trillion in total offsetting deficit reduction from Trump economic policies anchored by the OBBB, including discretionary spending reductions and tariff revenue;" and "debt falls as a share of gross domestic product (GDP) to 94 percent in 2034."

This is straight-up delusional.

Numbers released by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) in February 2026 revealed that debt held by the public will balloon to $56 trillion by 2036 and is projected to ***exceed*** 100 percent of GDP in 2026. They estimate it will reach 120 percent by 2036 – higher than at any point in U.S. history.

The annual U.S. budget deficit will top $3 trillion by 2036, reaching $3.1 trillion, or 6.7 percent of GDP (up from 5.8 percent in 2026). CBO projects cumulative deficits of $23.1 trillion from 2026 through 2035.

… and these were the numbers *before* Donald Trump took us to war.

†

So, here's the bottom line: We basically went from the longest economic expansion in history to a $1.8 trillion deficit and so much debt that it ***exceeds*** 100% of our entire gross domestic product (GDP).

How does that wise saying *make hay while the sun shines* sound right about now?

This has gotten completely out of control.

My fellow Americans, we CANNOT allow the White House and U.S. Congress to conduct OUR business this way. Our level of debt – now $40 trillion – is more than the economic output of China and the entire European Union combined. The national debt is growing almost five times faster than it was two decades ago. We are basically adding $1 trillion to the U.S. debt every five months.

Eight months before the One Big Beautiful Bill passed, Larry Fink, the chairman and CEO of BlackRock – the world's largest asset manager, with over $13 trillion under management – sent up a warning flare in a Wall Street Journal guest essay:

"From 1789 to 1989, the U.S. government amassed $2.9 trillion in debt. Coincidentally, the infamous 'debt clock' was installed near New York's Times Square in 1989. In the 35 years since, the country has added another $33 trillion. In nominal terms, that's more than 10 times the debt in one-sixth the time. The more crucial measure is how fast debt has risen relative to the economy. It has grown nearly three times faster than gross domestic product."

And it's not just the dollar amounts that make this incredibly risky. Take the spending in the first Trump administration, which essentially acted as another fiscal stimulus when we didn't need one. In an economy that was already humming, that level of spending amounted to taking lighter fluid and pouring it over an already roaring fire.

But here's the most dangerous part about doing that: Thanks to the lingering effects of the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis, we already had far fewer financial weapons in our arsenal to combat a new financial crisis than we had in the past.

What if we needed the boost of that lighter fluid down the road, like, say, if a scary worldwide virus started to spread and shut down a large part of our economy, or if war broke out in Eastern Europe?!? Did anyone in Washington even consider that possibility? Of course not.

…. which, of course, IS EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED! The United States allocated $4.64 trillion in total budgetary resources to respond to Covid-19 and its economic fallout.

It would be one thing if we borrowed all this money to buy ourselves state-of-the-art airports, subways, railways and ports; sophisticated fiber-optic lines, bandwidth and wireless networks; modern schools, roads, bridges, levees, dams and water systems; hi-tech electricity-distribution grids; or extensive high-speed rail systems.

But that's not what we have spent our money on. Except for President Biden's Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act – which has its own set of issues, like tons of waste and a severe lack of oversight and accountability – we have borrowed for consumption, not investment. As a result, we don't have squat to show for our $40 trillion dollars of debt. Nothing. Nada.

You and I don't have to be Nobel Prize-winning economists to understand that continued borrowing for consumption rather than investment is not good. We don't need a Ph.D. in economics to understand that there is a significantly negative relationship between crushing debt and economic growth.

As you know, I hate being a buzz kill, but it would be irresponsible to not paint a true picture of our predicament, even if the picture ain't pretty.

If we allow this recklessness to continue, our government will eventually become paralyzed.

It will be much harder for the United States to borrow money to respond to short-term financial emergencies such as wars, recessions, or economic calamities like the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis (when we desperately needed our public balance sheets to offset the enormous de-leveraging of private ones) or things like the economic fallout caused by the Covid pandemic (when American families were in dire straits).

If we keep borrowing, we will eventually be unable to find financing for our long-term productive capacity, where borrowed money can be repaid with actual income. Interest rates spike, exponentially increasing the pain of our massive indebtedness and make it more expensive, if not impossible, to raise capital, invest in innovation, and create jobs.

This will make us more beholden to foreign investors – including foreign private investors as well as foreign governments – who already hold roughly 9 trillion of Treasury securities.

At some point, investors will lose confidence that we can repay our debts or have the political will to, which could initiate a debt crisis and worldwide panic. Next comes a run on the dollar.

Inflation will come in even hotter which, as we already well know, causes serious pain for most American households. And this will do nothing but get more painful. Longer-term, high inflation strikes at the very heart of the financial security of the Middle Class, affecting savings accounts, pensions, and home ownership even more.

Not to mention that, thanks to years of financial irresponsibility, inflation is more dangerous than ever since both federal and corporate debt is so high, and the balance sheet of the Federal Reserve is so bloated. These factors alone could greatly diminish the effectiveness of a reduction in bond purchases or higher interest rates – tools the Fed uses to address inflation. < Sidebar: In 2008, right before the financial crisis, the Fed's balance sheet was $900 billion. By 2015 it had ballooned to $4.5 trillion. During the pandemic, it peaked at nearly $9 trillion. Today, it remains at $6.75 trillion – more than seven times its pre-financial-crisis size. >

Fear should not dictate policymaking, but this is not unjustified fear. This could very well be our future if we don't do something fast. The time has come where there is really no choice:

This has got to stop. We must be more fiscally responsible.

1787's Economic Growth Strategy

Let There Be Light

There is not one magic silver bullet that's going to fix this mess. We have gone so far down the rabbit hole that it will take an across-the-board hard correction to turn this thing around. But I promise it will be worth it! Believe me, it's far better to endure a little pain now – while we still have control over how to absorb it – than to live in denial until the music just stops and there aren't enough chairs.

It may not always be a ton of fun, but we can absolutely do it! We got this, America!! We have all the necessary ingredients – unlimited talent and intelligence, unparalleled freedom of opportunity, and vast economic resources – to cultivate the strength and goodness of America that we all know exists.

The easiest, least overwhelming way to think about this challenge is in terms of our overall long-term, big picture MISSION and our STRATEGIES, or what actions we're going to take to make it happen. We can break our STRATEGIES down into three categories: SHORT-TERM, MID-TERM, and LONG-TERM.

1787's Long-Term, Big Picture Mission:

1787's Plan of Action demands long-term fiscal responsibility – controlling deficits and debt; scrutinizing programs for waste and efficiency; and asking taxpayers to fund only what can be justified.

The Plan also ensures that Americans who genuinely need help are not abandoned, and protects Americans during times of crisis such as unemployment, disability, illness, old age, childhood poverty, or temporary financial crises.

We believe, like Abraham Lincoln, that government has a role to play in expanding opportunity and ensuring every American has a fair chance:

"To elevate the condition of men – to lift artificial weights from all shoulders – to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all – to afford all, an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life."

This plan protects vulnerable people, preserves opportunity and dignity, and helps those who are able to return to economic self-sufficiency. *America's safety net should be strong enough to catch people when they fall but designed to help them get back on their feet.* We also believe that a fiscally responsible government protects programs that prevent larger costs later – for example, childhood nutrition, preventive health care, workforce training, or assistance that helps someone remain employed rather than becoming dependent on longer-term support.

The number one goal of our social agenda should be to help level the playing field by creating fair and equitable opportunities that move people from any sort of dependency to self-sufficiency as quickly as possible. Notice I said *move people from*, not *yank the rug out from under their feet*. There must be an appropriate transition for those trapped in vulnerable circumstances, or it will just make the problem significantly worse – which the Republicans did on July 4, 2025 with their insidious One Big Beautiful Bill.

As we search for solutions, we all need to understand that chronic inequality is not something that those trapped in its relentless grip can work – or even at times educate – themselves out without a helping hand.... and it is highly insulting to act like they can or even should. In truth, *the only way to close these persistent gaps is to enact policies that actively work to counteract the original ones.*

Our national social service policies must be designed to work together to make the biggest impact. The main reason we constantly fall short of finding solutions is that we always approach our challenges compartmentally instead of comprehensively.... as if these challenges exist in isolation from one another. That is just not going to work.

Because there are so many problems to solve, the only plausible answer is to be *boldly strategic in our attack.*

I have a great idea! To operate at our very best, let's start thinking of America as a team instead of factions divided by race, money or social class. Think of the entire world as the Global Nation League, which, in my imagination, is kind of like the NFL. Every country in the world is its own team, and every team in the league competes against all the other teams.

To win this global game, it's going to take *every single one of us* playing *at our very best*. All successful teams understand that *every* player on the team needs the very best resources available to play at the highest level, and successful teams make sure *every* single player has those resources – which ultimately makes the entire team stronger.

< cue: the song *We are the Champions* by Queen >

Therefore, to be successful, *every* player on Team America needs to make sure *every* other player has access to the very best education, health care, and job opportunities, and that other things – like housing and wages, for example – are fair and equitable.

If we begin to operate like this, America will be unstoppable.

(*We are the champions, my friends…And we'll keep on fighting till the end. We are the champions, We are the champions, No time for losers, 'Cause we are the champions of the woooorld!*)

Short-Term Strategies:

There are things we can do to bring immediate relief to American families, many of whom are currently getting crushed. But we have to be careful here.

If you ever brainstorm ideas for financial relief with many Democrats, you often hear things thrown around like Guaranteed

Annual Income or Universal Basic Income (UBI), price controls/ freezes, free money for down payments, and proposals like the mayor of NYC Zohran Mamdani's network of government-run grocery stores.

Even though these ideas sound like music to the ears of weary voters on the campaign trail, there are two problems with them. The first is they often aren't generally feasible – or effective – long-term.

For example, although research has found benefits from cash transfers, particularly in reducing material hardship and improving health and educational outcomes, two randomized experiments suggest that simply increasing a family's disposable income – even by as much as $1,000 a month – does not necessarily produce measurable improvements in children's cognitive, behavioral, or educational development.

Recent randomized experiments have raised questions about how much unconditional cash payments, by themselves, improve children's development. In a National Bureau of Economic Research working paper, researchers studying *Baby's First Years* examined a randomized trial in which low-income mothers received either $333 or $20 a month beginning shortly after the birth of their child. After four years, the researchers found no statistically significant effects on any of four preregistered primary measures of child development – language, executive function, social-emotional problems, and high-frequency brain activity – or on three secondary measures, including pre-literacy skills and reported developmental diagnoses.

The results were startling enough that Greg J. Duncan, an economist at the University of California, Irvine and one of the study's authors, reportedly said, "I was very surprised – we were all very surprised. The money did not make a difference."

A separate randomized experiment conducted by the nonprofit OpenResearch produced similarly sobering results despite providing substantially more money. In that study, 1,000 lower-income Americans received $1,000 a month for three years, while a control group received $50 a month. Parents who received the larger payments spent more on their children and showed some improvements in parenting practices, but researchers found little evidence that the additional income translated into better outcomes for the children

themselves. The payments produced no meaningful improvement in most educational outcomes measured through school records, nor in measures of the home environment, food security, homelessness exposure, or parental satisfaction. Researchers concluded that although the payments changed some parental behaviors and investments, those changes "did not translate into measurable improvements in children's academic or parent-reported behavioral outcomes in the short run."

< Note: Guaranteed annual income and universal basic income should not be confused with the Child Tax Credit. Although the programs share some characteristics – particularly when the credit is made fully refundable – the Child Tax Credit is specifically targeted at families raising children and has a well-established record of increasing their disposable income and reducing measured child poverty. The expanded credit in 2021, for example, helped lift millions of children above the poverty line. That does not necessarily mean the credit produces large improvements in children's cognitive or behavioral development, but there is strong evidence that it accomplishes its more immediate objective: reducing the number of children living in poverty.

There are several reasons why the CTC appears to be more successful than the $1,000-a-month OpenResearch experiment, even though both involve giving families cash, including targeting, family composition, benefit design, outcome selection, and the difference between *alleviating poverty* and *changing child development*. >

Another example of a plan that sounds like a nice thing to do for people but has the potential for huge negative unintended consequences is one like Kamala Harris, the 2024 Democratic nominee for president, proposed in the 2024 election. A key part of the plan was to provide first-time home buyers with $25,000 in down-payment assistance. The Harris campaign estimated that four million homebuyers would be eligible, and the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget estimated that the program would cost around $100 billion over four years.

Again, on the surface, this sounds like a super helpful thing to do for people. However, it would most certainly lead to higher home prices in the end because subsidizing buyers also increases their purchasing power… and we know that one of the most basic laws of

supply and demand is that an increase in demand without a corresponding increase in supply will result in higher prices.

To be fair, Harris's proposal did attempt to also address the supply side. Her plan called for facilitating the construction of three million additional homes over four years through measures that included tax incentives for builders of starter homes, an expansion of affordable-housing tax credits, a $40 billion housing innovation fund, efforts to reduce regulatory barriers, and the use of some federal land for housing.

But many of those ideas would require congressional approval or action by state and local governments, and important implementation details remained elusive. This matters A LOT because purchasing power can reach the market much faster than millions of new homes can be permitted, financed and built.

Meanwhile, Kansas City poured almost $18 million of taxpayer money into the city-backed Sun Fresh grocery store at 31st Street and Prospect Avenue only to have it close in August 2025 after ten years. Two reasons given for the closure were crime and operational challenges – both of which contributed to the store's unsustainable financial losses

"It's a deep, deep, deep hole," said Emmet Pierson Jr., President and CEO of Community Builders of Kansas City, the nonprofit that ran the store – noting that the store was far from breaking even, "even with all this city money." This should come as no surprise because, in the best of circumstances, grocery stores are high-volume, low-margin businesses.

Community Builders continues to operate another Sun Fresh on Blue Parkway in Kansas City, but that store has shown signs of difficulty as well. In April 2026, local television station KSHB reported noticeably empty shelves and reduced inventory at the store, prompting concerns about its future. Community Builders said the store was not closing and described the situation as a transition but provided few details.

In Florida, Baldwin Market – a town-owned grocery store that opened in 2019 when Baldwin's only for-profit grocery store closed – was forced to shut its doors because the financial losses were

unsustainable. Although the city never intended to make a profit, they needed to at least breakeven – but the losses continued to be significant (in FY2021 there was a $178,000 shortfall and in FY2022 that number was $171,000).

More recently, after eight years and over $8 million spent by the citizens of Madison, Wisconsin, Maurer's Urban Market opened in the Bay Creek neighborhood. Even though Maurer's was developed as a measure to prevent a "food desert," the store ended up being right across the street from another grocery store and within a mile of three others.

Herein lies the paradox of things like price controls/freezes, government-run grocery stores, and "free" money for down payments. *Things like food and rent are never free.* Just because something is paid for and/or operated by state or federal governments doesn't mean that you and I aren't still paying for them. We absolutely are – because we *are* the state and federal governments. The costs of food and rent don't just magically disappear. The ways we pay for them are just shifted around.

Solutions like Guaranteed Annual Income and government-owned grocery stores not only do nothing more than shift costs around, but they also prolong and exacerbate our original problem… digging our hole even deeper. Take price "freezes," for example. On the 2025/6 campaign trail, Democrats promised to freeze prices on everything from rent to electricity rates. Without question, these things could bring temporary financial relief.

But the key word here is *temporary*. These interventions cannot possibly go on forever, *so we are just kicking the can down the road* AGAIN! Worse, while we buy ourselves nine to twelve months of relief, we are also distorting markets.

Markets will get jammed up even more because companies will be using fuzzy data to make decisions on where to concentrate goods and services. Prices are signals. They tell producers where goods and services are scarce, where demand is increasing, and where additional investment may be profitable. Suppressing those signals can distort decisions about where businesses invest and expand.

And when a price ceiling is held below the cost necessary to provide adequate supply, the consequences can become more serious. Producers have less incentive to expand capacity, while landlords and utilities may have less money or incentive to invest in maintenance and improvements. Over time, supply can fall short of demand – leading to shortages, deteriorating quality, waiting lists, or other forms of rationing.

And don't be fooled. With a $40 trillion debt, "taxing the rich" is no longer enough. Not by a long shot.

"Government-paid-for" anything at this point in our financial crisis is nothing more than politicians trying to continue the party – where the music doesn't stop on *their* watch – and we can't keep doing it. Our only choice at this point is an across-the-board hard correction, and that means that we can't keep putting Band-Aids over gaping wounds.

That's one reason why the policy agenda embraced by many candidates endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is so concerning.

These days, it sometimes feels like Socialism is on the rise in America. Even though Joe Biden won the 2020 Democratic presidential primary – a feat only achieved because establishment lions (namely South Carolina congressman Jim Clyburn) stepped in when far left-wingers Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren moved to frontrunner status – progressives had already been on somewhat of a roll electorally and had already been successful in heavily influencing the Democratic Party's platform.

Since becoming members of Congress in 2019, "The Squad" and its three highest-profile members – Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) and Ilhan Omar (D-MN) – had already managed to push the Democratic House leadership to the left.

Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the DSA, even nominated self-described democratic socialist Bernie Sanders to be president at the 2020 Democratic National Convention, even though Joe Biden had the nomination sewn up.

As a conciliation prize, Senator Sanders soon took the reins of the powerful Budget Committee, which has enormous influence over tax

and spending thanks to a budget mechanism called reconciliation, which allows legislation to pass with a simple majority.

Now, there is renewed enthusiasm among the Democratic Party's progressive ranks following a string of victories by democratic-socialist candidates. In November 2025, Zohran Mamdani – a self-described democratic socialist – defeated former New York governor Andrew Cuomo, who ran as an independent after losing the Democratic primary to Mamdani, and Republican Curtis Sliwa to become mayor of New York City.

Seattle is also now led by a self-described democratic socialist, Mayor Katie Wilson. And in June 2026, democratic socialist Janeese Lewis George won the Democratic primary for mayor of Washington, D.C., positioning her to become the city's next mayor if she wins the November general election.

The trend continued during the 2026 primary season. In Colorado, democratic socialist Melat Kiros defeated longtime U.S. Rep. Diana DeGette in the Democratic primary for the Denver-based 1st Congressional District. In Pennsylvania, democratic socialist Chris Rabb won the Democratic nomination for the open 3rd Congressional District. In Michigan, progressive Abdul El-Sayed narrowly defeated Rep. Haley Stevens in a closely watched and expensive Democratic primary for the U.S. Senate.

All that said, regardless of how many people like Bernie Sanders or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez or Zohran Mamdani periodically emerge, the reality is that America's economic system is capitalism. Period. This is a fact that isn't going to change and for this we should be exceedingly grateful. As the old saying goes, capitalism is the worst kind of economy until you try all the rest.

It's my belief that those on the far-left have gotten their hopes up – and that the modern-day conception of "socialism" in the United States has gotten twisted – because 1) the true definition of socialism has been completely watered down, together with 2) a few interesting public polls.

Way back in 2019, a Harris Poll revealed that 49.6 percent of Millennials and Gen Z-ers agreed with the statement: "I prefer living in a socialist country;" 73.2 percent agreed with the statement:

"Government should provide universal health care" and 67.1 percent agreed with the statement: "Government should provide tuition-free college." By March 2025, a survey by the Cato Institute and YouGov showed 62 percent of our fellow citizens aged 18–29 say they hold a "favorable view" of socialism and 34 percent said the same of communism.

A Gallup poll released in September 2025 found that Americans were still more positive toward capitalism than socialism, but the 54 percent of Americans who viewed capitalism favorably had fallen from 60 percent in 2021. While Americans felt more negative (57 percent) than positive (39 percent) toward socialism, 66 percent of Democrats told Gallup they viewed socialism favorably, while 42 percent said the same of capitalism.

A CNN/SSRS poll issued in August 2026 reported 34 percent of Democrats and Democratic-leaning adults identify as "democratic socialists."

Let's be clear: These polls are measuring what I like to call *sunny-side-up socialism*, not what true socialism actually is. A perfect example of this perversion of socialism is when Bernie Sanders points to Denmark as an example of his brand of socialism … which is strange because Denmark is not a socialist country.

Even the 25th Prime Minister of Denmark Lars Løkke Rasmussen rejected Bernie's definition when he remarked, "I know that some people in the U.S. associate the Nordic model with some sort of socialism. Therefore, I would like to make one thing clear. Denmark is far from a socialist planned economy. Denmark is a market economy. The Nordic model is an expanded welfare state which provides a high level of security to its citizens, but it is also a successful market economy with much freedom to pursue your dreams and live your life as you wish.

Aha! There it is. These polls are not measuring what Americans think of socialism à la Joseph Stalin or Chairman Mao Zedong. Rather, the term has come to mean something entirely different to many Americans. When "socialism" is mentioned in America today, it is more about the view/approach one takes to the welfare state, not whether the government should have complete control over our lives.

In my mind, the American view/approach to the welfare state is a spectrum: On the far end of one side there is zero help for citizens. Sink or swim, everyone is pretty much on their own. On the far end of the other side everything is provided to citizens for basically free.

Where the United States should land on that spectrum is an entirely different conversation, but the term "socialism" should not be a part of this conversation regardless of who is having it.

The fact is that Merriam-Webster defines socialism this way: "Any of various economic and political theories advocating *collective or governmental ownership* and administration of the means of production and distribution of goods; a system of society or group living in which there is *no private property*; a system or condition of society in which the *means of production are owned and controlled by the state*."

...and that is just not going to happen in the United States of America. Period. Believe us, the polls we referenced earlier would look far different if the question asked was: "Do you agree with this statement: I want the United States government to take all of my private property from me, tax me at a rate of 90 percent, and then be completely in charge of running every single thing about my life."

If that were the alternative, I imagine most of us would just work to improve the system we've already got! :)

One reason socialism resonates during difficult times is that it offers a hopeful and compelling story. While capitalism can appear unfair – or even brutal – to people struggling to get ahead, socialism presents an appealing alternative: a society with less inequality, greater economic security, and a stronger sense that everyone will share in the nation's prosperity. At its most idealistic, the vision can sound almost utopian.

But I deeply believe the 1787 Plan of Action offers an equally hopeful story – with a more realistic path to achieving it. As we navigate the difficult correction ahead, which at times may be painful, it will help to remember what we are fighting for. Our overriding goal is simple: *To restore the dream that is America*.

The American Dream is real. Americans are among the most dynamic and innovative people in the world. We are courageous and

confident. We possess conviction, an extraordinary capacity to adapt, and an enduring determination to build something better.

Americans strive. Americans thrive. Americans *believe*.

And that belief – in ourselves, in one another, and in the possibilities of this country – is ultimately what we are fighting to restore.

Mid-Term Strategies:

The focus here is making life easier for the American people, prioritizing lowering cost-of-living burdens and helping make living essentials – housing, food, healthcare, and utilities – affordable without unreasonable financial sacrifice or debt (for families or the United States government!).

For example, regarding child care, 1787 believes the best way forward is a plan that combines regulatory reform + employer incentives + provider loans and loan guarantees + narrowly targeted assistance for lower-income families. This way, we can increase the supply of child care and leverage private investment before resorting to large government subsidies. Our plan recommends:

- Expanding the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). CCDBG provides child-care assistance to lower-income working families, directly reducing what eligible parents pay for care. We would increase funding and expand eligibility for low- and moderate-income families while keeping assistance means-tested.

  Our design makes the subsidy portable across approved early-childhood providers, meaning *the money follows the child*. Eligible parents receive a means-tested child-care benefit that may be applied toward a private child-care center, family child-care home, nonprofit program, or participating public or private pre-K program. To prevent double-dipping, the subsidy would be reduced

by any other public funding already covering the same hours of care.

This is a great way forward because, rather than creating a separate universal pre-K entitlement, would help families afford the provider they choose, while using existing public and private child-care infrastructure.

- Targeted loans or loan guarantees for child-care providers. The federal government can help providers open new facilities or expand existing ones without bearing the full cost. Loans would generally be repaid, while federal loan guarantees could encourage private lenders to finance expansion with relatively little upfront government spending (although taxpayers would assume some risk if borrowers default).

- Cutting unnecessary barriers to affordable child care. Our underlying principle is simple: Keep the rules that protect children; reform the rules that merely make child care harder to provide and more expensive to purchase.

  States should maintain rigorous health and safety protections for children while eliminating regulations that unnecessarily increase costs or restrict the supply of care. 1787 would offer federal incentives for states to review their child-care regulations and streamline licensing, permitting, zoning, duplicative inspections, and other requirements that cannot be justified by a meaningful health, safety, or quality benefit.

  States should also make it easier for qualified home-based providers to enter the market, expedite applications from providers with strong compliance records, and simplify the process for successful providers to expand or open additional locations.

Many of the ideas in this category center around correcting mistakes that the Republicans have made since President Trump took back control of the country in 2025. You can find the full list – and it's long – on p. 69 of the *Policy Guide*, but it includes things like restoring many of the cruel cuts that the One Big Beautiful Bill imposed and restoring inflation to 2 percent while protecting employment (which

includes ending the Iranian war fiasco and stopping the Trump/Vance administration's obscene trade wars).

Another focus is to streamline the way we provide aid to American families. Unfortunately, bad program management is not a one-off in our federal government. It's the modus operandi for practically every single agency and department, and it's been happening for decades.

To demonstrate just how long this has been going on, let's go back in time fourteen years to FY2012, because it's one of the craziest examples. In FY2012, there were at least 92 federal programs designed to help lower-income Americans, for a combined cost of $799 billion to the American taxpayer. This included 28 education and job-training programs ($94.4 billion), 17 different food-aid programs ($105 billion), and over 22 various housing programs ($49.6 billion). There were seven federal agencies involved in "Education and Job Training" and seven involved in the category called "Social Services."

There are many glaring red flags in that last paragraph, but the most egregious is that it shows just how incredibly inefficiently the federal government does things. Inefficient is not even the right word – *we need an entirely new word for what this is.*

Seven separate agencies administering 28 separate employment and training programs? This is beyond absurd. It is imperative that we reorganize this mess and use our resources more effectively. *The overlap alone wastes so, so, so much money*.

In 1996, Congress passed – and President Bill Clinton signed – the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, promising to "end welfare as we know it" and transform welfare into "a second chance, not a way of life."

The legislation replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Unlike AFDC, TANF was established as a block grant that gave states considerable flexibility over eligibility, benefits, and how federal welfare dollars were spent. It also established work requirements and generally limited federally funded assistance to 60 months over a recipient's lifetime.

Nearly three decades later, there are serious questions about whether the system is accomplishing what Congress intended.

The problem isn't necessarily how much we're spending – it's where the money goes. States have broad discretion over TANF dollars, and much of the money is no longer spent on either basic assistance to poor families or programs that help recipients enter the workforce.

A 2020 Stateline investigation found that states were directing only about 11 percent of TANF funds toward work-related activities, including education and training, with 17 states spending less than 5 percent. States have also used TANF dollars for an enormous range of other purposes, including child welfare, pre-K, college scholarships, drug courts, and programs serving families well above the poverty line.

Even Robert Rector of the conservative Heritage Foundation, who advised members of Congress involved with the original welfare-reform legislation, concluded: "Overall, the states have radically abused the program." He argued that states had lost sight of one of welfare reform's central objectives: helping recipients move into employment.

1787's plan is to replace the existing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block-grant system with simpler, more targeted programs that provide assistance directly to families, support work, and reduce administrative waste. In other words: *Simplify the safety net. Make work pay. Let assistance follow the family. And spend anti-poverty dollars on reducing poverty.*

The plan replaces TANF but preserves the functions that actually work. Rather than continuing to funnel billions of federal dollars through a loosely structured block grant, we can divide TANF's legitimate functions among programs specifically designed to perform them.

† Replace cash welfare with more direct assistance to families. Increase the Child Tax Credit for children under six, when child-care costs are generally greatest, while maintaining a connection to work. The enhanced benefit should be structured so that very low-income working families can actually receive it. Instead of assistance depending heavily on where a family lives and how its

state chooses to spend TANF dollars, the benefit will follow the family.

- Consolidate child-care assistance under CCDBG.
  TANF dollars currently used for child care should be redirected into 1787's expanded Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). Under our proposal, child-care assistance would be portable – the money follows the child – allowing eligible parents to choose among approved private child-care centers, family child-care homes, nonprofit providers, or participating public or private pre-K programs.

- TANF programs that primarily help recipients find and keep jobs – including effective job training, placement, transportation, and other employment support – should be consolidated into existing federal and state workforce programs. This will be facilitated by U.S. Works, 1787's jobs program.

- Create a limited Family Emergency Assistance Fund. A tax credit cannot address every crisis. Families sometimes need immediate help to prevent an eviction, keep the electricity on, repair the car that gets a parent to work, or deal with another temporary emergency. States should retain a smaller, tightly controlled fund for short-term assistance, with benefits generally paid directly to landlords, utilities, child-care providers, or other vendors rather than becoming another system of indefinite cash assistance.

  Families with older children who currently depend on TANF cash assistance should also receive an appropriate transition so that restructuring the program doesn't abruptly eliminate assistance to some of the poorest households.

Long-Term Strategies:

"As we peer into society's future, we – you and I, and our government – must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering, for our own ease and convenience, the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow."

~ President Dwight D. Eisenhower ~

As hard as it may be to swallow, we need to understand and accept that not everything is about *us*. Meaning, there are some issues we must start correcting straightaway, even though some of us will never see the full benefit of doing so. These are things like stabilizing Social Security and Medicare; safeguarding our environment; and investing in cutting-edge research and development as well as state-of-the-art infrastructure.

We are not doing these things just for *ourselves*. We are doing these things *for our children and their children and their children*. We seem to have forgotten that we are only temporary stewards of the United States of America. To say we have been inadequate in our role as guardians is a huge understatement. There are millions of people who have to live in this country long after we're gone – and we must do right by them.

Are you ready, America? Let's Goooooooo!!!! We can do this! And we'll make this as easy breezy as we possibly can.

Fiscal CPR (Correct, Prioritize, Reform)

Fiscal CPR Step One:
Stop the Bleeding

A top priority is to significantly reduce our debt and close the ever-widening gap of our deficit.

We will achieve this in two ways:

Stop the Bleeding Part One:
No New Non-Emergency Spending,
Just a Reallocation of Existing Resources

All of 1787's non-emergency policies will be cost neutral for at least two years, then we will reevaluate. No new money is necessary… just a reallocation of existing resources.

Don't worry! None of our important federal programs will suffer – they will just run much more efficiently (I will explain how we will achieve this in Part Two, next). Without a doubt, we can make serious headway in our national funding crisis – full stop – if we just stop wasting resources and get a bigger bang for our buck by taking a comprehensive, as opposed to compartmental, approach.

Stop the Bleeding Part Two:
Reduce our Debt, Close the Gap on our Deficit, and
End the Massive Waste, Inefficiency & Corruption
that Infects Every Level of our Federal Government.

This part has two steps:

1. Step One
   Fairly readjust the tax code.

2. Step Two
   End the massive waste, inefficiency and corruption that infects every level of our federal government. The 1787 initiative that leads this effort is called *Operation Overhaul*.

† Step One: Fairly Readjust the Tax Code

Conversations about taxes usually focus on *who gets what* and *who pays what*, but we need to think much broader and design a tax system that matches our optimistic and ambitious vision for America's future.

Adam Smith, the author of The Wealth of Nations, once said taxes should be efficient, predictable and convenient. Our current approach is the exact opposite. The U.S. tax code is arbitrary and ridiculously complicated, which makes the entire mess inefficient, unfair and outdated. It's also super easy to cheat.

The "gross tax gap" is the amount of true tax liability that is not paid timely and voluntarily. This number provides a rough estimate of the level of noncompliance/voluntary compliance when it comes to how Americans pay their taxes.

In April 2025, the IRS reported that, in 2022, the projected annual gross tax gap was $696 billion. They break the tax gap down into three components: Non-Filing (tax not paid on time by those who do not file on time) $63 billion; underreporting (tax understated on timely filed returns) $539 billion; and underpayment (tax that was reported on time but not paid on time) $94 billion. They also break it down into four types of tax: individual income tax ($514 billion); corporate tax ($50 billion); employment tax ($127 billion); and estate tax ($5 billion).

Plus, the IRS estimates that the American public reports less than half of income that doesn't require third-party verification (i.e., a W-2). The New York Times put it this way in 2021: "Unreported income is the single largest reason that unpaid federal income taxes may amount to more than $600 billion this year, and more than $7.5 trillion over the

next decade. It is a truly staggering sum – more than half of the projected federal deficit over the same period."

You can find 1787's detailed plan for this tax restructure on p. 190 of the *Policy Guide*.

† Step Two:

End the massive waste, inefficiency and corruption that infects every level of our federal government through Operation Overhaul.

Operation Overhaul has four parts:

- † Fiscal Responsibility
- † Operations
- † Waste & Corruption
- † Comprehensive Government Reform

I just love how, for months after Donald Trump's reelection, he and his posse ran around Washington like the Hardy Boys, jumping up and down about "government waste" like they were the ones who discovered it existed. News flash, guys! We've all known it has existed. For decades. This book thoroughly covers this, with detailed examples.

Before and after the election, the boys also talked incessantly of taking a wrecking ball to the federal government. This should come as no surprise because, for years, Donald has been raging against the "Deep State" or, as he so eloquently puts it, "the sick political class that hates our country." Steve Bannon – the former chief strategist to Donald Trump turned self-appointed MAGA overseer, strategist, and propagandist – envisions the so-called Deep State as "Praetorian Guards," a group of elite soldiers who served as the bodyguards of the Roman emperors.

Although these overlords have never offered a more precise definition of what the "Deep State" is, I gather from context that it's the horribly corrupt members of the evil *status quo* who operate in the dark shadows of our big bad awful government.

On the 2024 campaign trail, Donald made clear that his first order of business in his "plan to shatter the Deep State and return power to the American people" was to "fire rogue bureaucrats" on "Day 1."

Russell Vought, who has now returned for round two of being the director of the Office of Management and Budget, took this heated rhetoric to the next level: "We want the bureaucrats to be traumatically affected. When they wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work, because they are increasingly viewed as the villains."

Dang. 'Ol Russ was throwing some serious shade at these *Americans*. I can just imagine those evil bureaucrats now, complete with their spiky fangs and devil horns.

Evidently, the plan for Trump's second term was for Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, the original co-leaders of his new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), to head the effort to make cuts to federal regulation, spending and personnel – or, as Vivek put it in a post on X, "we're not bringing a chisel. We're bringing a chainsaw."

On January 22, 2025, Vivek Ramaswamy left DOGE to run for the Ohio governorship and Elon, his reputation and companies battered and bruised, fled Washington on May 28, 2025… which came as no surprise because, by all measures, DOGE was a colossal failure.

While DOGE itself disbanded with eight months left to its mandate – officially ending on July 4, 2026 – the chaos and long-lasting destruction it caused is immeasurable. From the slashing of life-saving programs TO a disengaged and demoralized federal workforce TO the significant loss of talent and expertise on every level of our federal government TO the severe consequences of interrupting federally funded research that is vital to U.S. innovation and economic competitiveness, DOGE's destruction will be felt for decades.

One analysis – from the nonpartisan nonprofit Partnership for Public Service – found that DOGE and other Trump/Vance administration funding cuts have resulted in an economic cost of over $165 billion ($1,028 per taxpayer), which includes the loss of estimated economic benefits from axed grants; payments of severance packages; expenses associated with rehiring workers; and legal expenses to defend the 200+ lawsuits DOGE ignited – for everything from firing

federal workers to the freezing of grants to the elimination of already funded programs.

Far from making "at least $2 trillion in cuts," federal spending *increased* in 2025. The only real cuts DOGE made was to USAID; American small businesses; scientific, cancer and Alzheimer's research; and to programs devoted to civil rights and diversity – but these costs, while seriously damaging to many individual Americans and our country overall, were miniscule compared to the behemoth that is the federal budget.

That's largely because Batman and Robin clearly didn't understand how the U.S. government operates. If they did, they would have recognized that their "savings" targets were delusional – and literally unobtainable – from the start.

They never seemed to comprehend, for example, that there are two types of government spending: discretionary and mandatory.

Discretionary spending is authorized by Congress each year through the appropriations process, but *mandatory* spending basically runs on autopilot. Mandatory spending, or spending that is required by law, is handled through authorizing bills, allowing the government to fund all costs associated with programs like Social Security, military pensions, benefits for veterans, Medicaid and Medicare.

Because discretionary spending accounted for only 28 percent of the federal budget at the time – which means mandatory spending, plus interest payments on the debt (which alone totaled 13.1 percent of spending in FY2024), accounted for the other 72 percent – it was *impossible* for DOGE to come close to meeting its goal of making "at least $2 trillion in cuts" by slashing discretionary spending alone. Even if Elon had cut every penny of it, he couldn't possibly hit his target.

This means that, if Elon was serious about his targets, things like Social Security and Medicare (together, 34.6 percent of the budget) and defense spending (12.9 percent) had to be part of the plan. He also had to break it to his buddy Donald that even if Social Security, Medicare, etc. were on the table, this *still* couldn't happen if Republicans passed tax cuts that would add trillions to the national debt – which they did when they passed the One Big Beautiful Bill in July 2025.

The “savings” delusion didn’t stop there. For instance, even with their devious Schedule F workaround, reducing the federal workforce wasn’t going to make a significant dent in the federal budget anyway.

< Schedule F was a brainchild from the first Trump administration. Right before Election Day 2020, President Trump issued an Executive Order, naturally, that said each government agency needed to identify career employees that could be shifted into a new job category they called Schedule F to make it easier to fire people, including senior federal career officials. The final list covered around 88 percent of the federal workforce. President Biden reversed this Executive Order on his very first day in office. But in February 2026, the Trump/Vance administration issued a rule that is essentially Schedule F. >

Excluding military personnel, the U.S. government was spending just over $300 billion a year on salary/benefits for federal employees. This equaled only around 4 percent of the federal budget. So even if he cut a quarter of these workers, that’s only a 1 percent reduction overall.

Nevertheless, within weeks of storming Washington, Elon had moved aggressively to disrupt U.S. agencies (Department of Defense, Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services, Federal Aviation Administration, Internal Revenue Service, and Treasury Department) or dismantle them altogether (Department of Education, Federal Emergency Management Agency, National Institutes of Health, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and, of course, USAID).

…and disrupt them he did, with consequences that are still being felt far and wide today. The Social Security Administration – the $15.4 billion agency that delivers $1.5 trillion a year in benefits to 73 million retired workers, their survivors, and poor and disabled Americans – is still struggling. The website crashes, average hold times last hours, and the customer experience has plummeted as an exhausted workforce tries to keep up with 6 million unresolved cases in its processing centers and 12 million transactions out in the field.

The IRS, which lost around 25 percent of its workforce, is fighting a substantial backlog of cases. The Environmental Protection Agency also lost around 25 percent of its workforce and had $28 billion in

grants cancelled – a disheartening development for anyone who values clean air and water and protected federal lands.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture lost 20,000 workers and is decimated to the point that farmers who need vital information about the grants they rely on can't get anyone to answer the phone. This is distressing at a time when the agriculture industry is already in crisis thanks to the Trump/Vance administration's aggressive immigration tactics and high tariffs. This got so bad that Wes Gillingham, a farmer and the president of the Northeast Organic Farming Association, told The New York Times in December 2025 that, "We're just going to see a huge amount of farms going out of business this year because of the mayhem."

To be sure, one of the most disastrous long-term consequences that the failed DOGE experiment has wrought is the negative impact it has had – and will continue to have – on our federal workforce.

The U.S. government employs over 3 million civilians who work in hundreds of agencies. Around 4,000 of these are political appointees while the rest are nonpartisan people hired to do the tedious and often boring work of the government.

Who did Donald, JD, Elon and the rest think ensure our drinking water is safe from things like chemical pesticides and fertilizers? Who did they think tracks extreme weather? Who did they think calculates the Consumer Price Index? Who did they think cleans our parks or handles our air traffic control systems? Who did they think designs our spaceships and nuclear bombs?

Who did they think monitors for – then directs the government's response to – food-borne parasitic infections like cyclosporiasis, which ravaged the Midwest in the summer of 2026? Who did they think monitors screwworms, the little flesh-eating maggots that reappeared on a calf in Texas in June 2026?

Well, they found out real quick who does these things because most agencies – including the IRS, State Department, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Food and Drug and Social Security Administrations – scrambled from practically Day One to hire back many of the people that Elon fired.

This included the Department of Agriculture, which desperately tried to hire back bird flu response workers after an avian influenza outbreak, and the National Weather Service, which lost meteorologists, hydrologists, physical scientists and electronics technicians in the initial cuts – a mistake that became painfully evident when, shortly after, Americans lived through devastating wildfires in California; deadly flash floods in Texas; and tornados, hurricanes, and hail storms across the entire nation.

The way Donald Trump, JD Vance, Elon Musk, Russel Vought, and many others in the Trump/Vance administration treat these hard-working, dedicated Americans is outrageous. This "Deep State" b.s. is a highly insulting and sinister narrative that has gotten completely out of control.

This hateful rhetoric needs to stop *right this second*, and we ALL need to start appreciating lifelong federal employees for what they truly are: extraordinary Americans doing nothing more or less than the grinding, behind-the-scenes work of the American people. *These hard-working Americans don't deserve to be ridiculed and disrespected by rich guys trying to consolidate power*.

….and don't think for one second this unprecedented disrespect won't have long-term effects. One employee who returned to the Food and Drug Administration summed it up to The Washington Post: "Being back feels like a funeral. Morale is terrible. Everyone is stressed and feels the absence of our colleagues. … I'm looking for another job." Other people just didn't go back at all. One former Department of Agriculture safety inspector said this when he was asked to return: "I was like, yep, nope, I'm not risking it again. I'm gonna try to take the money and try to find something else."

It should have surprised no one that an Elon-led DOGE would be unsuccessful because one must look no further than what happened at Twitter, now X, after Elon bought the company in 2022 to see that, while he may be a genius at some things, talented cost-cutter and management guru? Not so much.

Immediately after taking the Twitter reins, he cut 80 percent of the staff, including many of the engineers who literally kept the site operating. He also decided he wouldn't honor back pay for thousands

of the employees he laid off, or the severance packages that he knew top executives were contractually entitled to – vacuous choices that resulted in multiple lawsuits.

But by far the most perplexing thing Musk did after buying Twitter was sabotage the company's relationships with its advertisers – an insane thing to do when advertising is your primary source of revenue. Elon & Co. has even sued some of them and, at one point, told them, from the stage of The New York Times' annual DealBook Summit no less, to "Go f^*k yourself."

Unsurprisingly, this ridiculousness decimated X's revenue. According to the investment firm Fidelity, X's valuation dropped 79 percent from October 2022 to October 2024. It eventually dropped to a $9.4 billion overall valuation, a devastating nosedive from the $44 billion that Musk paid for the company. Tesla's stock also went on a rollercoaster ride. From the day Elon bought Twitter in October 2022 to the end of that year, Tesla's stock fell by half.

It probably didn't help matters that Elon – who at a 2024 Trump campaign rally said, "I'm not just MAGA, I'm Dark Gothic MAGA" – was extremely aggressive in his support of Donald Trump in the 2024 election, while consistently trashing Democrats.

Or that he threw what looked eerily like a Nazi salute at President Trump's inauguration, *twice*. Elon denied that's what he did, posting on X, "The 'everyone is Hitler' attack is soo tired," and some Americans – way too many, in my opinion – bought his b.s. denials. But Germans sure didn't, with Tesla car sales in Germany nosediving 76 percent in February alone.

While all these are perfectly legal things to do in the United States of America, it may not be the smartest business move for an executive chairman of a social media company and a public company during the most divided election in modern U.S. history. Tesla storefronts, charging stations, and vehicles became targets for violence, including AR-style semiautomatic weapons being fired at Tesla storefronts, and Molotov cocktails thrown through store windows and at Tesla vehicles.

So, it was totally predictable that the destructive experiment that was DOGE not only saved *no* money for the American people but also, ironically, created *more* cumbersome red tape. This included hours

spent justifying the cost of mundane but extremely important tasks like having the windows washed in air traffic control towers or demanding vendors swear a blood oath to never engage in evil DEI activities – all of which created massive gridlock and delays.

In another ironic twist – given that Elon spent so much time bad mouthing and denigrating our federal workforce – the original "agents" at DOGE were mostly engineers from Elon's companies who had little to no work experience, much less government experience, and ranged from 19 to 24-years-old. One of the most notorious was a 20-year-old named Edward Coristine, codename "Big Balls."

Big Balls and the other kids essentially took over the Office of Personnel Management and the General Services Administration, and they had access to the Treasury Department's payment system – meaning they had access to the sensitive information of most Americans, including Social Security numbers and bank account information.

In January 2026, the Trump/Vance administration admitted that members of the DOGE team accessed and shared sensitive Social Security data. Agency officials admitted that one employee signed a secret agreement with a political advocacy group that called for sharing Social Security data with the aim of overturning election results in certain states. Who are the villains now, Mr. Vought?

All these harsh realities obviously started to dawn on Elon because, naturally, he started to lie about what DOGE was achieving. Within weeks, Elon announced that DOGE had already saved $55 billion through actions like layoffs, canceled contracts, and the renegotiation of leases.

Problem was, most of the "canceled" contracts were ones that were already completed and most of the leases were set to expire anyway. Analysis by the Associated Press found that almost 40 percent of these contracts weren't expected to save the government any money in the first place. The New York Times reported that, in DOGE's published list of canceled contracts and grants, the thirteen largest were presented incorrectly.

Elon also included blanket purchase agreements (BPAs) in the contract number. This was illogical because BPAs are agreements that

can be used if the government needs to buy anything in the future. In other words, no money had been spent yet and may never have been spent in the future. But, assigning each of these agreements a random dollar amount gave Elon and Big Balls a chance to give the false impression of more government spending.

Realizing people were getting wise to their shady tactics, DOGE finally stopped posting any information on its website to support its claims – even though Elon had promised to post thorough details to be "maximally transparent." The New York Times was initially able to get around this because identifying information had been embedded in the group's source code, but the guys at DOGE changed that as well.

In the end, a Politico analysis of DOGE data showed that Elon's contract termination scheme saved America less than 5 percent of what he said it did. Plus, the little money that *was* saved was simply returned to the agencies originally authorized by Congress to spend it. Meaning, not a dime of it went to lowering the deficit – even though Elon and Donald Trump said otherwise (many, many times).

All this is quite loathsome, but nothing could be worse than the destruction and literal death that Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Elon Musk have caused across the world.

< As you read this please keep in mind that, before these guys came to power, the United States spent **less than 1 percent** of the federal budget on foreign aid. We spent almost $65 billion in 2023, and in terms of dollars, that was more than any other country in the world. But before we break our arms patting ourselves on the back, as a *percentage* of our economy, the U.S. spent less than Japan, Britain, France, Norway, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands. Not to mention that billions of those dollars came right back into the American economy. USAID funded many American researchers, and American farms supplied around 41 percent of the food aid that the agency sent around the world every year. >

Since 1961, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) managed global projects that dealt with food aid, disaster relief, and health and education programs in over 100 countries.

For over six decades, support from the American people vastly increased access to education and healthcare for millions; helped

achieve significant reductions in child and maternal mortality; was instrumental in eradicating smallpox and reducing malaria deaths; helped secure democracy for vulnerable nations; and was responsible for sparking economic development in various regions throughout the world. We provided critical assistance during natural disasters, famines, and other emergencies; prevented millions of new infections of HIV/AIDS; and provided access to clean drinking water for millions.

The Center for Global Development estimates that, before 2025, aid distributed by USAID saved up to 5.6 million lives a year by providing interventions for HIV/AIDS, vaccine-preventable illnesses, and emergency/ humanitarian relief alone (this number doesn't include interventions for water and sanitation, family planning, and nutrition, which are significant in and of themselves).

By itself, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) – the largest ever global H.I.V. program that was started by President George W. Bush in 2003 – is credited with saving the lives of over 26 million people living in over 50 countries.

On his first day back in the Oval Office, Donald Trump signed Executive Order 14169, freezing all new foreign development assistance obligations and disbursements. Four days later, a stop-work order was issued for all existing foreign assistance awards; on February 2nd the USAID website was taken down; and five days later, signs identifying the headquarters of USAID were removed.

Okay, so even if you are going to do something despicable like this, surely you have enough compassion and awareness to understand that it's critical to give organizations around the world time to adjust to this massive change in humanitarian aid, right?

Nope. Elon/DOGE immediately started to systematically dismantle the rest of USAID, shutting down most all its programming and laying off almost all its staff. This included people working in war zones, who found themselves abruptly cut off from their work emails and the app they relied on to help them in case of an emergency.

Immediately after Elon, in his words, "fed USAID into the wood chipper," at least 11,500 Americans and 54,575 foreigners lost their jobs; around $1 billion in payments for work that had already been

completed was frozen; $500 million in food was just sitting in ports, ships and warehouses, rotting; health workers who provided preventive care were forced to leave devastated villages; and immunizations, Vitamin A distributions, and deworming were abruptly stopped.

Wait? Deworming? Like, as in people? What the heck is that? … many Americans are probably asking, since we don't have a clue of the horrors people in other countries face.

… but it's high time we learn more about these horrors, so here it is: Children in many countries are besieged by worms. Apologies if you're eating breakfast, but a female worm can lay 200,000 eggs a day – which vastly worsens children's malnutrition since the very little nutrients they receive go to the parasites, not to them. The great news is that aid agencies can deworm a child for less than *$1 a year*. The bad news is the $1 has now been cut.

Just in case you're not sufficiently outraged yet, a seven-page memo obtained by Bloomberg – dated June 3, 2025, prepared for Marco Rubio and signed by nine U.S. State Department aides – revealed that, instead of $6 billion going to dying children, the Trump/Vance administration was going to use that money – six billion dollars – to *dismantle* USAID, including hundreds of millions used to fight the legal challenges that were surely coming thanks to the administration closing the agency.

In a pathetic effort to clear his conscience, in testimony before Congress on May 21, 2025, Marco Rubio said that the gutting of USAID by the Trump/Vance administration had not caused any unnecessary deaths: "No children are dying on my watch… no one has died because of USAID."

That is a preposterous thing for him to say. Without question, ***directly*** because of heartless decisions made by Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Elon Musk, babies have needlessly died of malnutrition, cholera, malaria and AIDS, and more women and young girls have fallen victim to violence, both physical and sexual. That's just a fact.

Humanitarian aid in 2025 alone reached 25 million fewer people than the year before; over 2,000 health clinics have closed in crisis zones around the world; global food aid funding has dropped 58

percent; and millions of people have lost access to critical H.I.V. treatment and testing.

In fact, more than 1,700 H.I.V. treatment sites have closed since Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Elon Musk's cruel cuts to PEPFAR. PEPFAR treated 77,000 fewer children in 2025 than the year before, and now roughly half of the children living with H.I.V. around the world don't have access to the treatments they must have to stay alive. South Africa is being kicked out of the program altogether, even though the country has the highest H.I.V. rate in the world, with around eight million people living with the virus.

This all is heart wrenching, but it's also incredibly frustrating because, between 2000 and 2020, the number of children who died before their 5th birthday dropped by half. This is considered to be perhaps the greatest achievement *ever* in global health and shows a remarkable level of investment, dedication and collaboration between donors, governments, health professionals, families and communities.

Sadly – in direct contradiction to Marco Rubio's absurd assertion that no children have died on his watch – for the first time in decades, child deaths rose in 2025.

An Impact Counter designed by Dr. Brooke Nichols, an infectious disease mathematical modeller and health economist, put the number of child deaths caused by USAID cuts at 488,550 in 2025, or 88 deaths every hour. She estimates that, by mid-2026, the ruthless cuts had cost over 750,000 lives worldwide. < Dr. Nichols' work has reached over 150,000 people in over 175 countries, and her methodology has been peer-reviewed by multiple academic cohorts across disciplines to certify accuracy and transparency >.

This tracks with numbers provided by Atul Gawande, who told The New Yorker magazine that he estimates seven hundred thousand people have already died because of the cuts. <Mr. Gawande was the assistant administrator for global health at USAID until he resigned after the Trump/Vance administration ended U.S. foreign assistance. >

A study published in May 2026 in the peer-reviewed medical journal The Lancet estimates that development assistance funding cuts will cost 9.4 million lives across 93 low- and middle-income countries

by 2030 – including 2.5 million deaths among children under the age of five – if we stay on the current trajectory. If more severe cuts are made – and with these heartless men in charge, why wouldn't they be? – the numbers skyrocket to 22.6 million deaths overall, including 5.4 million among children under five.

Oxfam International – a global confederation of independent non-governmental organizations that operate in almost 80 countries worldwide – estimates that a child under five could die *every forty seconds* by 2030 because of the Trump/Vance/Rubio/Musk cuts to humanitarian and development aid.

To add insult to injury, many of the deaths in 2025 could have been prevented with existing resources. BUT, thanks to the haphazard and incompetent way the Trump/Vance administration dissolved USAID, over 60,000 metric tons of food – along with other commodities and nutritional supplements already paid for by the U.S. taxpayer – sat in warehouses in America and around the world rotting and expiring instead of being transported to crisis zones and famine-stricken countries. It's estimated these supplies could have helped over 60 million people.

More than $12 million worth of contraceptives and HIV-prevention medications purchased by the U.S. taxpayer – originally headed for 18 different countries – just sat in distribution centers in Belgium and the United Arab Emirates, going to waste.

A Washington Post investigation from the first half of 2025 found that supplies valued at over $190 million were scheduled to arrive at distribution warehouses by the end of June; however, shipments worth almost $76 million never made it. An additional $63 million worth of supplies – including life-saving medications for diseases like malaria that must be treated quickly – were delivered to the warehouses but delayed, on average, 41 days… in far too many cases, 41 days too late.

Hundreds of thousands of doses of a lifesaving supplement called Plumpy'Nut sat in a warehouse in Rhode Island, its shipment to Sudan canceled after Washington issued the stop-work order. Meanwhile, at the Almanar food distribution center in Khartoum, the capital city of Sudan, mothers sat in line – waiting – with their starving children.

By September 2025, The New York Times was reporting that the 260,000 innocent civilians trapped in El Fasher, a city taking the full brunt of Sudan's vicious civil war, were eating animal feed, trying to make the decision whether to risk being killed if they stayed OR raped *before* they were killed if they left. You know, much like the daily decisions we make over here, like if we're going to get our coffee at Starbucks or Dunkin'.

Doctors Without Borders reports that, in Somalia, the number of children they see with severe malnutrition has risen by 73 percent since 2024. At Baidoa Bay Regional Hospital, deaths among severely malnourished children increased by 44 percent in the first half of 2025 alone, compared to the same period the year before – with 47 percent of deaths occurring within two days of a child's arrival. By April 2026, the number of patients admitted was more than triple the number in April just one year before.

Elsewhere in Africa – where 46 million people are forcibly displaced, including nine million refugees – millions of refugees in Chad and Malawi lost aid practically overnight as the U.N. Refugee Agency closed American aid programs.

People trapped in South Sudan were living through the most dire humanitarian crisis ever recorded, with 34 million of them – two-thirds of the population – relying on U.S. humanitarian help for their very survival. Nevertheless, the Trump/ Vance/Rubio/Musk cuts forced the immediate closure of close to 80 percent of the emergency food kitchens that were often their only source of food.

The U.N. World Food Program was unexpectedly forced to end food distribution to one million refugees in Uganda's Kiryandongo refugee settlement, a place that cares for people forced to flee unthinkable violence in Sudan. This led to pandemonium, with hundreds of people physically fighting one another over the little food that remained. Duaa Tariq, one of the food kitchen organizers, described it this way: "People are screaming from hunger in the streets."

The 4.5 million people, including 2.9 million children, who are sick and starving in Burkina Faso – where the government's war against Islamist insurgents has intensified, leading to more deaths and

mass displacement, widespread hunger and unthinkable human rights violations – now have virtually no support.

In a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh – the world's largest – a million people, including 500,000 children, forced to flee Myanmar have nothing to eat. Even if they live, they are now more susceptible to outbreaks of diseases like tuberculosis and H.I.V. because clinics and programs have closed their doors.

Because USAID was one of the largest providers of health care to Indonesia, H.I.V., tuberculosis and malaria cases have exploded. Women who are being mistreated and/or trafficked in Cambodia and Guatemala are now unguarded and Colombia is on its way to becoming destabilized again. The six million Haitians who need humanitarian aid are facing, at best, malnutrition and, at worst, starvation.

The hundreds of thousands of displaced people in Syria who live in camps increasingly have no food, fuel or water, and the millions of Ukrainian children at risk of death, forced deportation, psychological trauma, indoctrination, and militarization under Russian occupation are now largely unprotected.

Dangerous pathogens were immediately left unsecured at labs across Africa, and airport and checkpoint inspections for mpox, Ebola, and other infectious diseases were reduced or stopped altogether – meaning millions of unscreened animals and people began freely crossing borders.

This obviously put Americans directly at risk because diseases – like the Marburg virus in Tanzania, the mpox in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Lassa in Nigeria – can travel quickly.

…a consequence that, unsurprisingly, didn't take long to materialize. In June 2026, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warned that the Ebola outbreak spreading through the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda could rapidly become the largest Ebola epidemic in history unless efforts to contain it improve.

This is highly problematic because Ebola is a severe, astonishingly deadly viral disease, with an average fatality rate of 50 percent. In past outbreaks, as many as 90 percent of those infected have died.

Unfortunately, containing this one will be much more difficult now that the Trump/Vance administration withdrew the United States from the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Trump/Vance/Rubio/Musk cuts have diminished or eliminated altogether many of the people, systems and agencies that once coordinated the U.S. Ebola and other outbreak responses. In fact, the United States didn't even know about the outbreak until nine days *after* the WHO did.

The once extensive disease surveillance networks and emergency teams located in East Africa are largely gone, and the CDC has lost hundreds of epidemiologists and other experts – including many stationed in Africa – who would be instrumental in containing the epidemic. In all, the CDC's emerging disease center – which handles hantavirus and Ebola – has lost about 700 employees and contractors, and its Global Health Center has lost hundreds more employees.

There is also no coordinator for global health security – a position created by Congress – and no one staffing the White House Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy, also created by Congress.

In yet another blow to America's readiness to address emerging infectious diseases and biological threats, just months before the Ebola outbreak, the Trump/Vance administration indefinitely paused research at National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Integrated Research Facility at Fort Detrick, one of the few global institutes with the facilities capable of researching Ebola.

Plus, the administration cut funding for GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance – an incredibly reckless move since GAVI is working to develop a vaccine for this specific strain of Ebola (this outbreak involves the Bundibugyo virus, a strain that has no approved vaccine).

Beyond obvious causes and effects – like the fact that cutting off food leads to people starving – it can be hard to visualize how cuts like the ones made by Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Elon Musk link directly to disasters, but here are two examples. For one, the outbreak got a head start because samples were taken to the national lab in Kinshasa, Congo at the wrong temperature – something that would likely never have happened when that task was managed by USAID.

Here's a second one: Because USAID provided crucial supplies that health workers no longer have access to, these workers have been

treating Ebola patients wearing only gloves and surgical masks instead of using respirators, face shields, airtight clothing, and/or surgical hoods that prevent exposure to bodily fluids. This obviously puts their lives in danger and exasperates the spread.

Heather Kerr, the International Rescue Committee's country director for Congo, put it this way: "The health system is on its knees here."

The thing that gets me is the casual, almost dismissive way Elon now acknowledges DOGE's failure… like a 5-year-old who simply got tired of the new toy he begged Santa Claus for (or, more accurately, paid almost $300 million for).

Upon his departure, Elon explained that "the federal bureaucracy situation" was "much worse" than he realized, and that it's "mostly just a lot of hard work." Wow, Elon! What a shocking revelation this is. In July 2026, he told The Economist that he simply got "carried away." Carried away? That is the underestimate of the century.

Elon's cavalier attitude about the havoc he wreaked is even more remarkable given what he gained from it. The conflicts of interest involved here were epic, and the fact that this was ever tolerated is a flaming red flag that should cause us all to be seriously concerned about the level of corruption in this administration (more on this later).

Elon's company SpaceX is regulated by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). In September 2024, SpaceX was fined over $600,000 by the agency for not following license requirements for two rocket launches, which infuriated Elon. But then on February 5th, Elon and the U.S. Department of Transportation announced that Elon had access to all FAA technologies to make "rapid safety upgrades." Ummm…what?

Then, the FAA abruptly put a $2.4 billion Verizon contract to upgrade its air traffic control communications systems under review – reportedly so that the FAA could cancel it to … wait for it… give the business to Starlink, another Elon company. SpaceX employees were promptly issued conflict-of-interest waivers to be able to review FAA technology "on behalf of the United States." Several of these SpaceX employees even had a FAA email address. Ummm…what?

Of the FAA's potential shift from Verizon to Starlink, Elon said on X, "The Verizon system is not working and so is putting air travelers at serious risk." Right. Of course it is, buddy.

< In July 2025, the FAA told lawmakers they were no longer considering replacing the Verizon existing contracts with Starlink. >

So much of Elon's time in Washington seemed to be driven by personal grievances. Because Tesla, SpaceX, and four other businesses Elon controls had been investigated and/or fined 32 different times by eleven different federal agencies, he had beef with lots of people throughout the United States government, including the Office of Government Ethics and the Securities and Exchange Commission, whose leadership he publicly called "bastards."

He had an ax to grind with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, an agency that investigated complaints about Tesla's debt collection and loan policies – enacting his revenge in February 2025 when he fired the head of the agency, locked the doors, and pretty much shut down all work, telling the employees to stay home. Big Balls and the other kids quickly gained access to the agency's computer systems, including personnel rolls and financial records.

Elon was also seriously ticked off at the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, a U.S. Labor Department agency created by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965 to prohibit discrimination by government contractors.

The source of Elon's ire was an audit the agency had opened on Tesla's Fremont, California plant in October 2024 to investigate potential workplace discrimination and to verify adherence to federal equal employment and civil rights laws required of government contractors.

But never fear! Donald Trump had his biggest donor's back, directing the agency to stop much of its work, essentially closing the case. The attorney the Trump/Vance administration appointed to oversee the agency – and ultimately dismantle it – had once represented SpaceX in matters involving the Labor Department.

Then there were the government contracts. A February 2025 analysis by The Washington Post found that Elon and his companies had received at least $38 billion in government contracts, loans,

subsidies and tax credits over the past twenty years. Almost two-thirds of that money was secured in just the previous five years (at least $6.3 billion was committed in 2024 alone). Fifty-two contracts with seven government agencies were ongoing, which were set to pay Musk & Co. $11.8 billion more over time.

Six months after Donald Trump returned to the Oval Office, Elon's A.I. company xAI signed a contract worth up to $200 million with the Department of Defense. The company was also added to the General Services Administration (GSA) schedule, meaning that its products are approved for purchase across every single federal office and agency.

And that's just the deals that were public. SpaceX is reportedly building spy satellites for the Pentagon's National Reconnaissance Office, a contract estimated to be worth $1.8 billion.

In June 2026, CNN reported that, all in, almost all of Elon Musk's now trillion-dollar wealth came from United States taxpayers and policymakers in the form of government grants, loans, contracts and regulatory policies. SpaceX and Tesla, for example, both struggled mightily as startups before receiving taxpayer subsidies.

< Remember, far more important than the actual dollar amounts received is ***when*** those dollars were received. Elon acknowledged this when he said in 2012, "The fact (is) that we could not have started SpaceX, nor could we have reached this point, without the help of NASA." … and when he admitted in 2020 that Tesla was close to declaring bankruptcy in 2019 before being saved by selling other car companies "emissions credits" provided for by a government program to reduce carbon emissions (between 2008 and 2019, sales of regulatory credits generated more than $2 billion for Tesla). >

Think about what this means. All of Elon's successes – all his creating, pioneering, achieving, and money minting – were made possible, not only by migrating from South Africa to a country that is stable and where the rule of law is sound, but through that country's federal subsidies, loans and contracts. And while he was gobbling up all the favors, money and power he could, he was doing everything possible to burn down the pathways for everyone else. What a class act.

†

Even though this horror show is now in the history books, breaking down the disaster that was DOGE is still an extremely important thing for us to do so that everyone can clearly see that there is a ***right*** way to do this and a ***wrong*** way to do this.

Without question, the United States government – a goliath that spent $7 trillion in FY2025 and employs around 3 million people – needs a major overhaul… which is why 1787 named our effort to do just that Operation Overhaul! (see what we did there?) However, the way we go about doing it matters. A LOT.

1787 can do this way better, with far less sleaze. Operation Overhaul, working in close collaboration with Congress, can reduce our debt, close the gap on our deficit, and end the massive waste, inefficiency and corruption that infects every level of our federal government. Operation Overhaul has four parts:

† Fiscal Responsibility
† Operations
† Waste & Corruption
† Comprehensive Government Reform

Through the years, layers upon layers of public policies have been added – one on top of the other – to create a complex, self-defeating labyrinth of jumbled mess.

I recognize that putting the toothpaste back into the tube seems overwhelming – if not impossible – but it can absolutely be done. Because this is such a big problem to try to solve, the only plausible answer is to be boldly strategic in our attack. We can no longer expect half-measures and incremental ideas to work. Instead, we need to embrace a full and fundamental restructuring.

I hope you agree that it feels really clarifying to see all these issues in one place, not to overwhelm everybody, but so we can understand how deep and wide we must go to solve these challenges. Scratching

the surface just isn't going to cut it anymore, and there is no magic bullet. It's not just one thing, it's *everything*.

† Fiscal Responsibility

We went over this one earlier, but I'll add one last thing: Stop believing politicians when they say they use the "Starve the Beast" strategy when they clearly don't. Instead, we need to implement a smart reduction strategy to tighten the cost structure.

Starving the Beast is a political strategy that chokes the amount of revenue going into the government's bank account by cutting taxes. The theory is that by cutting taxes, Congress will be forced to cut spending. I believe that some Republicans genuinely thought they were employing the Starve the Beast strategy with their 2017 tax cuts, but if they still believe that they are completely delusional.

They certainly got the tax cut part of the strategy down but just like in the Reagan administration, they forgot the other – and most important – half of the equation about cutting spending. Clearly, not having enough revenue means nothing to Congress. Lack of revenue hasn't slowed that bunch down one bit. And now, it's going to get much worse with the One Big Beautiful Bill.

† Operations

Operation Overhaul reduces costs, maximizes value, and improves performance by strengthening operational strategies that will build an effective organizational structure and demand accountability. We will remove redundancy, unlock hidden value, establish clear channels of reporting and responsibility and get the most out of government employees.

The hallmark of Operation Overhaul is that it demands tough but fair accountability. After the departments and programs are streamlined – which is a critical first step – strict review processes will keep them on track. Every program and agency will be continually evaluated and

measured. Plus, the federal departments must make a strong case for their value every single year. Departments must prove that they narrowly define their challenges, conduct in-depth due diligence, formulate smart and timely plans of action, assess the risks and develop responsible budgets.

To facilitate this process, a nonpartisan, non-connected Efficiency Review Board will oversee the federal departments, acting as a new line of financial defense. Currently, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) receives each department's yearly budget request, communicates with them about the requests, and makes budget recommendations before the president's budget is sent to Congress. The new Efficiency Review Board will assess each department's programs and approve their budgets before they are even presented to the OMB. See 1787's entire plan for *Operations* on p. 124 of the *Policy Guide*.

† Waste & Corruption

Waste. The word that comes to mind over and over when I think of our governmental policies is waste. Billions after billions are just wasted. Seriously wasted. Like just flush-it-down-the-toilet wasted.

Why does this happen? Because our government has become a bureaucratic Behemoth monster that will eventually strangle our ability to advance on any level. This is not a Republican-esque rant about the size of government, because theirs is a misguided argument.

Contrary to their belief, size does not necessarily correlate to efficiency. Just because the federal government is smaller doesn't mean it will automatically run more effectively. Some of the largest of companies run like a well-oiled machine while some of the smallest of companies are management disasters.

It's not about ***size***. It's about ***efficiency***. If we focus on being efficient, our government will be exactly the size it needs to be.

Amazon tops the Global Fortune 500 list with $717 billion in annual revenue and Walmart is second with $631 billion. Meanwhile, the U.S. government collected $5.23 trillion in revenue in FY2025.

The portion of that figure squandered is off the chain. From things like the two new Gulfstream private jets former DHS Secretary Kristi Noem ordered for herself at a cost of $172 million, along with the $220 million glossy "illegal immigration" ad campaign that featured her, among other things, in full make-up astride a horse to Pete Hegseth and the Pentagon spending $2 million on Alaskan king crab, $6.9 million on lobster tail, and $15.1 million spent on rib-eye steak in September 2025 alone to the IRS having to pay taxpayers over $3 billion in interest because refunds were late, waste permeates our federal government.

… and those types of things are just the tip of the iceberg. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports that, in FY2025, 15 federal agencies reported a total estimate of around $186 billion in improper payments – or payments that should not have been made or that were made in incorrect amounts – across 64 programs, an increase of $24 billion from the prior fiscal year. Most of these improper payments were a result of overpayments. < Ummm… can someone get Big Balls on the phone to explain this increase? >

In fact, the GAO estimates that federal agencies have made about $3 TRILLION in improper payments since 2003, which is likely a low number since not all federal agencies report improper payment data. Medicare, Medicaid, the Earned Income Tax Credit and SNAP are consistently the worst offenders.

SAY WHAT? 3 TRILLION DOLLARS? Is this a joke? And the Chinese and Japanese governments say, "Thank you, America!"

Then there's the outright fraud. On March 27, 2020, President Trump signed into law the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), unleashing the largest flood of federal money into the American economy in U.S. history.

The nonpartisan think tank Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget says that, as of July 2026 we had spent over $11 trillion in in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and economic crisis – Federal Reserve ($4.7 trillion), legislative actions ($5.9 trillion); and administrative actions ($875 billion).

Because it's the federal government, there were basic bookkeeping errors, naturally – like when the GAO found that stimulus payments

were sent to nearly 1.1 million dead people, a mistake that totaled $1.4 billion – but the fraud associated with this money is epic.

In September 2023, the GAO issued a report that estimated between 100 billion and 135 billion dollars – or 11-15 percent of the total amount of unemployment insurance benefits given to Americans during the pandemic – was fraudulently obtained.

A follow-up GAO report in April 2025 acknowledged that "the full extent of fraud within the pandemic-relief programs will never be known with certainty. The scope of the pandemic-relief response; the inherently deceptive nature of fraudulent activities; and the resources needed for detection, investigation, and prosecution of fraud make it difficult to measure. However, estimates indicate hundreds of billions of dollars in potentially fraudulent payments were disbursed."

"In reviewing Department of Justice (DOJ) case documentation, GAO identified different types of fraud schemes and fraudsters who defrauded at least 19 different pandemic-relief programs. In addition to more traditional and organized criminal groups, entities in a wide variety of sectors, and individuals from all walks of life, defrauded these programs."

A massive theft involved a federal food program called the Federal Child Nutrition Program, an initiative that provided free meals for low-income children throughout the pandemic. In this scheme, criminals used fake names of children "in need" to defraud the U.S. of hundreds of millions.

This fraud was particularly popular in Minnesota, where at least 79 people were charged with stealing $250 million using a nonprofit called Feeding Our Future (the organization recruited people and entities to open fake Federal Child Nutrition Program sites throughout the state). The U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota Andrew Luger said that, after using shell companies and bribes to steal, the culprits bought "houses in Minnesota, resort property and real estate in Kenya and Turkey, luxury cars, commercial property, jewelry, and much more."

Sixty-eight (68) total convictions have been secured through trials and plea deals, and 61 defendants have pleaded guilty. Seven defendants were convicted at trial, including the fraud's mastermind Aimee Bock, who received a sentence of nearly 42 years in federal

prison. The remaining people are either awaiting trial, have fled the country, or are making their way through the federal court system.

< Sidebar: This story came back into the news with vengeance because, while it originally looked like this was just a one-off, singular scheme, we now know that it was one of multiple ways fraudsters have stolen lots of money from Minnesota's generous safety net programs.

In December 2025, prosecutors announced that at least 14 state-run programs in Minnesota had been flagged for fraud and that a significant portion of the roughly $18 billion paid out by Medicaid to Minnesota programs since 2018 – maybe even more than half – could have been fraudulent.

The programs defrauded included housing, autism and integrated community services. First Assistant U.S. Attorney Joe Thomposon spoke candidly about the scale of the fraud being uncovered in the state: "The fraud is not small. It isn't isolated. What we see in Minnesota is not a handful of bad actors committing crimes. It's a staggering industrial scale of fraud. It's swamping Minnesota and calling into question everything we know about our state."

The New York Times reported that, "Over the last five years, law enforcement officials say, fraud took root in pockets of Minnesota's Somali diaspora as scores of individuals made small fortunes by setting up companies that billed state agencies for millions of dollars' worth of social services that were never provided. Federal prosecutors say that 59 people have been convicted in those schemes so far, and that more than $1 billion in taxpayers' money has been stolen in three plots they are investigating."

The Times reports that all but eight of the 86 people charged in the meals, housing and autism therapy fraud cases are of Somali ancestry, according to prosecutors. "A vast majority are American citizens, by birth or naturalization." >

But, however grotesque, these stolen amounts are child's play when you consider the amount of fraud associated with the PPP. The Paycheck Protection Program, one of the signature programs in the CARES Act, was a loan program enacted during the pandemic to

provide an incentive for small businesses to keep workers on the payroll.

This $840 billion program – which included Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDLs) – offered up to $10 million in loans and, if certain rules were followed, they didn't have to be repaid. The rules included that the number of employees and their compensation had to stay consistent and at least 60 percent of the money had to be spent on payroll costs. Around 98 percent of PPP loans were forgiven.

The amount of PPP money that was misused, misappropriated, and flat out stolen is shameful. Okay, I get it. The pandemic was wreaking economic havoc, and we had to do something fast, and if we didn't the American economy would crater, and on and on and on. I get that, and I believe that.

This is not a commentary on the *concept* of PPP. *It's an indictment of how haphazard this country continually conducts business.*

At what point did our government decide to not prepare for ANYTHING? EVER?!? Being in a rush IS NOT AN EXCUSE for gross negligence. We had 13 years since the last financial crisis to get our act together. Did not one person in Washington think it was wise to draft even the most rudimentary plan of action for the next one? Guys, seriously. We can't go on like this.

Taking time to design an effective emergency financial response *before* we needed to use it would have made a huge difference because the PPP as it was thrown together was not the best use of our money, to say the least.

The Wall Street Journal reported that "researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in July 2020 compared payroll data at PPP-eligible companies to ineligible ones and estimated the program had boosted employment by about 2.3 million jobs. At that rate, the PPP would have cost about $224,000 per job supported." In other words, we paid $224,000 for jobs that usually paid employees just a small fraction of that amount. Using that logic, why not just hand everyone $224,000?

We almost never knew about how badly the PPP was mismanaged because the first Trump administration tried everything under the sun to keep the information from seeing the light of day – including sidelining

inspectors general and refusing to hand over information to watchdog agencies like the Government Accountability Office, even though the CARES Act mandated the information be released.

This reluctant behavior of the Trump administration is far less surprising when you read some of the Inspector General's reports. For instance, on June 27, 2023, the SBA's Office of the Inspector General issued a report that revealed the "SBA disbursed over $200 billion in potentially fraudulent Covid-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDLs), EIDL Targeted Advances, Supplemental Targeted Advances, and PPP loans."

Among those arrested were people who spent the money on personal luxury items; those who applied for multiple loans, which was not allowed; and people who faked documents and even entire companies.

< "The SBA's oversight and investigative work – *after* the fact and in collaboration with the U.S. Secret Service, other federal agencies, and financial institutions – had resulted in nearly $30 billion in Covid-19 EIDL and PPP funds being seized or returned to SBA," plus there had been "1,011 indictments, 803 arrests, and 529 convictions related to EIDL and PPP fraud as of May 2023." Still, that's A LOT of resources we had to use to only recoup 15 percent of the fraud >.

Honestly, none of this should come as surprise since businesses applying for PPP loans were allowed to self-report their eligibility with practically zero vetting. The Washington Post and ten other news organizations were finally forced to sue the SBA under the Freedom of Information Act to get more information about PPP.

What they found was disturbing. The first problem is how the loans were distributed. Instead of targeted relief based on need, the program was essentially a first-come, first-served deal, which threw everything off from the jump. Large companies, including those backed by private equity and/or otherwise well capitalized, headed to the front of the line, even though the PPP application required borrowers to verify the money was "necessary to support ongoing operations."

Because outside lenders across the nation processed these loans, business owners with long-term banking relationships – which tend to be larger companies – had a tremendous advantage. Businesses with

fewer employees and less revenue were put at an additional disadvantage because, since banks were allowed to establish their own lending criteria, the lenders were inherently incentivized to select large businesses over smaller ones.

The fact that the program allowed multiple subsidiaries of the same owner to apply for loans separately further increased the advantage for larger businesses while amplifying the disadvantage for smaller ones. All these factors, in turn, disproportionally hurt businesses owned by racial and ethnic minority groups.

The lenders that processed PPP loans won big. Combined, they collected somewhere between $18 billion and $20.9 billion in fees. The reason for the wide divergence – the Miami Herald put the number at $18 billion while The New York Times had it at $20.9 billion – is that news agencies had to extrapolate the numbers since the SBA refused to release the exact amount (which is telling in and of itself).

In 2020, the University of Massachusetts Amherst's Political Economy Research Institute estimated the lenders collected a total of around $19 billion in fees. By their math, JPMorgan Chase earned just over a billion, with Bank of America right on their heels. Both firms originally said they would donate any profits they made from processing PPP loans but then said their expenses were so high there wasn't any money left over after all. Dang! That's some expensive paperwork those guys did.

< At least some lenders did the right thing. Citi and Wells Fargo each committed millions of the net profits they earned in PPP fees to support communities disproportionally impacted by the pandemic. Wells Fargo CEO Charlie Scharf said that "by donating approximately $400 million in processing fees to assist small businesses in need, Wells Fargo's Open for Business Fund created opportunities for near-term access to capital and addressed the road ahead to meaningful economic recovery, especially for black and African American entrepreneurs and other minority-owned businesses."

Citibank expanded its Covid-19 U.S. Small Business Relief Program – which was launched to help smaller businesses and entrepreneurs who may not otherwise be eligible for federal stimulus programs and to support small businesses owned by people of color

and lower-income individuals and communities – plus donated funds to the Local Initiatives Support Corp. to support the New York Forward Loan Fund, which provides loans to small businesses, nonprofits and small landlords for working capital. >

A month into the PPP program, almost 300 publicly traded companies had received over $1 billion in PPP money that was meant for small businesses. Several of these companies had executives who were paid at least $2 million a year. An artificial intelligence tech firm named Veritone, for example, received $6.5 million after paying its chief executive $18.7 million and the company president, his brother, $13.9 million in 2018.

Around 600 large entities – including chain restaurants, hotels, law firms, horse tracks and even churches – received a $10 million loan, the maximum allowed. In fact, the run on the PPP was so aggressive by these larger entities that the program ran out of money in just 13 days, leaving over 80 percent of applicants with no funding.

In the end, although 87 percent of the PPP loans were for $150,000 or less, these loans made up less than 30 percent of the total amount dispersed. ONE PERCENT of the 5.2 million borrowers received a FULL QUARTER of the $523 billion distributed. Twenty-seven companies that enjoyed annual sales of $1 billion+ received loans, as did 2,068 that reported over $100 million in sales just a year before.

Providence Health Systems, for instance, was a multibillion-dollar institution and then one of the largest hospital chains in the country. Although Providence had $12 billion in its coffers, the company received at least $509 million in federal assistance.

In addition to Providence, nineteen other large hospital chains received over $5 billion – even though, combined, these hospitals had over $108 billion in cash. The Cleveland Clinic received $199 million, then paid investment consultants $28 million to manage the windfall. It's worth noting that most of these organizations are established as nonprofit organizations, which exempts them from paying federal income tax.

On the flip side, *2,000 rural hospitals didn't have enough money to survive for even a month*. The $3 million St. Claire HealthCare in

Kentucky received only paid for two-weeks of payroll, forcing them to lay employees off and cancel vendor contracts.

So, how in the world did this get so twisted? The answer will not surprise you. Yep, good 'ol lobbying.

The National Restaurant Association and the American Hotel and Lodging Association lobbied hard to make sure restaurants and large hotels got their rightful slice of the pie. Together, they spent $5,400,000 on lobbying efforts in 2020 alone, plus $2,523,251 in political contributions. This strategy was nothing new for them. Combined, they had spent $95,221,273 on lobbying since 1998 and $28,546,814 in political contributions since 1990.

They also saw a perfect opportunity to pounce on something that had alluded them pre-pandemic. For years, the retail, restaurant, and hotel industries had been pushing hard to allow quick write offs for renovation costs. Even though this had nothing – NOTHING – to do with the pandemic, the provision was put in the CARES Act at a cost to the U.S. government of $15 billion.

Straight-Up Corruption

The level of corruption that has contaminated and compromised the White House, Congress, and even one of our Supreme Court Justices is unprecedented – and cannot be tolerated any longer.

Donald Trump is using the office of the presidency to enrich himself and his family, administration officials, and business partners like no other president in history ever dreamed of – everything from inaugural and White House ballroom fundraising bribes to pardon kickbacks to cryptocurrency sweeteners to Middle Eastern-funded golf tournaments and luxury jets. And Republicans in Congress are just sitting by letting it happen – which makes them as complicit as he is.

I would say the line between President Trump's private business and the business of the American people is now completely blurred but, in truth, there is no longer even a line. Seriously, this is Putin-level depravity… but the difference is that Vladamir Putin doesn't hold the levers to the most powerful country on earth.

President Trump has even demanded that the Justice Department pay him $230 million of taxpayer money to compensate him for the special counsel investigations into Russian election tampering and possible connections to the 2016 Trump campaign as well as the search for classified documents at Mar-a-Lago – – a demand that may actually be granted since he installed his former defense lawyers for those very cases at the top of the U.S. Justice Department.

The president of the United States is also trying hard to use the power of his position to shield himself, his family, and their affiliated businesses from being investigated and/or audited on tax returns filed before May 18, 2026, giving them sweeping and unprecedented immunity from tax inquiries.

This is a substantially lucrative gift to Donald Trump, because just one of those audits – one that he has been fighting since 2010 – could have cost him over $100 million.

This particular grift started in January 2026, when Donald Trump sued the IRS for $10 billion, alleging the agency failed to protect his private tax records after Charles Littlejohn, an IRS contractor from Booz Allen Hamilton, leaked the records to the press.

Four months later, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and President Trump reached a "settlement agreement," with the president agreeing to drop the lawsuit in exchange for the tax shield and, of course, an apology. < This "settlement deal" initially included the creation of a $1.8 billion "anti-weaponization fund" to compensate people who claim they are victims of political prosecutions – including those who stormed the Capitol on January 6th – but the administration dropped that plan after almost every single person in America who heard about it completely flipped out. That's not to say, however, he won't try to revive it. >

For her part, federal judge Kathleen M. Williams wasn't having any of it, saying that Donald's lawsuit was brought to "manipulate the judicial process to pursue benefits unavailable in litigation," and ruling that his lawsuit against the IRS was an improper exercise in self-dealing.

Judge Williams also referred Alejandro Brito, the attorney who brought Donald's case against the IRS, to Florida bar authorities to

determine whether any disciplinary action is appropriate; ordered her ruling be forwarded to bar associations in New York and Washington to be considered in previously filed ethics complaints against Stanley Woodward – a top DOJ official who signed the paperwork creating the weaponization fund – and acting U.S. Attorney General Todd Blanche, who was previously one of Donald Trump's personal attorneys; and banning Daniel Epstein, another Trump lawyer, from making court appearances in the Southern District of Florida for one year.

She took special aim at Todd Blanche – who President Trump has nominated to be the permanent U.S. Attorney General – writing that she was "extremely troubled" by testimony he gave to the U.S. Senate, where at least one of his answers was "at best, misleading and, at worst, disingenuous."

Of the entire debacle, Judge Williams wrote, "This was an attempt to use the Court to provide some legitimacy to an agreement to confer immunity to people and entities affiliated with the president and to earmark billions of dollars from American taxpayers to redress grievances not defined in the law."

She continued, "Whatever may be the parties' wishes, inclinations or the dictates of their passion, they cannot alter the state of the facts or evade the rule of law."

Unlike presidents and their families before him – Lady Bird Johnson, LBJ's wife, transferred her radio and television stations into a trust controlled by an independent attorney; Jimmy Carter turned over the operation of his beloved peanut farm to an independent trustee; President Reagan liquidated his stock holdings; and George W. Bush sold his stake in the Texas Rangers baseball team – President Trump refused in his first and second terms to put his assets into blind trusts or broadly diversify them to avoid conflicts-of-interests (his investments, assets and business interests are held in a *revocable* trust, which is not the same thing as a blind trust).

At the beginning of his first term, President Trump and his family announced they would not do any new international business deals – even though lots of foreign governments and lobbyists still spent plenty of money at Trump hotels and their other spots. However, at the beginning of his second term, he made clear he and his family would

not refrain from personally participating in any new global business deals because, as he told The New York Times, when they did so during his first term no one appreciated it: "I prohibited them from doing business in my first term, and I got absolutely no credit for it. I didn't have to do that. And it's really unfair to them. I found out that nobody cared, and I'm allowed to."

His son Eric put it this way in late 2024: "The first term we did everything imaginable to avoid any appearance of impropriety, and frankly, we got crushed anyway," adding that the presidency had cost his father "an absolute fortune." "We can't just sit out in perpetuity," he continued, "and I won't."

As a result, the intermingling of Donald Trump's politics and profitmaking is staggering, allowing the president and those in his orbit to benefit not only because of their proximity to power, but also from heavily investing in industries the federal government oversees and regulates and that the Trump/Vance administration champions.

From A.I. to cryptocurrency to financial products to fusion-power deals to rare earth minerals to communications, the president of the United States is heavily invested in companies whose businesses are *directly* affected by policies he is making… actively trading in stocks while making decisions that *directly* influence the value of those stocks.

… and it's not like President Trump even tries to keep all this under wraps. Any time his staff tries desperately to throw everyone off the scent, he almost immediately undercuts them – like the time in May 2025 when White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt was saying, "I think everybody, the American public, believe it's absurd for anyone to insinuate that this president is profiting off of the presidency" just as President Trump was posting, "THIS IS A GREAT TIME TO GET RICH, RICHER THAN EVER BEFORE" at a Saudi-backed golf tournament kicked off at Trump National Doral in Florida.

In May 2026, President Trump filed his Periodic Transaction Report (Form 278-T) detailing hundreds of millions of dollars traded through 3,642 transactions during the first quarter of 2026. One month later, his broader Annual Financial Disclosure was released, a 927-page report that disclosed over 20,000+ trades across 2025, an average of over 50 trades a day.

Donald Trump reported over $2.2 billion in revenue for 2025. This was a huge jump from 2024, when, of course, he wasn't president. His total revenue in 2024 was $622 million. This means that revenue in Donald Trump's first year back in office increased by over 250 percent.

According to The Wall Street Journal, this included $575 million in real estate deals, including an increase of $50 million (2024) to $77 million (2025) from Mar-a-Lago, probably because it's the go-to place to kiss up to him; $68.6 million in royalites and licensing fees; $79.3 million for things like uncharacterized income, pensions, etc.; and $86.5 million in settlements, mainly from media and tech firms like CBS, ABC, Paramount and Meta.

DIRECT CORRUPTION LINK: These settlements came at a time 1) when the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) chairman Brendan Carr was threatening to revoke the licenses of broadcasters like ABC News (which Donald Trump had sued, along with its anchor George Stephanopoulos, for defamation a year earlier) and CBS (which was being sued by Donald Trump over a 60 Minutes interview with then-Vice President Kamala Harris that he claimed used "deceitful editing" to help her and hurt his campaign), and 2) several corporate mergers, like Paramount's merger with Skydance Media, which required approval from the FCC.

Then there's Trump Media & Technology Group, his own publicly traded social media company, which owns and operates the Truth Social platform. While it's true that, right before the 2024 presidential election, a sudden stock market crash in the company wiped out $2.4 billion in paper wealth from Donald Trump's personal stake in just three days, the value of his stake as of June 2026 was still around $875 million.

DIRECT CORRUPTION LINK: Because President Trump uses his Truth Social feed as a direct communication channel to make major policy announcements, control the national agenda, and bypass traditional media, sophisticated traders watch it like hawks, even creating automated systems to monitor the feed so they can react quickly to his comments and take immediate action, such as buying big or canceling positions. Certainly nothing wrong with that!

But naturally, our grifter president had to turn this into something self-serving and super shady. Now, through a new product called "Truth API," Truth Social is *selling* stock market traders faster access to the president's posts for $100,000-a-month, or $60,000 a month if they commit for multiple years. < You have GOT to be kidding me with this. It is *INSANE* that we are allowing this, America. >

There is no question this gives traders a huge advantage, A Wall Street Journal analysis of trading data shows "how quickly some traders have pounced on the president's online comments. In the minute following two of Trump's posts about Iran < in June 2026 >, investors traded more than 2 million shares, according to data from Data Transmission Network (DTN). These trades caused swings of more than 2 percent in almost two dozen energy and industrial stocks."

From the WSJ: "On June 9th, the president posted at 12:38 p.m. that Iran had shot down an Apache helicopter that was patrolling the Strait of Hormuz, adding, 'The United States must, of necessity, respond to this attack.' Trading in energy stocks spiked almost immediately, pushing share prices up."

"Two days later, the president said in a post that he was canceling strikes scheduled for that evening because negotiations were proceeding with Iran. He hinted that a long-term peace deal could be in reach. 'Time and place of the signing to be announced shortly,' Trump wrote. This time, the instant reaction triggered a steep fall in energy and defense-related share prices."

Mark my words, this is going to get lots of people in lots of big trouble. Already, the sheer volume of mysterious trades that have accumulated across markets during the Iran war have sparked increased scrutiny by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), which is investigating a surge in oil futures trading that took place just before President Trump postponed strikes on Iran in March 2026. Multiple firms are part of the CFTC's inquiry, as they try to assess whether an insider with prior knowledge of the president's March 23 post traded on that information or leaked it to someone who did.

From the WSJ again: "Moments before President Trump postponed strikes on Tehran's energy infrastructure in a morning social media post on March 23, a spasm of trades hit the market during off-

hours. More than $800 million worth of U.S. and international oil futures changed hands in a matter of minutes, according to London Stock Exchange Group (LSEG) data."

"The traders on the right side of those well-timed bets profited when U.S. oil prices fell as much as 13 percent in the wake of Trump's change of heart. At least five firms posted gains of $5 million or more on crude futures they bought and sold that day, as measured by average prices adjusted for volume."

"The CFTC is looking into several other instances of suspicious trading regarding Iran-related announcements in April and May… On May 6, in one of those surges in volume, roughly $700 million of crude futures changed hands about an hour before a report on talks to end the Iran war, according to Dow Jones Market Data."

Some people have already gotten into – or are on their way to – serious trouble. Bubblemaps, a crypto-analytics firm, said it found "six suspected insiders" who had made $1.2 million wagering on a U.S. strike on Iran through the prediction platform Polymarket. Most of those six bet that a strike would take place by February 28th, which turned out to be the exact date. One account bet just $26,000 but won over $200,000, a return of over 657 percent.

In March 2026, three accounts on Polymarket made over $600,000 by correctly betting on a U.S.-Iran cease-fire. The accounts in question started buying cease-fire contracts in late March and early April, during a time when traders assessed the chances of a truce at less than 35 percent.

Polymarket and Kalshi, another online prediction market, were already under scrutiny after traders made a number of profitable wagers on controversial – and many say, unethical – events, including short-term wagers that Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, would be out of power before his death (Kalshi, a U.S.-regulated entity that doesn't allow bets on wars or assassinations, refunded $2.2 million in fees and payments for the Khamenei bets).

Who, you may ask, are the people on the other side of these bets? In April 2026, the feds charged a master sergeant with the U.S. Army Special Forces – who happened to take part in the planning and execution of the mission to capture Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro

– with using classified information to profit over $400,000 from betting on the timing and outcome of the Venezuela operation on Polymarket.

In July, a guy who has been operating Donald Trump's teleprompter since 2016 came under investigation after allegedly using his inside knowledge to make $100,000 betting on what the president would say in public addresses on Kalshi. Kalshi's lawyer and head of enforcement said on social media that the "Kalshi surveillance team promptly flagged, investigated and referred these trades" to the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission."

Also in July, former congressman George Santos – who was pardoned by President Trump after being kicked out of Congress for pleading guilty to federal wire fraud and identity theft charges – agreed to pay $35,000 and to a three-year trading ban to settle an investigation into his dubious trades on Kalshi after he bet against his own plans to attend President Trump's State of the Union (the Commodity Futures Trading Commission says he made $17,000 from the trade).

Jeez. I'm exhausted. Could there possibly be more?

Yep. A LOT more. President Trump's disclosure also showed that his investment accounts skyrocketed – from at least $237 million (2024) to at least $858 million (2025).

DIRECT CORRUPTION LINK: On May 6, 2025, President Trump bought up to $5 million in the U.S. chip powerhouse Nvidia. One week later, he announced that his administration was going to allow Nvidia to export advanced H200 A.I. processors to ten Chinese companies, potentially resulting in a $50 billion market opportunity.

Nvidia shares rose 4 percent on the news, pushing the company's market cap above $5.7 trillion. For the big announcement, President Trump took Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang with him to China on Air Force One, where they announced the deal on the very first day.

The CEO of Boeing also joined President Trump on Air Force One for the China trip, after the president bought between $1 million and $5 million of the company's stock. During the trip, President Trump announced that China had committed to purchasing 200 commercial jets from Boeing (Chinese officials didn't confirm the orders).

DIRECT CORRUPTION LINK: In July 2025, one of President Trump's investments accounts purchased between $6 million and $30 million worth of stock in large tech companies, buying at least $1 million apiece in Broadcom, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft and, again, Nvidia. Plus, at least $1 million in Alphabet shares.

That same day, the Trump/Vance administration announced their "A.I. Action Plan," laying out their strategy to dominate the A.I. race. The plan included streamlining permitting for data-center development and chip factories.

On August 18th, the president's accounts made their largest trades of the year, moving over $75 million – over double the action of their next most active day. One of the purchases that day was stock in Intel. Just days later, President Trump announced that the U.S. government planned to take a 10 percent equity stake in the company. Intel's shares have since increased over 370 percent.

Likewise, right after Donald Trump returned to the Oval Office, he began showing – rightly – significant support for critical minerals, providing billions of dollars in financing to critical mineral developers to bolster U.S. supply chains.

DIRECT CORRUPTION LINK: Personally, Donald started buying stock in the critical mineral developer MP Materials. In July 2025, the Trump/Vance administration announced they would take an unprecedented 15 percent equity stake in the company. After MP Materials stock price climbed sharply, the president of the United States sold at least some of his shares, reporting between $100,001 to $1 million in capital gains from his stake in the company.

The Trump/Vance administration also offered up to $1.6 billion in financing to a little-known American company called Kaz Resources for a project to develop a tungsten mine in Kazakhstan (tungsten is a critical metal for weapons systems and computer chips).

Within weeks of Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick meeting with Kazakhstan president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to seal the deal – and *six days before* he signed it – Dominari Securities, a firm partially owned by Eric and Donald Jr. Trump, joined with other investors to take a 20 percent stake in a corporate entity tied to Kaz Resources.

< The New York Times describes the relationship between the Trump boys and Dominari Securities this way: "After Mr. Trump returned to the White House, Dominari hired Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump as paid advisers, giving them stock now worth about $7 million, representing about 10 percent of the company's total shares. The firm launched an explicit effort to invest in companies aligned with the president's agenda, ranging from military drones to critical minerals." >

According to The New York Times, "Cantor Fitzgerald, an investment company controlled by Mr. Lutnick's family and overseen by his sons Brandon and Kyle Lutnick, helped one of the lead investors working with Dominari on the Kazakh deal raise $210 million in new capital for a related entity. Such rounds of fund-raising typically net Cantor millions of dollars in fees."

The self-dealing involved here is epic.

The NYT continues: "The arrangement is hardly an outlier. One or both families have financial ties to at least 14 companies that are actively working with the federal government on critical mining deals, including the Kazakhstan project, according to federal filings examined by The New York Times."

"All 14 of these companies have either benefited directly from offers of financial assistance from the Trump administration, or have pending permit applications before the Commerce Department, which Mr. Lutnick oversees. The total amount of federal funding that the Trump administration has provided or is considering providing to the companies exceeds $8.9 billion, according to public statements by the companies and federal government."

Here's one example: "In June 2026, the Trump administration committed to provide up to $1.6 billion in financial support to USA Rare Earth… That deal gives the Commerce Department 16 million shares of the company's stock. Cantor Fitzgerald separately earned millions of dollars in fees by helping USA Rare Earth in a series of deals since last year that ultimately raised $1.5 billion for the company.

Cantor Fitzgerald, which Mr. Lutnick ran before he became commerce secretary, has long had a division that helps mining companies raise capital. But it has seen a surge in its business helping to launch or finance mining companies, especially those benefiting from Trump administration support."

< To really understand how this all went down, I encourage you to read The New York Time's June 28, 2026 article *Trump Cut a Billion-Dollar Mining Deal. His Sons Stand to Profit.* It's so gross. >

In addition to his good fortune with Cantor Fitzgerald, Commerce Secretary Lutnick is busy selling data center projects that his family companies profit from.

Reporters at The New York Times put it this way: "In his role, Mr. Lutnick has twisted the arms of American allies, dangling policy favors in exchange for investments in U.S. industrial projects. At times, these tactics have created opportunities for his family's clients to gain access to much-needed foreign capital."

"The job of commerce secretary has always been to promote American industry through deal-making at home and abroad, and the position has traditionally been populated with titans of industry who were expected to bring a business sensibility to meetings filled with career government workers. But never in modern U.S. history has the office intersected so broadly and deeply with the financial interests of the commerce secretary's own family, according to interviews with ethics lawyers and historians."

On October 30, 2025, one of the Lutnick family companies, Newmark, announced it had closed over $25 billion of data center deals in the previous twelve months. At a conference in Switzerland, Brandon said: "We are having our best year ever," with zero sense of irony. I bet you are, Brandon.

Meanwhile, another favored son, Donald Trump, Jr., has also somehow (miraculously) become the next Warren Buffett!!! Somehow (miraculously) his investment firm, for example, tripled in value in just months!!!

Through their investment firm 1789 Capital, he and his business partner Omeed Malik have invested in numerous companies that are directly affected by President Trump's policies. The New York Times

reports: “Many of the companies that 1789 has invested in have large government contracts while others have benefited directly from new Trump policies or rollbacks of existing laws.”

“The firm bought shares in some of the most coveted private companies before many went public, including SpaceX, Anduril, Cerebras and Reflection A.I., often by leveraging their political and business connections to secure a stake or to help boost the companies’ sales.”

“Just two years ago, 1789 managed a few hundred million dollars. It now oversees more than $3 billion. Its main investment fund generated returns of roughly **200 percent** as of June 30, according to a person familiar with the firm’s performance. While still early in its investment cycle, those returns eclipse the average returns of about 21 percent from venture capital firms started in 2023, according to PitchBook, a provider of financial data.”

Perhaps the shadiest deal so far is 1789’s investment in Vulcan Elements, a rare-earths magnet manufacturer that was then valued at roughly $200 million. A few months later, the company received a $620 million loan commitment from the U.S. Defense Department. Vulcan is now worth roughly $2 billion.

This is how ProPublica reported the deal: “When the Pentagon announced a $620 million loan last year to a small North Carolina startup linked to Donald Trump Jr., defense officials and the company tried to tamp down suspicions of cronyism.”

“The president’s eldest son said through a spokesperson that he wasn’t involved. The Pentagon said Trump Jr. played no role in the record-setting deal. And the startup’s founder told reporters that his company, Vulcan Elements, received no political favoritism.”

“But interviews and Defense Department records reviewed by ProPublica show that the request to loan hundreds of millions of dollars to the firm linked to Trump Jr. was made by Peter Navarro, a White House adviser to President Donald Trump and a friend of Trump Jr.’s. Of the dozens of companies the Pentagon was considering funding at the time, Vulcan’s was the only deal initiated by a top aide to the president, said an official at the Pentagon who was not authorized to speak publicly.”

"After defense officials got the White House request, they asked Pentagon staff to move at an unusually rapid pace, said another person who was involved in the deal at the Pentagon but not authorized to speak about it. The staff worked late nights and with little sleep to get the loan through in a matter of weeks, the source said. 'The call came from the White House: We have to get this done,' the person said."

… and it goes on and on and on. President Trump owned Oracle shares while he brokered its deal to buy TikTok. He bought as much as $5 million in Axon stock two weeks before Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) posted a notice seeking a five-year, $220 million Taser contract that experts say only Axon can provide. He bought Paramount Skydance and Warner Bros Discovery securities during an eight-month antitrust review by the U.S. Justice Department regarding the $111 billion merger between the two (the DOJ's Antitrust Division cleared the merger in June 2026, although the deal is on hold after an antitrust lawsuit was filed by a coalition of state attorneys general).

President Trump bought between $247,000 and $630,000 worth of Palantir (an A.I. software maker) stock during the first quarter of 2026. In April, he lavishly praised the company on Truth Social – while displaying its ticker symbol – at a time when the company's shares were having their worst week in over a year. By mid-2026, his overall stake in Palantir was valued at $1 million or more.

Meanwhile, Palantir landed several major contracts with the U.S. government, including a $30 million contract from ICE; a landmark 5-year, $1 billion blanket purchase agreement that allows Department of Homeland Security agencies like ICE and U.S. Customs and Border Protection to license Palantir's commercial software; and multiple contracts with the U.S. Department of Agriculture ($13.3 million to design and manage a tool tracking return-to-office mandates for employees; $94.7 million to centralize IT systems; a $250,000 fraud-detection pilot for SNAP; and $300 million for farmland management software).

By August 2026, Palantir had experienced a 93 percent revenue growth after its stock surged after stellar earnings.

In July 2026, The New York Times reported that President Trump was paid $2 million by a South Korean company that is facing a trade

investigation by the U.S. Commerce Department: “The lead investor in a South Korean aluminum company that has challenged Commerce Department penalties on certain exports from South Korea to the United States made a $2 million payment to President Trump’s holding company.” The president’s disclosure form “offered only a cryptic explanation for the payment, stating that it was part of a ‘letter of intent’ and a ‘nonrefundable development fee.’”

Also in July, The Wall Street Journal reported that President Trump’s brokerage accounts made big trades around his ‘Liberation Day’ tariffs. From the WSJ: “In a series of trades on April 3 and April 4 – the days after Trump announced global tariffs in the Rose Garden – his investment accounts bought and sold hundreds of individual stocks. The strategy shifted somewhat on April 8, when his accounts only purchased 327 individual stocks, spending more than $3.6 million to scoop up Apple, Berkshire Hathaway and other blue chips. There was no selling that day.”

Then, “Trump posted on social media the next morning that it was ‘a great time to buy’ and paused much of his tariff regimen that afternoon. Markets boomed.”

On August 1, 2026, the major financial institution Capital One said an anti-money laundering review triggered the closure of over 300 Trump-affiliated accounts, after the Trump Organization and Eric Trump sued the bank in March 2025 alleging “woke” political debanking. This is the first time a bank has formally tied money laundering concerns to Donald Trump and/or his businesses.

Although Capital One has never officially accused the Trumps of illegal money laundering, its court filing argues that “documents and Plaintiffs’ own allegations make clear that Capital One closed Plaintiffs’ accounts for anti-money laundering (“AML”) reasons. The closures were the result of months of analysis and a careful review by Capital One’s AML team in accordance with bank policies and regulatory guidance.” Yikes.

When asked about the 250 percent revenue increase between a year he wasn’t president and the following year when he was, he tried to explain it away by saying he made the money from a hot stock market: “You know why I’m profiting? Because the stock market’s going up,

everybody's profiting." But in his case, that's a flat out lie. The vast bulk of the money didn't come from growth in the stock market but from cryptocurrency. In truth, crypto ventures accounted for more than $1.4 billion of the $2.2 billion.

In 2017, most of the revenue of Donald's businesses – around 90 percent – came from his domestic golf and real estate portfolio. Back then, he didn't earn a penny from crypto and even dismissed it as a "scam" that threatened the dollar's global dominance. But in the first year of his second term, Donald Trump became not only a major player in the crypto industry but also its top policymaker.

DIRECT CORRUPTION LINK: Since returning to the Oval Office, President Trump has committed to making America a global leader in crypto, signing legislation called the GENIUS Act to promote a form of cryptocurrency called stablecoins – four months after his family-backed firm introduced its own stablecoin.

He has also issued an executive order to establish a strategic crypto reserve; pushed for the limiting of regulations; weakened existing safeguards; eliminated the Department of Justice's crypto enforcement team; and ordered the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to pause or drop lawsuits against crypto firms.

President Trump brought in a total of $798 million from World Liberty Financial and a related stablecoin business. World Liberty Financial is a cryptocurrency start-up founded by the Trumps and the family of Steve Witkoff, a billionaire real estate investor and President Trump's special envoy to the Middle East and for peace missions. Donald Trump's sons – Don Jr., Eric and, this time, Barron – are co-founders, as are Witkoff's two sons, Zach and Alex.

Lest anyone think it doesn't matter that the sons of the president of the United States are co-founders, consider this: Reuters interviewed half a dozen foreign crypto entrepreneurs who met with them and at least five of them admitted that "they sought out the younger Trumps for business opportunities because of their proximity to the president and hopes of cashing in on his political and financial power."

In April/May 2025 alone, Donald Trump Jr. visited Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria on a paid tour he called "Trump Business Vision 2025," while Eric Trump visited Qatar, the United

Arab Emirates, and other Middle Eastern countries to market the family's business ventures.

DIRECT CORRUPTION LINK: In September 2025, The New York Times reported that, after meeting with Steve Witkoff in Sardinia that summer, Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan, "a trim figure in dark glasses who controls $1.5 trillion of the Emiratis' sovereign wealth," agreed to "deposit $2 billion into World Liberty Financial, a crypto-currency start-up founded by the Witkoffs and Trumps."

The New York Times continued, "Two weeks later, the White House agreed to allow the UAE access to hundreds of thousands of the world's most advanced and scarce computer chips, a crucial tool in the high-stakes race to dominate artificial intelligence. Many of the chips would go to G42, a sprawling technology firm controlled by Sheikh Tahnoon, despite national security concerns that the chips could be shared with China."

< To really understand how this all went down, I encourage you to read The New York Time's September 15, 2025 article *Anatomy of Two Giant Deals: The UAE Got Chips. The Trump Team Got Crypto Riches*. The NYT article is careful to include that "no evidence that one deal was explicitly offered in return for the other" regarding the two deals described above, but I don't feel that generous. This is about as shady as shady gets. >

I cannot imagine a more startling example of people jeopardizing American exceptionalism for personal greed.

If you disagree, just ask yourself: Why in the world would the United States negotiate a deal to export our advanced microchip tech to the UAE so they can build massive data centers in Abu Dhabi? Especially when there are virtually no protections against our technology eventually benefitting China?

Well, allow me to offer a reason why: The *United States* doesn't want this. *Donald Trump* and *his oligarch buddies* do.

The Trump family's business with the United Arab Emirates doesn't stop there. The UAE is a key partner for their international real estate business expansion, and Emirati billionaire Hussain Sajwani,

chairman of DAMAC Properties, has been a close business partner of Donald Trump for over a decade.

In the first months of the second Trump presidency, the Trump Organization and its partners announced 12 global projects, including ones in Serbia, Oman and Vietnam. Trump-branded residential towers and at least one luxury golf resort were green-lit in Dubai and Saudi Arabia, as well as Qatar (who agreed to finance a Trump-branded beachside golf and luxury villa project there worth $5.5 billion).

From The New York Times: “The president’s family business, the Trump Organization, has also capitalized on Mr. Trump’s popularity in certain parts of the world, licensing the Trump name to properties in countries that are crucial to U.S. foreign policy interests, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Those two deals alone generated more than $14 million for Mr. Trump in 2025, the (president’s financial disclosures) show.”

“The Trump family also continued to pull in chunks of money from real estate branding deals, the new report showed, including some in the Middle East that generated a minimum of $35 million in revenue last year. Deals in Vietnam and Romania, as well as older ones in India, Turkey and Indonesia, combined to bring in at least another $20 million.”

In fact, even though he decided to bomb Iran for God knows why, the Middle East has been great for President Trump’s bank account. The Wall Street Journal reports that “entities from the Gulf paid around $300 million to the president’s businesses (in 2025), more than any other foreign region identifiable in his financial disclosures.”

But Saudi Arabia is just a whole other level. The Trumps and their Saudi-based development partner, Dar Al Arkan, one of Saudi Arabia’s largest private real-estate developers, have at least eight Trump Organization projects in the works.

In November 2025, President Trump welcomed Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia to the White House, giving him a red-carpet arrival and military honors, plus a lavish dinner attended by American business, finance, and tech leaders.

During the trip, the United States formally designated Saudi Arabia a major non-NATO ally and announced deals on arms sales, nuclear

energy, and bilateral investments. Then, in July 2026, President Trump approved an agreement with Saudi Arabia that could potentially provide the kingdom with uranium enrichment capability for its civilian nuclear program, a terrible move for the United States and the world but a huge victory for the Saudi Crown Prince (read more on p. 490).

… but, nevertheless, President Trump and Prince Mohammed have much more pressing things to collude over, including their joint cryptocurrency trading enterprise and their real estate development deals. One of those deals involves a $63 billion project in Diriyah, one of Saudi Arabia's largest government-owned real estate developments, where there will eventually be a Trump-branded 18-hole golf course, luxury hotel and exclusive mansions.

When President Trump visited Saudi Arabia in May 2025, he and Prince Mohammed visited Diriyah's revitalized historical center. In an interview, Jerry Inzerillo, chief executive of the Diriyah development, said – clearly not understanding U.S. ethic rules – that the two leaders talked "not just as heads of state," but as "visionaries and developers."

When Saudi officials questioned whether it would be appropriate to present architectural models at the state dinner, Inzerillo – again, not understanding U.S. ethic rules – said, "You're right, you normally wouldn't do that in a state dinner. It's not really the normal protocol. But that's because you're looking at the president of the United States as the president of the United States. You're not looking at him as a developer." Good Lord.

The Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund invested $2 billion in Jared Kushner's (husband of Ivanka and one of his father-in-law's key negotiators on Middle East policy) private equity firm, Affinity Partners, along with the sovereign wealth funds of the UAE ($300-500 million) and Qatar ($200 million+). In September 2025, Jared's firm and the Saudi sovereign fund joined together to take the video game publisher Electronic Arts private, a deal valued at roughly $55 billion. If closed, the deal would be the largest leveraged buyout ever.

Speaking of Jared and Ivanka, thousands of Albanians have been protesting a luxury resort they plan to build on an unspoiled strip of the Mediterranean coastline. Before Jared and Ivanka invaded, this segment of the Albanian coast had been off-limits to developers as a

protected landscape, but in 2024 – curious timing, no? – the Albanian government amended the law to allow for high-end tourism facilities of "5 stars or more."

The protests in Albania are reminiscent of how things went down for Jared in Belgrade, when Affinity Partners had to withdraw from a planned Trump-branded development after protests and indictments (a Serbian special prosecutor indicted a cabinet minister and three other officials over the project).

Even though a special prosecutor is investigating the land sales for the Albanian project and the European Union (EU) has voiced concerns directly to its government, Ivanka didn't seem to care much about the turmoil, saying the project was "the culmination of all of my experience in real estate." < insert eye-roll emoji >

Ugh. These people. I need a shower.

But back to crypto. Daddy Trump's May 2026 financial disclosure revealed that over $635 million of his $2.2 billion came from $TRUMP memecoin, which opens a whole other can of worms – mainly because almost one million people who bought this memecoin lost money through the end of June 2026. Their losses total $3.81 *BILLION*.

< Let me do the math again, just in case anyone missed it. Donald Trump, the president of the United States, MADE $635 *MILLION* while many of the people he works for LOST $3.81 *BILLION*. I forgot to mention that Donald profited whether the price of his memecoin went up or down because he made money *any time* anyone *traded* the tokens, which he incessantly pushed people to do on Truth Social >.

DIRECT CORRUPTION LINK: In February 2025, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) notified the crypto industry that these types of tokens would no longer be subject to its oversight. Then in March 2026, through a joint interpretive release by the SEC and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), the Trump/Vance administration officially adopted the term "digital commodity" as part of a new five-category crypto asset taxonomy. This marks the first time federal regulators formally codified these definitions into a functional regulatory framework.

This was an enormous win for the crypto industry, even though this potentially exposes the crypto market to shady shenanigans like wash trading, where traders simultaneously (and illegally) buy and sell the same security to manipulate market prices. A paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research found that 70 percent of all wash trading – which can involve trillions of dollars every year – happens on unregulated exchanges.

Even before these moves by the Trump/Vance administration, the conflicts-of-interest and legal landmines involved with the $TRUMP memecoin were unprecedented. What actually happens if the president makes $636 million on a trade where ordinary investors lose $3.81 billion? Especially when he relentlessly pushed his followers to buy his tokens using his Truth Social account? What happens if someone needs a political favor from the U.S. president, so s/he very publicly announces a huge purchase of the president's coins to get his attention?

How is it going to look when the president of the United States holds a private dinner at his Virginia golf club for $TRUMP crypto customers – who spent $148 million for the opportunity to hear him speak from a lectern adorned with the presidential seal – and he gives the top 25 of those customers a private meeting plus arranges a tour of the White House?

…. and how is it going to look when those attending that event includes a Chinese billionaire who was the largest holder of the $TRUMP crypto token; is a delegate of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, an advisory board that aims to broaden the Communist Party's influence; and who has been sued by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission for allegedly inflating the value of a cryptocurrency?

How is it going to look if, as The Washington Post reports, soon after the dinner was announced, "the mostly anonymous investors of the Singapore-based crypto collective MemeCore raced to capitalize on the opportunity. The group of roughly sixty members, many of whom live in China and Southeast Asia, quickly amassed $18 million worth of the coin, securing a seat at Trump's dinner party" thereby "contributing a share of millions of dollars in crypto transaction fees the Trump venture has collected since the contest was announced."

Just in case there was any doubt why exactly this group would do this, the Post reports that MemeCore chief business development officer Cherry Hsu said in an interview that they "sent a co-founder to the dinner with hopes of shaping Trump's views on their industry."

The Washington Post went on to say that, from the time the party was announced until five days before the party itself, "crypto wallets linked to Trump and his partners earned about $3 million in transaction fees. Between the launch of Trump's token in January 2025 until mid-May, "the president and his partners had received $312 million from crypto sales and $43 million in fees."

DIRECT CORRUPTION LINK: President Trump showed more love for the crypto industry when he pardoned Changpeng Zhao – the Binance cryptocurrency exchange founder and crypto's richest man – who was convicted by the U.S. Department of Justice for violating U.S. laws by allowing sanctioned entities and criminals to use the exchange.

Accusing Binance – the world's largest crypto exchange – of being a massive money-laundering operation that laundered billions of dollars in illicit funds, the Justice Department imposed a record $4.3 billion fine and strict oversight on the company. The company pleaded guilty in 2023 to violating U.S. anti-money-laundering requirements and was barred from operating in the United States.

Zhao was pardoned after Binance participated in a deal with Trump's World Liberty Financial that significantly increased the value of the company's stablecoin and helped elevate their crypto business.

Months before the pardon, The Wall Street Journal reported that the "Trump family had been in talks to acquire a stake in Binance" and that the "Binance founder Changpeng Zhao, who served four months in prison after pleading guilty to a related charge, was seeking a pardon from the Trump administration to facilitate Binance's return to the U.S. market… The talks began after Binance reached out to Trump allies, offering a business deal as part of a plan to return the exiled company to the U.S."

Even President Trump sensed this pardon was not going to be a popular move. In a November 2025 interview on 60 Minutes, when asked about Zhao's pardon, the president said, "I don't know who he is.

I know he got a four-month sentence or something like that. And I heard it was a Biden witch hunt." …. which brings up lots of questions about how this man is deciding to pardon people.

But the allegations against Changpeng Zhao were far from a Biden witch hunt. A November 2025 analysis by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists found that "between the guilty pleas and Zhao's pardon, Binance continued to profit from hundreds of millions of dollars in cryptocurrency transactions linked to some of the world's most notorious organized crime groups."

"While the company was under the supervision of court-appointed monitors, at least $408 million worth of digital currency flowed to Binance accounts from Huione Group, a Cambodia-based financial firm used by Chinese crime gangs to launder proceeds from human trafficking and industrial-scale scam operations."

In May 2026, The Wall Street Journal published a report revealing that, in addition to the U.S. Justice Department investigating Iran's use of Binance to evade sanctions, billions in crypto transactions have flowed through Binance to networks financing Iran's regime until as recently as that month:

"Billions in crypto transactions have flowed through Binance to networks financing Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in the two years preceding the current U.S.-Iran war, according to Binance compliance reports, blockchain data, foreign law-enforcement officials who track terrorism financing and other crypto researchers and nonpublic documents… The vast sums show how Binance has been used as a financial artery for the IRGC, the powerful political, military and economic force that dominates Iran."

It's also important to remember that the Iranian force also supports proxy armies throughout the Middle East, including terrorist-designated groups Hamas, Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi militants.

The WSJ continues: "Iran's central bank moved $107 million in crypto through a series of transactions into Binance accounts last year, according to an analysis by a blockchain data firm…. Data compiled by a foreign law-enforcement agency recorded about $260 million in direct transactions during 2024 and 2025 between accounts on Binance and digital wallets associated with Iranian terrorist financiers and

sanctioned Iranian entities. In addition, Binance investigators flagged that a digital wallet held by an unknown user outside Binance received money through the exchange and sent $218 million to an Iranian-state financing network in 2023, a transfer confirmed by blockchain data."

"These funds are on top of the roughly $1.7 billion that Binance investigators concluded moved through Binance to that same Iranian network, as previously reported by The Wall Street Journal in February. The Binance compliance reports said the Iranian actors moved funds using sophisticated techniques in an effort to evade detection."

"The funds moving through Binance to Iran-linked groups largely corresponded to payments from Chinese buyers of Iranian oil, part of a sanctions-busting trade that is controlled by the IRGC and that is a significant revenue source for the regime, according to foreign law-enforcement officials, Binance compliance reports and the nonpublic documents."

While we're on the subject, the abuse of the presidential pardon is out of control and has been for decades (President Joe Biden granted 80 pardons and 4,165 commutations during his one term, including one for his own son).

But, with the help of the Department of Justice pardon attorney Ed Martin, President Trump has taken the pay-to-play pardon process next level (Ed Martin was an organizer in the *Stop the Steal* movement who declared "No MAGA Left Behind" regarding pardons).

Living up to that promise, President Trump has pardoned loyal donors, political allies, corrupt politicians, business executives, a drug lord who was also the former president of Honduras, the founder of an online drug bazaar, antiabortion activists, sports stars, rappers, TV reality stars, people who helped him try to subvert the 2020 election, and anyone "convicted of offenses related to events that occurred at or near" the Capitol on January 6th, which covered at least 1,500 people.

But, as demonstrated by the Changpeng Zhao pardon, never is the abuse of the pardon so stark than when it comes to people who can do something directly for President Donald Trump. Take Paul Walczak, for example. Paul, a former nursing home executive who pleaded guilty

to tax crimes days just after the 2024 election, submitted a pardon application to President Trump practically on Inauguration Day.

Even though the pardon application was technically for Paul, it mainly focused on a woman named Elizabeth Fago, Paul's mother who had raised millions of dollars for the Trump campaign and had, the application explained, done her part to sabotage Joe Biden by helping publicize the private diary of his daughter Ashley.

After weeks of no news, Elizabeth was suddenly invited to a $1-million-per-person fundraising dinner at Mar-a-Lago that promised an introduction to the president. Less than three weeks later, President Trump signed a full and unconditional pardon for her son.

In 2022, Julio Herrera Velutini, a Venezuelan-Italian banker, was accused by the U.S. Department of Justice of bribing former Gov. Wanda Vázquez of Puerto Rico two years before. Four years later, as Mr. Herrera faced felony bribery and other charges in the political corruption case, his daughter, Isabela Herrera, donated $2.5 million to MAGA Inc., a super PAC that supports Donald Trump.

In 2025, Mr. Herrera's lawyer, Christopher M. Kise – who served on Donald Trump's legal defense team during the FBI investigation into his handling of government documents, as well as for legal issues arising from Trump's role in the January 6th U.S. Capitol attack – negotiated an eyebrow-raising lenient deal with the Justice Department.

The deal allowed Julio Herrera, Wanda Vázquez, and Mark Rossini, a former FBI agent who had worked as a consultant for Mr. Herrera, to plead guilty to misdemeanor campaign finance charges. Isabela Herrera then promptly donated another $1 million to MAGA Inc. Finally, in January 2026, President Trump pardoned Julio Herrera, Wanda Vázquez, and Mark Rossini.

But, of course, the monkey business doesn't end there. I would tell you how much it's going to cost the United States to renovate the new Air Force One that Donald got for "free" from the Qatari government – the one that will eventually be displayed at his presidential library – but that amount has been conveniently classified (that said, ABC News reports that lawmakers say it could cost as much as $1 billion).

I *can* tell you that the $400 million super jet Boeing 747-8 "palace in the sky" has five galley kitchens, nine bathrooms and a master suite.

I can also tell you that, right after the president started using the plane in July 2026, it was grounded on security grounds because of hostilities with Iran (which was probably a smart move given that several prominent Hamas terrorists have come from Qatar and the mastermind of 9/11 Khalid Sheikh Mohammed worked for the Qatari Ministry of Electricity and Water while he funded and coordinated international terrorist plots).

The New York Times reported that the new plane "lacks the same defensive countermeasures that were security features of the old model, including its advanced antimissile capabilities, according to multiple officials who have been briefed on how the jet was retrofitted."

Naturally this enraged the president, who demanded the U.S. Department of Justice haul five New York Times reporters in for questioning – for reporting *the truth*. Incidentally, the DOJ also sought subpoenas targeting family members of the journalists, including parents and spouses, which is a new low. < After the very first court hearing – where U.S. District Judge Arun Subramanian eviscerated the DOJ over "sloppy legal work" and government overreach, the DOJ voluntarily withdrew the subpoenas. >

… and on and on it goes. LIV Golf, a Saudi-backed golf league, hosted a tournament at Trump National Doral in Florida, with President Trump joining the festivities by military helicopter. Not only did LIV pay the Trump family to host the tournament, but the event sold out its hotel resorts rooms and restaurants.

According to a House oversight committee, the Trumps charged the Secret Service as much as 300 percent or more over the agency's authorized government per diem – and often charged the agency more than it did other hotel guests – when the Secret Service stayed at their hotels while protecting the family during President Trump's first term.

The Washington Post confirmed this in a separate investigation, revealing the Trumps charged the U.S. taxpayer hotel rates as high as $650 per night. The Trump National Golf Club Bedminster charged the Secret Service $17,000 a month to use a three-bedroom cottage, an uncommonly high rent for homes in that area (the agency was billed even for days when the president was not there).

… this, even though Eric Trump claimed multiple times that the Trump organization let Secret Service agents "stay at our properties for free." He once said, for example, the U.S. government "saves a fortune because if they were to go to a hotel across the street, they'd be charging them $500 a night, whereas, you know we charge them, like $50." …which is a blatant lie.

After Jeff Bezos had dinner at Mar-a-Lago, Amazon MGM Studios paid $40 million to acquire – and $35 million to market – a documentary about Melania Trump. Despite a strong $7 million opening weekend, ticket sales quickly plummeted – with the film earning roughly $16.6 million in total, with just $291,000 coming from international markets. Meaning, Jeff and Amazon lost over 58+ million. Her husband's May 2026 financial disclosure reported that Melania earned $11 million from the project.

In addition to all his other endeavors, Don Jr., the new Warren Buffett, launched a Washington-based members-only club named "Executive Branch" that costs $500,000 to join.

And all that's before we even get to the really classy stuff, like Donald's royalties on Bibles, watches, sneakers, phones, guitars, books and fragrances. According to President Trump's 2024 financial disclosure form, he made $1,306,035 from Bibles sold on Lee Greenwood's website that have the American flag embossed on the cover along with the words "God Bless The USA." He made over $1 million from hawking a "45" guitar, $2.8 million from Trump watches, and $2.5 million from Trump sneakers and fragrances. I guess he didn't have time to resume sales of his vodka, steaks, ties, and mattresses.

In 2025, Donald Trump's merchandise and publishing revenue reached around $17 million, including Trump watches ($4.7 million) – which included one watch sent to customers that spelled "Rump" instead of "Trump" and another that featured an image the company didn't own, resulting in a cease and desist letter against them; the "Save America" book ($1.89 million); the "A MAGA Journey" book ($552,685); Trump sneakers and fragrances ($67,634); and, of course, Greenwood Bibles ($208,486).

The second inauguration of Donald J. Trump was just one big boondoggle bribe. Donald raised $250 million, which was around the

amount raised for the last four inaugurations combined (note: any unused funds will go to help build his future presidential library).

Unsurprisingly, the oil, crypto, pharmaceutical and financial services industries gave their fair share. However, the single largest contribution was a $5 million check from Pilgrim's Pride, a chicken processor – whose Brazilian parent company, JBS, (somehow, finally!) received government approval for a U.S. stock listing that it had been trying to get for over a decade. It got this even though a group of fourteen senators – including now Secretary of State Marco Rubio – said in a 2024 letter that approving it was risky because JBS had a "history of blatant, systemic corruption."

JBS also won big when, less than a month after taking his second oath of office, President Trump signed an Executive Order stopping any investigations and enforcement actions under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, pausing cases involving foreign bribery, public corruption, and money laundering. This benefited the owners of JBS mightily since it stopped any enforcement from a 2020 case where they pleaded guilty to paying bribes in Brazil, agreeing to pay $128 million to settle with American authorities.

The latest big win for JBS came after Joesley Batista, a major shareholder and board member of JBS, visited the Oval Office on August 20, 2026 to speak with President Trump about lowering tariffs on Brazilian beef imports. The very next day, the Trump/Vance administration announced a plan to temporarily expand lower-tariff beef imports by 300,000 metric tons.

Among the $1 million inaugural donor club was JPMorgan Chase, Anheuser-Busch, Nvidia, Blackstone, Google, Adobe, General Motors, Uber, Boeing, Toyota, Comcast, Meta Platforms, Amazon, McDonald's, Delta Air Lines and Johnson & Johnson. Plus, Apple CEO Tim Cook, Open AI CEO Sam Altman, hedge fund managers Ken Griffin and Paul Singer, and Miriam Adelson, the wife of the late Sheldon Adelson.

Some people even got jobs out of the deal. Warren Stephens, who became the U.S. ambassador to the United Kingdom, gave $4 million; Melissa Argyros, the new ambassador to Latvia, gave $2 million;

Tilman Fertitta, the new ambassador to Italy, gave a million; and Daniel Newlin, the nominee to be Colombia's ambassador, gave a million. Jared Isaacman, a close ally of Elon Musk who was originally tapped to lead NASA, gave $2 million – but his nomination was stalled after Elon's infamous May 2025 clash with The Donald. But great news! After those two crazy kids made up, Isaacman was installed as the new administrator of NASA.

I would get into the creepy Stalin-like Trump banners the DOJ installed all over Main Justice – which were part of a nearly one million dollar "beautification" project – the $160 million spent on the Freedom 250 events that no one went to; the tacky $100 million Trump triumphal arch; and the new $600 million ballroom that will replace the White House's East Wing the president demolished, where many of the already announced donors – including Palantir, Coinbase, Lockheed Martin, Meta, Amazon, Google, Apple, and Microsoft – have pending business with the Trump/Vance administration, but I am thoroughly sick of writing about all this.

I'll just let conservative Wall Street Journal columnist Peggy Noonan sum the ballroom up: "All this was done without public demand or support, and was done in a way that was abrupt, complete, unstoppable… Might the whole thing be open to corruption? Would it even have been attempted in a fully functioning, sharp and hungry republic? Or only a tired one that's being diminished?"

Corruption: U.S. Congress

The other end of Pennsylvania Avenue doesn't look much better. Did you know that there was a provision slipped deep into the One Big Beautiful Bill that would have allowed U.S. senators to collect $500,000 for every phone record lawfully acquired at the time of lawful investigations? The provision was clandestinely put in the bill after it was revealed that, in the FBI's investigation into President Trump's effort to overturn the results of the 2020 election, eight senators had their phone records lawfully analyzed due to their part in the scheme. <After severe public backlash, the provision was removed. >

Members of Congress are still trading stocks like mad, amid renewed calls for legislation that bans lawmakers and their families from trading individual stocks.

Interestingly, a bill banning Congress, the president and the vice president from trading stocks was recently approved by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs committee, but only with the caveat that a divestment requirement included in the bill wouldn't start until an elected official's *next* term – meaning it would never apply to President Trump. What?

In 2022, reporting by The New York Times revealed that "from 2019 to 2021, 183 current senators or representatives reported a trade of a stock or another financial asset by themselves or an immediate family member. More than half of them sat on congressional committees that potentially gave them insight into the companies whose shares they reported buying or selling." In the end, the Times found that "97 lawmakers or their family members bought or sold financial assets over a three-year span in industries that could be affected by their legislative committee work."

This seems to be continuing to this day. According to a Wall Street Journal analysis of disclosure filings, between April 2, 2025 ("Liberation Day," when President Trump announced sweeping new tariffs on imported goods) to April 8th (the day before he announced a 90-day pause on most of the reciprocal tariffs), over a dozen House lawmakers and their family members made more than 700 stock trades.

Ironically, Representative Ro Khanna (D-CA) and Representative Rob Bresnahan (R-PA) – who both have called for legislation banning members of Congress from trading stocks – reported the most trades by themselves or family members, followed by Reps. Jefferson Shreve (R-IN), Julie Johnson (D-TX) and Michael McCaul (R-TX).

Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) bought at least $28,000 of stocks, including that of FedEx, Amazon, Lululemon, Athletica, and Palantir Technologies. She also sold at least $50,000 in U.S. Treasury bills on April 8th.

Since disclosures don't include specific amounts or prices, it's not possible to tell if someone made or lost money in any transaction.

However, the volatility in the markets between April 2nd and April 8th was the most dramatic it had been in years.

It just goes on and on, year after year. I'm guessing it won't surprise you that Republicans used super shady gimmicks to artificially reduce the cost of the One Big Beautiful Bill, but the slight-of-hand, hide-the-ball tactics they used to make this legislation look less fiscally damaging are epic.

One of these comes in how the tax cuts are structured and accounted for in the budget. The Republicans declared many of the tax cuts in the bill *temporary* as opposed to *permanent* because, if a program is considered temporary, the Congressional Budget Office **(**CBO) doesn't calculate it over the requisite 10-year period – obviously lowering the overall cost impact of the legislation. Problem is, these cuts aren't truly considered temporary by *anyone*. Things passed by Congress rarely get cancelled; rather they typically get renewed, adding huge additional costs – in this case to the tune of $736 billion.

There was another shady trick involving the tax cuts. The tax cuts Republicans passed in 2017 were set to expire at the end of 2025 and extending them would cost an estimated $3.8 trillion. Historically, extending tax cuts beyond their scheduled expiration is considered a new tax cut. But Republicans just decided to ignore this $3.8 trillion by declaring that the old tax cuts would be extended regardless – making them appear in their new numbers to cost *nothing*.

This is even worse than it sounds because, to achieve this fairytale, the Republicans blatantly disregarded certain rules of reconciliation, the special legislative procedure they had chosen to use to avoid a filibuster in the Senate (meaning, their bill only required a simple majority vote and was not subject to limits on debate that require sixty votes to pass). The rules *they chose* but *ignored* – which say that legislation cannot add to the debt for more than a decade – are supposed to help contain how much debt is added by requiring bipartisan support.

But perhaps the shadiest trick is how the One Big Beautiful Bill is being phased in. Extending the 2017 tax cuts and increasing military and border spending will likely boost near-term growth. The temporary tax deductions for tip income, overtime pay and senior citizens, plus the full expensing of business investment will also help (these provisions,

other than investment expensing, phase out after several years). However, the painful cuts to Medicaid, SNAP (food assistance), and new rules on health insurance kick in *after* the 2026 midterm elections. Anyone else find that timing curious?

The result is that the temporary sugar high from the tax cuts and increased military/border spending are frontloaded while the pain from spending cuts kicks in later – and that's also about the time we'll begin to see the longer-term impact of trillion-dollar deficits on interest rates, private investment and growth. It's the ultimate double-whammy.

That said, shady gimmicks aren't unique to Donald Trump and Republicans. When President Biden was pushing the original American Jobs Plan ($2.3 trillion) and the American Families Plan ($1.8 trillion), he claimed they wouldn't add a penny to the national debt. He insisted that raising taxes on corporations and taxing anyone who makes over $400,000 would pay for both plans.

This was not true. There just wasn't enough money there to cover it. The largest tax slice of both proposals was taxing multinational corporations but, by the administration's own calculations, that piece was estimated to only bring in $1 trillion.

The Penn Wharton Budget Model projected the American Families Plan (AFP) alone "would spend $2.5 trillion, about $700 billion more than the White House's estimate, over the 10-year budget window, 2022-2031." They estimated that "AFP would raise 1.3 trillion in new tax revenue over the same period. By 2050, the AFP would increase government debt by almost 5 percent and decrease GDP by 0.4 percent." The final Congressional Budget Office report on AFP, released in November 2021, concluded that the American Families Plan would increase the budget deficit by $160 billion over the next decade.

So, at best the Biden administration was doing the fuzziest of fuzzy math. At worst, they were being straight-up deceitful.

To pay for the American Jobs Plan, the Biden administration planned to raise the corporate tax rate from 21 percent to 28 percent; increase the global minimum tax from 10.5 percent to an average of 21 percent (the exact calculation on this is country specific); impose a 15 percent tax on "book-incomes," or the amount of income corporations publicly report; end federal tax breaks for fossil fuel companies; crack

down on U.S. corporations claiming to be foreign companies; stop deductions for moving jobs overseas; and offer tax credits for bringing jobs back home to America.

But here's the catch, and it's a BIG one (and I think it's super sketchy they even tried this). The Biden administration said that the $2.3 trillion worth of spending in the American Jobs Plan would take place over the next 8 years, but that it will take the next 15 years of higher taxes on corporations to pay for it. Sorry to break it to you, Joe, but that ain't what I call apples to apples. Do you think no one is going to look into this stuff? C'mon man!

For one, the "spend for 8 years, tax for 15 years" plan couldn't even logistically work because, back in 2021, Joe Biden had zero control over what would or would not happen over the next fifteen years (as evidenced by the fact that he only served one term, which was definitely not in his plan). When he was making these grand promises, he knew he only had "control" for the next four, possibly eight, years, and even that was a stretch given our practically dead even Congress.

The Biden administration also used the "*temporary* versus *permanent*" trick. Take, for example, just four of the "temporary" policies in the original American Families Plan; an increase in the Child Tax Credit; an expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit; support for child care and pre-k; and an expansion of the Affordable Care Act.

If these four programs were renewed, it would add $2.18 *trillion* to the bottom line. This means that the cost of the bill would actually be $4.29 trillion instead of the officially stated $2.43 trillion. Meaning, the total deficit impact would be $2.7 trillion. Shady.

Meanwhile, Biden's funding strategy for his American Families Plan was no more realistic. This one allocated money for universal pre-K, free child care, two years of free community college for all, a paid family and medical leave program, Affordable Care Act subsidies, scholarships for teachers, increased Pell Grants, and expanded nutrition programs, among many, many more things. It also claimed to help solve climate change and racial inequities, end child poverty, and ensure world peace (okay, I made that last one up).

For this phase of his plan, President Biden intended to impose new taxes on rich people. This included almost doubling the capital gains tax to 39.6 percent for people earning over $1 million a year (this would have been the highest capital gains tax in a hundred years). Plus, the top marginal income tax rate would increase from 37 percent to 39.6 percent (effectively rolling back the Republicans' 2017 tax cut).

What President Biden obviously forgot is that, although it makes good television to say that huge taxes on rich people and corporations will solve every single cash crunch in this country, all that really happens – as we learned from the ProPublica tax exposé – is that uber rich people find ways to wiggle around tax law. Especially when, although the Biden administration talked a big game about "closing tax loopholes" and the like, there was no meaningful tax reform to accompany their tax hikes.

So, what would have really happened is that corporations, rich people, and their teams of financial wizards would have found tax loopholes to exploit, and the astronomical cost of this legislation would have been passed through to consumers and employees through higher prices and lower wages. Like always.

Corruption: U.S. Supreme Court

… and then there is Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

Note: In no way do I believe the entire U.S. Supreme Court is corrupt. I believe most justices sincerely follow the law as they understand it (more on this in a minute). But Supreme Court justices are human, and no institution is immune from individual misconduct. This is a specific example involving an individual justice – not an indictment of the Court as a whole.

In the past few years, there have been several concerning stories about ethical issues and Supreme Court Justices – everything from Justice Samuel Alito, Jr. engaging in luxury travel to Alaska with a billionaire hedge fund manager who often has business before the

Court to the Mississippi Book Festival buying 1,500 copies of Justice Elena Kagan's books in exchange for her speaking at the event.

But these things are child's play when compared to Justice Thomas, who has shown not only outrageously bad judgement (first and second examples below) but who has also exhibited corruptive behavior that is worthy of impeachment (third example).

Under the heading of outrageously bad judgement: First came the text messages sent between former Donald Trump Chief of Staff Mark Meadows and Virginia "Ginni" Thomas, Clarence Thomas' wife, in the weeks following the 2020 election. The text messages sent between Mark and Ginni show Ginni's extraordinary access to the White House, and that she not only championed but encouraged efforts to overturn the perfectly valid 2020 presidential election.

** It is very, **VERY** important to remember that, at the time of these texts, Donald was very publicly declaring his intention to take what he called a "major fraud on our nation" to the U.S. Supreme Court. **

On November 10th, seven days after the 2020 election, Ginni texted: "Help This Great President stand firm, Mark!!!...You are the leader, with him, who is standing for America's constitutional governance at the precipice. The majority knows Biden and the Left is attempting the greatest Heist of our History."

Even though some of the text messages were completely unhinged on Ginni's part – "Release the Kraken and save us from the left taking America down." (Kraken is a term often used by followers of QAnon) – every American has the right to his or her own political opinion, regardless of whom they are married to.

Plus, to be fair, in her September 29, 2022 testimony before the January 6th U.S. House Select Committee, Ginni said her husband was "uninterested in politics" and that they don't discuss her "day-to-day work" or who she is "calling, emailing, texting or meeting." Also in her testimony – where she made clear she still believed the 2020 election was "stolen" – she claimed that she "never spoke to her husband about legal challenges to the 2020 election" and that they do not talk about

pending Supreme Court cases as "an iron clad rule." …which I find very hard to believe, but whatever.

However, in a text exchange between Meadows and Ginni on November 24, 2020, she mentions having a "conversation" with her "best friend" (it is well documented that Clarence and Ginni often refer to one another as their "best friend" in public).

Meadows kicked things off with, "This is a fight of good versus evil. Evil always looks like the victor until the King of Kings triumphs. Do not grow weary in well doing. The fight continues. I have staked my career on it. Well at least my time in DC on it."

Ginni responds: "Thank you!! Needed that! This plus a conversation with my best friend just now… I will try to keep holding on. America is worth it!"

In case there was any doubt she was speaking of her husband in the text, Ginni's testimony to the January 6th committee pretty much cleared it up: "My husband often administers spousal support to the wife that's upset. So, I assume that that's what it was."

I get that Ginni Thomas having a "conversation" with her "best friend" is not illegal. BUT it becomes highly suspicious when her husband is the ONLY Supreme Court Justice to voice dissent after the U.S Supreme Court rejected Donald Trump's 2021 efforts to stop the National Archives from releasing documents to the January 6 House Select Committee – a release of documents that eventually uncovered Meadows' and Ginni's text messages.

This Meadows/Ginni text episode is in addition to the facts that 1) Ginni has often been cozy with many right-wing individuals and groups with interests before the Supreme Court, and 2) that Crowdsourcing for Culture and Liberty, a right-wing think tank she led, received nearly $600,000 in anonymous donations between 2019 and 2022 to ostensibly bring together – in the words of Mark Paoletta, Ginni's personal attorney – "conservative leaders to discuss amplifying conservative values with respect to the battle over culture."

The anonymous donations came to Crowdsourcing for Culture and Liberty via the think tank Capital Research Center (CRC) as a "fiscal sponsorship," with at least $400,000 routed through yet another

nonprofit called Donors Trust, a fund also known to support conservative causes.

The same year CRC funneled the money to Ginni Thomas' organization, the organization filed an amicus brief before the Supreme Court requesting the Court hear a case to limit fuel emission regulations in Oregon. This was the only time CRC filed a brief with the Supreme Court since at least 2001, which is the latest information available.

Then there is this. Federalist Society leader Leonard Leo, a conservative judicial activist, directed GOP pollster Kellyanne Conway (yes, the same Kellyanne Conway who became a senior adviser in the first Trump White House) to bill a nonprofit group he advises and use that money to pay Ginni for "consulting work," telling Conway he wanted her to "give" Ginni Thomas "another $25K." Leo helpfully added to his directive: "No mention of Ginni, of course." Yes. *Of course*.

That very day, Conway's firm, The Polling Company, sent the nonprofit Judicial Education Project a bill for $25,000. As Leo instructed, Conway listed the purpose of the payment as "Supplement for Constitution Polling and Opinion Consulting."

All in, The Polling Company paid Ginni Thomas' firm, Liberty Consulting, $80,000 between June 2011 and June 2012, with the expectation they would pay another $20,000 by the end of 2012.

In what must be the craziest "coincidence" in U.S. history, in 2012 the Judicial Education Project filed an amicus brief in the U.S. Supreme Court case Shelby County v. Holder, a landmark voting rights case that challenged a civil rights law that protected minority voters. The Court held the predominately conservative view that it is unconstitutional to use the coverage formula in the Voting Rights Act to determine which jurisdictions are subject to the preclearance requirement. Clarence Thomas was part of the 5-to-4 majority.

But the worst was yet to come. Soon after all these revelations, it got much darker for Clarence Thomas. ProPublica reported that Justice Thomas accepted luxury trips (think huge yachts and private jets) for over twenty years from Dallas real estate tycoon Harlan Crow, a well-known, wealthy Republican donor. Just one of the luxury vacations Clarence and Ginni enjoyed – a 2019 trip to Indonesia – would have

cost the couple over $500,000 if they had paid for it out of their own pocket. Associate Supreme Court Justices earn $274,200/year.

ProPublica also revealed that, in 2014, one of Harlan Crow's companies bought several properties in Savannah, Georgia from Clarence Thomas, his mother, and the family of Clarence's deceased brother. Not long after the purchase, contractors began an extensive remodel of the home, where Clarence's mother still lived.

Yet another story showed that, although Thomas reported on financial disclosure forms that his family received between $50,000 and $100,000 a year from an entity called Ginger, Ltd., Partnership, this partnership has not existed since 2006. Evidently, the family created a new company when Ginger, Ltd., Partnership was supposedly shuttered but, as is everything with this man and his wife, the details are murky and the record-keeping at best sloppy.

Unfortunately for Clarence, the ProPublica exposé brought back to the front-page other articles from the past, like a 2011 New York Times report that Harlan Crow had made other huge gestures for Clarence and Ginni since they all met in the mid-1990s – like giving them a Bible once owned by Frederick Douglass and coughing up $500,000 for Ginni to start a Tea Party-related organization.

And it just goes on and on and on. Next, we heard that Crow paid for two years of private-school tuition for Clarence Thomas's grandnephew, who Thomas has said he raised as a son.

In what comes as no surprise, Harlan Crow isn't the only generous Thomas benefactor – and the grift goes way, way back. It started just months after Thomas' Supreme Court confirmation hearing, when he was accepted into the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, a club ripe with wealthy, mostly conservative members.

The New York Times reports that "over the years, his Horatio Alger friends have welcomed him at their vacation retreats, arranged V.I.P. access to sporting events and invited him to their lavish parties. In 2004, he joined celebrities including Oprah Winfrey and Ed McMahon at a three-day 70th birthday bash in Montana for the industrialist Dennis Washington. Several Horatio Alger friends also helped finance the marketing of a hagiographic documentary about the Justice in the wake of an HBO film that had resurfaced Anita

Hill's sexual harassment allegations against him during his confirmation."

ProPublica confirms much of The New York Times reporting, revealing Justice Thomas' wealthy friends "have treated him to far-flung vacations aboard their yachts, ushered him into the premium suites at sporting events and sent their private jets to fetch him – including, on more than one occasion, an entire 737."

These gifts include "at least 38 destination vacations, including a previously unreported voyage on a yacht around the Bahamas;" a "dozen VIP passes to professional and college sporting events, typically perched in the skybox;" "two stays at luxury resorts in Florida and Jamaica;" a "standing invitation to an uber-exclusive golf club overlooking the Atlantic coast;" and 26 private jet flights and eight helicopter flights.

One of the most fun examples is from 1999, when Justice Thomas purchased a $267,230 40-foot Prevost Le Mirage XL Marathon R.V. Over the years, he described to friends and colleagues how he sacrificed and saved to purchase it, and he often used the R.V. to polish his down-to-earth, I-was-born-in-poverty-but-somehow-pulled-myself-out-of-it-by-my-bootstraps persona: "I don't have any problem with going to Europe, but I prefer the United States, and I prefer seeing the regular parts of the United States. There's something normal to me about it. I come from regular stock, and I prefer being around that."

Problem is, Thomas didn't buy the R.V., at least not outright. His rich buddy Anthony Welters – who made tons of money in the health care industry – "financed" it for Thomas with terms Thomas would never have likely received from a bank. Thomas would not comment on the transaction and beyond a cryptic email, Welters would also not answer straightforward questions, despite repeated requests from The New York Times: Anthony Welters "would not say how much he had lent Justice Thomas, how much the justice had repaid and whether any of the debt had been forgiven or otherwise discharged. He declined to provide The Times with a copy of a loan agreement – or even say if one existed. Nor would he share the basic terms of the loan, such as what, if any, interest rate had been charged or whether Justice Thomas had adhered to an agreed-upon repayment schedule. And when asked to

elaborate on what he had meant when he said the loan had been 'satisfied,' he did not respond."

We later found out why Anthony Welters was so unforthcoming. After reviewing loan documents, Democratic members of the Senate Finance Committee found that "Welters forgave a substantial amount, or even all of the principal balance of his loan to Clarence Thomas, constituting of the forgiveness of approximately $267,230.00 of debt owed by Justice Thomas."

When these extremely concerning revelations about Clarence and Ginni Thomas came to light, much of the debate in political circles and on cable news revolved around things like *when* should Justices have to disclose certain things OR *when* should Justices recuse themselves OR what is the definition of things like "personal hospitality."

But to me, this behavior goes far beyond nuisance. Clarence Thomas' behavior is corrupt, plain and simple. Only one Supreme Court Justice – Samuel "Old Bacon Face" Chase – has ever been impeached, and that was in 1805. It's time for it to happen again with Clarence Thomas. At a bare minimum, the charge of bribery applies.

How Did We Get Here?

All this talk about the U.S. Supreme Court is a perfect segue to one of its worst decisions of all time. The Court made a grave error with the Citizens United decision, and we should work hard to see it overturned.

The Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (2010) case revolved around political campaign spending by organizations. In a 5–4 decision, the Court held that the Free Speech clause of the First Amendment prohibits the government from restricting independent expenditures for nonprofit corporations, for-profit corporations, labor unions, and other associations – meaning these organizations can now spend unlimited amounts of money on political activities as long as they don't give money directly to political candidates and their spending is not coordinated with any candidate (a "prohibition" that is a total joke).

This decision – together with another awful federal court decision, SpeechNow.org v. Federal Election Commission – gave rise to so-called Super PACs. Super PACs, or "independent expenditure only" committees, can raise unlimited sums of money from corporations, unions, associations and individuals, then spend unlimited amounts of money to advocate for or against political candidates.

The Citizens United decision is deeply flawed in part for its unintended consequences, because the Federal Election Commission's (FEC) interpretation of it has caused even more damage than the decision itself.

The Supreme Court held that independent expenditures should be "totally independent" of candidates and made it clear that corporate spending should be fully disclosed. However, neither is being properly enforced, to say the least.

Super PACs are legally required to report where their money comes from but, naturally, they have devised ways to undermine any transparency by funneling money through secretly funded "dark money" groups – which are, for some strange reason, allowed to keep their donors hidden from the public.

These groups channel money to elections typically though donations given to 501(c)(4) social welfare groups or 501(c)(6) trade associations. While Super PACs do have to disclose these groups, they are only required to disclose the *name* of the group, not who gave money *to* the group – so the true source of the money remains a secret.

In total, $5.3 billion was spent on the 2024 presidential election by presidential candidates, political parties and independent interest groups. If you count Senate and House candidates, that number jumps to $14.8 billion. Dark money groups accounted for over $1.9 billion of that number. Since Citizens United, these groups have spent at least $4.3 billion on federal elections.

The Citizen United ruling included this statement: "We now conclude that independent expenditures, including those made by corporations, do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption."

Let's check to see if that's true…

A 2025 Washington Post analysis found that "billionaires are spending unprecedented amounts on U.S. politics. Dozens have stepped up their political giving in recent years, leading to a record-breaking surge of donations by the ultrarich in 2024. Since 2000, political giving by the wealthiest 100 Americans to federal elections has gone up almost *140 times*… *roughly 1 in every 13 dollars spent (in the 2024 national elections) was donated by a handful of the country's richest people."*

The Post also discovered that "overall, billionaires have rallied behind Trump's Republican Party. More than 80 percent of the federal campaign spending by the 100 wealthiest Americans in 2024 went to Republicans." So, unsurprisingly, twelve billionaires – who had a combined net worth of $390 billion – held roles in the Trump/Vance administration in 2025. The Post, again: excluding Elon Musk, "the billionaires in the Trump administration, along with their spouses, gave more than $52 million to Trump, pro-Trump PACs and the Republican National Committee in the 2024 campaign alone."

A July 2026 report from The Wall Street Journal revealed that over $781,948,878 in donations and other payments had been given to Trump-linked groups *since* the 2024 election.

By July, megadonors had already poured over $1.6 billion into the midterm elections – most of which was given to super PACS. In fact, each of the past three midterm elections has set new spending records and advertising spending will reach $10.8 billion in 2026.

It just cannot be denied that Super PACs and dark money are the perfect way for corporations, unions, and rich people to influence elections and gain political influence and access.

There is no better example of this than Elon Musk, who famously spent $294 million to support Donald Trump and other Republicans in the 2024 election. Next thing you know, he's waving around chainsaws, becoming a permanent fixture at Mar-A-Lago where he was given free rein to almost destroy the framework of our entire federal government through his failed DOGE experiment.

This has to stop.

It's been several pages since we started this section so, as a reminder, we've been talking about the 4 parts of Operation Overhaul:

† Fiscal Responsibility
† Operations
† Waste & Corruption

… and now we've finally come to….

† Comprehensive Government Reform

Now, we come to the good part: What can we do about all this? You can read about comprehensive government reform on p. 567.

Fiscal CPR Step Two:

Liberty & Justice for All

A Heart Forever Changed

Three events significantly altered the direction of my life. The third incident (by date not impact) was when three white supremacists dragged James Byrd, a black man, behind their truck and to his death in my hometown of Jasper, Texas.

James' mom, Stella, was a family friend and his brutal murder had a profound impact on me – mainly because, for years, I had been far too busy with my career and fabulous life to waste my time fighting for unpleasant things like racial equality and social justice.

Hearing of James' death by the hands of ignorant, despicable racists was the ultimate wake-up call. It also immediately brought to mind the first incident that changed my life forever.

In college, as required by my Criminal Justice degree, I spent 40 hours volunteering at the Gardner-Betts Juvenile Justice Center in Austin. My first day, I met a thirteen-year-old black inmate named Michael who had been charged with attempted murder. After a few days of my tutoring Michael, he started cautiously confiding in me. Over the next few weeks, the life story he revealed was like something out of a horror movie.

Michael's earliest memory is hysterically crying while crawling over his mother who was unconscious and bleeding profusely from her head. Although he never knew how she was hurt that particular time, he later assumed she had been beaten by one of her live-in boyfriends or her pimp, a pattern that would repeat itself until Michael was arrested.

He knew his mom was a prostitute, and men would come and go all day and night. A couple of them had been nice to him, but those didn't seem to last very long. The others would beat him, mock him, have sex with his mother in front of him, burn him with cigarettes and, in the case of the man who was possibly his birth father, force him to try marijuana at the age of seven.

Michael had two older brothers, but one was in prison from the time Michael was born and the other was killed in a drive-by shooting when Michael was three. Once in a while, his mom would ask him to deliver little packages around their decrepit apartment complex, instructing him to bring back the money he was given in return. His best buddy lived next door and they would leave early on summer mornings and roam around the neighborhood until well after dark.

After wheezing most of his life, the school nurse determined Michael had acute asthma, but he never got the proper medication to ease it. He started stealing at eight, hardcore drug use at ten and, because he and his mom were being increasingly terrorized, joined a gang at twelve for protection.

The attempted murder charge was a result of his initiation into the gang, which required Michael to kill a random stranger for his jacket. The night before Michael shot the guy, he decided not to go through with it, but the gang members said they would kill his mom if he backed out.

For as long as I live, I will never forget this child's face as he calmly and candidly described his reality. The flashes of shame, rage, bitterness, acceptance, heartbreak, innocence, resentment, sorrow and regret that intermittently crossed his face and flickered in his eyes are forever scorched in my mind. I wish I could adequately describe the memory to you, but I have rewritten it over ten times and can't find the words to do it justice.

Meeting Michael was a radically life-changing experience for me. It took a thirteen-year-old to act as a mirror into my soul, forcing me to accept the dark shadow inside of myself. Every word Michael spoke was an indictment of my past prejudices, judgments and intolerances.

My past behaviors haunted me, and every moment I mistreated and misjudged someone "beneath me" came flooding back – every time I automatically conjured hateful classist and racist thoughts when passing people on the street; every inappropriate joke at another's expense; every time I took for granted how blessed my life has been.

Michael taught me more than any degree ever could. He taught me about empathy, compassion and what it means to truly forgive those who trespass against you in egregious ways. He gave me unconditional trust and friendship. He showed me that although nature loads the gun, *nurture pulls the trigger*.

A year after I met Michael, the second life-altering lesson occurred when I received *The Phone Call* from my dad. My mom volunteered at a food pantry in the Dallas inner-city and, even after my enlightening experience with Michael, I could only hope it was a phase that would pass without disrupting my life in any way. I mean, surely I couldn't possibly be expected to go down there and serve at Thanksgiving or anything – I mean, *please.*

The day my dad called, he asked that I come to an address that sounded suspiciously like one in a shady neighborhood. After rolling my eyes and making very rude remarks about bulletproof vests, I went.

My worst fears were soon realized. The parentals were moving from swanky North Dallas into the inner-city neighborhood where my mom volunteered, because they thought it was important for them to "be a part of the community" they were trying to help.

Well, you can just imagine the absolute spoiled brat fit I threw. I asked repeatedly how they could do this to me and I made it clear this was irresponsible, dangerous and that I was never, ever coming to visit ever again. You know, because all this was about *me.*

One month later, I relented and went to my parent's new home for dinner (which I feel certain had something to do with a need to borrow money). I maintained my dignity by making a big show of taking cover against the potential gunfire as I advanced with my baseball bat toward the front door.

I also purchased a brand new, heavy duty Club steering wheel lock on the way over, just to prove I hadn't changed my mind about this nonsense. Taking the involuntary commitment papers may have gone too far, but I think I made my point.

We were seated for dinner when the doorbell rang. Standing on the porch was a filthy, stinky man with bloodshot eyes who reeked of alcohol. I shot my dad a major I-told-you-so look while, at the same time, wondered why he never looked quite as compassionate when I appeared on the doorstep in this condition.

Quietly, the man said to my dad, "Could you please keep this $200 until tomorrow morning? I'm afraid I will spend it on drugs and I'm trying so hard to stay clean."

Seeing this man had neither an ulterior motive nor anywhere else to turn, I finally realized that by my parent's very presence in that neighborhood – just by showing up – they had made more of an impact before their breakfast than I had made in my entire life.

Looking back, I really shouldn't have had the nerve to be such a self-centered, spoiled brat because at the time my professional life was mediocre at best. Sure, I had my share of success and made a little cash, but working in the energy industry back in the day made that pretty easy. It's my *when the wind is right even turkeys can fly* theory.

The central reason for my lukewarm success was, let's be honest, it's somewhat difficult for someone in their early 20s to get super stoked about pipelines and British thermal units for very long. Plus, because I made decent money when I did work, I had to do so less often which fueled a self-perpetuating lack of interest.

My dad would often say that, if I worked an entire year with no travel breaks, I would, amazingly enough, be able to pay off my student loans and establish a savings account. But I never really grasped that concept. To the contrary, whenever I would begin to make headway in my career, I found I could no longer breathe, and my wanderlust instincts kicked in with full force.

Very soon thereafter, I would find myself on the next plane, off once again in search of some sea no man can measure. Each time I got back, I felt far less inclined to reengage in my career and, when I did, I felt even more like I was on a fast train to nowhere.

That said, although pipelines and British thermal units couldn't hold my undivided attention, I'm actually an extremely motivated and determined person. When called upon, I'll do my best to get the job done and get it done right. Knowing this about myself, I'm convinced I know a profession where I would have been wildly successful.

It's a job that transforms entrepreneurship and intelligence into commerce. It's a job where seamless, tight organization and flawless execution are critical to its success. It's a job that allows even those with a seventh-grade education to excel. It's a job that offers a unique chance to provide for those you love in ways that you never imagined.

Without a doubt, I would have been the most successful drug dealer on the street.

It's not that I have a criminal mind… I've never been charged with a major crime in my life. It's not that I'm a big fan of drugs… I tried them and never figured out what the big deal was. It's not that I'm lazy… I'm quite energetic. If I were indeed a successful drug dealer, there would be one reason and one reason alone for my phenomenal success: I would be in a position where I felt I had no other choice.

This is not said to condone criminal behavior and chemical dependency or to justify poor self-control and excuse those who languish in a lifetime of debauchery. However, it's time to put the judgment on hold and get really honest about why people sometimes do the things they do.

Be extra careful in your indictment of others. Have you never done something that you thought you would never do only to later be ashamed because you were better than what you did?

Quite frankly, when it comes to most of our social issues, far too much energy is spent finger pointing and placing blame – which is a massive waste of time. The fact is we are where we are regardless of who played what part. Let's just focus on solving the problems, then we can sort all the rest out later.

For all our sakes, we need to move forward toward reconciliation instead of backward to condemnation. Our goal should be to mitigate the current problems and put mechanisms in place to prevent history from repeating itself, not to continue to exacerbate the problems through denial, defensiveness, and accusation.

We also need to be 100% honest about what is really going on here. There is no getting around the actual evidence; facts that many people continually refuse to acknowledge.

Some people try hard to convince themselves, despite the rather straightforward statistics, that it's some miraculous coincidence that people who are involved in injurious behavior are often the ones who are caught in the vicious cycle of economic and racial inequities.

Having gone to graduate school to study psychology, I've been inundated with the various psychological theories that attempt to explain the intricacies of *nature* versus *nurture*. Most of the theories have valid points, but none of them encompass the true complexity of the relationship.

In truth, we don't need some textbook to explain this. Watching carefree children as they run and laugh on the playground tells us all we need to know. What happens to their innocence? There is only one sensible answer: Circumstance.

Certainly, we each have innate personality traits that contribute to our *reaction* to circumstance, and some dispositions are more difficult to control and are more potentially damaging than others. But it cannot be denied that being self-actualized is much more difficult when you experience trauma to the extent Michael has.

Seven-year-old minds don't have the ability to appropriately assimilate and process violent and shocking experiences. Therefore, their only alternative is to internalize them. And then those seven-year-old minds suddenly find themselves encapsulated in eighteen-year-old bodies.

I'm confident that, by now, you recognize the balance I strive for between personal responsibility and compassion. I'm equally certain that my capitalistic beliefs come through crystal clear. I firmly believe that, when done *fairly* and *correctly, a rising tide lifts all boats* (it's my *s%^# rolls downhill* theory).

But good grief, can we please have some empathy and humility about it? I can't tell you how many times I've been stuck at dinner with people – draped in $5,000 suits, sipping $100 cognac, and dripping with a sense of entitlement – regaling the table with stories of their exceptional brilliance.

With every sip, they become more and more convinced they are somehow smarter and more deserving than everyone else (especially those lazy ass people who should get a job but instead sit around all day smoking crack and having babies that the government will have to support).

People like this make me want to stab myself in the eye with my dinner fork. My aversion to these types has grown so deep that I now actually request the waiter remove my utensils as quickly as possible, just in case. I mean, who do these blowhards think they are? If only modesty, compassion and humility could be bought on Fifth Avenue.

Believe me, I understand and appreciate hard work as much as anyone. I understand having pride in one's accomplishments and deserving the success that follows. I'm neither short on self-confidence nor self-appreciation. I think so highly of myself and my triumphant endeavors that I have to practically force myself not to kiss my reflection in the mirror every morning. :)

However, I also fully recognize and appreciate the contributions of an extremely comprehensive support system, a financially blessed upbringing, private school education and just plain luck. These factors have contributed exorbitantly to my having access to a vast array of choices in my life (and should be given full credit for my knowing the word exorbitantly). There were tons of avenues available to me. So many, in fact, that not once was I forced to consider being a drug dealer to achieve my dreams.

I recognize there are far more than two options. I've seen people born in the most devastating conditions imaginable work four jobs to

ensure they wouldn't have to engage in a life of crime. I also know plenty of people raised with a ton of money and opportunity who have crashed and burned.

However, from my experience and with minor exception, this last group always miraculously rebounds virtually unscathed from their mistakes and bad decisions. Redemption seems to come much easier when you can afford rehab and qualified attorneys. It's funny how prosperity can hide a multitude of sins.

But I learned a long time ago that many ignorant and hateful people will believe what they believe regardless of the massive amount of evidence you provide. They subscribe to the ol' *we're on the boat now pull up the ladder* theory.

After years of frustration, I have decided to stop trying to change these hateful people's minds. I have simply had enough of listening to idiotic, repulsive theories from uninformed people who possess zero facts to back-up their position.

Those people aren't going to be my close friends or anything – since I prefer people who have all their internal organs, including a brain and a heart – but I've made peace with the fact that some people make a conscious choice to develop a belief system that makes them feel better about themselves and less guilty about failing to act on the behalf of others.

So, to those hateful people: Go ahead and fool yourself into thinking you are smarter, more worthy, and that God loves you more than the child born to a fifteen-year-old mother in a crowded and dangerous public housing unit.

Feel free to believe that the 38 million people living in poverty are stupid, lazy and that they just want to sit around and live off the government so they can drink cheap, hot beer on the stoop – just because it's so much fun.

Continue to denounce statistics that say children born into low-income families perform far worse on almost all indicative measures including physical health, emotional health, cognitive ability, literacy and school engagement.

Perpetuate the argument that people who experience the deeply entrenched stress of poverty are in their position because they made

their own conscious choice to be there... that they somehow think life is better as an unemployed, uneducated drug addict whose children have virtually no chance of breaking the nightmare cycle they were lucky enough to be born into.

To those hateful people who believe such things: It's certainly your right in a free society to believe some or even all these things. But then what? If your hypothesis is correct – and absent an exit strategy – we're essentially screwed.

If you are right, it's virtually impossible for non-stupid, non-lazy, God-blessed Americans to procreate fast enough to overtake the ever-growing population of quart-guzzling, crack-shooting, border-jumping, gun-wielding lazy freeloaders that threaten our very existence. Holy smoke, we better move to Canada!

But before we pack, is it possible there is a better way to approach social justice? Is it possible that blaming the victim, justifiable or not, has incessantly proven to be a losing strategy and that we *all* as Americans and human beings have an ultimate bond of common fate?

Callous voices that carry little empathy for the vulnerable may sound somewhat credible when they speak of thousands of unseen people, but I am living proof that their argument deflates when you look into the eyes of just one. I challenge anyone to stand before a destitute, desperate mother who has neither the capacity nor the resources to create a better life for her children.

Lifelong hopelessness, addiction and abuse have catapulted her into a perpetual cycle of despair and now her children are left to raise themselves, as she was, in a drug infested neighborhood where they can either hit the streets or helplessly watch the world through the steel bars of their tiny rat-infested apartment.

Look into the eyes of her kids who, at home, are surrounded by complete chaos and who, at school, are falling farther and farther behind their classmates with no chance of catching up.

I would love to see your resolve then, because it's far harder to crush a person's spirit to their face than it is when gossiping over cocktails – or when signing legislation.

Inequality

For decades, the damaging consequences of our national social service policies – which have taken already vulnerable populations and forced them into a devastating cycle of long-term dependence – have mounted. Many Americans remain captive to our misaligned social systems, ones that establish detrimental patterns that are impossible to unilaterally break.

Certainly, there was an enormous need for social and economic programs after the Great Depression. President Roosevelt's New Deal provided relief for the poor and unemployed, greatly aided economic recovery, and established reforms to prevent another depression. But some of these programs ignited and fueled a devastating cycle of generational poverty.

When poverty goes generational – meaning a family has lived in poverty for at least two generations – it becomes about far more than how much money they have in the bank. Every single day that someone has no job, for example, they experience a tremendous loss of hope and self-esteem, along with increased stress and depression.

In fact, poverty can literally shrink the brain. One study, led by neuroscientists from Columbia University and Children's Hospital Los Angeles, found that children in households earning less than $25,000 per year had, on average, a brain surface area 6 percent smaller than those from families earning more than $150,000.

The study also discovered that children in the poorest households not only had lower scores on tests measuring cognitive skills (i.e., reading and memory ability), there were significant differences in the actual structure of the brain, particularly in areas of the brain that handle language and decision-making skills. Take a minute to really think about what that means.

To add insult to injury, the tone often used in any conversation having to do with inequality and vulnerable Americans is incredibly paternalistic and condescending. And often hateful.

Undoubtedly, there are those on all income levels who engage in self-destructive behavior, and it's important these individuals recognize and take responsibility for their actions. However, when speaking of

those trapped in the lower brackets, there is plenty of blame to go around as the sins of the past haunt us.

We can scream personal responsibility until we are blue in the face, but our government ensured long ago that many bound by its social policies have no idea how to even remotely begin to claw their way out – or even what that really means.

Out of everything the Democratic and Republican parties have gotten terribly wrong, vulnerable American families are the number one tragedy. As our leaders in Washington increasingly shift their focus to poisonous politics, our most imperative systems – everything from health care to education to those that help lower-income Americans – have slipped further into total chaos.

I honestly can't decide which is worse: Democrats who act like they give a damn but fail to appropriately act or Republicans who don't even pretend to give a damn. Both major parties have proven to be consistently inept at confronting these challenges.

To be fair, social justice isn't simple. For one thing, it's not easy to reconcile social justice and capitalism. On one hand, we have the *American Dream*, which promises every American the opportunity to achieve success and prosperity, regardless of their originating circumstances.

On the other hand, we have statistics that reveal a shocking level of income and wealth inequality in the United States.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is an inter-governmental economic organization that has 38 member countries. Out of these 38 countries, only Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico and Turkey have more income inequality than the U.S.

According to the Federal Reserve's latest data, the wealthiest 10 percent of American households owned about 69 percent of the nation's household wealth in the second quarter of 2026. The bottom 50 percent owned just over 2 percent. In dollar terms, the top 10 percent held roughly $128 trillion in net worth, compared with about $4.3 trillion for the entire bottom half.

These numbers are startling. Quite frankly, it just doesn't seem fair. However, to succeed *we must build strategies within the context of the realities of our situation, not what we wish the realities were*.

The reality is that America's economic system is capitalism. This is a universal fact that isn't going to change and for this we should be exceedingly grateful. As the old saying goes, capitalism is the worst kind of economy until you try all the rest.

The great irony about capitalism is that, although a competitive market operates at its best when capital is widely distributed, a well-functioning free market doesn't care who gets what as long as it's operating efficiently. This means that, basically, the *who gets what* as well as the *when, where,* and *how they get it* is largely left up to us… and on so many levels we've been doing this horribly wrong.

Okay, I get that some of you may already be calling me the quintessential bleeding heart, but that's not necessarily accurate.

True, I love and care deeply about people in general, but my social justice views and recommendations are not merely a sympathetic call for charity or even compassion. My overriding argument to Americans is not that we address income imbalance, for example, simply to be nice to our fellow man (although that would, in and of itself, be an awesome thing to do!). Rather, rising inequality is increasingly strangling our economy and impeding our economic growth – big time!

We have arrived at a point where empathy must be applied as an intellectual exercise. If I can't appeal to your heart, let me appeal to your wallet. In 2019, pre-pandemic, analysis by McKinsey & Company found that the racial wealth gap has a "dampening effect on consumption and investment" and will "cost the U.S. economy between $1 trillion and $1.5 trillion between 2019 and 2028 – 4 to 6 percent of the projected GDP in 2028." That's a lot.

Two years later, they estimated that "the median annual wage for black workers was approximately 30 percent, or $10,000, lower than that of white workers – a figure with enormous implications for household economic security, consumption, and the ability to build wealth. Black workers make up 12.9 percent of the U.S. labor force today but earn only 9.6 percent of total U.S. wages."

They also estimated that there could be a "$220 billion annual disparity between black wages today and what they would be in a scenario of full parity, with black representation matching the black share of the population across occupations and the elimination of racial

pay gaps within occupational categories. Achieving this scenario would boost total black wages by 30 percent and draw approximately one million additional black workers into employment."

That's incentive enough, but it goes deeper than that. In December 2023, they warned that, "if we don't correct long-standing patterns," generative AI < a type of AI that can create new content, like text, images, music, and videos > "has the potential to *widen* the racial economic gap in the United States by $43 billion each year."

"Annual global wealth creation from gen AI is projected to be about $7 trillion, with almost $2 trillion of it expected to go to the United States, given its share of global GDP. U.S. household wealth captures about 30 percent of U.S. GDP, suggesting the United States could gain nearly $500 billion in household wealth from gen AI value creation."

"This increase would translate to an average of $3,400 in new wealth for each of the projected 143.4 million U.S. households in 2045. Black Americans capture only about 38 cents of every dollar of new household wealth despite representing 13 percent of the U.S. population. If this trend continues and projections of the growth of black households are accurate, by 2045, racially disparate distribution of new wealth created by gen AI could increase the wealth gap between black and white households by $43 billion annually."

Most of us probably agree that it doesn't seem like massive income inequality is a particularly positive thing for a society, and obviously the Americans trapped at the bottom of the income ladder are more than ready for us to bridge the divide. But why should the middle and upper classes care about this? Well….

First, this should matter to all of us because inequality is a creeper. In the past, the devastating consequences of considerable income disparity was largely confined to those on the margins of society, but now it's quickly enveloping the middle class.

The Pew Research Center discovered that the growth in income in recent decades has tilted to upper-income households while the middle class, which once comprised most Americans, is shrinking. In 1971, 61 percent of Americans lived in middle-class households, but by 2023 that share had fallen to 51 percent.

They continue, "As a result**,** Americans are more apart than before financially. From 1971 to 2023, the share of Americans who live in lower-income households increased from 27 percent to 30 percent *and* the share in upper-income households increased from 11 percent to 19 percent." In fact, "the middle class has fallen behind on two key counts. The growth in income for the middle class since 1970 has not kept pace with the growth in income for the upper-income tier. And the share of total U.S. household income held by the middle class has plunged."

Second, rising inequality strangles our economy and impedes our growth in a big way. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), an organization with 191 member countries, says "a 10 percentile decrease in inequality increases the expected length of a growth spell by 50 percent." That's *huge*!

These numbers show just how fundamental social justice is to our position on the world stage. In this relatively new era of globalization, an uneducated, unskilled and unprepared workforce equals an unparalleled disaster for this country. To survive in this still rapidly emerging environment, we must do whatever it takes to ensure a flexible, dynamic labor market and a well-educated, adaptable workforce. This means we must fully invest in our people… *all our people*.

1787 has eight policy initiatives that address our social challenges. You can find more information about each of these on the 1787 website or in the *Policy Guide*.

America's Best Chance (Education Reform)
Empower Society (Poverty/Wealth Gap/Inequality)
Let There Be Light (Making Life Easier)
It's All About the Benjamins ($$$ Plan)
National Opioid Withdrawal (NOW)
New Beginnings (Criminal Justice Reform)
Service for School (Affordable Higher Education)
U.S. Works (Jobs and Higher Wages)

These programs encourage work and increase opportunity. But best of all, they are empowering, far-reaching, enduring, and, above all, *truly transformational*.

The Racial Wealth Gap

The racial wealth gap in America may just be the most astonishing statistic in this entire book. The latest Federal Reserve Survey of Consumer Finances found an enormous racial wealth gap. In 2022, the median white family had $285,010 in wealth, compared with just $44,890 for the median black family and $61,620 for the median Hispanic family. That is a $240,120 gap between the typical white and black families. Really think about what that means: For every $100 in wealth held by the median white family, the median black family held about $16.

The disparities are even more stunning when looking at averages: mean net worth was $1.37 million for white families, compared with $211,450 for black families and $227,490 for Hispanic families.

Wealth is defined as the total value of everything a family owns – things like homes, cars, cash, retirement/savings accounts, and stock and bonds – and is the best measure of a family's overall financial health because it determines their financial *security*.

After all, even if someone has a fabulous, high-paying job *today*, they could lose that job *tomorrow*. Wealth, on the other hand, provides a financial buffer not only if someone loses their job, but also in the case of an economic downturn like the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis or the economic disruption of something like the pandemic.

Wealth also provides the opportunity for the creation of *even more* wealth, like the ability to start a new business venture, and it also allows families to finance their children's education, prepare a nest egg for their retirement years, and often allows parents to leave their kids an inheritance – which passes wealth on to the next generation, where the cycle can continue.

This is how wealth builds over time. Obviously, a well-paying job is helpful in building wealth because it allows people to save and/or

invest, and healthy financial markets don't hurt either. But more than anything else, homeownership is the most common way people build wealth.

And herein lies the problem.

A report from the National Association of Realtors showed that "over the last decade, the median-priced home has become worth about $190,000 more. As a result, the net worth of a typical homeowner is about 40 times the net worth of a renter."

However, "across racial/ethnic groups, the black homeownership rate continues to be well behind the rate of any other group. At the end of 2022, the homeownership rate for black Americans was 44.9 percent compared to 74.5 percent for white Americans…. the black homeownership rate hasn't kept pace with increases in the other racial/ethnic groups, making the gap even larger between white and black homeownership rates."

Although housing is just one of many issues we need to address to close the racial wealth gap, it's an excellent example of how the *staggering inequality that exists in this country didn't just miraculously happen out of the blue.*

Earlier in this book, I said that redlining – the discriminatory practice in the 1930s where the government and lenders mapped and denied mortgages in minority neighborhoods, primarily affecting black communities – cut far deeper than black people just not getting to own a house over ninety years ago. In truth, redlining was one of the very first bricks in the wall that makes it difficult for many black Americans to fully participate in American capitalism to this day.

That said, there were plenty of other bricks that helped build that wall, like the carnage that happened in the Greenwood district of Tulsa, Oklahoma – often called the "Black Wall Street" – on May 31, 1921. That fateful day, a white mob not only attacked black people and their homes, but also their businesses.

A report by the *Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* describes it this way: "As the whites moved north, they set fire to practically every building in the African American community,

including a dozen churches, five hotels, 31 restaurants, four drug stores, eight doctor's offices, more than two dozen grocery stores, and the black public library. By the time the violence ended, the city had been placed under martial law, thousands of Tulsans were being held under armed guard, and the state's second-largest African American community had been burned to the ground."

These types of atrocities started well before Tulsa. On September 22-24, 1906, during the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906, white mobs murdered numerous black men and women and destroyed many of their businesses. In the years leading to the riot, the black population had become increasingly educated and successful, building strong networks and communities along with thriving, competitive businesses. This shift in dynamics threatened many in the white elite class in Atlanta, and they responded by expanding Jim Crow segregation laws, which only served to heighten tensions even more.

The death and destruction in Atlanta in 1906 led W.E.B. Du Bois – a sociologist, historian and civil rights activist – to write his haunting A Litany of Atlanta:

"A city lay in travail, God our Lord, and from her loins sprang twin Murder and Black Hate. Red was the midnight; clang, crack and cry of death and fury filled the air and trembled underneath the stars when church spires pointed silently to Thee. And all this was to sate the greed of greedy men who hide behind the veil of vengeance! Bewildered we are, and passion-tost, mad with the madness of a mobbed and mocked and murdered people."

In the East St. Louis Race War of 1917, a white mob brutally murdered black men and women when white workers at the Aluminum Ore Company went on strike and black workers were hired to replace them. Dhati Kennedy, the founder of the Committee for Historical Truth, told Smithsonian Magazine the story of his father, who lived through the massacre:

"We spent a lifetime as children hearing these stories. It was clear to me my father was suffering from some form of what they call PTSD.

He witnessed horrible things: people's houses being set ablaze, people being shot when they tried to flee, some trying to swim to the other side of the Mississippi while being shot at by white mobs with rifles, others being dragged out of street cars and beaten and hanged from streetlamps.

Thousands of blacks were streaming across that bridge when what they called the 'race war' got into full swing. When that happened, the police shut down the bridge, and no one could escape. Some, in desperation, tried to swim and drowned."

Carlos F. Hurd, a reporter, wrote a first-hand account of the mayhem in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch: "The East St. Louis affair, as I saw it, was a man hunt, conducted on a sporting basis, though with anything but the fair play which is the principle of sport. There was a horribly cool deliberateness and a spirit of fun about it. 'Get a n*****' was the slogan, and it was varied by the recurrent cry, 'Get another!'"

Another journalist, Hugh L. Wood, wrote in the St. Louis Republic:

"A Negro weighing 300 pounds came out of the burning line of dwellings just north and east of the Southern fright home. 'Get him!' they cried. So, a man in the crowd clubbed his revolver and struck the Negro in the face with it. Another dashed an iron bolt between the Negro's eyes. Still another stood near and battered him with a rock. Then the giant Negro tumbled to the ground. A girl stepped up and struck the bleeding man with her foot. The blood spurted onto her stockings and men laughed and grunted."

Unsurprisingly, in most all these instances, the victims were unable to recover and rebuild. The consequences of these unthinkable tragedies extend far beyond death, destruction, and property damage. *These events literally smashed and burned the prosperity that black men and women had – against all odds and with zero advantages – worked so hard to build.*

… and they also ignited the ultimate *Butterfly Effect*.

Over 160 years ago, an entire community of Americans was, as abolitionist and my personal hero Frederick Douglass described, turned loose from slavery into "destitution" the likes the world had never seen: "The old roof was pulled down over their heads, before they could make for themselves a shelter. They were free; free to hunger, free to the winds and rains of heaven; free to the pitiless wrath of the enraged master's hand. They were without roofs to cover them, or bread to eat, or land to cultivate…*we gave them freedom and famine at the same time."*

Then, to add insult to injury, they were – for decades – robbed of the chance to generate wealth through opportunities like building businesses and homeownership.

….which led to some Americans in later generations being born out of the financial mainstream, making them "credit invisible" ….which prevented them from building credit and, as an extension, wealth ….which forced many of them into the predatory side of our dual credit market, saddling them with extremely expensive, unsafe money (i.e., predatory subprime loans, payday loans, illegal land contracts, etc.) ….which caused them to get stuck in a debt catch-22 that created chronic indebtedness ….which likely led to other long-term consequences like wage garnishment and restricted access to insurance, employment, housing and utilities.

But it doesn't stop there. Pile on all the other bricks that life has handed some of these Americans along the way – inadequate education and health care, low or no employment, episodic poverty, and so much more – and that impermeable wall quickly becomes insurmountable.

When you look at it this way, it's undeniable that the staggering inequity that exists in this country in practically every category didn't just miraculously happen. From the jump, bad decisions by politicians – made both intentionally and unintentionally – ignited, fueled and perpetuated pervasive, deep-rooted division and inequality.

Debating whether this is true is a waste of time because numbers don't lie. All one must do is read the astonishingly unequal statistics scattered throughout these books – in everything from wealth to incomes to education to criminal justice – to know that these inequities not only exist, but they are not healing on their own.

Pharisees, Practice What You Preach

If you're confused as to why I placed this section in this exact spot, then I'm writing it especially for you.

To be clear, I don't think all modern-day Christians are Pharisees – far from it – and this is not a comprehensive rant against the so-called "religious right" as a whole. I recognize and respect that there are many committed people who fight for issues they wholeheartedly believe in and, whether I agree with their position or not, I fiercely support their right to do so.

Unfortunately, mirroring the political arena, it seems the most fanatical and misguided of the religious right are the loudest, creating the erroneous (and unacceptable) perception that they speak for the entire Christian faith.

My favorite episode of Seinfeld is the one where Jerry's dentist, who was raised Christian, converts to Judaism so he can inoffensively tell Jewish jokes. Using that logic, I feel I can speak openly and honestly to Christians because I have, after all, been one my entire life.

I'm not one who talks about this often, but I take my spirituality extremely seriously. I have seen God work extraordinary miracles in my life as well as in lives of those around me. In *everything* I do, I give Him the glory.

Although, I must admit, there have been times I've seriously wavered. As you know, I was raised in the good 'ol Bible Belt. To a curious and inquisitive child, it often seemed like I was doomed to a life of absolutely no fun and, if I did not cease my evil ways, a one-way ticket to hell.

I heard one Sunday morning that a man was trying to determine where he should retire, so he decided to visit churches all around the country to see what part he liked best. In the foyer of each church in California he would see a gold phone with a sign that said, "Phone Call to God – $20,000."

On the East Coast, he saw the same sign, but the call was $10,000. When he reached a church in East Texas, the phone was there but the sign was changed to "Phone Call to God – $0.25." Somewhat confused,

he asked the preacher why the call was so much cheaper in Texas. The preacher responded, "Son, you're in Texas now. It's a local call!"

< My favorite English teacher taught me to always tell a joke before offending a large group of people. >

Thanks to my religious upbringing, feel free to disagree with me on interpretation of scripture all day long, but it would be hard to "out-scripture" me. For this I give credit to the hours I was drilled on various scriptures – cherry-picked, naturally – with the themes of *fiery gates of hell* and *eternal damnation* throughout them.

I received gold stars on the Scripture Memorization Challenge poster every Sunday morning and Wednesday night and even competed for several years in the annual Bible Bowl competition.

Although I have many positive memories of these experiences, I have also seen plenty of people who look like they've sucked on sour lemons for decades – so much so that I thought their faces would stick that way permanently.

Because these people are terrified everyone will see through their sanctimonious façade, they work extra hard to destroy everyone else with their gossip, hypocrisy, and judgment. They love nothing more than to shoot the wounded…which, of course, is the <u>exact</u> <u>opposite</u> of what Jesus would do.

There are scores of amazing people, too. That is what makes this all the more tragic. Most Christians have always been – and still very much are – wonderfully compassionate and simply want to be the light of Christ as He intended. These are Christians who actually read *the entire* Bible and are held accountable by scriptures many people this day and time seem to disregard, like those on grace, mercy, forgiveness and justice, to name a few.

Christians, we have a serious problem on our hands. Left unattended, this problem threatens to permanently divide this nation and destroy any potential we have to recapture the true essence of what being a Christian actually means.

So, my message to all the lemon-juice-sucking people out there: <u>Quit ruining it for the rest of us</u>! Christianity is not yours to manipulate and alter to fit your social and political agenda. You have somehow hijacked my faith and managed to create the misperception

that the gifts of forgiveness, compassion and grace have been replaced with judgment, hypocrisy and blame. Evoking God as a political power play not only poisons the water, it poisons the well.

Your abuse and exploitation of Christianity have caused it to be unrecognizable to many Christians and, even more heartbreaking, to those who haven't yet found the peace of God's love.

It reminds me of the middle-aged lady who had a near death experience after a heart attack. Seeing God, she asked, "Is my time up?" "No," He replied. "You have another 40 years to live."

Ecstatic and with a new lease on life, the woman decided to stay in the hospital a few days longer and have a facelift, liposuction and a tummy tuck. She even bleached her hair blonde again figuring that, as she had so many years left, she might as well make the most of them. Just after her release from the hospital, she crossed the street and was hit and killed by an ambulance!

When she arrived in front of God, she complained, "I thought you said I had another 40 years! Why didn't you pull me out of that ambulance's path?" God replied, "I didn't recognize you!" < See how deftly I did that, once again with the humor? >

Those guilty of these atrocities feel invincible because the religious right has, to my utter disbelief, remained largely influential in politics. But without an infusion of true Christ-like behavior, their days are numbered.

For one, young people aren't impressed. The median age of Christians has risen from 46 in 2007 to 54 in 2024. Roughly seven-in-ten U.S. adults with no religion are under 50. Muslims and Hindus are much younger, on average, than other U.S. religious groups: About three-quarters of adults in each group are under 50. And a third of U.S. Muslim adults are younger than 30. Uh oh.

The Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) – a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and education organization – found that white Christians now account for only 40 percent of adults living in America. In 1976, that number was 81 percent and in 1990, it was 72 percent.

Ask yourself why. Why do so many Americans increasingly have a problem with Christians, particularly white ones? The easiest answer for the exoneration of the religious right would be the soul-sucking

influences of transgender and gay people, "woke" crazies, no prayer in schools, premarital sex, access to abortion, Democrats, rap music, drugs, single-parent households, pornography, movie violence, etc.

The level of the denial of the religious right reminds me of that mythical ostrich that sticks his head in the sand to avoid danger. For some insane reason, they think limiting their flocks' exposure to gay people, lifesaving vaccines, sex education, and other religions will reduce the chance of defection from the one true path. I have a mental image of thousands of little ostrich butts sticking straight up in the air throughout the churches in America.

Surely, these ostriches believe, the decline in our nation's morality is caused by these horrific stimuli instead of something the good brethren of the church are doing. We are obviously being attacked *from the outside in* as opposed to *the inside out*, right?

Wake-Up!!

Temptation and "bad" behavior have been around forever. Go back to Sodom and Gomorrah and we look like a 50s television show. Although it may come as a surprise to those who believe America is becoming increasingly secular, in truth Americans are pretty spiritual people. The Pew Research Center found that – although Americans have become less likely to identify with an organized religion – 81 percent say there is something spiritual beyond the natural world, even if we cannot see it, and 70 percent of adults think of themselves as spiritual people or say spirituality is very important in their lives.

The harsh truth is that it appears to many – including me – that *some* Christians have started to completely ignore the non-negotiable value that Jesus Christ places on love, forgiveness, compassion, empathy, tolerance, grace and non-judgement. It pains me to say this, but, these days, many of the most high-profile Christians come off as callous, petty, and…well… just plain mean.

Brethren, for every scripture that sets forth rules and regulations, there are a hundred espousing the Christ-like principles of love, forgiveness, compassion, empathy, tolerance, grace and non-judgment.

I would never suggest any of us abandon our moral principles, nor do I advocate we stop fighting for what we believe is right. If you think keeping *In God We Trust* on the quarter is an important issue or that abortion is against God's will then, by all means, keep fighting the good fight.

The issue is not the issue. It's the approach that desperately needs work. It would be far more effective to simply emulate the life of Christ instead of pointing out the speck of sawdust in another's eye as we ignore the plank in our own.

Christ did not spend his time on earth destroying everything around him, or judging, diminishing and demeaning people. He inspired them. These days, I suspect Jesus would avoid politics like the ten plagues. Jesus would instead be at the well giving hope to prostitutes, healing paralytics, and washing the feet of homeless people.

It's time for Christians to honestly ask ourselves: What would Jesus – Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace – *really* do?

Lucky for us we don't have to guess, because scripture is crystal clear on what Jesus would and wouldn't do. We can get the answers straight from Jesus and his disciples directly! Thanks to scripture, none of us have *any* excuse not to follow what I call the "Red Words Rule" – meaning often we can be guided by what Jesus said Himself, out loud.

< For those of you who haven't gone to church five times a week since birth, I call this the "Red Words Rule" because Jesus' words are usually written in red in the Bible... His actual words! Isn't that convenient? Or, actually very *inconvenient* for those who choose to blatantly and willfully ignore Him. >

Jesus Christ would never perpetuate political hate and divisiveness ("Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen." 1 John 4:20). Jesus would never judge people or call them hateful names ("Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." Matthew 7:1-2).

Jesus would never trivialize the plight of the poor ("If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" 1 John 3:17) – especially if they were innocent, precious children ("Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 19:14). Jesus Christ would never stand for bigotry or discrimination of any kind ("There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28).

I imagine Jesus would also never condone Donald Trump's lies, insults, pride, personal attacks, lack of humility, racism, misogyny, sexual misconduct, adultery, obsession with settling old scores and grievances, using the f-word on Easter Sunday, disrespecting the Pope, or his blasphemously portraying himself as Jesus online. < Relax, Trump supporters. You knew we were going to get here eventually. >

… and for any of you who say, "Well, we all sin and fall short of the Glory of God," I would agree – but most of us ask for forgiveness (which is what we're called to do). Donald, on the other hand, says he tries to make his transgressions right without "bringing God into the picture" and that he doesn't often feel the need to ask for forgiveness.

I only bring this up because it's imperative that we, as Christians, examine why so many in our faith tolerate (and even defend, promote and encourage) Donald Trump's vile behavior.

I can only imagine the sheer confusion of people of different faiths – or those with none at all – trying to figure out the rules: So, it's okay in Christianity to abandon your entire moral code for tax cuts and conservative judges?

It's okay in Christianity to justify lies, slander, corruption, blatant immorality, crass comments, hurtful insults, casual cruelty, and pure nastiness from one of the biggest bullies in American history, solely in the service of political gain and to vilify Democrats? Can Christians really be *that* cheap of a date?

We need to honestly assess this disgraceful phenomenon, because this dark episode of our faith is NOT OKAY. It is unworthy of our God, directly threatens the future of Christianity, and violates almost everything that the Bible demands of us.

In fact, we, as witnesses, ambassadors and reflections of our Lord and Savior, are required to challenge both Donald Trump's behavior and his policies with the word of God and put his political decisions to the ultimate test: Jesus.

I recognize that it may seem like I'm sitting in judgement of both Donald Trump and those who follow him. I assure you I'm not, because it's simply not my place (re-read Matthew 7:1-2).

This is a lesson I learned early on. When I was young, the most annoying people in the Bible were those thieves nailed to their crosses beside Jesus (the ones He gave forgiveness to at the very last minute).

I used to get so irritated in Bible class thinking: How come I have to be good my entire life to get into Heaven, but God is letting these losers right on in? I figured God was way too busy to make a proper decision, and that He clearly needed *my* input on who should and should not get into His Kingdom.

I finally realized that this approach is exhausting, and that I better not worry that God will make a mistake and instead concentrate on not *being* the mistake. That instead of worrying about *everyone else's* salvation, I better just focus on my own.

…. which, I normally do. But, after witnessing the Christian community's idol-like worship of Donald Trump, I deeply believe that, as a child of God, I don't have the luxury of choosing not to stand up for Him. After all, I will stand before Him one day too.

All I'm doing is offering my sincere, unsolicited advice to my fellow Christians – because I know my Bible well enough to know *exactly* where Jesus and his Father come down on injustice:

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing

clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you? He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

The only time Jesus got mad in the entire Bible was at the pious, greedy, arrogant Pharisees (yes, I'm drawing a parallel). Jesus said of the Pharisees in Matthew 23: "They do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them...Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! *You shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces*."

A vivid memory of my congressional campaign occurred when one of those lemon-juice-sucking women stood in front of the audience microphone at a debate in Hallsville, Texas.

She was absolutely incensed that *those sinners* wanted some Ten Commandments monument out of an Alabama courtroom and where was this leading and wasn't this another example of the moral decline in this country and doesn't this prove this is a Holy War and we should also talk about the sinners who are taking *In God We Trust* off the money and who were we supposed to trust if not in God and by the way those Democrats are going to make sure that every girl in this country has an abortion and every homosexual has a right to get married and blah blah blah for at least ten minutes.

She finally finished with, “Ms. Mathews, what do you think about the Ten Commandments monument being taken out of the Alabama courthouse?”

What I wanted to say is “Lady, I don’t give a rat’s ass about some concrete Ten Commandments statue” but actually said something to the effect of: “I hear you, and you have every right to be upset about the moral decline in this country. But can you recall the last time you actually discussed the Ten Commandments with your neighbor? Or shared with your coworker the joyful news of God’s grace and forgiveness? Can you even name the Ten Commandments? Is this statue really not just an easy way out for Christians who are reassured by its presence, because it somehow alleviates our responsibility to share the love of God with others? Would it not be better to simply live a life that others admire, respect and want to imitate? Instead of caring so much about keeping *In God We Trust* on money, why don’t we encourage people to trust in God in their everyday life as opposed to relying on some statue or quarter to do our work for us?”

She didn’t ask me any more questions, but I assure you I got the evil eye the rest of the night. I can also say with certainty that I didn’t get her vote, which made that single incident the proudest moment of the race.

Here’s a relatively small request for the Christian community, including myself: Lighten your spirit and simply be willing to freely extend what you have been unlimitedly given. Come to the end of yourself in brokenness and begin to live in the light. Because if you don’t, God can’t meet you where you are, and you can’t authentically do the same for those around you.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, *blessed are the peacemakers.*

Now, let’s go make a joyful sound.

They will know we
are Christians by our

Love.

The Butterfly Effect in Action

To close this section out, let's walk through an example of *The Butterfly Effect* in action.

Michael, my friend I introduced you to at the beginning of this section, is back! As a reminder, Michael is a black man who lives in Austin. Michael's earliest memory is hysterically crying while crawling over his mother – a prostitute – who was unconscious and bleeding profusely from her head. He's the one her boyfriends would beat, mock, and burn with cigarettes.

Michael's chaotic early life and his time in juvenile detention have made his life difficult to say the least, but things are turning around!

He recently got his GED, received a small pay raise at work, and married the love of his life, the very beautiful Angela. Michael and Angela just had their first child, a perfect baby boy named James, and they are ready to buy their first home. Everything is looking up for Michael!

Let's take this journey with Michael and Angela. The first stop is house hunting:

Michael and Angela contact a realtor and are ready to see houses, but they soon learn that racial discrimination is still painfully prevalent in the housing market.

Several realtors won't even see them at all, proving true what the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice says: "race discrimination in housing continues to be a problem."

"The majority of the Justice Department's pattern or practice cases involve claims of race discrimination. Sometimes, housing providers try to disguise their discrimination by giving false information about availability of housing, either saying that nothing is available or steering home-seekers to certain areas based on race. Individuals who receive such false information or misdirection may have no knowledge that they have been victims of discrimination."

Michael and Angela have found the perfect home, but no bank will give them traditional financing because they are "credit invisible."

Before the Trump/Vance administration decimated it, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) reported that around 7 million American adults are "credit invisible," meaning they have no credit history with the major credit bureaus. An additional 25 million consumers have "thin" or unscored files, bringing the total of those with limited access to mainstream credit to roughly 32 million people.

These consumers face a range of issues, from trying to obtain credit to leasing an apartment.

A study from the National Fair Housing Alliance – a consortium of more than 200 private, nonprofit fair housing organizations, state and local civil rights agencies, and individuals from throughout the United States – found that "our current credit-scoring systems have a disparate impact on people and communities of color. These systems are rooted in our long history of housing discrimination and the dual credit market that resulted from it. Moreover, many credit -scoring mechanisms include factors that do not just assess the risk characteristics of the borrower; they also reflect the riskiness of the environment in which a consumer is utilizing credit, as well as the riskiness of the types of products a consumer uses."

Meanwhile, the rent is due, but Michael doesn't get paid until next Friday.

So, he heads to the nearest payday loan store, where he is forced to pay sky-high interest for a short-term loan. Millions of Americans use payday loans, which remain among the most expensive forms of consumer credit. A typical two-week payday loan charging $15 for every $100 borrowed carries an annual percentage rate of nearly 400 percent.

This is a vicious cycle. Every time Michael gets paid, he is already financially behind because he has an enormous interest payment to make from his last paycheck – which means he has to take out another of these high interest loans to just barely keep up with the interest.

Michael has an accident that damages his car, but he doesn't have the money to pay the deductible to get it fixed. His job is an hour away from his home and there is no public transportation that can get him there. Michael loses his job.

According to the Federal Reserve, 45 percent of American adults have not set aside money for three months of expenses in an emergency "rainy day" fund. Some of this group say they could possibly borrow money from friends or family. However, 30 percent of Americans say they couldn't cover three months of expenses by any means.

Michael got a ticket because of the car accident but, because he lost his job, he is unable to pay the fine. A warrant is issued, and Michael is arrested.

The cards are already stacked against Michael. Black Americans continue to face enormous disparities in the criminal justice system. Black adults are imprisoned in state and federal prisons at more than five times the rate of white adults. And according to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, after controlling for available personal and offense characteristics, black men sentenced in federal court received overall sentences 13.4 percent longer than white men and were 23.4 percent less likely to receive probation. Even among defendants who were sentenced to prison, black men received prison terms 4.7 percent longer than white men.

Michael is in jail. Two years pass.

Michael was brutally attacked by another inmate his first week in jail. Even though by all accounts Michael did nothing to provoke the attack, both he and the other guy were charged with felony assault. Michael has been released from prison but now has a felony on his record. He has been unable to find steady work since getting out.

Since the Bureau of Labor Statistics began tracking unemployment by race in 1972, the black unemployment rate has consistently been higher than the white unemployment rate and has generally hovered

around twice as high – a persistent disparity often described as the "two-to-one" unemployment gap.

To add insult to injury, substantial earnings disparities remain. In 2025, the median black full-time wage-and-salary worker earned $986 per week, compared with $1,231 for the median white worker – about 80 cents for every dollar earned by white workers.

Michael was recently diagnosed with kidney disease.

The Atlantic magazine reports that "across the United States, black people suffer disproportionately from some of the most devastating health problems, from cancer deaths and diabetes to maternal mortality and preterm births. Although the racial disparity in early death has narrowed in recent decades, black people have the life expectancy, nationwide, that white people had in the 1980s – about three years shorter than the current white life expectancy. African Americans face a greater risk of death at practically every stage of life."

"In Baltimore, a 20-year gap in life expectancy exists between the city's poor, largely African American neighborhoods and its wealthier, whiter areas. A baby born in Cheswolde, in Baltimore's far-northwest corner, can expect to live until age 87. Nine miles away in Clifton-Berea, the life expectancy is 67, roughly the same as that of Rwanda, and 12 years shorter than the American average. Similar disparities exist in other segregated cities, such as Philadelphia and Chicago."

Michael and Angela are out of options. They move into a government housing facility in a very dangerous, high-crime neighborhood. Their son, James, is now four years old. It's time for him to head to school.

In 2019, right before the Covid-19 crisis, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) – commonly referred to as The Nation's Report Card – revealed that 40 percent of 4th graders and 34 percent of 8th graders performed at or above the *Proficient* level in Math, a level that represents "solid academic performance." Only 8 percent of 4th graders and 10 percent of 8th graders performed at

the *Advanced* level. In reading, 37 percent of 4th graders and 36 percent of 8th graders performed at or above the *Proficient* level. Only 9 percent of 4th graders and 4 percent of 8th graders performed at the *Advanced* level.

Breaking the numbers down by race is absolutely devastating. In 4th grade math, there was a 32-point score gap between white and black students (51 percent to 19 percent) and a 25-point score gap between white and Hispanic students (51 percent to 26 percent). In 8th grade math, there was a 31-point score gap between white and black students (44 percent to 13 percent) and a 24-point score gap between white and Hispanic students (44 percent to 20 percent).

In 4th grade reading, there was a 27-point score gap between white and black students (47 percent to 20 percent) and a 24-point score gap between white and Hispanic students (47 percent to 23 percent). In 8th grade reading, there was a 27-point score gap between white and black students (45 percent to 18 percent) and a 22-point score gap between white and Hispanic students (45 percent to 23 percent).

Minority children are always hit the hardest. In the case of the Covid-19 disruption, any progress made in closing the educational gap over the past two decades was essentially wiped out. An economist at Stanford, Eric Hanushek, put it this way: "This cohort of students is going to be punished throughout their lifetime."

Fifteen years pass.

Meet James, a black man who lives in Austin, Texas. One of James' earliest memories is hysterically crying while trying to revive his father, who collapsed from kidney disease. His dad died two days later.

His mother was devastated by the loss but was pregnant and had to support her family. James knew his mom had become a prostitute, and men would come and go all day and night. A couple of them had been nice to him, but those didn't seem to last very long. The others would beat him, mock him, have sex with his mother in front of him, burn him with cigarettes and force him to try marijuana at the age of seven.

Once in a while, his mom would ask him to deliver little packages around their decrepit apartment complex, instructing him to bring back the money he was given in return. His best buddy lived next door and they would leave really early on summer mornings and roam around the neighborhood until well after dark. After wheezing most of his life, the school nurse determined James had acute asthma, but he never got the proper medication to ease it.

When he was sixteen, his mom was diagnosed with a deadly heart condition, so James dropped out of high school to work full time to support her.

James' life has been difficult to say the least, but things are turning around! He recently got his GED, received a small pay raise at work, and married the love of his life, the very beautiful Kimberly. James and Kimberly just had their first child, a perfect baby boy, and they are ready to buy their first home. Everything is looking up for James!

Let's take this journey with James and Kimberly. The first stop is house hunting….

Nine Bad Habits We Need to Break

Bad Habit One:	Tolerating shady shenanigans from our leaders. Example: Government Reform
Bad Habit Two:	Refusing to learn from history. Example: The 2007-2009 Financial Crisis
Bad Habit Three:	Making legislation cumbersome, complicated and jam packed, which does nothing but increase costs and inefficiency and create confusion and uncertainty. Example: Infrastructure
Bad Habit Four:	Hitting the bulls-eye on the wrong target. Example: Education
Bad Habit Five:	Constantly reacting to negative outcomes as opposed to proactively anticipating them. Example: Global Trade
Bad Habit Six:	Getting stuck in ideology instead of just doing the math. Example: Health Care
Bad Habit Seven:	Allowing past prejudices and preconceived notions to prevent potential progress. Example: Health Care, again
Bad Habit Eight:	Foolishly believing, for years, promises made by politicians who have zero intention of keeping them. Then, if they do finally keep a promise, they wildly overreact and overcompensate – making the problem infinitely worse. Example: Immigration
Bad Habit Nine:	Being an unreliable partner. Example: Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Afghanistan

Bad Habit One
Tolerating Shady Shenanigans from Our Leaders

America, there are some seriously shady shenanigans going on. For the most part, I believe the best way to fight many of these is to just bust up the existing game of politics, like we're doing with 1787. After all, these shady practices are not the *root* of our problems… most of them are just unfortunate *consequences* of a severely broken system.

Unfortunately, there are certain things that are too destructive to our democracy to wait out. Every challenge we face is important, but we must get a handle on these things quickly because an honorable, resilient federal government is the bedrock of everything else we do.

Hashing through all the government reform issues requires its own book, but there *is* room here for me to rant about four examples of government rot that are particularly insidious: out-of-whack checks and balances, earmarks, lobbying, and redistricting and its inevitable associated gerrymandering.

See 1787's Plan of Action for Government Reform on p. 116 of the Policy Guide.

An honorable federal government is essential. But it's as essential that the American people *believe* that it is honorable. It's crucial that we have *trust* in the fact that: Our Constitution is being interpreted objectively; our judiciary dispenses justice impartially; our election commissions count votes accurately; our U.S. intelligence agencies act honorably; our scientific institutions research intelligently; our global alliances promote positivity; universities teach judiciously; private enterprise builds wealth honestly; media reports independently; and that our federal, state and local agencies operate autonomously.

Donald Trump's attempts to destroy our trust and faith in these institutions is one of the most destructive things he has done. No political figure – much less U.S. president – has ever undermined and assailed basic democratic principles like he has.

His job was made far easier by the fact that many Americans had been losing faith in their government for decades. Political scandals like Watergate and the Iran-Contra Affair – along with the corruption introduced by powerful lobbyists and well-financed special interests – began to erode the public's trust in its leaders and planted seeds of anger, disappointment and disrespect toward the White House, Congress, and other government institutions.

At the same time, the energy crisis in the 1970s, the savings and loans fiasco, and massive accounting scandals planted seeds of anger and animosity toward private enterprise, well before the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis solidified the outrage. The subprime bank bailout was particularly hard to swallow because the United States has consistently had the largest wealth divide between the rich and the poor for decades. Meanwhile, moral catastrophes like the My Lai massacre, the Iraq invasion, Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, and Hurricane Katrina called into question our national core values and threatened our global image.

The loss of trust is understandable, but we must put an end to this – quickly – because these American institutions are the backbone of our democracy. To be a healthy, highly functioning society, we MUST ALL have confidence that *all* our institutions are competent and acting in *all* our best interests.

This can absolutely be done, but we have A LOT of work to do. Americans' trust in their government remains near historic lows. In 2025, just 17 percent said they trusted the federal government to do what is right "just about always" or "most of the time" – one of the lowest readings in nearly seven decades of polling.

Confidence in Congress is similarly dismal. In July 2026, 72 percent of Americans viewed Congress unfavorably, while just 25 percent viewed it favorably. And back in 2023, a Pew survey found that an extraordinary 85 percent of Americans said elected officials *don't care what people like them think*.

Then there is the U.S. Supreme Court. In 2022, Gallup reported that Americans' opinions of the Court were the worst they have been in 50 years of polling. Just 47 percent of Americans said they had "a great deal" or "a fair amount" of trust in the federal judicial branch headed

by the Supreme Court – a 20-point collapse in just two years and, at the time, the lowest level Gallup had ever recorded.

In September 2025, just 49 percent of Americans expressed a great deal or fair amount of trust in the judicial branch – still near the historic low and far below the levels of 60 to 70 percent or more that were common for decades.

This is a huge problem. We cannot have Americans lose trust in the American judiciary. It just cannot happen.

In my mind, the primary reason the highest Court in the land has gotten such a bad rap is the perception that it has become insanely ideological and political. This is highly concerning – understandably – to Americans since the Supreme Court essentially has the final word on our fate as citizens.

…which is why Justice Clarence Thomas must be held accountable for his corrupt behavior (as described earlier), and what makes Justice Samuel Alito's breathtakingly bad judgement so damaging.

On May 16, 2024, The New York Times reported that an upside-down American flag had flown outside Samuel Alito's home after the 2020 presidential election.

Although the upside-down flag has always been a sign of emergency and distress for the military, in the weeks after the 2020 election and subsequent January 6th insurrection it was embraced by supporters of "Stop the Steal" (i.e., those who believed the false narrative that the 2020 election was "stolen" from Donald Trump). In fact, many Trump supporters at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th carried upside-down American flags for this reason.

This is obviously not a great look for a sitting U.S. Supreme Court Justice on any day, but especially not at a time when the Supreme Court was actively deciding – and would continue to decide – whether to hear cases surrounding the 2020 election, the Capitol riots, and Donald Trump himself.

But it didn't stop there. Less than a week after the first New York Times report, it was discovered that a second flag – known as the "Appeal to Heaven" flag – was flown outside the Alito's vacation home during the summer and fall of 2023. The Appeal to Heaven flag, also carried by Trump supporters on January 6th, is yet another flag that has

been embraced in support of the "Stop the Steal" movement (as well as Christian nationalism and other far-right causes).

Justice Alito's actions don't rise to the level of impeachment – since, according to the U.S. Constitution, impeachment should be reserved for "treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors" – but, at a minimum, given the circumstances he should have recused himself from *any* case involving January 6th and/or Donald Trump's involvement on that day.

Justice Alito repeatedly said that his wife was "solely responsible" for flying the flags – which is not hard for anyone to believe after she was secretly recorded at a party saying "I want a Sacred Heart of Jesus flag because I have to look across the lagoon at the Pride flag for the next month" – but he is delusional if he thinks he can just blame outrageously bad judgement on his wife going forward. In my mind, Justice Alito gets one mulligan. That's it.

< Just a gossipy side note: The secret recordings almost make you feel bad that Justice Alito has to put up with this from Martha-Ann. She said at one point that, after her husband asked her to please not fly flags, she agreed but then told him, "When you are free of this *nonsense*, I'm putting it up and I'm going to send them a message every day, maybe every week. I'll be changing the flags." How old is she, twelve? Ugh. And can you imagine her telling her husband – A U.S. SUPREME COURT JUSTICE – that his job is *nonsense*? >

Episodes like this are causing enormous damage. For the American judicial system to work, there must be enormous trust between judges and the American public – meaning our judges must be seen as fair and impartial. If they are not, the entire thing falls apart. This goes tenfold for the Justices that sit on the bench of the U.S. Supreme Court. Not only can Justices have *no* conflicts of interest; there cannot be even the *appearance* of any.

< Sidebar: In November 2023, under enormous pressure, the Supreme Court Justices released a Code of Conduct to "set out succinctly and gather in one place the ethics rules and principles that guide the conduct of the Members of the Court." The language is broad – for example, it prohibits Justices from letting "family, social, political, financial or other relationships influence official conduct or

judgment," and engaging in activities that "detract from the dignity of the justice's office," "interfere with the performance of the justice's official duties," or "reflect adversely on the justice's impartiality" – and offers no ideas on how to enforce the code or specific examples of compromised "activities" (i.e., expensive trips, R.V.s, and other perks given to them by rich friends). I guess we'll just have to wait and see if this is a serious attempt at changing behavior, or just a gaslight maneuver to try to squelch bad press. >

To restore faith and trust in the U.S. Supreme Court, there are two things we should do. The first is to end lifetime appointments for Supreme Court justices. The appointments can now be ten years, and the terms should be staggered to ensure that the terms expire fairly across presidential terms. (Warning: This is a heavy lift because it requires a constitutional amendment.)

The second thing we should do is expand the Supreme Court, but not for the reasons Democrats claim (i.e., to right past wrongs, or to ensure the Court is more balanced between "liberal" or "conservative"). In fact, that politically based thinking is exactly the problem.

Simply put, there are not enough justices on the bench. A small Supreme Court has outsized power and tends to be unrepresentative and non-collaborative.

If you have any doubt that this is where we are, just look at the partisan warfare that is ignited every time a seat becomes vacant. These nasty political fights are damaging to our country and only serve to divide us even more than we already are, not to mention that appointing like-minded Supreme Court justices becomes the most important decision(s) a president makes.

We should double the number of justices to 18, then add one more because we need an uneven number. The additional justices should be phased in gradually to avoid an advantage for any one political party.

Expanding the Court is much easier to do than enacting term limits because the current number of justices was established by Congress in 1869. Therefore, Congress can simply pass a law to change the size of the Court.

These two things are a solid start, but the most important thing we can do to restore faith in ***all*** our sacred institutions is to make sure

everyone gets *the facts* about them – instead of the usual political propaganda.

These days, for example, the prevailing narrative from the political Left is that the conservative majority on the Supreme Court is running roughshod over the left-leaning minority, creating a bitterly divided Court. However, *the facts* don't necessarily support this.

Although cultural topics that are typically viewed as partisan get the most attention (i.e., abortion, gay marriage, transgender rights, religious liberty), the Supreme Court's voting patterns are often more complicated than the familiar "six conservatives versus three liberals" narrative suggests.

The Wall Street Journal reported that, in the Supreme Court term that concluded at the end of June 2025, only six cases overall – or 9 percent – resulted in the liberal Justices dissenting as a bloc (resulting in an ideologically split 6-3 outcome). In only four cases – or 6 percent – there was an ideological split in the other direction, with Justices Thomas, Alito and Gorsuch dissenting as a bloc.

Given the panicked chatter from the Left, it may also come as a surprise that 42 percent of the rulings in the last term were unanimous. These decisions included a ruling to eliminate the "background circumstances" test for reverse discrimination claims under Title VII; a decision that found Wisconsin was wrong to deny a tax exemption to a Catholic Charities nonprofit; a decision that constrains lower-court judges who tried to intervene in federal environmental reviews; a decision that said American victims of terrorism are not prevented from suing the Palestine Liberation Organization in American courts; and upholding a law that effectively banned TikTok in the United States unless it is sold by its Chinese parent company.

Yet another surprise may be that Justice Elena Kagan – one of the Court's most liberal Justices – was in the majority of the non-unanimous outcomes 70 percent of the time, while super conservative Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito were each at 62 percent (tied with Justice Sonia Sotomayor). Justice Neil Gorsuch clocked in at 61 percent.

It's true that the 2025–26 term seemed considerably more ideologically divided. Nearly 29 percent of the Court's decisions were

decided 6–3, and roughly 23 percent of all decisions split along conventional ideological lines, with the six conservative Justices opposed by the three liberal Justices – more than double the share from the previous term.

But even then, significant cross-ideological coalitions remained. In the major birthright-citizenship case Trump v. Barbara, for example, Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Amy Coney Barrett joined Justices Sotomayor, Kagan and Jackson in holding that President Trump's executive order violated the Fourteenth Amendment. Justice Brett Kavanaugh agreed that the order could not stand, but on statutory rather than constitutional grounds.

… and then there is this. The Supreme Court has repeatedly reversed the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, which is based in New Orleans, covers Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi, and is widely regarded as one of the nation's most conservative federal appellate courts.

In the 2024–25 term, the Supreme Court reversed or vacated 10 of the 13 Fifth Circuit cases it reviewed – a reversal rate of 76.9 percent – including major cases involving "ghost guns," the Affordable Care Act and the Universal Service Fund, which provides billions of dollars to support telecommunications and broadband services.

And the pattern continued. In the 2025–26 term, the Fifth Circuit was once again reversed more times than any other federal appellate court – the third consecutive term in which it led the nation in total Supreme Court reversals. The Justices reversed eight of the 11 Fifth Circuit decisions they reviewed on the merits, or roughly 73 percent.

Another narrative coming from the political Left is that the conservative majority on the Court is making decisions specifically to do the bidding of Donald Trump. However, *the facts* don't support this either.

Don't misunderstand, I absolutely believe Donald Trump wants the Court's help in making him a king. Don't believe me? Just ask him.

On February 2025, he posted, "CONGESTION PRICING IS DEAD. Manhattan, and all of New York, is SAVED. LONG LIVE THE KING!" – along with a picture of himself wearing a crown. Four days before, he had posted the quote, "He who saves his Country does

not violate any Law," a quote largely attributed to Napoleon, a dictator who restricted freedom of speech, press, and women's rights; re-imposed slavery; empowered a greedy nobility; stole elections; and literally crowned himself emperor. No one ever excused this man of being subtle.

After his first term, Americans could be forgiven for thinking his decisions had been a one-off made by a rookie president, or maybe they didn't even know about them at all. But after the 2024 campaign, no one can say they didn't know his intentions because he certainly wasn't shy about telling the world exactly what they were.

On the 2024 campaign trail, for example, he said he would "use the president's long-recognized Impoundment Power to squeeze the bloated federal bureaucracy for massive savings" – which basically meant he planned to refuse to spend money Congress has appropriated if he didn't like what they appropriated it for. Never mind that, far from this being a "long-recognized" power, Congress severely limited this type of scheme during the Nixon administration.

So, it shouldn't have come as a surprise to anyone that, in his first year alone, he did – or tried to do – the following: unilaterally impose import taxes; hold migrants at Guantánamo Bay; abruptly fire civil servants, government watchdogs, independent agency members and a Federal Reserve member; bypass the confirmation process; seek to end birthright citizenship; dismantle/disrupt/destroy government agencies; target law firms, universities, and students over speech he didn't like; use troops on domestic soil; federalize the National Guard; centralize control over independent agencies; direct criminal investigations; expedite deportations; order military boat attacks; seize Venezuela's leader; and bomb Iran.

His "throw everything at the wall and see what sticks" approach led to the actions and activities of the Trump/Vance administration dominating the Supreme Court's time, energy, press and emergency docket in 2025.

As of September 2026, Just Security – an independent law and policy journal based at New York University School of Law's Reiss Center on Law and Security – was tracking 963 legal challenges to Trump administration executive actions.

The administration frequently encountered resistance in the lower federal courts, particularly during the first months of 2025. But when those disputes reached the Supreme Court on an emergency basis, the administration initially fared much better. During the Court's 2024–25 term, it granted the Trump administration relief in 19 of 21 emergency cases with clear outcomes – about 90 percent.

Those rulings allowed the administration to move forward, at least temporarily, with some of its most consequential policies, including large-scale reductions in the federal workforce, layoffs at the Department of Education, the cancellation of hundreds of millions of dollars in education grants, and the termination of temporary immigration protections for hundreds of thousands of people.

That said, most of those were emergency rulings, not final decisions that the administration's actions were lawful (they generally determined whether a lower-court order would remain in effect while litigation continued).

In the end, as major disputes subsequently received full consideration, the administration's record became considerably more mixed. In 2026, the Supreme Court rejected the administration's use of emergency economic powers to impose sweeping tariffs, struck down President Trump's attempt to restrict birthright citizenship, and rejected his effort to remove Federal Reserve Governor Lisa Cook. At the same time, the Court handed the administration an important victory in Trump v. Slaughter, substantially expanding presidential authority to remove officials from independent regulatory agencies such as the Federal Trade Commission.

Even still – unsurprisingly – many of the Court's decisions have caused outrage among Democrats, feeding directly into the *we're going to lose our democracy* because the *U.S. Supreme Court is doing the bidding of Donald Trump* narrative. But personally, I don't think that is what's really going on here.

What's really going on is that many Democrats are confusing *losing our democracy* with just plain 'ol losing. Just because you don't agree with a Supreme Court decision doesn't mean your way is better, or that our entire democracy is about to crumble. It more likely means

that the Justices on the current Court take a more originalist and/or textualist view of legal questions than you do.

< An *originalist* interprets the Constitution according to the original public meaning of its words when the relevant provision was adopted. A *textualist* focuses primarily on the ordinary meaning of the words actually enacted, generally rejecting reliance on lawmakers' subjective intentions or purposes that cannot be found in the text. These two approaches often overlap.

A *living constitutionalist*, by contrast, believes that constitutional principles can be applied and understood in light of changing social conditions, contemporary values and circumstances rather than being confined to their historical understanding at the time of adoption. >

When it comes to Supreme Court decisions, people get so caught up in the *topic* of the case that they forget there are also underlying *legal questions* involved.

Take abortion, for example. The 2022 Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization decision overturned Roe v. Wade and Planned Parenthood v. Casey. The majority concluded that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion and returned the issue to "the people and their elected representatives."

This is important because the majority's reasoning reflected principles frequently associated with originalism. Although the Fourteenth Amendment's Due Process Clause protects some rights that are not expressly mentioned in the Constitution, the Court said such rights must be "deeply rooted in this Nation's history and tradition" and implicit in the nation's "scheme of ordered liberty." After examining the historical regulation of abortion, the majority concluded that abortion did not meet that test.

So, regardless of the Justices' personal views about abortion, *Dobbs* cannot accurately be understood simply as a decision about the abortion procedure itself. The majority framed it as a constitutional question: whether the judiciary had authority to recognize abortion as a right protected by the Fourteenth Amendment or whether abortion policy should instead be determined through the democratic process.

The dissenting Justices saw the issue very differently. Justices Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan argued that the

Fourteenth Amendment's protection of "liberty" should not be limited to rights recognized when the amendment was ratified in 1868. In their view, broad constitutional principles must be interpreted in light of the nation's evolving history, subsequent precedents and changing understanding of individual liberty. They also argued that *Roe* and *Casey* had become important precedents on which Americans had relied for decades.

That disagreement goes to the heart of the debate over constitutional interpretation: Should judges look primarily to the Constitution's text, history and original understanding, or can broad constitutional principles acquire new applications as society changes?

And it may also be true – personally, I think it's 100% true – that the current decisions being made by the Supreme Court have nothing at all to do with Donald Trump the person. In fact, my guess is that most of the Justices can't stand him (I've actually heard this from several of my friends in "the know"). Rather, the current decisions being made by the Supreme Court are based on the individual Justice's *approach* to interpreting the United States Constitution.

Obviously, the Trump/Vance administration is fully aware of each Justice's proclivities, which is why Donald Trump chose Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett in the first place (remember Democrats, losing elections has huge consequences).

The Constitutional approach of these three Justices – together with Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito and Chief Justice John Roberts – are the main reason the Trump/Vance administration feels so empowered to test the scope of Article II, Section 1, Clause 1 (the Vesting Clause) that says "the executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America" – embracing a concept called the *unitary executive theory*. The unitary executive theory holds that executive power ultimately belongs to the president, who therefore must possess substantial authority to supervise and remove officials exercising that power.

In 2020, in the majority opinion for Trump v. Mazars, Chief Justice Roberts wrote that the president is "the only person who alone composes a branch of government." Many people used his words as tea leaves to predict what the Supreme Court would do amid the Trump/

Vance administration's unprecedented power grabs (this is also a huge reason for the Democrats' *we're going to lose our democracy* because the *U.S. Supreme Court is doing the bidding of Donald Trump* narrative).

… but Justice Roberts' words weren't necessarily wrong. It is a fact that Article II of the Constitution says, "the executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America." Of course, for some people, that short sentence is screaming for clarity. What does "executive power" mean? Does it have any limits? If so, what are they?

The Court provided such clarity in Trump v. Slaughter in 2026, holding that the Federal Trade Commission exercises executive power and that Congress generally cannot prevent the president from removing its commissioners, substantially limiting the 1935 precedent Humphrey's Executor v. United States, which had permitted Congress to protect FTC commissioners from removal except for cause.

But the Court has also made clear that presidential power has limits. The Federal Reserve provides a particularly important example. The Court distinguished it from ordinary independent regulatory agencies because of America's long historical tradition of independent central banking. In Trump v. Cook in June 2026, the Court rejected the administration's attempt to immediately remove Federal Reserve Governor Lisa Cook, leaving her in office while litigation continued and emphasizing that Congress deliberately protected Fed governors from presidential removal except "for cause."

This distinction helps explain what otherwise might appear contradictory. Many of the administration's early Supreme Court victories involved control over the executive branch – removing executive officials, reducing the federal workforce, accessing government data, or temporarily withholding grants while litigation proceeded. Those decisions often fit naturally within the larger constitutional debate over how much control Article II gives a president over the executive branch. And many were preliminary emergency orders, not final rulings that the administration's policies were lawful.

But when the administration has claimed powers extending beyond executive-branch management, the Court has drawn sharp boundaries – and gone against the fervent wishes of President Donald Trump.

In December 2025, for example, the Court refused to allow the administration to federalize the Illinois National Guard for deployment in the Chicago area while litigation continued. The Court concluded at that preliminary stage that the government had not demonstrated the statutory authority necessary to do so.

Then came an even more consequential decision. On February 20, 2026, the Supreme Court rejected President Trump's use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to impose sweeping global tariffs. The Court concluded that Congress had not granted the president the virtually unlimited tariff authority the administration claimed.

The ideological alignment was striking. Chief Justice Roberts was joined on the controlling portions of the decision by liberal Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson—and by Trump appointees Neil Gorsuch and Amy Coney Barrett. Chief Justice Roberts went as far as saying, "the president's assertion of authority was "extravagant by any measure." Accepting the legal arguments presented, Roberts continued, "would replace the longstanding executive-legislative collaboration over trade policy with unchecked presidential policymaking."

Taken together, these decisions reveal a more complicated Supreme Court than the simple narrative that it either supports or opposes Donald Trump – or believes America should have a "King" or that no one is above the law. The Court has strengthened presidential control over much of the executive branch while simultaneously imposing significant limits when it concludes that the president has exceeded authority granted by the Constitution or Congress.

Listen, I get that many of Donald Trump's actions are frightening, and I also worry about the long-term effects many of his decisions will have on our democracy. Surely that is crystal clear by now.

But the idea that, since Donald Trump is such a "danger" to this country, we have the right to fight back with anything and everything we have at our disposal – even if it means sacrificing a few basic rules of our own here and there – is even more dangerous than he is. The only thing more destructive than having a president with autocratic

tendencies is to overcompensate for him. When it comes to preserving democracy, two wrongs *do not* make a right.

Take the case Trump v. United States, decided in July 2024. Trump argued that a former president was absolutely immune from criminal prosecution for official acts and that prosecution could not occur unless the president had first been impeached by the House and convicted by the Senate. The Supreme Court agreed to decide a narrower question: "Whether and if so to what extent" a former president enjoys immunity from criminal prosecution for conduct involving official acts while in office.

In a 6–3 decision divided along ideological lines, the Court rejected both extremes. It rejected Trump's claim of absolute immunity for all official acts but also rejected the government's argument that a former president generally enjoys no immunity from criminal prosecution.

Instead, the Court established three categories. A former president has absolute immunity for actions within his core constitutional powers; at least presumptive immunity for other official acts; and no immunity whatsoever for unofficial acts.

The Court also did more than simply send the entire question back to the lower courts. It held that Trump was absolutely immune from prosecution for his alleged discussions with Justice Department officials and that his communications with Vice President Mike Pence involved at least presumptively immune official conduct. But it left the lower courts to determine the status of other alleged conduct, including Trump's interactions with state officials, private individuals and the public concerning the 2020 election.

Well, it goes without saying that Democrats went berserk, saying that the Supreme Court was obviously in Donald Trump's "pocket" and that they had essentially made him "a king." President Biden said that "this nation was founded on the principle that there are no kings in America. Each of us is equal before the law" – but that had now "fundamentally changed."

Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) chimed in, saying: "This disgraceful decision by the MAGA Supreme Court – which is

comprised of three justices appointed by Mr. Trump himself – enables the former President to weaken our democracy by breaking the law."

In her dissent, Supreme Court Justice Sotomayor went as far as to write that the ruling reinvented post-presidential immunity "through brute force," and that it "makes a mockery of the principle" that "no man is above the law."

These reactions are ridiculous. That IS NOT what the Court did in the least. Chief Justice Roberts was 1000% right when he said that Justice Sotomayor's words "strike a tone of chilling doom that is wholly disproportionate to what the court actually" did.

Apparently, Democrats believe the Supreme Court should have ruled on whether Donald's actions in this case were "official" or "unofficial," which *wasn't the question before them*.

The case before the Supreme Court wasn't whether presidents are simply "above the law" – the majority expressly said they are not. It was about how much protection the Constitution requires for official presidential conduct so that the threat of later criminal prosecution does not interfere with a president's ability to perform the duties of the office.

And the Court did not declare all of Trump's conduct surrounding the 2020 election immune. It decided that some alleged conduct was protected, established the constitutional framework for evaluating the rest, and sent the case back to the lower courts to apply that framework.

Unfortunately, the same pattern emerged after the Supreme Court, in Trump v. CASA, significantly limited the power of federal courts to issue nationwide injunctions – a decision Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson called "an existential threat to the rule of law" that created "a zone of lawlessness within which the executive has the prerogative to take or leave the law as it wishes," where "all bets are off."

It's important to remember that, even though this case involved birthright citizenship, the Court didn't address the constitutionality of President Trump's Executive Order to end it. The decision they made was specifically about what the proper role of the federal courts are within our constitutional system.

Based on their horrified reactions to the ruling, the political Left evidently believes that universal injunctions – which are court orders

that halt the enforcement of government policies for everyone across the country, not just the parties involved in any specific case – are a tool that should be used to provide a check on the Executive Branch (at least as long as Donald Trump is president).

But it's not the job of federal courts to conduct general oversight of the Executive Branch. The role of federal courts is to resolve cases and provide relief to plaintiffs consistent with the authority given to them by Congress. All the Supreme Court did was confirm that nationwide injunctions give individual judges, particularly at the district court level, outsized power – which they do.

It's also important to remember that, at the same time they made this decision, the Court paused Trump's birthright-citizenship order for thirty days, giving potential challengers time to block the order in one of several other ways.

One way was to reframe the legal challenge as a class-action lawsuit that sought to protect all children born to families without permanent legal status (class action lawsuits allow large groups of people who have the same issue a chance to come together and sue as a group. If a judge sides with the group against a federal law or policy, the judge can then issue a binding order that protects everyone in the group from being subject to the law or policy).

… which is exactly what happened. Within hours of the Court's decision, one of the groups challenging Trump's birthright citizenship policy refiled it as a class action and, within two weeks of that move, U.S. District Judge Joseph Laplante of New Hampshire approved a request to certify a class-action lawsuit against the administration on behalf of U.S.-born children or future children whose automatic citizenship could be jeopardized by the president's executive order. Then he placed a new nationwide block on Trump's efforts to end birthright citizenship.

That case eventually became Trump v. Barbara, and in June 2026 the Supreme Court finally confronted the underlying issue that *CASA* had deliberately avoided. This time, the administration lost: the Court held that Trump's restriction on birthright citizenship could not stand.

The two decisions therefore addressed very different constitutional questions. In *CASA*, the administration prevailed on the scope of

federal courts' power to issue universal injunctions. In *Barbara*, it lost on the underlying birthright-citizenship policy itself.

Let's get real here. After Trump v. United States – the case where the high court left it in the hands of the lower court to decide whether Trump was acting "officially" or "unofficially" when he challenged the results of the 2020 presidential election – Democrats were lashing out, not over the merits of the case, but because Donald's attorneys were able to delay his trial until after the 2024 election. Meaning they were mad that the Supreme Court *didn't play better politics* – WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT THEY SAY REPUBLICANS DO!

They were outmaneuvered yet again, and it infuriated them. So, what do they do? They start disparaging the United States Supreme Court, which undermines our institutions and cause people to lose trust in our system – WHICH, AGAIN, IS EXACTLY WHAT THEY ACCUSE REPUBLICANS OF DOING!

Make no mistake, Democrats doing things like this is every bit as dangerous as *anything* Donald Trump has said or done regarding the Supreme Court or anything else. Undermining our institutions is undermining our institutions, regardless of how pious and patriotic you try to sound when you do it.

Checks & Balances

Our system of checks and balances is completely out of whack – which is unacceptable because separation of powers is fundamental to both our democracy and rule of law. The U.S. Constitution is clear: The Legislative Branch (Article 1), the Executive Branch (Article 2), and the Judicial Branch (Article 3) each have separate and independent powers, and each branch is given equal weight. There is *ZERO* wiggle room in this.

Except that's not how it's playing out. We have a power-hungry executive branch that is spinning out of control and a hyper partisan-driven Congress that just sits there like lap dogs and allows it to happen (this goes for both parties).

Although President Trump pushed the limits of executive power to unfathomable levels in his first term – and continues his quest for total

domination in his second – the Lone Wolf mentality of the Executive Branch has been inappropriately increasing for decades.

President Obama severely overreached when his administration unilaterally paid for cost-sharing subsidies after the Affordable Care Act passed, while President Biden did when he tried to unilaterally cancel billions of dollars in student loans – both being nice gestures if they weren't *straight-up unconstitutional*.

Within hours of his inauguration, President Joe Biden had signed fifteen executive orders and two additional actions to rescind Trump-era policies, including ones regarding immigration, the pandemic response, and climate change. Within sixteen days, Biden had signed three times the number of executive orders than past presidents had at the same point in their presidencies.

Among other things, Biden ended the bans on Muslim travel and transgender military service; revoked the abortion "global gag rule," the 1776 Commission, and the permit for the Keystone XL pipeline; plus stopped construction on "The Wall." He also rejoined the Paris Climate Agreement and reiterated U.S. support for the World Health Organization.

Then, of course, the pendulum swung back hard the other way, and Donald Trump is now back in the White House flooding the zone with executive orders like a bat out of hell.

On the first day of his second presidency, he signed twenty-six executive orders, including ones to roll back the Biden administration's climate and environmental regulations; ending birthright citizenship in the U.S; withdrawing from the Paris climate agreement and the World Health Organization (again); recognizing two sexes; and revoking the security clearances of his former national security adviser, John Bolton, and any former intelligence officials who signed onto a letter saying the Hunter Biden laptop story was Russian disinformation (you know, the *really important* things a president should be doing on their first day).

By the sixth week of his second presidency, President Trump had signed over eighty executive orders and, also by the sixth week, over a hundred lawsuits had been filed to stop him. Plus, five former Treasury Secretaries had written an essay titled Our Democracy Is Under Siege and five former Secretaries of Defense had written a letter denouncing

his “reckless” firings of the Joint Chiefs chairman and several other senior military officials.

By September 2026, Trump had issued more than 280 executive orders since returning to office – far surpassing the 220 he issued during his entire first term – along with numerous presidential memoranda and proclamations.

This is an incredibly dangerous path we are on. Please believe me, an America without appropriate checks and balances is *not somewhere you want to be*.

Clearly, executive orders are being used as a substitute for having to build consensus in Congress to legislate. This approach is somewhat understandable given our two-party system has severely limited the ability to get things done, but the fact remains that the way executive orders are being used is *straight-up unconstitutional*. We need to get this back under control. *Right now*.

It’s true that, over the years, Congress has given the president a certain degree of additional discretionary power, but the Supreme Court has also ruled that every executive order must adhere to Article II and/or by statutes that Congress has already legislated. In other words, *Congress still makes laws, not the president.*

Originally, executive orders were designed as a way for presidents to establish directives, communicate priorities, and provide guidance within the bounds of existing law. A great example of the true intention of the executive order is the very first one, issued in 1789 by President George Washington to those in charge of the federal departments.

In part, his order said: “I am desirous of employing myself in obtaining an acquaintance with the real situation of the several great Departments, at the period of my acceding to the administration of the general Government.”

“For this purpose, I wish to receive in writing such a clear account of the Department, at the head of which you have been for some years past, as may be sufficient (without overburdening or confusing the mind which has very many objects to claim its attention at the same instant) to impress me with a full, precise, and distinct general idea of the affairs of the United States, so far as they are comprehended.”

In other words, Washington used the executive order kind of like a management tool, which makes sense because the U.S. Constitution says that the president may "require the opinion, in writing, of the principal officer in each of the executive departments, upon any subject relating to the duties of their respective offices."

The example that best illustrates my point is perhaps the most consequential presidential overreach in American history: President Lincoln's Proclamation 95 (the Emancipation Proclamation). This 1862 executive order/presidential proclamation changed the legal status of over 3.5 million slaves.

This remains the single bravest, most noble action in U.S. history. But since Proclamation 95 essentially overturned the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 – a law that forced slaves to be returned to their "owner" if captured – it fell outside Constitutional presidential action. No one knew and respected the rules more than President Lincoln, so he quickly followed the Emancipation Proclamation up with a demand that southern states include abolition in their plans for Reconstruction, as well as a hard push for the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment – which finally ended slavery for good.

President Lincoln's actions *after* the Emancipation Proclamation are the most instructive when it comes to executive orders. In their essence, executive orders are nothing more than theatre because they are *temporary*. They provide a way for presidents to look like they are doing something – and they may be for three or four years – but in the end they achieve nothing because they can simply be rescinded by the next president (as illustrated by the Trump – Biden – Trump yo-yo).

Imagine if President Lincoln had just stopped after he made his initial proclamation by executive order. Andrew Johnson was the next president. Andrew Johnson, one of the most hideous, racist presidents in American history. Andrew Johnson who opposed Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and the Fourteenth Amendment.

Imagine if Lincoln had just gotten lazy and simply left the freedom and protection of enslaved Americans to the fate of an executive order. Imagine if Andrew Johnson could have just repealed the Emancipation Proclamation? …which under the rules he most certainly could have.

This is a perfect example of why the founding fathers thought it was worth the time and effort to *actually pass legislation*. It's harder, no doubt. But it's *lasting*.

Beyond the constitutionality of executive orders, one of the most damaging things they do is create chaos and uncertainty. Take DACA, for instance. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, established by the Obama administration in 2012, allowed certain undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children to receive renewable two-year protection from deportation and become eligible for work authorization.

The kids protected by DACA – also referred to as "Dreamers" – were ecstatic and started to make plans for their unencumbered future in the United States. That is, until five years later when the first Trump administration attempted to end DACA. The Supreme Court blocked that effort in 2020, finding that the administration had not followed the requirements of federal administrative law. In 2021, President Biden directed the government to preserve and fortify DACA, and his administration subsequently established the policy through a formal DHS regulation.

But DACA remained tied up in court. In January 2025, the Fifth Circuit held that the Biden administration's DACA rule was unlawful, while concluding that protection from deportation could be separated from the program's work-authorization provisions.

Although those who became Dreamers before July 16, 2021 are surely relieved they will continue to be protected, their lives are still subject to political whiplash – especially now that Donald Trump is back. For hundreds of thousands of DACA recipients, that means a policy intended to provide stability has itself remained unstable – shifting between administrations and court decisions and leaving its long-term future unresolved. Although the prevailing sentiment may favor Dreamers *today*, they continue to live in a perpetual state of limbo about *tomorrow*.

The Courts obviously play a role here, but make no mistake, the people who bear the most responsibility for allowing *whoever* is president – Democrat or Republican – to get away with this are

members of the United States Congress, who should be ashamed of themselves.

The most destructive consequence of an overly empowered Executive Branch is that, as the power of the presidency has grown, the power of Congress has equally diminished.

For example, the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power to protect civilian control of the military by setting forth congressional war powers (Article I, Section 8). This is critical not only to protect our rule of law, but also to ensure we have solid national security objectives and a smart, thoughtful foreign policy strategy. Most importantly, our troops must be certain that the dangerous missions we ask them to engage in are fully warranted and vetted.

But, for well over two decades, Congress has taken the coward's way out, purposely avoiding tough votes on military action. For some insane reason, we have allowed our leaders to use a two-decades old congressional authorization – the longest-running authorization for the use of military force in U.S. history – to justify military actions that clearly fall outside the parameters of the original mandate. This violates the Constitution and deprives Americans the opportunity for vigorous debate and appropriate oversight.

This irresponsible inaction has given the U.S. president unlimited power to unilaterally make military decisions, which is unacceptable. *And straight-up unconstitutional*.

< In December 2025, Congress finally repealed the outdated 2002 and 1991 Iraq AUMFs through the FY2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Now, the 2001 Authorization of Use of Military Force (AUMF), enacted in the aftermath of 9/11, must also be repealed. Twenty-five years later, it remains in force and has been repeatedly invoked to justify military operations far beyond the circumstances for which it was originally enacted. Read more on p. 330 of the *Policy Guide*. >

Another fundamental responsibility of the U.S. Congress is inquiry and oversight (Article I, Section 8). The Supreme Court has ruled on this in several different ways: In Watkins v. United States (1957): "The power of the Congress to conduct investigations is inherent in the legislative process. That power is broad. It encompasses inquiries

concerning the administration of existing laws, as well as proposed or possibly needed statutes." In Barenblatt v. United States (1959): The "scope of the power of inquiry is as penetrating and far-reaching as the potential power to enact and appropriate under the Constitution." And in Trump v. Mazars USA: "Without information, Congress would be shooting in the dark, unable to legislate 'wisely or effectively.'"

All of this was preceded by a 1938 judgement by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit which found "a legislative inquiry may be as broad, as searching, and as exhaustive as is necessary to make effective the constitutional powers of Congress."

However, even when Congress does decide to fulfill its inquiry and oversight obligations, the effort is jammed up by blatant political moves like claiming *executive privilege*.

Among many, many other times in his first term, President Trump invoked executive privilege to try to block Congress from receiving the findings of the *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election* (a.k.a. the Mueller report) and to block witnesses in the investigation from testifying before Congress. In other words, he invoked executive privilege to try to stop Congress from conducting its constitutionally mandated oversight responsibilities.

The term "executive privilege" is not even in the Constitution. The U.S. Supreme Court did finally address this in United States v. Nixon (1974), acknowledging "the president's need for complete candor and objectivity from advisers." However, in that instance the Court was speaking specifically to judicial subpoenas.

Jeez. I'm exhausted. Okay, do we need any more examples of a checks and balances system out of control? What the heck, let me give you one more. And it's a biggie. Article I, Section 9, Clause 7 of the U.S. Constitution says: "No Money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law" – meaning Congress, and Congress alone, has control of spending policy. The Constitution is pretty clear on this, right?

In the Federalist Papers: No. 58 (uh oh! I'm bringing out the big guns!), James Madison – the "Father of the Constitution" himself – called this the *power of the purse*, as in "this power over the purse may, in fact, be regarded as the most complete and effectual weapon with

which any constitution can arm the immediate representatives of the people."

In his first term, President Trump tried to circumvent this mandate a thousand different ways, his favorite being declaring everything an "emergency."

In its purest form, declaring a "national emergency" is a crucial power used to provide an immediate, decisive response to sudden and unexpected catastrophes (think hurricanes, wildfires, pandemics and cyberattacks). There are around 150 statutory powers that can become available to the president upon a declaration of a "national emergency" – allowing him/her to intervene in extraordinary ways.

But naturally, these powers have been perverted and corrupted – bigly – and are now being used to both bypass Congress and blatantly infringe on constitutional rights.

The most obvious abuses in President Trump's first term were, of course, tied to his beloved border wall and illegal immigration. On February 15, 2019, he declared a "national emergency" at the U.S-Mexico border, giving him more authority to reallocate taxpayer money from other accounts to fund more than 230 miles of barriers along the U.S.-Mexico border. He also redirected millions and millions from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

President Trump also unlawfully went around Congress when he imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum imports by claiming Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, a provision that allows the president to levy tariffs on the grounds of "national security."

Surprising no one, he has doubled down on "emergencies" in his second term, starting with claims made on Day One that an "invasion" of "illegal aliens" constituted a "national emergency" along the U.S.-Mexico border. This allowed him to unlock federal funding – without congressional authorization – for his "Wall" that didn't work the first time around (see the immigration section) along with a vast array of other immigration enforcement.

Weirdly, he then invoked the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) multiple times for multiple – and very, very different – things.

For one, he used it to mess with trade again, claiming that "large and persistent annual U.S. goods trade deficits" and unfair foreign trade practices pose an "unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and economy of the United States." He also used the IEEPA to impose sweeping tariffs on Canada and Mexico, citing "national emergencies" related to drug trafficking and illegal immigration.

As egregiously, on their very first day in office, the Trump/Vance administration declared a "national emergency" because of our "precariously inadequate" energy supply, even though American oil and gas production was at record levels and gasoline prices were at their lowest in over three years.

The Trump/Vance administration also used the IEEPA to address threats from international drug cartels in January 2025, designating Mexican cartels, the Venezuelan prison gang Tren de Aragua, Salvadoran La Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), and other organizations as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) and specially designated global terrorists (SDGTs).

This declaration led to the Trump/Vance administration invoking the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, giving them wartime powers to deport citizens of nations engaged in war, invasion, or "predatory incursion" with little or no due process. Before this, the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 had only been used in the United States three times: the War of 1812, World War I and World War II.

The Trump/Vance administration used the Alien Enemies Act as an excuse to deport hundreds of Venezuelan migrants. This turned into a total mess – bordering on a Constitutional crisis – when Federal District Court Judge James E. Boasberg issued an order blocking them from using this law to deport people, then ordering the planes carrying the migrants to return to the United States. The administration ignored the order, however, sending hundreds of migrants to the extremely dangerous maximum-security mega-prison CECOT in El Salvador.

< In May 2025, the Supreme Court blocked the Trump/Vance administration from using the Alien Enemies Act to quickly remove the Venezuelan migrants and held that the government must provide "constitutionally adequate notice" before removal, so that individuals have an opportunity to go to federal court. >

These "national emergency" declarations are absurd – and *flat unconstitutional*. Full stop. Take trade, for example. There have been absolutely zero emergencies in either of President Trump's terms to justify his actions.

Article I, Section 8, Clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution (a.k.a. The Commerce Clause) says: "The Congress shall have power...To regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes." It's true that, under Article II, the president has the "power, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, to make treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur." However, that only means the president has the authority to negotiate treaties with the Senate's approval.

Even with the expanded powers Congress has given the president over the years to enact tariff polices – there are currently six statutory provisions in place that control how the president and the executive branch can use tariffs – s/he DOES NOT have authority over international commerce and/or trade. But, because Congress has no backbone, voilà. We suddenly have completely made-up "national security" situations.

To be fair, this "emergency" play can get easily twisted because the 1976 National Emergencies Act – which significantly weakened Congress' Article 1, Section 9, Clause 7 power – provides a framework for the president to declare a "national emergency" but doesn't define what a national emergency actually is – an oversight that we now know is a recipe for total disaster.

That said, it's not that difficult to read between the lines. The Supreme Court has held that "unless otherwise defined, words will be interpreted as taking their ordinary, contemporary, common meaning."

Using that guideline, Merriam-Webster defines "emergency" as an unforeseen combination of circumstances or the resulting state that calls for immediate action; applying to a sudden unforeseen situation requiring prompt action to avoid disaster.

When you add "national" to the definition, Merriam-Webster adds: a state of emergency resulting from a danger or threat of danger to a nation from foreign or domestic sources.

The key words here are *unforeseen* and *immediate*. So, I'll go out on a limb and say that something is not an official "emergency" if oil and gas production is at record levels and gasoline prices are at their lowest in years, or if the country has run a trade deficit for 48 years, or if your "solution" for the "emergency" will take 5+ years to construct (like, say, "The Wall").

Do we have issues that need to be addressed? Absolutely. Are they "emergencies" as defined here? Absolutely not.

The Earmark

Now on to a truly gross topic, the earmark. An earmark is a line-item in congressional legislation that allocates a specified amount of money for a specific project, program, or organization. Conveniently for lawmakers, the taxpayer dollars that are allocated for these specific purposes bypass customary budgetary procedures, and often the American people never hear about them. You may know this better as "pork."

This entire topic is just vomit. Instead of intelligent compromise and altruistic collaboration, Congress uses the American people's money as their very own re-election fund, exchanging their vote for money to fund their local pet projects.

The highly corrupt process ensures that the funding of these projects is based on power instead of merit, and they clearly exemplify one of the most fundamental problems with our government: a lack of transparency that leads to a significant absence of accountability.

Congress' exploitation of the earmark is so shady that it often borders on criminal. There is no other way to say it: These special projects, regardless of their worthiness, are straight up bribery. It's absolutely flabbergasting that we let them get away with this.

Please forgive me if this section comes across angry, but this topic makes my head explode. Because our dysfunctional two-party system has completely broken down, Congress has decided to pass legislation by simply paying one another off. Paying. One. Another. Off.

…in *the United States of America*. Not Colombia, not Mexico, not Guatemala, not Ghana. The *United States of America*.

The crazies have officially taken over the asylum and they have our checkbook. *This* is how the world's greatest democracy legislates? *This* is the level of corruption, malpractice and irresponsibility that we have decided to accept?

No. Just no. No! No! No! No! Remember when I said earlier that we could significantly reduce our deficit and balance our budget through little more than eliminating waste? This is *exactly* the kind of b.s. I was talking about.

Earmarks alone are reason enough to bust up the little party our members of Congress are having in Washington. This is *not* the way to run a country.

< Okay, I'm taking a break and going for a run before I have a heart attack. >

I'm back, in a much better state of mind (not for nothing, but when I said "run" in that last sentence, I meant "beer"). I will now calmly walk through the ways of the evil earmark.

Earmarks were technically "banned" in 2011, but that was pretty much a joke. In fact, Citizens Against Government Waste's annual Congressional Pig Book < is it just the beer or is that the greatest name of anything, ever? > revealed that Congress attached earmarks to all 12 appropriations bills during the so-called ban, adding on average 192 earmarks costing $9.4 billion.

Yes, you read that right. Even though there was an actual law prohibiting Congress from adding earmarks to legislation, they just completely ignored it and did it anyway. I guess laws just don't apply to them. In any country and in any language, that is the very definition of corruption.

Earmarks were brought back by the House in FY2022. Senate Democrats also voted to bring them back, but Senate Republicans voted to uphold the ban. Before you get too impressed by this moral stand, their agreement was nonbinding and many of them received earmarks anyway.

The 2024 Congressional Pig Book exposed 8,222 earmarks costing $22.7 billion. That brings the grand total to 132,434 earmarks costing $460.3 billion since FY1991.

The Pig Book also revealed that "earmarks continue to provide the most benefit to the most powerful legislators. In FY2024, the 90 members of the House and Senate appropriations committees, making up only 17 percent of Congress, were responsible for 42.2 percent of the earmarks and 35.2 percent of the money. Three of the top five recipients by dollar amount served on the Senate Appropriations Committee, and a fourth was Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY).

Senate Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Susan Collins (R-ME) claimed the most earmarks in FY 2024. Her 231 earmarks cost $575,580,000, which is $109,429,721, or 23.5 percent more than the legislator in second place, Senate Appropriations Committee member Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), who received 185 earmarks costing $466,370,279.

Three more senators rounded out the top five: Senator Angus King (I-ME), who received 186 earmarks costing $453,591,043; Senate Appropriations Committee member Brian Schatz (D-HI), who received 114 earmarks costing $ 428,634,250; and Senate Majority Leader Schumer, who received 227 earmarks costing $421,738,113. These five legislators, constituting just 0.93 percent of the 535 members of Congress, together received $2,345,913,685, or 10.3 percent of the total cost of the FY 2024 earmarks, the same percentage the top five claimed in FY 2023."

Are you kidding me with this?

In July 2025, Republicans in the U.S. Senate paid off Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska so she would vote for the One Big Beautiful Bill after threatening to vote against it over concerns about the bill's cuts to Medicaid and food assistance.

Who knows if she ever really cared about these cuts, but she certainly leveraged the heck out of them – getting tax breaks for Alaskan whaling captains and fisheries, plus a special exception to

lessen the pain of the cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The SNAP sweetener is particularly insightful, showing just how inefficient and incompetent Congress can be. As the One Big Beautiful Bill cuts federal funding for food stamps by $186 billion over ten years, the plan is for the administration of the programs to totally shift to the states.

However, Senator Murkowski made sure Alaska was exempt from this rule in exchange for her vote. But then the question became *how would the Senate do this*? Well, turns out that Alaska has the distinction of being the state *with the highest rate of incorrect payments in food stamp programs*. So, your "leaders" decided the best way to facilitate Senator Murkowski's demands was to delay federal cuts for states with the highest rates of erroneous payments – which effectively rewards states whose food stamp programs have the most errors and are the most inefficient. Great job, guys!

This absurdity didn't seem to bother Senator Murkowski in the least. She reveled in her good fortune, saying, "Do I like this bill? No. But I tried to take care of Alaska's interests."

Other goodies in the One Big Beautiful Bill include tax breaks for the rum industry in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands and coal used in steel production; $300 million to protect Donald when he stays at Mar-a-Lago and his other clubs in Virginia and New Jersey; $1.2 billion for the Secret Service to protect him and his family everywhere else; $150 million to help celebrate American's 250th anniversary; $10 billion for missions to the moon; $40 million for the creation of the National Garden of American Heroes; $85 million to move the space shuttle Discovery from a Smithsonian museum just outside Washington to a NASA-run museum in Houston for Senator John Cornyn (R-TX); and a significant increase in subsidies for large and profitable farms and farmers in Southern states.

These are pretty good, but some of my very favorite examples of earmarks showed up in FY2020, when Congress included $15.9 billion worth. Examples that year included $2.1 billion for twenty-two F-35 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft that, by the way, the Pentagon didn't even request (plus, doesn't the Pentagon have their own astronomical budget

already?); wild horse and burro management ($25.8 million); money to get rid of the poor little brown tree snake ($663,000); and $65,000,000 for Pacific coastal salmon recovery.

Listen, I love the Pacific coastal salmon as much as the next guy, but could whoever's in charge of their recovery not get it done with the $65,000,000 they received in both FY2018 AND FY2019? I'll do the math for you. In just those three years, the United States of America spent $195,000,000 on this one fish.

I mean, seriously? People, we have eighth graders *who can't read*.

"Underwater pests" – whatever the heck that means – should be super jealous of the Pacific coastal salmon, because they only got $39,325,000 in FY2020. But all the other fishies shouldn't worry, they weren't forgotten entirely! "Fish passage" and "fish screens" – again, whatever the heck that means – were funded in FY2020 with $11,400,000 of American taxpayer money.

< my head just literally exploded again. I'm going to have to go out for another "run" soon. >

If you're looking for President Trump to nip this in the bud in his second term, don't get your hopes up. Not long into his first one, before the "ban" was lifted, he said to members of Congress: "Maybe all of you should start thinking about going back to a form of earmarks. Our system lends itself to not getting things done, and I hear so much about earmarks – the old earmark system – how there was a great friendliness when you had earmarks."

Hey, I would be friendly too if someone handed me $65,000,000 to recover salmon. But let's get real, coming from the most transactional human being to ever sit in the Oval Office, that statement alone is evidence enough that earmarks are bad news.

Some people (mainly in Washington, naturally) would say that my animosity toward earmarks is a disproportionate response. After all, earmarks accounted for less than 2 percent of President Obama's $410 billion spending bill, signed less than two months after he took office.

Overlooking the fact that earmarks were less than 2 percent of an exceptionally bloated budget – and that the projects included thirteen that were driven by a lobbying firm accused of passing illegal campaign contributions to congressmen – when did $7.7 billion become inconsequential?

In fact, though the $410 billion was to fund the government for less than seven months, the earmarks in the bill equaled 16.5 percent of the entire 2010 budget for the Department of Education, 29 percent of the Department of Energy's budget, and 32 percent of the budget for the Department of Justice.

It's also important to remember that this occurred right after the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis, at a time when we had just spent billions on an unprecedented financial bailout. Because the supposed purpose of the congressional rescue was to stabilize our financial system and to strengthen it, one would hope that Congress would have been extra careful with our money.

Ha! As if. Even in a time of devastating crisis, they just couldn't help themselves. Amid the largest financial calamity in decades, and when the *only* concern should have been the protection of our economic future, our leaders crammed billions of dollars-worth of tax breaks into the bill at the very last minute – to the tune of $6.6 billion.

These included $6 million for the manufacturers of wooden arrows for children, $192 million for Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands rum producers, and $128 million for auto racetrack owners.

Representative John Murtha (D-PA), who himself included projects totaling $111 million, was quick to explain that people really shouldn't be annoyed with the clandestine add-ons, because the $6.6 billion in earmarks were just an itty-bitty percentage of "what the administration wants to bail out those rich guys in New York."

That is just a gross thing to say. Everyone in Washington knows full well that Americans are suspicious of earmarks in the very best of times. But in a time of economic crisis, when we were already on the hook for billions and billions of dollars, shoving *even more* billions of dollars-worth of earmarks into a spending bill feels like nothing less than a slap in the face.

If our leaders will blatantly squander billions against strong public dissent, how can we possibly feel confident that they make any prudent decisions on our behalf?

The oink-oink in President Obama's spending bill was even more frustrating given that he promised multiple times during his presidential campaign to finally correct the egregious practice.

Although *Senator* Obama requested 112 earmarks totaling more than $330 million in 2007, *presidential candidate* Obama declared, "We can no longer accept a process that doles out earmarks based on a member of Congress' seniority, rather than the merit of the project. The entire earmark process needs to be re-examined and reformed."

On the 2008 campaign trail, Obama specifically said, "I've pledged to slash earmarks by more than half when I am President of the United States." He went on to say, "I will go through the entire federal budget, page by page, line by line, and eliminate programs that don't work and aren't needed."

To be fair, I guess he eventually (kind of) tried with the toothless "ban," but not before he allowed $7.7 billion to slip through the net.

It was difficult even back then to find a member of Congress who would publicly defend earmarks – even though almost all of them jammed them into legislation – but those who did publicly defend them claimed earmarks are simply a harmless way to fund worthy projects in their districts.

Senator Dan Inouye (D-HI), then chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, came out swinging after critics slammed the number of earmarks in President Obama's inaugural spending bill.

He cited the creation of programs like the F-22, the C-17, and the Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicle: "I dare anyone to suggest these are evil projects. It has helped to shorten the war. It has helped to save lives. It will bring back the brave men and women from Iraq. I think these few should remind us that earmarks are not evil."

Again, Senator, I will remind you that the Department of Defense has its own enormous budget. Why didn't you just transparently appropriate money for these non-evil projects in that? In addition to the military bonanza, other earmarks attached to the bill involved swine odor, tattoo removal, Mormon crickets, and lighthouses.

Whether these projects sound ridiculous to me or not, this conversation is not about judging the merit of them. Not every earmark is evil, wasteful or crooked. I have had three tattoos removed and know how liberating it can be.

But, again, what's with the secrecy?

If members of Congress are so proud of their decisions, why not openly share the worthiness of their hometown projects with those of us who pay for them instead of covertly attaching them to unrelated legislation? Why not be completely transparent, eliminate earmarks, and pass standalone legislation to fund all these goodies?

Back in 2010, Senator Mel Martinez (R-FL) agreed: "At a time when families are struggling to balance their budgets, when workers are concerned about losing their jobs, when states are struggling to maintain service levels, it's unconscionable Congress won't end its addiction to earmarks."

That would have been a heroic stance if Senator Martinez's earmarks in the spending bill hadn't totaled $106.7 million.

When asked about his hypocrisy, Senator Martinez's spokesman said, "Florida taxpayers are federal taxpayers and until all earmarks are stripped, Florida deserves its fair share" …which pretty much sums the entire problem up in a nutshell, no?

And the examples just go on and on and on. Before Obama, one of President George W. Bush's spending bills, worth $555 billion and signed at the end of 2007, passed with over 9,000 earmarks, at the time the second largest number in U.S. history.

Addressing his spending bill, President Bush said, "These projects are not funded through a merit-based process and provide a vehicle for wasteful government spending." But, of course, he signed it anyway.

Not only did President Bush sign the bill, but he also requested thousands of earmarks of his very own, including $6.5 million for research on the "fundamental properties of asphalt" and $330 million to eradicate plant pests like the light brown apple moth and the sirex woodwasp.

All in, President Bush and Congress had a huge year in 2007. In the Iraq Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act – a 2007 emergency appropriations bill to address military spending in Iraq – they covertly attached $21 billion (House) and $18 billion (Senate) of non-war spending.

This nonsense included $100 million for the Democratic and Republican national conventions, $3.5 million to fund tours of the Capitol, $13 million for ewe lamb replacement and retention, $74 million for peanut storage, $95 million for dairy producers, and $24 million for sugar beet growers.

These all, of course, were buried deep, deep, deep within the bill. The $100 million given for the conventions was included in a section called "Katrina recovery, veterans' care and for other purposes." Interesting.

I would certainly never diminish the importance of the sugar beet, but the funding of what I can only assume is some sort of plant should be addressed elsewhere, not hidden in a bill whose sole concern should be the safety and care of our military. And screw the national conventions. I'm sure Congress has other ways to pilfer our money for those. I cannot imagine a more insulting tribute to our troops.

Lobbying

Earmarks are most definitely evil, but then there is the lobbying naughtiness on Capitol Hill – which possibly makes my head explode even faster than earmarks. Most lobbying practices have become so detrimental to our nation that they too can no longer be tolerated.

Corporations, labor unions, trade associations, and other special interest groups have spent a whopping $85,425,249,175 to lobby Washington since 1998. There are 13,699 lobbyists working in the United States today.

This is not an anti-union commentary or an indictment of special interest groups or lobbyists on their merit. All voices in this country have an equal right to be heard, and these groups have as much of a right as anyone to contribute to the conversation.

These groups should not be demonized. In fact, many of the leaders of these organizations do an incredible job of giving their issue a heartbeat. Sure, some lobbyists are sleazy, but it's the politicians that sell out to them who cause the problem.

Within the brokenness of our dysfunctional two-party political atmosphere, the problematic dilemma with special interest groups is that there is no appropriate counterbalance to their control, which ensures them disproportionate influence that allows them to essentially own Congress.

In theory, a lobbyist is an expert in governmental policy that provides useful information to policymakers. In its purest form, lobbying can provide lawmakers with valuable knowledge of our nation's challenges and, sometimes, the exchange can even lead to plausible solutions. But unfortunately, the potentially productive act of sharing information has morphed into the decidedly destructive practice of people buying access and influence.

It is imperative we have significant lobbying reform that protects the right of Americans to have a voice but that puts an end to the modern-day corruption that exists among lobbyists, lawmakers, and the almighty dollar.

America, seriously, enough is enough.

Redistricting/Gerrymandering

Every ten years, the U.S. Census Bureau conducts a census and uses the data to assign each state the number of seats it will have in the U.S. House of Representatives for the next ten years. Individual states then draw legislative boundaries for congressional districts and state legislative districts. This process is conducted by the state legislature in some states, while a few states use independent commissions.

Redistricting is intended to give states the ability to appropriately respond to population shifts and to ensure that no geographic area is underrepresented.

Unfortunately, that's not the way it has played out. Opportunist politicians have kidnapped the system and made the despicable habit of drawing districts for competitive advantage standard operating procedure. Sophisticated voter profiling and a significant advancement in mapping technology allow legislators to essentially pick and choose the voters that will ensure their party's victory.

These fabricated districts are drawn specifically to capture the crazed party faithful, and the crazed party faithful demand likeminded candidates. Therefore, the possibility of a moderate candidate is largely eliminated and most of this country is silenced.

The prevailing system in most states is railroaded by partisan collusion and protects the interest of political parties to the detriment of the American citizen. Redistricting (to revise legislative districts) is certainly legal but, thanks to the 1995 Supreme Court decision Miller v. Johnson, gerrymandering (to divide an area into election districts to give one political party an electoral majority while concentrating the voting strength of the opposition in as few districts as possible) is 1000% *not*.

Gerrymandering is a blatant abuse of power and is a perfect example of partisan politics at its very worst. Its tentacles poison far more than just an election or two; gerrymandering is the breeding ground for the deep ideological split that now plagues this country.

In 2025, The Wall Street Journal reported that "in 40 states, a single party controls the House, Senate and governor's office – a so-called trifecta – or else has enough power to block vetoes from a governor of the other party. That leaves less than 20 percent of Americans living in a state where the minority party has a meaningful voice in governance. The result has been a deepening of differences in red and blue America."

…and this is just going to get worse if we don't do something, fast. Even though it has been only six years since the release of the 2020 census data, states have undertaken mid-decade redistricting at rates not seen since the 1800s. Since the summer of 2025, states across the country have redrawn congressional maps, although court challenges and referendums have prevented some of those maps from taking effect.

The scale is remarkable. According to a September 2026 analysis by Protect Democracy, 34.8 million Americans – roughly one in ten – now live in a different congressional district than they did during the 2024 election cycle. About one-fifth of Americans live in districts where more than a quarter of the voters are new to the district.

And the process is still unfolding. Missouri is currently set to use its previous congressional districts in the November election after litigation over its newly drawn map, while other states have pursued or considered additional redistricting that could affect elections beyond 2026.

That said, some heroes are holding their ground. Despite enormous pressure – which included the swatting of legislators' homes, death threats, and social media temper tantrums and threats of being "primaried" from Donald Trump – Republican legislators in Indiana voted their conscience in 2025 and defeated a dishonorable gerrymandering ploy. Thank you, Indiana!! Hooray for Hoosiers!!

See 1787's Plan of Action for Government Reform on p. 116 of the Policy Guide.

Bad Habit Two:
Refusing To Learn from History

"When the situation was manageable it was neglected, and now that it is thoroughly out of hand we apply too late the remedies which then might have effected a cure.

There is nothing new in the story.

It is as old as the Sibylline books. It falls into that long, dismal catalogue of the fruitlessness of experience and the confirmed unteachability of mankind. Want of foresight, unwillingness to act when action would be simple and effective, lack of clear thinking, confusion of counsel until the emergency comes, until self-preservation strikes its jarring gong. These are the features which constitute the endless repetition of history."

– Winston Churchill –

... the endless repetition of history. Although history is always there for us, patiently waiting to impart its hard-earned knowledge, we often continue to stubbornly disregard it.

It's fascinating how soon we forget disasters, for example. From botched hurricane relief efforts to wars to financial crises, it seems we have little interest in examining cause and effect – which is unfortunate because that is perhaps the very best way to stop bad history from repeating itself.

In the years leading to the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis, for instance, there was a multitude of events – the savings and loans fiasco, the dot-com bubble burst, the Asian currency crisis, the Russian government bond default, massive accounting scandals, and blatant fraud – that presented alarming cautionary tales.

But the lessons weren't learned because – miraculously – the fallout from those events had little long-term significance to Americans. Any one of these events should have brought our economy

to a screeching halt but we somehow recovered from them virtually unscathed. Yet someday, if we're not diligent, *the music will stop and there won't be enough chairs*.

Throughout the financial crisis, the term *moral hazard* was widely used in reference to the government "bailing out" the financial industry. Moral hazard is the idea that people take riskier risks if they are not the ones who directly feel the consequences of their actions. How little has changed since 2007 proves that those concerned about moral hazard had a very valid point.

… yet these are lessons we clearly haven't learned yet. Although, even with the bailouts, the consequences of the 2007-2009 global financial catastrophe were massive, it seems like people started to believe – pretty much the second the crisis was finally in our rearview mirror – that the good times were going to once again roll forever. *Laissez les bons temps router*!

I'm the first to admit that, before the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis, my self-interest had started to overshadow my self-sacrifice. I had become so seduced by the glitter of the American Dream that I lost sight of its glory.

But then that wakeup call came. The first few days of the financial crisis felt like the last day of a four-day Vegas trip. You know the one – where you live daring and carefree and throw all caution to the wind… the one where, although you really don't know what the heck you're doing, you throw that dice like a high roller and double down and hit 18 like the high-rolling gambler you are.

The trip where, on the final morning, you suddenly feel irresponsible and reckless as you mentally calculate the little cash you have left as you fearfully check for a wedding ring.

After a few days, fear quickly turned into anger and frustration because most of us felt blindsided by the financial disappearing acts in the markets. But then, unexpectedly, something else started to tug at our subconscious. Although it would be far easier to ignore the rude intrusion and continue to blame uncontrolled traders and corrupt executives, feelings of regret, responsibility and guilt crept in as we tried to answer a question that in retrospect was as inevitable as it was disturbing: *Why did we allow things to get this out of control*?

It would have been painful enough to look at our 401(k) statements if we were unaware that a day of reckoning was coming, but many of us had a gut feeling that a debt far costlier than our Visa bill was about to come due – the nagging sensation that most of us had tilted more toward the glitter than the glory.

We already knew it happened on Wall Street, where a few bad apples show contempt for responsible governance and even the most minimal discipline and compromise morality and ethics for nothing more than quick wealth. We already knew it dominated Congress, where our leaders use our tax dollars as their very own re-election fund, and often sell us out to the highest bidder. But we also knew that the trend extended beyond Washington and Wall Street.

From the edge of the abyss – where an international crisis of confidence crashed into a citizen's crisis of conscious – it was impossible to ignore in that moment that we *all* needed to make changes. But did we?

Read more about the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis – a cautionary tale for the ages – on p. 95 of the Policy Guide.

Bad Habit Three

Making Legislation Cumbersome, Complicated and Jam Packed, Which Does Nothing but Increase Costs and Inefficiency and Create Confusion and Uncertainty

Behold, one of the most fundamental problems in Washington! Albeit the atmosphere is already toxic – or probably *because* of that – politicians decide the best way to proceed with their legislative agenda is to cram as many issues as possible into a bill, which does nothing but *increase* costs and inefficiency and *create* confusion and uncertainty.

The examples are endless. The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act – the sweeping financial reform legislation passed in the wake of the 2007–2009 Financial Crisis – was

848 pages long. Within five years, however, federal regulators had published 22,296 pages of proposed and final Dodd-Frank-related rules in the Federal Register (of those, 13,115 pages represented finalized rules).

To put this into perspective, the National Bank Act of 1864, a law that helped establish our entire banking system, was just 29 pages long. The Federal Reserve Act of 1913, which created the Federal Reserve system, was 30 pages, and the Banking Act of 1933 (a.k.a. Glass-Steagall), the law that separated commercial banking from investment banking and created the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), was just 37 pages.

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act itself ran 906 pages when enacted in 2010, with a companion reconciliation law adding another 55 pages. But implementing the law required federal agencies to produce thousands of additional pages of proposed and final regulations, guidance, explanations, and related material in the Federal Register.

The sheer breadth and depth of the bill led former Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), one of the primary authors of the legislation, to say it's "probably the most complex piece of legislation ever passed by the United States Congress" and "just beyond comprehension."

Guys, there is *no way* these mammoth bills are as efficient as they could – or should – be. To make any sort of progress, there is one thing we must do before all else: Simplify. Legislation needs to be clear, precise and uncomplicated – the exact opposite of what happens today.

Bad Habit Four: Hitting the Bulls-Eye on the Wrong Target

Our federal government is absolutely genius at hitting the bulls-eye on the wrong target. Why do we, time after time and issue after issue, keep going back to failed policies and political philosophies that don't work? Answer: Because that's the *easy* thing to do.

It's easy to vote yes to billions of dollars in funding. It's easy to hand someone a school voucher, or promise to give them free housing, college, and health care. It's easy to attend meetings ad nauseam to discuss tweaking existing, but failing, programs.

But just going through the motions like this is only lulling us into a false sense of security that allows us to foolishly believe that things may actually get better by doing these things. *At least*, we tell ourselves, *we're doing <u>something</u>*!

But we're not. The only way things will truly get better is if we learn from past mistakes, then roll up our sleeves and do the really hard work of developing a clear, thorough and accountable plan of action – *<u>before</u>* we spend billions of dollars on it. Let's look at education reform as an example.

The success or failure of our education system will determine if we are able to preserve supremacy within the global power structure. The way we educate our children – *<u>all</u>* our children – has increasingly historic implications for every single one of us. In this relatively new era of world interdependence, an uneducated, unskilled, and unprepared work force equals an unparalleled disaster for this country.

And don't be fooled. Regardless of the havoc the Trump/Vance administration is wreaking with their shockingly irresponsible trade war, America's long-term commitment to worldwide commerce will not likely change any time soon because, realistically, retreating from the rest of the world is not a long-term option. That's just not the world we live in anymore. Temporary economic assistance for displaced workers may help in the short term, but at the end of the day it's education and education alone that will be the great equalizer.

And we're failing at it, spectacularly.

In November 2025, the University of California at San Diego – ranked sixth nationally by U.S. News & World Report – released a shocking report. It said, in part:

"Over the past five years, UC San Diego has experienced a steep decline in the academic preparation of its entering first-year students –

particularly in mathematics, but also in writing and language skills. Between 2020 and 2025, the number of students whose math skills fall below high school level increased nearly thirtyfold; moreover, 70 percent of those students fall below middle school levels, reaching roughly one in twelve members of the entering cohort.

This trend poses serious challenges both to student success and to the university's instructional mission. Admitting large numbers of underprepared students risks harming those students and straining limited instructional resources."

This sounds bad enough, but the details are mindboggling. Since the skills of their incoming students were so dismal, USC was forced to add remedial classes for middle- and elementary-school math. You would think that the students in these new classes were among those in high school that never took advanced math, yes? Nope. Ninety-four percent (94%) of them had completed an advanced math class in high school (i.e., pre-calculus, calculus or statistics) and received an average of A- in the course.

USC found that, in 2023, students who had been in a remedial math class in high school basically had fifth grade-level abilities. Only 39 percent of them could correctly round the number 374,518 to the nearest hundred, which is a third-grade skill.

In 2019, right before the Covid-19 crisis, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) – commonly referred to as The Nation's Report Card – revealed that 40 percent of 4th graders and 34 percent of 8th graders performed at or above the *Proficient* level in Math, a level that represents "solid academic performance." Only 8 percent of 4th graders and 10 percent of 8th graders performed at the *Advanced* level.

In reading, 37 percent of 4th graders and 36 percent of 8th graders performed at or above the *Proficient* level. Only 9 percent of 4th graders and 4 percent of 8th graders performed at the *Advanced* level.

The *Basic* NAEP level means that the student demonstrated only "*partial mastery* of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade." Only 69 percent of 12th grade students achieved the *Basic* level in reading and 58 percent

of them achieved the *Basic* level in mathematics. Only 43 percent of them achieved the *Basic* level in U.S. History.

These next set of numbers should terrify every single American who values our continued democracy. Only 26 percent of 4th graders, 23 percent of 8th graders, and 23 percent of 12th graders were *Proficient* in Civics, and 19 percent of 4th graders, 14 percent of 8th graders, and 11 percent of 12th graders were *Proficient* in U.S. History.

Breaking the numbers down by race is absolutely devastating. In 4th grade math, there was a 32-point score gap between white and black students (51 percent to 19 percent) and a 25-point score gap between white and Hispanic students (51 percent to 26 percent). In 8th grade math, there was a 31-point score gap between white and black students (44 percent to 13 percent) and a 24-point score gap between white and Hispanic students (44 percent to 20 percent).

In 4th grade reading, there was a 27-point score gap between white and black students (47 percent to 20 percent) and a 24-point score gap between white and Hispanic students (47 percent to 23 percent). In 8th grade reading, there was a 27-point score gap between white and black students (45 percent to 18 percent) and a 22-point score gap between white and Hispanic students (45 percent to 23 percent).

That was then. You just won't believe what the numbers are post-pandemic.

In October 2022, the NAEP released its first results since Covid-19. Even though the federal government sent schools $190 billion in pandemic relief funds – to be used for interventions like increased tutoring, expanded summer school, and after-school programs – the math scores of 4th and 8th grade students showed the steepest decline in the history of the assessment.

In Math, just 26 percent of 8th graders performed at or above the *Proficient* level, a drop of eight percentage points, and only 36 percent of 4th graders performed at or above the *Proficient* level, a drop of five percentage points. In reading, only 33 percent of 4th graders and 31 percent of 8th graders performed at or above the *Proficient* level.

And the news just keeps getting worse. Even though the evidence was clear that school closures during the pandemic were disastrous for

our children *at the time*, we now know that instead of catching up, our kids are continuing to fall farther behind.

In a depressing report released in July 2023, NWEA – a research and assessment methodology organization – called this phenomenon "education's long Covid-19." The report revealed that the average student would need "the equivalent of 4.1 additional months of schooling to catch up in reading and 4.5 months in math" and that "marginalized students remain the furthest from recovery."

This last point should come as no surprise since minority children are always hit the hardest. In the case of the Covid-19 disruption, any progress made in closing the educational gap over the past two decades was essentially wiped out. An economist at Stanford, Eric Hanushek, put it this way: "This cohort of students is going to be punished throughout their lifetime."

Reporting from ProPublica reenforced all these assessments: "An analysis of data from about 80 percent of public schools in the country has found that, in districts that went remote for 90 percent or more of 2020-21, the decline in math scores represented the loss of two-thirds of a year, nearly double the drop in districts that were remote for less than 10 percent of the year. And these numbers don't take into account the millions of students who have vanished from the rolls entirely since the extended hiatus during which the norm of attending school eroded."

On January 29, 2025, the latest Nation's Report Card assessing students in 4th and 8th grade math and reading was released – and the nightmare continues.

Although public schools had pretty much spent all the $190 billion in federal emergency funding they received during Covid-19, there was no improvement in 8th grade math (although 4th graders got a two-point rebound after dropping five points between 2019 and 2022) and reading scores took a beating across the board. The number of 8th graders reading below the base line is now the largest in the assessment's history and the number of 4th graders reading below the base line is the highest it's been in 20 years.

In September 2025, the results for 12th graders were released, revealing record lows in reading and math. A third of high-school seniors don't have basic reading skills and almost half can't do basic

math. The average math score of 12th graders was the lowest since the current test began in 2005 and reading scores were roughly 10 points worse than when that exam was introduced in 1992.

We are in a full-blown crisis here, and we can't ignore it anymore.

Clearly, yet another generation of Americans is receiving inferior education and that is COMPLETELY UNACCEPTABLE. It's not only completely unacceptable… it's downright embarrassing.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international assessment administered by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that measures the reading, mathematics, and science literacy of 15-year-old students. Unlike other modern-day assessment tests, PISA questions do not measure memorization of facts. Instead, the questions measure real-world problem solving and critical thinking skills.

Highlights from the latest PISA report:

- U.S. students ranked 28th out of 37 OECD member countries in math, representing the lowest U.S. math scores since the test was first taken in 2003. Over a third of American 15-year-olds were "low performers," meaning they were unable to do things like compare distances between two routes or convert prices into a different currency. *Only seven percent of the American students could do math at advanced levels.*
- Half of 15-year-olds in Hong Kong performed as well or better than the wealthiest 10 percent of American students in math.
- There is a significant domestic gender divide. Ten percent (10%) of our boys scored at the highest level, compared with 5 percent of our girls.
- Black and Hispanic American students performed, on average, far below Asian and white students, and American students from low-income backgrounds scored lower than the more affluent ones.

† United States students ranked 9th in reading and 16th in science. Students from India and mainland China did not take the 2022 PISA test but, in 2018, China was first in all three categories (math, reading and science).

Guys, we CANNOT allow this to continue. If we don't turn this around – FAST – we will lose our global competitive advantage and NEVER get it back.

These disastrous scores from the NAEP and PISA are not just inconsequential numbers in some tired old reports. They mirror what is actually happening IRL (in real life) – and the harsh realities of our bleak situation are already coming into sharp relief.

It's not just the University of California at San Diego that's having to adjust. Many companies are now having to provide foundational learning classes for their employees (i.e., things like reading, writing, and basic math), and the U.S. military, the nation's largest employer, is now forced to offer academic prep courses for potential recruits after scores on the Armed Forces Qualification Test continue to decline.

Then there is this reality. In a Fox News interview in November 2025, President Trump said that the United States doesn't have workers with "certain talents" to fill jobs needed domestically. In response, Fox host Laura Ingraham said, "We have plenty of talented people here." To which Donald Trump replied, "No, you don't, no you don't… you don't have certain talents, and people have to learn. You can't take people off an unemployment line and say, 'I'm going to put you into a factory where we're going to make missiles.'"

Laura Ingraham is right: We do "have plenty of talented people here." But Donald Trump is also correct when he says we don't have enough people with "certain talents." Simply put, we are focusing on the wrong things for the future.

A report from the professional services organization Deloitte and the Manufacturing Institute estimates there could be as many as 3.8 million jobs in the U.S. manufacturing industry between 2024 and 2033. That's exciting! However, the report also warns that over 1.9 million of these jobs could go unfilled if the employee skills gap is not

addressed. Sixty-five percent of employers surveyed said attracting and retaining talent is their number one business challenge.

We have to recognize and respond to the fact that our job market is rapidly shifting, and we must do whatever it takes to ensure a flexible, dynamic labor market and a well-trained, adaptable workforce.

Combined, globalization and technology make drastic alterations to our educational curriculum an urgent priority. There has been a 75 percent increase in demand, for example, for simulation and simulation software skills in the last five years.

Jobs like statisticians, data scientists, engineers, computer and information systems managers, software developers, logisticians, and industrial maintenance technicians are increasingly needed, as are semiconductor processing technicians, machinists, welders, first-line supervisors, and electronics and electromechanical assemblers.

Without a doubt, we can fill this skill void by implementing new courses of study beginning in high school that give our kids the vocational and technological tools necessary to succeed in high-tech workplaces.

Luckily, our universities are still considered to be the best in the world, which is why the Trump/Vance administration needs to back off its attacks on them. The top three universities on the 2025 Shanghai Ranking Consultancy's list of the world's best universities – Harvard, Stanford and MIT – are in the United States. In fact, we have 16 out of the top 25 spots.

However, our continued success in higher education depends on the skill level of future American students, which is what makes the USC report such a flaming red flag. If the talent of our graduating students continues to diminish, our institutions of higher learning will have to progressively rely on foreign students to maintain their superiority (and we already rely on them heavily!).

Demanding educational excellence is not only a critical component of the United States' business model, but it is also our moral obligation as a great nation … which means we must solve the achievement gap once and for all. I say this not simply because it's the right and honorable thing to do for our fellow Americans, but also because the

negative financial impact of this injustice becomes more ominous every passing year.

Sixteen years ago, McKinsey & Company released a report called The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools. It was a cautionary tale for the ages:

- If the U.S. had in recent years closed the gap between its educational achievement levels and those of better-performing nations such as Finland and Korea, our gross domestic product (GDP) in 2008 could have been $1.3 trillion to $2.3 trillion higher. This represents 9 to 16 percent of GDP.
- If the gap between black and Latino student performance and white student performance had been similarly narrowed, GDP in 2008 would have been between $310 billion and $525 billion higher, or 2 to 4 percent of GDP. (They also noted that the magnitude of this impact would rise in the years ahead as demographic shifts resulted in blacks and Latinos became a larger proportion of the population and workforce).
- If the gap between low-income students and the rest had been similarly narrowed, GDP in 2008 would have been $400 billion to $670 billion higher or 3 to 5 percent of GDP.

During the pandemic, McKinsey provided an update to the 2009 report that said "if the black and Hispanic student-achievement gap had been closed in 2009, today's GDP would have been $426 billion to $705 billion higher. If the income-achievement gap had been closed, we estimate that GDP would have been $332 billion to $550 billion higher."

As we discuss these issues, it's important we all see the big picture as opposed to simply looking out of our own individual windows. You may not recognize your experience or your child's experience in these words, and I genuinely hope you don't. But, trust me, far too many

people do – and, as a nation, we cannot afford this. *We are all in this together*.

Think about it this way: Uneducated kids are just bad business. Take two fifteen-year-olds, Justin and Charles. Charles attends Highland Park High School, an exemplary school that should be congratulated for consistently ranking as one of the top schools in the nation.

Highland Park, an enclave of Dallas, is 91 percent white, and 88 percent of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher (63 percent of the teachers in the Highland Park Independent School District have a master's degree). The median household income is above $250,000.

Over 95 percent of Highland Park ISD graduates attend college, and the students consistently score above the national and state average on college entrance exams. The most recent statistics show that Highland Park High School students scored a composite 26.9 on the ACT, 7 points above the state average, and the district's average SAT composite score of 1286 is higher than the state average (978) and national average (1028).

Amazingly, 631 Highland Park High School students were recognized with Advanced Placement Scholar Awards by the College Board for demonstrating outstanding college-level achievement through their performance on AP exams and 257 students were recognized as AP Scholars with Distinction.

Across town, Justin attends Franklin D. Roosevelt High School. Justin's school recently received the equivalent of a D/F rating from the Dallas Independent School District. The average SAT score is 835 and the average ACT score is 15.5. U.S. News and World Report ranked Justin's school within the bottom 20 percent of all the schools in Texas.

Eighty-four percent (84%) of the students at Franklin D. Roosevelt are classified as "at-risk" of dropping out of school and only 67 percent of them manage to graduate in four years. Of those who stay, only 4.5 percent are considered "college-ready" in reading and math at graduation.

Since only 67 percent of students at Roosevelt graduate in four years, there is a high probability that Justin will drop out of high school before graduation. Workers without a high school diploma earn around

$734 a week while high school graduates earn around $946 a week, meaning Justin, if he drops out, will earn roughly $11,000 a year less than high school graduates. Since workers with a bachelor's degree earn around $1,533 a week, Justin will likely earn around $41,500 a year less than them.

In large part because of this wage disparity, a high school dropout will probably rely heavily on public assistance throughout his or her lifetime. High school dropouts also have more health problems and are more likely to be incarcerated at some point.

But the social services Justin and, presumably, his children will use are only half of the equation. The total financial cost to society remains severely incomplete if we fail to include the lost revenue from Justin's reduced tax contribution and his lack of participation in our national economy.

On the other hand, Charles will most likely graduate from both high school and college and, statistically speaking, earn at least $79,000 a year. If he gets a master's or other professional degree that figure is more like $99,500.

Assuming they both work until they are 65 – and depending on the path Charles chooses – Charles will earn and pay taxes on $1.6 million to $2.5 million more than Justin over their lifetimes. Plus, Charles' earnings will give him the financial wherewithal to buy homes, cars and other goods and services to fuel the overall economy.

When you consider what Justin is taking *from* the system as opposed to what Charles is adding *to* it, the business of education seems much more like an investment than some sort of charity case, doesn't it?

Our children are the most valuable resource we have. There is nothing – NOTHING – more important than protecting them and making sure they get the best education possible.

The best hope we have for our future is to create a culture of accomplishment in our schools that equals the optimism and ambition of this nation. We must create a learning environment that encourages children to succeed and convinces *every* child that success is possible – a place that makes us *believe* again.

To start, we should start with these five things:

1. Admit We Have a Serious Problem.

Our educational system has failed. Not *might* fail, not *is* failing – it *has* failed. Not every school and not everywhere, but when taken in its entirety, our kids are learning insufficiently to thrive in the increasingly competitive and complex world around them.

2. Recognize That Politics is Making Our Problem Significantly Worse.

The politicizing of American education can no longer be tolerated in any form or fashion. It's abundantly clear that education reform must be tackled outside of self-serving political maneuvering and entrenched bureaucracy. The arsenic of politics is never more apparent than with education policy, which is deeply troubling given that the stakes are never higher and the victims never more helpless. Through our chronic indifference and inaction as a nation, we have allowed our children to be sacrificed on the altar of selfish greed.

At a time when many of our children's futures are in jeopardy, our politicians treat their primary lifeline as a political football, tossing the challenges of education policy around like they are holding explosive dynamite.

Republicans choke at the faintest hint of anything remotely resembling a social safety net, while Democrats would never dream of compromising their own personal ATM machine, otherwise known as the teachers unions. No more.

3. Accept the Fact that Our Politicians Educational Efforts Have Been Frighteningly Inadequate for Decades.

For decades, in the face of devastating evidence, the White House and U.S. Congress have consistently refused to challenge failed policies or champion innovative ones.

For example, in 2010 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released an impact study on the effectiveness of the Head Start program, which was established in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty.

According to HHS, "the Head Start program promotes school readiness for children from birth to age 5 in low-income families through services that support early learning and development, health, and family well-being. The program is rooted in urban, suburban, and rural communities throughout the nation."

The results of the 2010 study were alarming. Although "providing access to Head Start had a positive impact on children's preschool experiences" and "access to Head Start had positive impacts on several aspects of children's school readiness during their time in the program," the "advantages children gained during their Head Start years yielded only a few statistically significant differences in outcomes at the end of 1st grade for the sample as a whole."

*** An Important Note: ***

> While I believe we have no choice but to honestly assess our current programs, I want to separate my overall verdict of the Head Start program from the many amazing people who work within it. I have spent time in many of these classrooms around the nation and have found most of the Head Start employees to have huge hearts for our children and to be tireless in their dedication to them. In my mind, by not making the difficult changes necessary for them to succeed, we are failing them as much as anyone. I say these things in support of them, not as criticism of them.

Two years later, a follow-up HHS report said this: “There were initial positive impacts from having access to Head Start, but by the end of 3rd grade there were very few impacts found for either cohort in any of the four domains of cognitive, social-emotional, health and parenting practices. The few impacts that were found did not show a clear pattern of favorable or unfavorable impacts for children.”

The report continued, “No significant impacts were found for math skills, pre-writing, children’s promotion, or teacher report of children’s school accomplishments or abilities in any year.”

This analysis was disheartening, but more disturbing was the reaction of the Obama Administration and the U.S. Congress – which both decided to just throw more money at the problem.

Despite the discouraging evidence, Congress authorized $8.2 billion for Head Start in 2011, almost a billion more than they allocated in 2010. Combined, from 1970 to 2000, the budgets for Title I and Head Start grew in inflation-adjusted dollars from $1.7 billion to $13.8 billion. The combined budget for 2010 for both was $21.7 billion.

“Head Start remains a key part of the Obama Administration’s strategic focus on early learning,” said HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius at the time. “Still, for Head Start to achieve its full potential, we must improve its quality and promote high standards across all early childhood programs.”

Ya think? Ms. Sebelius, with all due respect, that was the understatement of the year. When you made that statement, Head Start had already had 47 years and nine presidents to prove its effectiveness.

In April 2019 – almost ten years after that devastating HHS impact study – researchers from Brown University released a study that replicated and extended Harvard professor David Deming’s 2009 evaluation of Head Start’s life-cycle skill formation impacts (in 2009, Professor Deming’s study found that attending a Head Start program had lasting positive impacts into early childhood).

The researchers from Brown found that after “extending the measurement interval for Deming’s adulthood outcomes, we found no statistically significant impacts on earnings and mixed evidence of impacts on other adult outcomes. Applying Deming’s sibling comparison framework to more recent birth cohorts born to CNSLY

mothers (mothers who participated in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 Children and Young Adults) revealed mostly *negative Head Start impacts*. *Combining all cohorts shows generally null impacts on school-age and early adulthood outcomes*."

These damaging assessments of Head Start weren't even a speed bump for the Trump I and Biden administrations, or the U.S. Congress. For FY2019, Congress appropriated $10 billion for programs under the Head Start Act*;* $10.6 billion for FY2020, plus an additional $750 million under the CARES Act; $10.7 billion for FY2021; $11 million for FY2022; $12 million for FY2023; $12.27 billion for FY2024; and $12.5 billion for FY2025.

Although I have researched deep and wide, I've seen no president or legislator demand Head Start officials present a plan for improving their outcomes. Nada. They just keep handing them money so they can assure their constituents that they "support early education."

This, even though lackluster performance is far from the only problem that plagues Head Start. In December 2024, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a disastrous report outlining significant fiscal mismanagement at the program, as well as severe instances of neglect and negligence that put children's well-being at risk.

For the report, the GAO analyzed Head Start programs that were operating under interim management (when a Head Start program loses its federal grant due to poor performance, interim managers are appointed by the Office of Head Start (OHS) to run the program until a new grant recipient can be placed).

The GAO found that "OHS skipped crucial monitoring steps and did not enforce certain standards for programs under interim management for at least the last five school years. For example, it did not monitor half of the 28 programs due for monitoring between January 2020 and June 2024, leaving it unaware of documented and potential child safety incidents and other concerns. Further, OHS had neither assessed classroom quality nor monitored finances for all programs under interim management, both of which are required under the Head Start Act."

"Lastly, OHS officials stated that they had never enforced enrollment standards or required Head Start funds to be returned for children not served. In the 2022-2023 school year, GAO found that fewer than half of the nearly 4,000 Head Start seats available in programs under interim management were filled."

These programs spent 72 percent of the total amount of taxpayer-funded grants, even though their enrollment was just 47 percent. The incompetence and irresponsibility involved in how that money was spent is preposterous.

For example, one manager "agreed to pay rent that was more than four times what the current grant recipient paid for classroom space in the local area" while, at another site, "one local staff person described carefully scrutinizing invoices and urging the interim manager's staff to contest charges. This staff person said they insisted that the program solicit additional bids rather than accept the landlord's quote for food service, which the staff person said ultimately saved the program nearly a million dollars per year." Meanwhile, the programs "frequently ran out of diapers, baby wipes, soap, and other essentials," which forced teachers to "purchase these items with their own money."

But money is inconsequential compared to the negligence the analysis uncovered. One former center director described, for instance, "witnessing a teacher grab a child by the hood of their coat and slam them to the ground. The former center director said that the interim program director instructed them to not report the incident or fire the teacher." At another site, a former local center director said that "the interim manager instructed her not to inform parents that environmental testing had revealed mold in two classrooms, even though children and staff had developed respiratory symptoms, and one child had a known allergy to mold."

4. Be Bold & Understand That the Entire Paradigm Must Change.

There is no question that early childhood education is a critical factor in our children's brain development, love of lifelong learning and academic performance, social and emotional growth, and overall health

and wellbeing, so why do we continually put their futures at risk by passively accepting miserable outcomes?

I'll ask the question again: Why do we, time after time and issue after issue, keep going back to failed policies and political philosophies that DO NOT work? Answer: *Because that's the easy thing to do.*

The hard part of education reform is addressing *what* we teach in programs like Head Start and schools across the nation, *how* we teach it, and *how* we measure our progress. This is a much scarier proposition for school administrators and politicians because it requires some serious soul searching and some significant changes.

People talk about "reform" all the time, but the definition of reform doesn't lend itself to a delicate approach. The truest definition of reform is "to put an end to an evil by enforcing or introducing a better method or course of action."

To achieve a monumental turnaround, we can no longer expect half-measures and incremental ideas to work in systems that have collapsed; rather, we must embrace an unprecedented full and fundamental restructuring. It's way past time that we move to crisis mode and thoroughly alter the way we approach the education of our children to prevent an all-out disaster.

Doing nothing more than continuing to throw money at failed programs is not going to cut it anymore. According to the OECD, we spend more money per student on education (elementary school through higher education) – $20,387 – than every OECD country besides Luxembourg, Norway and Austria. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that total spending for public K-12 education in FY2023 totaled $947 billion from all sources – around $16,526 per student.

Clearly our problems cannot be solved with money alone. That's why it's time we make substantial and sustaining improvements in the way we educate our children and boldly approach the challenges from a completely new perspective, making our resolution both wide and deep for *every* child.

Year after year our progress remains painfully slow because we cling to one or two topics at a time and obsess on them to the exclusion of everything else. We keep searching in vain for the one magical solution to our education predicament: Is the answer increased funding,

teacher quality or merit pay? Does the answer exist in higher standards, smaller class size, shorter summer breaks, early childhood learning or charter schools?

Unfortunately, the widespread assumption that these complex issues exist in isolation from one another has undermined our ability to address any of them. The problems we face in education are linked in intricate ways, and our solutions must be developed comprehensively as opposed to compartmentally.

5. Shift Our Focus from One-For-All Education to a More Personalized Approach & Redefine What "Intelligence" Means.

The truth is this: It doesn't matter how much money you spend or how many early education programs you modify, or how many qualified teachers you recruit or how many charter schools you open. Every effort toward education reform will fail without a complete overhaul of our misguided curriculum; a change in how it is presented; a reevaluation of what we value in education; and how we define what success actually means. We will also continue to fail if we have zero understanding how our kids *think*.

In his book Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences, renowned Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner suggests there is a collection of intelligences that exists in each of us. Because everyone exhibits these intelligences on various levels, everyone has a distinctive cognitive profile.

Gardner initially identified seven intelligences: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal (Gardner later concluded naturalist intelligence should be added to the list and insinuated two others may be worthy of inclusion: spiritual intelligence and existential intelligence).

According to Dr. Gardner, the child who masters math is not necessarily more intelligent overall than the child who struggles with it; rather, s/he is stronger in that *particular* intelligence.

I love this guy. The conventional American method of assessing what is and is not "intelligent" is absurd. When it was time to take my Assessment of Intelligence class for my psychology degree, I was

stunned when my professor passed out these black briefcases that held the standard psychometric "instruments" we would use to test our patient's "level" of intelligence.

The contents inside the briefcase were an absolute joke. Are we really so simple in this country that we think intelligence and individual capabilities can be evaluated by items that fit into a 10" x 15" piece of luggage? Traditional IQ tests and our current educational assessment tests fail miserably to adequately assess the wide array of aptitude each human being distinctly exhibits.

Okay, so I may be a little defensive on this point, but I know from firsthand experience that this is true. Once, I read a SAT prep question – "If there are 8 x 1012 hydrogen molecules in a volume of 4 x 104 cubic centimeters, what is the average number of hydrogen molecules per cubic centimeter?" – and immediately went into the fetal position.

I consistently received horrendous scores on these tests and quite frankly I'm still ticked off about it. Maybe I can't tell you within three seconds how much faster Train A got to the station than Train B, but I always knew I was smart in a unique way. I never understood why I had to suffer through advanced equations in high school when I could be writing short stories, studying history, or learning a foreign language.

Advanced math was not my thing back then and it's not my thing now. I vividly remember sitting in Algebra thinking I might actually die before the bell rang. Just as I suspected, and as I told my math teachers and parents many times, there isn't one math challenge I'm confronted with today that requires more than what a calculator will fix. I'm certainly not pulling out a protractor and determining the circumference of a freak'n circle on the daily.

This I can say with certainty: If I would not have been grounded for months by my parents, I would have cut Algebra II every day. And, if I hadn't been born with a supercharged superego, my consistent inability – fueled by a complete lack of interest – to grasp difficult mathematical concepts would have completely depleted my confidence.

Most of our kids experience this feeling every single school day. Our across-the-board approach to curriculum is a fossilized tactic and an enormous contributor to our kids being bored and unprepared. Those

who have interests in careers that don't require advanced science or math sit in class questioning what the heck any of this has to do with their *futures*. And, if they happen to have parents who will not ground them for months, they get bored, disenchanted, and simply leave.

We have reached a point where much of what happens in our schools doesn't resemble education at all. Putting aside the discipline issues for a second – which are completely out of control, by the way – somewhere down the line we forfeited vital knowledge for trivial test scores. A high school sophomore once told me that most of her school day in the Spring semester revolves around memorizing test questions and learning testing strategies.

Ugh.

Hell on earth is to sit in an uncomfortable chair, memorizing material that you know has zero relevance to your life's ambition. High-stakes testing has reduced American education to nothing more than a regurgitation of facts that will be forgotten the minute the bell rings.

This is the main reason our kids do so badly on the PISA assessment. Real-world problem solving, deep deliberation, and critical thinking are out – right and wrong answers to questions that out-of-touch administrators deem important are in. This approach is beyond lazy and completely strangles the construction of knowledge. What a wasted opportunity and what a waste of everyone's time.

Obviously, there are certain basic math skills everyone needs to master, like arithmetic, multiplication, division, decimals, fractions, ratios, percentages, probability, exponents, and how to calculate volume and surface areas.

AND the benefit to studying math isn't just that you learn how to *do* math. Rather, studying math is a great way for people to learn how to formulate complex thought.

But the fact remains that we have advanced in the preparation for a chosen few but have still not learned how to properly empower those who continue to be left behind. As a four-year college education increasingly become the be-all and end-all in America, we started to

completely miss the immense value of high-quality vocational schools, junior colleges, on-the-job training, and apprenticeships – which are often the best ways to train (and retrain) for many of today's jobs.

When asked near the end of his life what schools should emphasize in the teaching process, Albert Einstein said, "Accumulation of material should not stifle the student's independence."

Children don't develop in a straight line. Therefore, our focus must shift from blanket education to a more personalized approach. Embracing individualized learning styles enables children to learn the most advantageous way possible for their aptitude.

Kids will be far more engaged if they study material that reflects their individual skills, interests and aspirations – in other words, material *relevant* to their *futures*. When students are exposed to meaningful material, they will be able (and much more willing) to tackle more rigorous, academically challenging curriculum.

It may seem that this approach would take a tremendous amount of additional money, time and effort, but that's not true. Switzerland's educational system provides an excellent example. Switzerland has created a system that embraces innovative thinking and open learning, ensuring their position among the global elite in education.

A key element of the Swiss system is the student's ability to choose their educational path according to their abilities and interests. The initial decision is made early, but students can alter their course if they choose. To begin, students attend primary and lower secondary school, which provide a basic general education as well as encourages a balanced relationship with social, personal, and technical abilities.

Then, the students enter the upper secondary level, which offers a "dual" vocational education and training system. If the vocational path is chosen, students can enhance their education by learning both in school and within a workplace setting. Over 70 percent of Swiss students choose to participate in this Vocational Education and Training (VET) program.

A report called Gold Standard: The Swiss Vocational Education and Training System from the Center on International Education Benchmarking explains that the VET program "prepares a broad cross-section of students including high achievers for careers in a range of

occupations – high-tech, human service, health, as well as traditional trades and crafts, so white-collar as well as blue-collar."

The report also describes how, in Switzerland, the entire country takes ownership of the educational process: "The Swiss VET system is well supported by employers who see it as their obligation to help prepare young people for productive and meaningful employment. Apprenticeships also make economic sense for employers, providing them with an incentive to continue to participate in the system."

"The apprenticeships provide hands-on and applied learning opportunities, giving students real work responsibilities with plenty of coaching and adult support. Small and large companies, state of the art factories, insurance agencies, banks, hospitals, retail stores, and child care centers host 16- to 19-year-old apprentices who serve customers, work on complex machines, carry out basic medical procedures, and advise investors – in short, they do everything an entry level employee would do, albeit under the wings of credentialed trainers within the company."

The final step for Swiss students is the Tertiary level, or higher education, where students again choose between technical or vocational schools, or higher university degrees which include universities of art and music as well as universities of teacher education.

Finland has a truly unified school system, where kids stay at the same school until they are sixteen. Then, Finnish education is also divided into two systems – vocational and academic. There are special programs where adults receive additional training, all students learn to speak English, free hot meals are provided to all students, and free health and psychological services are offered to all students.

Teachers in Finland have wide professional discretion and autonomy and have the freedom to teach how they want. The only external testing is done solely on a sampling basis and is designed to provide information on the functioning of the overall school system. Therefore, it is the teachers' responsibility to regularly assess their students using national assessment guidelines. Students are expected to take an active role in their learning, and, in upper grades, even design their own individualized programs.

The Preamble of Finland's National Core Curriculum for Basic Education says: "The learning environment must support the pupil's growth and learning. It must be physically, psychologically, and socially safe, and must support the pupil's health. The objective is to increase pupils' curiosity and motivation to learn, and to promote their activeness, self-direction, and creativity by offering interesting challenges and problems. The learning environment must guide pupils in setting their own objectives and evaluating their own actions. The pupils must be given the chance to participate in the creation and development of their own learning environment."

Finland has the third best education system in the world, according to NJ MED's 2024 World Best Education Systems. It's surely no coincidence that according to the United Nations' World Happiness Report, Finland is also the happiest place on earth.

1787's Mission:

To ensure every high school student:

Acquires the knowledge and skills
necessary to attend higher education,

OR

Can immediately be productive within the American enterprise
– meaning students leave high school with a marketable skill
and/or industry credential that can earn them money that day.

This may sound like common sense – and it most certainly is – but this nation has lost sight of this very simplistic idea.

The belief that superior education is a hit or miss game is categorically false. Outstanding research and numerous success stories

provide clear answers to many of the issues involved. Unfortunately, these heroic efforts are severely limited if their results go no further than an occasional newspaper article or a handsomely bound report that sits on a shelf somewhere.

Charter schools are an excellent example. Although the U.S. charter school movement has mixed results, there are extraordinary charter schools that have pioneered extremely innovative educational concepts.

However, without a centralized effort, it's virtually impossible for other schools to benefit from the invaluable knowledge these charter schools have gained. It's highly doubtful that thousands of school administrators can travel across America to observe these successful schools. Even if they could, the process would be too invasive, too arduous, and too time-consuming.

It's an irresponsible, reckless waste of resources if the successful components of these endeavors aren't incorporated into a national strategy, based on pragmatism instead of political quicksand. We will not see a significant shift in our education crisis until a far-reaching framework is created that allows educational achievements to be learned from and replicated.

But here's the good news! 1787 has created an educational model of excellence called America's Best Chance. Our strategy is to bring everyone and everything UP to the highest common denominator in education instead of bringing everyone and everything *down* to the lowest – which is what is happening now.

We will achieve this by leaving no stone unturned. America's Best Chance addresses every aspect of the school experience, from the material taught in the classroom to what is served in the cafeteria. This policy is not a consequence of a guessing game, politically motivated, or a product of preconceived notions or opinions. Every single thing in it is backed by extensive evidence to justify its inclusion.

America's Best Chance will eventually become national policy – when 1787 reaches the White House – but we're not going to sit around and wait for that moment. We need to start making progress in our educational crisis now!

So, in the meantime, 1787 will present this groundbreaking policy to the White House, all members of Congress, every state governor, every state legislature, state boards of education, state education departments, local school boards, local superintendents, and school principals.

Privately raised funds will allow America's Best Chance to be offered to schools free of charge, to include all instruction materials and staff for the transition. Schools will retain complete control of school operations and the decision-making process, plus the school's existing budget will be honored, so participating schools will need no additional funds to accommodate the program.

Some people say the federal government should stay out of education policy altogether, and I'm in complete agreement that, in a perfect world, the federal government's role in American education would be limited, if not completely absent. Education policy would be decided at the state and local levels, and local communities and their respective states would be responsible for their schools, including the standards and curriculum.

But unfortunately, we don't live in a perfect world. Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution says that "Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts and excises, to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and *general welfare of the United States*."

Tragically, we have arrived at a point where the *general welfare* of many of our children and their Fourteenth Amendment equal protection guarantees are being infringed upon by terribly inadequate education.

… and inadequate education and achievement gaps are not the only challenges our kids' face. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Americans ages 10-14. The PISA results revealed that America has more kids than average living with food insecurity (13 percent, compared with an average of 8 percent in other OECD countries), more kids who don't feel safe at school (13 percent versus 10 percent), and more kids who are lonely at school (22 percent versus 16 percent).

If you think about this in a much broader sense, since the *general welfare* of the entire United States relies heavily on properly educated citizens, we are *all* getting screwed by terribly inadequate education.

As a result, like it or not, we have no choice but for the federal government to step in and be a part of the solution (with a mechanism for states to opt out, of course).

Without a doubt, I recognize the federal government's track record in education policy is abysmal, to say the least. If past is prologue, the federal government being involved could be the kiss of death. But it doesn't have to be. Under the right leadership, it's entirely possible for the federal government to enhance our ambitious plans without strangling them.

The most important – and exciting – thing about America's Best Chance is that it incorporates ways to help achieve a dramatic increase in achievement for all children while significantly decreasing racial, ethnic and socio-economic discrepancies.

There are very specific and overwhelming challenges for children who are born into low-income families, and racial disparity has reached crisis-levels. A major focus of America's Best Chance is to develop enhancements outside of the standard curriculum that will address and attempt to solve these inequities. We will continually search for the root causes of the disparity epidemic and incorporate programs to help end this terrible trend once and for all.

Without question, it *is* possible to develop a school structure that brings success for all children, regardless of their demographics or home situation. Wait a second…what? But what about those social factors we always hear about like poverty, race, etc.?

The Gallup organization once asked the American public why the U.S. has such low educational outcomes in low-income communities. Among the most frequent responses were the home life of the students and a lack of community and parental involvement.

This may be true, but lower outcomes in vulnerable communities *are not* prevalent because the kids are more difficult to educate; rather, systems and circumstances have them starting on severely cracked foundations, then ensures they fall right through.

1787's contention is that creative restructuring and an overhaul of curriculum will alleviate many of these factors, including elevated dropout rates, from even being an issue. For this to happen, education must now be viewed as an autonomous endeavor, meaning it must

completely stand on its own. Parental involvement can no longer be an automatic assumption, and issues such as race, economic status, and the dysfunctional home life of the child can no longer be an excuse for our failing to properly educate them.

Like it or not, the future success of many of our children is largely dependent on what they are provided during the school day. I know well the argument that it is not the government's place to raise children and in that elusive perfect world, I believe that to be true.

The involvement of parents is incredibly advantageous for the children blessed to have it, and parental commitment should be loudly applauded whether demonstrated at home or within the classroom.

My mom was actively involved in the PTA every year I was in school, and my dad was on the school board. They both stayed up late many a night to help with my homework or special projects – including an award-winning depiction of Egypt, complete with Plaster of Paris pyramids, just say'n – and they made sure I had any extra tutoring help that I needed. In fact, although I'm grateful now, at the time their level of involvement was extremely irritating to me.

But, in crisis mode, you must build strategies within the context of the realities of the situation, not what you wish the realities were.

Not everyone's experience is the same. Obviously, in a perfect world, all children would learn basic life skills – everything from self-control to sex education – within the home environment. Unfortunately, it appears this is not the prevailing trend. Sex is an excellent example, and one that can have lifelong implications for the children who are not adequately educated about its potentially dangerous consequences.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 32 percent of high school students have had sex and 52 percent of them didn't use a condom the last time they did it. Around half of the nearly 2.4 million new sexually transmitted diseases reported each year are among people aged 15 to 24. Nineteen percent (19%) of all new HIV diagnoses are among people aged 13-24. Over 143,000 babies are born to adolescent females every year.

Clearly, not everyone is hearing these things at home, and it is our responsibility to make certain they hear it somewhere.

I'm always baffled when I hear resistance to this concept. How can anyone possibly justify withholding age-appropriate sex education from our kids while, at the same time, be aghast by high abortion rates and furious that the government (in their words) has to financially provide for babies who have babies and then their babies?

This is ridiculously flawed logic and unbelievably unfair to our kids. I recognize things like sex may be outside some comfort zones, but the faster we face these difficult truths, the faster we can fix them.

Because most education still happens at the state and local levels, schools can obviously opt to not take advantage of America's Best Chance, but I'm not really worried about that happening. Once we prove this model works – and we most certainly will – the program will spread like an inescapable wildfire, because it's hard to argue against successful results.

Wow, we're almost there! Now all we need is an infusion of good old common sense. We feed our children Froot Loops for breakfast and pizza for lunch, give them a fifteen-minute recess, and then force Ritalin down their throats because for some odd reason they can't sit still and concentrate. *Common sense*.

The ratio of our publicly educated students to their school counselors is 376-to-1, even though the counselor's primary purpose is to enhance students' academic achievement, personal development, and to help them develop future career plans. *Common sense*.

We have systematically dismantled the discipline function in our schools giving our educators no recourse against kids who essentially run wild, cause trouble, and have free reign to recruit other kids to come along for the ride. *Common sense*.

We spend $27 billion a year for the federal Pell Grant program; meanwhile, the American public spends $152 billion a year on their pets. *Common sense. Common Sense. Common sense.*

Learn more about America's Best Chance and 1787's Plan of Action for Education Reform on p. 74 of the Policy Guide.

Bad Habit Five

Constantly Reacting to Negative Outcomes as Opposed to Proactively Anticipating Them

The word *proactive* has been used a lot in this book, but I cannot stress enough how critical it is that, as a nation, we start being *proactive* as opposed to *reactive*.

Somewhere down the line, we got into the bad habit of constantly reacting to negative outcomes as opposed to proactively anticipating them. This approach lends itself to overreaction and overcompensation, which causes even greater chaos.

It reminds me of the Popeye cartoon where the mighty Sailor Man and his beloved Olive Oyl are in a boat that, thanks to dozens of leaks, is rapidly sinking. Every time they manage to plug one of the leaks with their fingers, toes and Olive Oyl's pointy nose, a brand-new leak springs making it impossible to catch them all.

Guys, we don't have time for this. Constantly playing defense instead of offense has us running on a treadmill that often carries us backward. We must – for once and for all – solve the roots of our challenges instead of just treating the symptoms. This means a more preemptive approach, which will minimize potential problems before they escalate into full-scale catastrophes.

Trade is an excellent example. As we covered at the beginning of this book – exhaustively – the world has become entangled in unprecedented ways. We live in an unparalleled era of global interdependence, multilateralism, and competition.

… and make no mistake, no matter how many times the Trump/Vance administration imposes tariffs, threatens, yells, rage posts, and jumps up and down, America's dedication to global commerce over the long-term will not change because the overall financial benefit to our nation greatly outweighs the negatives. It just does. *Love it or hate it, there is no escaping it.*

The great news is that, if we *proactively* make smart adjustments, we can *all* successfully evolve within this rapidly changing landscape.

This will allow us to maintain control over our future instead of being vulnerable to forces beyond our control.

There is no question that global trade has hit certain sectors of our economy hard and that the federal government should provide a financial backstop for these families and communities, just in case there is any gap between winding down old jobs and beginning new ones. This should include temporary income replacement, strong protections for pensions, and retraining and relocation support.

Learn more about U.S. Works on p. 258 of the Policy Guide.

That said, a more connected world is not wholly responsible for the displacement of certain American workers. Even if we halt all progress toward globalization, including imports and outsourcing, advancements in technology alone would cause certain jobs within industries such as steel, textile and automobiles to eventually become outdated.

The coolest thing about a capitalist economy, however, is that it offers everyone the opportunity to adjust as the demands of the economy evolve.

I know I sound like a broken record, but it's better for *all of us* to reject isolationism and embrace the world market. We do not have such an embarrassment of riches in this country that we can afford to abandon this golden opportunity solely out of fear and misperception.

Thanks to the Trump/Vance administration's extremely misguided and misinformed beliefs about this topic, perhaps the number one misconception about global trade is that there must be "winners" and "losers." This is a false premise.

One of Tariff Man's favorite rally lines is that the entire world is out to get us, screwing us at every opportunity. But that's just not true. Guys, honestly, that's just not happening.

Donald, I need you to listen up, pal: Contrary to what you seem to think, *trade deficit* doesn't automatically mean *we're getting screwed*. Trade deficits are not scorecards that keep track of who is winning and who is losing, or if trade deals are "good" or "bad." Unlike what you seem to believe about *everything*, trade is not a zero-sum game.

Let's say that China really loves American tractors. They just can't get enough of our tractors over there! So, China buys $100 worth of our tractors. We, in turn, love us some Chinese fortune cookies. We just can't get enough of Chinese fortune cookies! So, we buy $200 worth of Chinese fortune cookies.

The difference between these two purchases is the *trade deficit* (i.e., the gap between how much in goods and services we import from other countries, and how much we export to them). As it stands now in our example, China has a $100 trade *surplus* and America has a $100 trade *deficit*. But notice that no one is "winning" or "losing" in this scenario. Remember, we didn't just write China a check for nothing ...we got a lot of fortune cookies for our money!

It's true that trade deficits are subtracted from the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) so, on paper at least, if one country is selling less stuff, they could be producing less, which means there could potentially be less jobs. But in real life, that's not necessarily true.

For instance, the United States had a large trade deficit in 2009, when the unemployment rate was 10 percent, but had an even larger trade deficit in 2006, when the unemployment rate was just 4.4 percent. The trade deficit is more a function of the value of the U.S. dollar (more on this in a minute).

Isn't this fun!?! Now, there's a flip side to all of this that some people fail to consider, and it's a major one. When we last left our tractor/fortune cookie trade, China had a $100 trade surplus. So, what is Xi Jinping going to do with that $100?

Well, he can do one of two things: 1) He can do nothing and just keep the money in a back account somewhere. However, this will just increase the value of his currency and ultimately push his domestic prices upward; OR he can 2) Take the $100 and invest it back in the United States through stocks, bonds, or direct investment (i.e., plants, equipment, and real estate).

The Economist explains this concept way better than I: "It is as if container ships arrived at American ports to deliver furniture, computers and cars, and departed filled with American stocks and bonds. Over time, those assets yield returns in the form of interest, dividends and capital gains."

This is awesome because foreign direct investment (FDI) is vital to our economic growth and development – and the U.S. attracts more foreign direct investment than any other nation in the world.

The Economist continues, "To the extent that trade deficits thus represent borrowing from abroad there is some truth to the idea that they could erode American wealth. But that is to ignore a crucial point about the debt incurred: it comes cheap. America has run current-account deficits – which are substantially driven by the balance of trade – almost every year since 1982. As a result, foreigners own American assets worth $8.1 trillion more than the assets Americans own overseas, a difference equivalent to 43 percent of America's GDP." (this was written in 2017)

It's very important to keep in mind that trade deficits are different for the United States than other countries because our currency is the dominant global reserve currency – meaning the U.S. dollar is used in many transactions that the United States has nothing to do with. Many countries trade with one another – and borrow and lend – using the U.S. dollar. This increases the demand for our dollar on foreign exchange markets which, in turn, makes our dollar stronger. A stronger U.S. dollar, in turn, makes our exports more expensive and imports less expensive – which ultimately leads to an overall trade deficit.

In fact, because of our currency's position in the world, the U.S. running a trade surplus would create serious strain on the entire global market. That sounds dramatic but remember that, in the past four decades, the United States has had current-account surpluses in only three years –1980, 1981 and 1991 – and each of those years was tied to a recession.

Far from being a burden, we as a country *want* this role. It gives us unparalleled power in global finance, not to mention lower interest rates which leads to cheaper financing.

So, guys in the Trump/Vance administration, the lesson here is that, if the U.S. economy is growing faster than other economies around the world, our trade deficit will probably increase – because strong domestic growth increases America's demand for imports while, at the same time, weaker foreign growth decreases the world's demand for America's exports.

Donald Trump's first trade war was an unmitigated disaster. But his second one – the one The Wall Street Journal called "The Dumbest Trade War in History" – has been even worse.

In truth, the only winners in this disaster have been lobbyists. In 2025, the 20 largest lobbying firms reported $824 million in revenue, an increase from $595 million during the final year of the Biden administration. In the fourth quarter of 2025, lobbying contracts that included anything about "tariffs" were worth $10.6 million, an increase of $1.8 million from the year before.

As we all well know, on April 2, 2025 – President Trump's "Liberation Day" – he levied massive tariffs that sent shock waves through countries around the world and roiled global financial markets.

By the end of the year, some people were saying that the economic calamity many people predicted hadn't materialized – but don't be fooled. That's only because the tariff rate importers were paying was significantly lower than what President Trump originally announced.

Plus, for much of the year, large retailers like Walmart, Target, and P&G tried to avoid raising prices by absorbing some of the higher costs caused by the tariffs. An October analysis by Goldman Sachs estimated that companies were passing along only around half of the costs of higher tariffs on imported goods. However, by the end of the year, almost all large retailers were warning they would increasingly begin passing those higher costs through to consumers.

That's not to say that prices hadn't already started to rise because every one of us who goes grocery shopping knows they had. In 2025, costs for goods and services were up 25 percent from where they were in 2020. Even though the inflation rate was below the high it hit in 2022, certain things like coffee, beef and car repairs were way higher.

The fact that prices were increasing should have come as a surprise to NO ONE because it's a fact that U.S. consumers pay for Donald Trump's trade wars. The Chinese people don't pay for them. Canadians

and Mexicans don't pay for them. Nor do people from any other country. *Americans pay for them. Period. End of Story*.

We learned this the first time around. A study by Aaron Flaaen of the Federal Reserve Board and Ali Horta and Felix Tintelnot of the University of Chicago found that "in response to the 2018 tariffs on nearly all source countries, the price of washers rose by nearly 12 percent; the price of dryers – a complementary good not subject to tariffs – increased by an equivalent amount. Factoring in the effect of dryers and price increases by domestic brands, our estimates for the 2018 tariffs on washers imply a tariff elasticity of consumer prices [or, the costs that pass-through to consumers] of between 110 and 230 percent." That translated to an additional $1.5 billion a year on washers and dryers because of the tariffs.

Another study – released by economists Mary Amiti of the New York Fed, Stephen Redding of Princeton University, and David Weinstein of Columbia University – found that "the full incidence of the tariff falls on domestic consumers, with a reduction in U.S. real income of $1.4 billion per month by the end of 2018."

The damage didn't stop there. "The trade war also caused dramatic adjustments in international supply chains, as approximately $165 billion dollars of trade ($136 billion of imports and $29 billion of exports) was lost or redirected to avoid the tariffs. We find that the U.S. tariffs were almost completely passed through into U.S. domestic prices, so that the entire incidence of the tariffs fell on domestic consumers and importers up to now, with no impact so far on the prices received by foreign exporters. We also find that U.S. producers responded to reduced import competition by raising their prices."

In May 2019, the Peterson Institute found that U.S. consumers and businesses were paying over $900,000 *a year* for every job saved or created by Donald Trump's tariff on steel – which was thirteen times the typical salary of a U.S. steelworker.

Also in May, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York issued a report on the impact of tariffs on $200 billion of U.S. imports from China (before, these imports were subject to 10 percent levies but, after a breakdown in trade negotiations, that increased to 25 percent): "As a result of this expenditure switching, we estimate that the annualized

deadweight loss increases from $132 to $620 per household, bringing the total annual cost of the new round of tariffs to the typical household to $831."

Cut to 2026, when the New York Fed revealed that, in 2025, "nearly 90 percent of the tariffs' economic burden fell on U.S. firms and consumers."

Research by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, the Budget Lab at Yale, and by economists at Harvard Business School back this up – all finding that only a small fraction of the tariff costs was borne by foreign producers. This means that, rather than acting as a tax on *them*, the tariffs functioned as a consumption tax on *us* – which, of course, most of us knew all along.

After analyzing $4 trillion of shipments between January 2024 and November 2025, the Kiel Institute found that foreign exporters absorbed only around 4 percent of the burden of the Trump/Vance administration's tariff increases by lowering their prices, while U.S. importers and consumers absorbed 96 percent.

President Trump eventually all but admitted this. In November, he moved to lower tariffs on beef, coffee, and over a hundred agricultural and food items. He also announced deals with several countries to relax tariffs on bananas and other consumer imports. On the last day of 2025, he delayed new tariffs on upholstered furniture, kitchen cabinets and vanities for a year.

Also in November, the president started floating a $2,000 tariff rebate to American consumers to make-up for the pain his border taxes were inflicting. He announced this on social media in his typical subtle manner: "People that are against Tariffs are FOOLS!" He went on to claim that tariffs are "taking in Trillions of Dollars" that will soon pay down the national debt.

This became one of his favorite mind tricks. Every time anything negative came up about tariffs, he would simply say that his tariffs were going to pay for ***this***, of for ***that***, or for ***this***, or for ***that***. The Cato Institute actually tracked his promises on how the tariff revenue would be spent and they discovered he had claimed the "windfall" from his tariffs would help cover almost $6 trillion in costs. There was only one

problem – that was over *22 times* more than his own administration was estimating the tariffs would bring in.

While it's true that tariffs bring in real money – the U.S. collected $195 billion in customs duties in FY2025, more than double the year before – that is still only 3.7 percent of overall federal revenue. And not to beat a dead horse but, again, that amount was just shifted into a tax on American businesses and consumers.

Chair of the Federal Reserve Jerome Powell certainly understood all this – which is one of the reasons Donald Trump has it out for him. After "Liberation Day," Mr. Powell warned that "it is now becoming clear that the tariff increases will be significantly larger than expected. The same is likely to be true of the economic effects, which will include higher inflation and slower growth… while tariffs are highly likely to generate at least a temporary rise in inflation, it is also possible that the effects could be more persistent."

By September 2025, Powell was warning that "companies that sit between the exporter and the consumer" were bearing the biggest impact of the tariffs.

Of course, this was already painfully apparent in the real world, where the tenacles of tariffs were long and poisonous. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, 86 percent of U.S. companies that import goods by sea have less than 50 employees. By the end of 2025, many of these small businesses – which are critical drivers of U.S. employment and growth – had already reached a breaking point.

The Trump/Vance administration stopped even smaller things that could help small businesses and consumers out, like the *de minimis exemption* which allowed businesses and individuals to import up to $800 of goods duty-free each day. This was a real bummer because Americans took advantage of this rule to the tune of over 1.3 billion packages in 2024.

The official word from the Trump/Vance administration was that the *de minimis exemption* was out because it was helping facilitate drug smuggling, but even this must be weighed against higher consumer prices, delayed shipments, and increased costs for businesses that rely on small imports (it's also important to note that law enforcement has gotten pretty good at screening these packages).

A 2025 research paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research revealed that ending the *de minimis exemption* could cost American consumers as much as $13 billion. Researchers also found that low-income and minority consumers will disproportionally feel the negative impacts since they rely more on cheaper, imported purchases.

But then, the real twist happened.

On February 20, 2026 – in a huge loss for President Trump and an equally huge win for separation of powers – the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the Trump/Vance administration's sweeping emergency tariffs they had levied without Congressional approval. A 6-3 Supreme Court majority essentially erased the 10 percent tariff President Trump imposed on Liberation Day on almost every country in the world, as well as targeted, higher tariffs on some of the top U.S. trading partners, including Canada, China, Japan, Mexico, the European Union, and South Korea.

Chief Justice Roberts explained it this way in the majority opinion: "Recognizing the taxing power's unique importance, and having just fought a revolution motivated in large part by 'taxation without representation,' the Framers gave Congress 'alone . . . access to the pockets of the people.'"

Unsurprisingly, our calm, cool and collected president lashed out at the Justices who ruled against him, calling them "unpatriotic and disloyal to our Constitution." Then, he immediately invoked another trade law – Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 – to impose a 10 percent tariff on imports from nearly every country. Section 122 allows the president to impose tariffs of up to 15 percent for no more than 150 days to address certain serious international balance-of-payments problems; extending them beyond that requires an act of Congress.

But in May 2026, the U.S. Court of International Trade ruled that Trump's tariffs did not satisfy Section 122's statutory requirements. The administration appealed, allowing the tariffs to remain in place while the case proceeded, but the 150-day period expired on July 24, 2026 without Congress extending it. The legality of the tariffs – and disputes over duties already collected – remains in litigation.

Thank God the Supreme Court did the right thing, but in many ways the damage was already done.

Far from President Trump's promise that his steep tariffs would reduce U.S. imports, shrink our trade deficit, and bring American manufacturing "roaring back" – beginning in April, U.S. manufacturing employment declined every month in 2025 (factories employed 72,000 fewer people at the end of the year than when he declared "Liberation Day" in April). This extended a contraction that has seen over 200,000 roles vanish since 2023.

American imports grew in 2025 and the trade deficit in goods hit a record high. It's true that the total trade deficit (i.e., trade in both goods and services) shrank slightly as growth in exports narrowly outpaced growth in imports. However, that was solely the result of an expanding trade surplus in services. Even though the global tariffs announced by the Trump/Vance administration in April were designed to specifically target the trade imbalance in goods, the trade deficit in physical goods rose to a record $1.24 trillion, up from $1.22 trillion the year before.

Tariffs don't affect only manufacturers. America's enormous service sector – including finance, healthcare, hospitality, information, professional services, retail and wholesale trade, transportation and travel – has also been affected by higher costs for imported goods and equipment, retaliatory measures, weaker demand and trade uncertainty.

That matters because services are one of America's great strengths in international trade. In 2025, the U.S. exported approximately $1.235 trillion in services while importing about $895 billion, producing a $339.5 billion services trade surplus – an increase of nearly 9 percent from 2024.

… and the hits just kept on coming. Tariffs on timber, wood, furniture and kitchen cabinets – together with hefty tariffs on steel and aluminum – also raised the costs of building and buying a home, further depressing an already weak housing sector and worsening the nationwide housing shortage by slowing the pace of new home construction ($14 billion of all goods used in new residential construction comes from overseas). This got so bad that, as I mentioned earlier, President Trump had to delay new tariffs on upholstered furniture, kitchen cabinets and vanities for a year.

… and coming and coming. In August 2025, John Deere – one of the country's largest manufacturers, founded in 1837 – reported that its net income in the most recent quarter was down 29 percent from the year before. Higher steel and aluminum tariffs had already cost the company $300 million, and they expected to be hit by another $300 million by the end of the year. Already, the company had been forced to lay off hundreds of employees in factories in Illinois and Iowa.

John Deere is a perfect example of how Donald Trump has hurt the very type of company he claims he wants operating in the United States. This is a die-hard American company that employs 30,000 workers in 60 facilities across the United States. Over 75 percent of its machines are assembled here and just 25 percent of the components used in its products come from overseas.

If John Deere is a perfect example of how Donald Trump has hurt true-blue American companies, Iowa is a perfect example of how he has hurt his own voters. President Trump's policies on trade, energy and immigration have threatened entire industries – causing a 6.1 percent contraction in Iowa's real gross domestic product in the first quarter of 2025 alone.

… and our farmers got straight up screwed – *again*. Costs across the board for farmers have skyrocketed, including the cost of tractors and fertilizers, and their labor market has been severally disrupted.

By the end of 2025, crippling tariffs, coupled with ICE raids, had exacerbated the agriculture labor crisis to a degree that many farms went under (315 farms filed for bankruptcy in 2025, up 46 percent from the year before). The U.S. agricultural workforce fell by an estimated 155,000 to over 200,000 workers between March and July 2025 alone.

The Trump/Vance administration even targeted the wind turbines that provide not only income for some Iowa farmers, but over half of the state's electricity.

President Trump further enraged American ranchers – whose cattle herds are already at their smallest size since the 1950s – when, in October, he decided to act on high beef prices, which had skyrocketed 14 percent since he took office in January. His big plan? *Quadruple* the amount of beef we *import from Argentina* – a country that sells tons of

soybeans to China. This was a follow-up to the $20 billion bailout for his buddy Argentinian President Javier Milei that President Trump had announced earlier that month.

This all prompted Kyle Hemmert from Kansas, a Trump voter who got his first cow in second grade and grew his herd to 275 over the years, to tell The New York Times, “It’s really just a kick in the nuts. Come on, President Trump, this is ‘America First’ policy? No.”

Things got so bad for farmers that, like he did the first time around, President Trump announced yet another round of economic support for them ($12 billion) in December 2025. At the time, the Trump/Vance administration indicated that farmers could need as much as $50 billion in support, which was probably an understatement.

While I’m sure they appreciated the help, American farmers don’t want handouts, they want to compete. In farming, if you lose global market share in things like soybeans, pork, beef and poultry, you will have a heck of a time getting it back, if you even can at all – a lesson they already learned the hard way during Donald Trump’s first term.

In early February 2026, a bipartisan group of former Agriculture Department officials and leaders of farm groups warned in a letter to House and Senate agricultural committees – signed by 27 influential players in the farming sector – that Trump/Vance administration policies could lead to “a widespread collapse of American agriculture.”

Not only did it express deep concern for the “damage done to American farmers,” but it said it had become clear “that the current administration’s actions, along with congressional inaction, have increased costs for farm inputs, disrupted overseas and domestic markets, denied agriculture its reliable labor pool, and defunded critical ag research and staffing.” The letter urged Congress to relax tariffs for the agriculture sector, expand global markets, pass an updated farm bill, and reinstate funding for agriculture research and staffing.

And how’s this for the Butterfly Effect? In normal times, soybeans are one of America’s most important exports to China. China bought approximately $12.6 billion worth of U.S. soybeans in 2024 and historically has purchased roughly 30 percent of total U.S. soybean production and around 60 percent of U.S. soybean exports.

But China's retaliatory tariffs during the 2025 U.S.-China trade war devastated that market. Chinese purchases of American soybeans virtually disappeared for months as buyers turned instead to Brazil and Argentina. U.S. soybean exports to China plunged from approximately $12.6 billion in 2024 to just $3.1 billion in 2025 – a decline of roughly $9.5 billion.

Although China has resumed purchasing American soybeans, there is still an additional 10 percent tariff on them, and China's purchase commitment remains below recent historical levels, while Brazil has strengthened its position as China's dominant soybean supplier.

This obviously sucks for our farmers, but the unintended consequences of the Butterfly Effect reach beyond the fields. Thanks to the Trump/Vance administration, farmers won't be able to afford John Deere equipment anytime soon. As a result, John Deere – already hurting – saw a 12 percent decrease in its equipment sales in 2025 and expects a 15-20 percent decline in the U.S. and Canada in 2026.

And do we even need to ask how our auto industry fared? From well before "Liberation Day," American auto executives were freaking out… as they should have been… because they know what President Trump and his crack team obviously don't: No car is entirely made "in America." Cars are really made in "North America." Canada supplied around 13 percent – and Mexico almost 42 percent – of American imports of auto parts in 2024. Think about it this way: One tiny car component can cross the U.S. border between six and eight times before it's physically put in a car.

Therefore, when Donald throws massive taxes on Canada and Mexico, he's essentially taxing the American auto industry at the same exact level. Six months into this mess, General Motors announced that new tariffs on imported cars and auto parts had already cost the company $1.1 billion and that its net income shrank 35 percent in the second quarter of 2025 – which sent its stock price into a nosedive. In 2026, the company expects tariffs to reduce its adjusted operating earnings by another $2.5 billion to $3.5 billion.

THIS MAKES NO SENSE! Regardless of what our president has convinced himself of, the old arrangement with our neighbors – scratch that, OUR PARTNERS – benefited the United States tremendously.

In 2022, America exported $75.4 billion worth of parts and automobiles to Canada and Mexico. That number jumped to $86.2 billion in 2023, an increase of 14 percent. All in, the auto industry added over $809 billion to our overall economy in 2023. This supported almost ten million direct and indirect American jobs and was over 11 percent of our total manufacturing output.

Nevertheless, here's our new reality: In June 2025, for the first in over 30 years. Canada imported more vehicles from Mexico than from the United States. That wasn't just a one-month one-off. From April 2025 through March 2026, Canadian imports of U.S. motor vehicles fell approximately 22 percent – from $25.9 billion to $20.3 billion – while Canadian imports of Mexican vehicles increased roughly 24 percent over a comparable period.

Yep, this went really, really well.

Bad Habit Six

Getting Stuck in Ideology Instead of Just Doing the Math

&

Bad Habit Seven

Allowing Past Prejudices and Preconceived Notions to Prevent Potential Progress

Health care provides the perfect example for two bad habits we need to break. The first is getting stuck in ideology instead of just doing the math, which we will get to in a few minutes. But first, let's talk about the second bad habit: Allowing past prejudices and preconceived notions to prevent potential progress.

For decades – and especially when President Obama got serious about passing the Affordable Care Act (ACA) fifteen years ago – every time the highly controversial and heated debate over the *public option* and *single-payer health care* was brought up, it was immediately shut down by Republicans, mainly because of the "Socialist" connotation associated with them. The inherent laziness in this approach drives me C R A Z Y!

Over the years, I have taken a hard look at both the public option and single-payer health care and, based on the *facts*, neither of these ideas is the way to go (more on this later).

That said, although these are not solutions I ultimately landed on, I learned a ton about the health care system from researching them, and

I'm convinced this newfound knowledge made 1787's health care plan stronger and more comprehensive than it would have been otherwise.

Making decisions based on nothing more than an ideology makes **zero** sense. Why in the world would we take *any* potential solution off the table without fully checking it out, simply because the supposed philosophy behind it makes us uncomfortable?

I admit that, before doing research, I always associated the public option and single-payer health care with the Soviet Union and, being a good capitalist, both concepts made me plenty nervous. But this reaction *had* to be based on a preexisting bias because, until a few years ago, I didn't know what the heck they even were.

Let's please, please, *please* not allow preconceived notions and past prejudices to prevent potential progress. We have lost the luxury of making uninformed, snap judgments about pivotal issues. I don't know about you, but I'd rather be called a Socialist than stupid.

Let's start this section off with a bang. Is health care a *right* or a *privilege*? In my mind it's neither. It's a means (the best way to deliver high-quality, low-cost health care) to an end (living the healthiest life possible). Whether we get good health care or bad health care is a vital component of all our lives, and I want *every* American to get the highest quality care.

But the *right v. privilege* debate misses the point. If you go straight to the founding documents, health care is not a *right.* The Declaration of Independence says that we all have "unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," but that's not the U.S. Constitution – and using that phrase to say we all have a *right* to health care is a stretch anyway.

Sure, the purpose of the actual U.S. Constitution is to "promote the general welfare," but the word used is promote, not provide.

The two documents that inch health care more toward being an actual right are the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human

Rights ("everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care") and World Health Organization resolution 58.33 (which speaks to equity in access, plus financial-risk protection to ensure that the cost of health care does not put people at risk of financial catastrophe).

But those still don't get us to *every single American has the right to free health care*, which is pretty much what people mean when they say health care is a right (meaning, people who say this typically don't mean the government should simply acknowledge that health care is one of our Constitutional rights – they mean the government should be responsible for *giving* health care to each of us).

It's 1000% understandable this issue sparks heavy-duty emotions because, at its core, it's about our loved ones who have life-threatening cancer, heart disease, or things like high-blood pressure that can cause massive strokes.

It's about our children who have severe asthma or diabetes or other potentially debilitating health issues. It's about desperately wanting the ones we love to have the highest quality of health care, and to be with us – pain free – for as long as they possibly can.

Again, I want *every* American to have the very best health care. But when speaking of *how* to best deliver high-quality, low-cost health care, the stronger argument is one that moves beyond emotions and goes straight to dollars and cents.

The principle at the heart of the health care debate is not about our rights. It's about the best way to provide universal health coverage – which means that, as the World Health Organization puts it, "all people and communities can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship."

On this point, I am an emphatic YES!! One thing the Constitution absolutely provides us is the freedom to build a country we can all be proud of. America will never be a country that abandons citizens in need and thank God for that. Because of this gift, we need to design

smart programs that give us the biggest bang for our buck. Because – hear this loud and clear – *we are spending the money anyway*.

With so many issues, if we allow emotions to get in the way of common sense we will lose our way. In a country with over 342 million people, the challenges we face in health care are linked in intricate ways and, therefore, our solutions must be developed collectively as opposed to individually.

I realize that we Americans cherish our individual freedoms but, when it comes to health care, our fortunes are completely tied to one another. For good or ill, *we are all in this together*.

As we move forward, it's critical that we *forget ideology and just do the math*. First, let's address the elephant (or, in this case, donkey, LOL, see what I did there?) in the room: Medicare for All, single-payer, and/or a public option.

Let's get our terms squared away.

- Medicare for All – All Americans would be covered under the government-sponsored insurance program that currently serves Americans 65 and over.
- Single-Payer – A term typically used to describe a system run by the federal government: Everyone gets health care from one insurer, and the system is generally paid for by taxes.
- Public Option – Sort of a mix between single-payer and what we have now (where only certain citizens qualify for programs run by the government). With a public option, more people could qualify for government-run programs (i.e., Medicare or Medicaid) if they wanted to. These could replace private insurance plans for people, but private insurance plans would still exist.

None of these are the way to go for at least four reasons:

- Every one of these alternatives demand massive middle-class tax increases. Anyone who says differently is being dishonest. Very

few things in this world are free, and health care certainly isn't. If you are getting "free" health care, you are paying for it through increased taxes. That's just a fact. Taxing the rich is not enough to cover this divide. Not even close.

† The reason taxes would have to increase is that these options are insanely expensive. During the 2016 presidential campaign, the Urban Institute, a research institute, said this about Senator Bernie Sanders' Medicare for All plan: "In total, federal spending would increase by about $2.5 trillion (257.6 percent) in 2017. Federal expenditures would increase by about $32 trillion (232.7 percent) between 2017 and 2026."

To put this into perspective, overall spending in the entire FY2025 U.S. Budget – literally *everything* we spend money on – was $7 trillion.

Two years later, a research team led by Charles Blahous – a senior economic adviser to former President George W. Bush and a public trustee of Social Security and Medicare during the Obama administration – found that Bernie's proposal would increase federal spending by around $32.6 trillion over its first ten years.

† These options would all disrupt private insurance contracts, which would affect the coverage of 215 million Americans.

† Patient choice would decrease big time, and doctors' salaries and hospital revenue would drop significantly.

Believe me when I say we don't want this to happen. Yes, we must control costs, and how much we pay doctors and hospitals are certainly not immune from hard choices. But these decisions must be strategic and part of a broader plan. The last thing we want to do is unleash a bunch of unintended consequences by pulling the rug out from underneath everyone and everything all at once.

Cutting doctors' pay, for example, incentivizes them to choose higher-paid specialties over lower-paying jobs in primary care. This one act alone could lead to fewer available doctors for the sickest patients, plus would mean longer wait times and less time with the doctor when you finally get into one. With challenges like

this, we must be super careful that every issue is part of a smart broader strategy... and be *very* mindful of #TheButterflyEffect!

So, where should we go from here?

Answer: We should stick with – but vastly improve – the Affordable Care Act (ACA) structure…. the exact opposite of what the Republicans have done for the past 15 years.

We already have the ACA – it's here, it's a reality, and American companies have spent billions to comply with it. So, we need to make it the smartest health care policy we possibly can. The bottom line is that we have the architecture of something that can work, so starting from scratch makes no sense.

Although the initial ACA structure was janky – the final version of the legislation was a complex hodgepodge of private insurance and government-funded care with a healthy dose of regulations – it cannot be denied that the ACA has been successful by many measures.

In 2010, 18.2 percent of Americans under the age of 65 didn't have health insurance. By 2023, that number had dropped to a historic-low 8 percent. In 2025 alone, 24.2 million people bought coverage through the exchanges, with 3.9 million of those being new consumers. Over 60 percent of Americans now have a favorable view of the law.

There are many things we can do to get health care costs down and make the ACA fairer across the board, the least of which is reassess the tax subsidies for individuals and the tax exemptions for employer/employee contributions to employer-sponsored insurance and make sure they are set at the fairest, most effective levels.

There are other changes we can make that would make a huge impact: no longer require businesses of any size to offer insurance to their employees; allow small businesses to form a larger risk pool to make offering insurance more feasible; support plans that can be combined with tax-preferred health-savings accounts; address the

medical-loss ratio (MLR); expand site-neutral payments; allow independent contractors to access benefits without losing their independent status; encourage portable benefit plans that can travel with workers; compensate doctors based on value-based care, not fee for service; and listen to the smart recommendations of the private sector, just to name a few.

See 1787's entire Plan of Action for Health Care Reform on p. 134 of the Policy Guide.

The time for debate on whether the ACA is "Socialist" or the work of "Obama the Devil" or whatever else (blah blah blah) has passed.

Even though, to this day, Republicans vilify "Obamacare," they never have adequately articulated what their objections are beyond it being "Socialist." It seems like their real objection to the ACA is that Obama's name is attached to it, which I think we can all agree is an incredibly juvenile response. And, not for nothing, but for those worried that our health care system is getting more "Socialist," that ship sailed long ago. By their definition, we already have "Socialist" systems called Medicare, Medicaid, and the Veterans' Administration.

The strangest thing about the Republicans sticking with *the ACA is some sort of Socialist government takeover of the health care system* narrative is that it's just not true. In fact, in its purest form, the ACA draws on market-based ideas – like competition through the exchanges, which is a conservative theory, right? < that said, we have a way to go to make it truly competition-based, which we'll work hard to do >

Besides – let's get real – whether you like the ACA or not, we don't really have a choice because neither major political party can seem to devise a viable alternative. We've already gone over the fact that the plans being pushed by progressive Democrats are just too expensive and unrealistic, and it's obvious that the Republicans have NO IDEA how to solve our health care crisis (and, no, simply trying to destroy the ACA IS NOT a solution).

In the 2014 midterm elections, the Republicans took control of the U.S. House and Senate with the largest Republican majority since 1929. This means that for the final two years of Obama's presidency,

Republicans had a solid platform to outline their solutions for the nation's health care challenges, and after Donald Trump's election to the presidency the first time, their power became absolute.

Throughout the first Trump administration, the Republicans' petty and insufficient sabotage efforts to destroy the ACA made our long-term crisis so much worse. Even with a vast amount of time and influence available to them, they were unable to craft an intelligent health care agenda. They clearly had no idea what to do, so to substitute for substance and compensate for incompetence, they reduced complex issues to inflammatory dogma and dirty little tricks.

They essentially tried to dismantle the ACA piece by piece with nothing to put in its place – basically the "repeal" without the "replace" that Donald Trump promised on the campaign trail.

The Republican efforts included canceling the all-important individual mandate; blocking reimbursements to insurers who sold ACA health plans; establishing new rules that allowed states to opt-out of the ACA's most important provisions; cutting the open enrollment period in half; limiting the operating hours of HealthCare.gov; slashing funding for "navigators" (or, individuals or organization that were trained to help consumers, small businesses, and their employees look for health coverage and complete eligibility/enrollment forms); and killing an outreach program that helped people sign up for health insurance.

Eight years later, Republicans doubled down on their attempted detonation of the ACA with their One Big Beautiful Bill, stripping away health coverage from millions of Americans and significantly raising health care costs for millions more. They also changed who is eligible to receive Medicaid and Medicare benefits and who has access to Affordable Care Act plans, plus shifted most of the responsibility and costs to the states – a burden most states cannot even come close to shouldering.

In total, the One Big Beautiful Bill cuts $1.1 trillion from the ACA marketplaces and Medicaid. As a result, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that around 15 million Americans will lose health coverage and become uninsured by 2034 (10 million will

simply lose their health care and over five million more will lose coverage because the enhanced ACA tax credits won't be extended).

The changes the Republicans have made are going to create huge challenges for many Americans but, by far, Medicaid got the biggest throttling in the bill – taking a hit of $911 billion over ten years.

I cannot overstate what massive chaos and hardship this is going to create. In fact, we have already had a tiny glimpse. Fifteen years ago, the ACA extended Medicaid eligibility to almost all people with incomes at or below 138 percent of the poverty line as the mechanism to cover low-income individuals. Since then, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states could individually decide whether they wanted to take advantage of this provision.

This decision by the highest Court created a huge coverage gap in many states because Medicaid expansion was the only assistance the ACA provided for people who had incomes above their state's Medicaid eligibility threshold but below the poverty level (making them ineligible for marketplace subsidies).

To this day, in the ten states that decided not to expand Medicaid – Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Wisconsin and Wyoming – an estimated 1.4 million Americans remain in this coverage gap.

Now, the Republicans have made this far, FAR worse. Not only does the One Big Beautiful Bill make it harder to sign up and stay enrolled in Medicaid, with tedious new paperwork requirements, it also requires beneficiaries to prove they have worked at least 80 hours a month – and, just in case there is any confusion as to why, many Republican lawmakers made clear the reason is because, as House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) said, many Americans "choose not to work when they can….that is called fraud; they are cheating the system." (Good grief. It's like they go out of their way to be as un-Jesus-like as humanly possible.)

Listen up, Mike, because here's the deal: Most working-age adult enrollees in Medicaid do work. In 2023, around 31.2 million people ages 19 to 64 were enrolled in Medicaid. That number dropped to 26.1 million when you exclude the 2.4 million also covered by Medicare and the 2.7 million who also received disability benefits from Social

Security. Among this 26.1 million people, 44 percent worked full time and 20 percent worked part time. For the most part, those who didn't have a job were usually caregivers for family members; were in school; or had an illness or disability.

< Sidebar: U.S. Works – 1787's jobs program – requires anyone who is capable of work, receives federal assistance, and is unemployed to register with an Empower Society to actively look for a job OR be engaged in the specialized education/training programs provided there for at least 20 hours every week. The clients will be paid the federal minimum hourly wage, and the first funds earned will go toward the total amount of money the participant receives in federal government assistance. Any remaining funds go directly to the client. BUT people who receive Medicaid benefits only are exempt from this. Read more on p. 165 of the *Policy Guide*. >

If you or your loved ones are not on Medicaid, you may think these cuts don't affect your life – but think again. The Butterfly Effect is in full force with this one. Over 40 percent of the funding for community health centers across the nation comes from Medicaid. Medicaid also provides much of the money for addiction treatment and inpatient psychiatric care, plus well over a third for home health care, nursing homes, and births.

Medicaid also pays a significant amount of the money needed for hospitals in low-income and rural communities. Now, thanks to the Republicans, many of these facilities will be forced to substantially cut services or close altogether. This means that people will once again be forced into extremely expensive emergency rooms, like they were before the ACA.

But perhaps the biggest reason we should ALL care about the changes in the One Big Beautiful Bill is that they are going to cause health care costs to skyrocket beyond belief.

Costs were already out-of-control before the Republicans' wreaked their legislative havoc. The annual health benefits survey of employers by KFF, a nonpartisan health policy organization, found that the cost of health insurance increased for a third year in a row in 2025, reaching an average of almost $27,000 for a family plan. This is a 6 percent rise from 2024, building on two prior years of 7 percent gains. Employees

contribute $6,850 annually to the cost of family coverage, which obviously eats into their paychecks.

The U.S. Department of Labor reports that the amount of money individual consumers spent on health insurance in 2023 was an increase of almost 20 percent from five years before and has almost doubled over the past decade. Already, the average American spends around eight percent of their money on health care, which is more than they spend on clothes, education or just on having a little fun.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services reports that U.S. health care spending reached $5.3 trillion in 2024, an increase of 8.2 percent. The amount Americans spend on health care goods and services account for 18 percent of our gross domestic product (GDP). They project health care spending will grow another 7 percent in 2025.

Now, on top of this, average ACA premiums are about to increase up to 30 percent, impacting at least 17 million Americans who buy coverage on the marketplaces – meaning millions of people will see their health insurance payments double or even triple in 2026.

Everyone will feel the squeeze but people in some states more than others. If you live in New Jersey, for example, you may see your out-of-pocket premium increase over 175 percent, while if you live in Maryland – a state that is kicking in money to minimize the pain of the surge – you will see around a 30 percent increase.

The weird thing is that most Americans who rely on Obamacare live in super red areas. This is why I can't understand for the life of me what the Republican Party is thinking. I know they don't really seem to care about people, but do they care about votes?

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of people enrolled in the Marketplace live in congressional districts represented by a Republican. In Florida, there are ten congressional districts where at least 20 percent of the population is enrolled in a Marketplace plan. In fact, the top five congressional districts by marketplace enrollment are <u>all</u> in Florida. In Georgia, Mississippi and South Carolina, at least 10 percent of the population is enrolled in a Marketplace plan. Since these states didn't expand Medicaid, they are more dependent on tax subsidies to help low-income Americans get health insurance (this goes for Florida also).

So, the result of this legislative disaster is that premiums are going to substantially increase at the same time many Americans are losing the subsidy that helps reduce their costs. This ignites a devastating cycle because, now that the subsidies will dwindle, many Americans will likely leave the ACA marketplaces. Unfortunately, the people who leave will probably be the healthiest, which blows the entire model up.

I hate being the skunk at the garden party, but in any health insurance model, you have to have healthy people to balance out the unhealthy people. It just doesn't work otherwise. This means that the inescapable reality is that, if we want to keep covering things like pre-existing conditions – and I promise you, Americans will *freak out* if that provision goes away – there must be some sort of individual mandate in our plan (meaning we get insurance or pay a penalty).

That's just a fact. Anyone who says differently is just lying or does not understand how insurance models work *at all*. You can't have one without the other. Period. For this to work, healthy people must offset people who are not as healthy. There's just no way around it.

< And a quick word to all the healthy people out there: This may annoy you *today*, but keep in mind that there will probably come a day, if only temporarily, that *you* get sick, or someone in *your* family gets sick. Remember, it works both ways! >

To be clear, I'm not suggesting that without the individual mandate the health insurance markets would suddenly come crashing down. In fact, we already know they won't. When Congress set the penalty to zero in 2017 – effectively repealing the individual mandate provision in the ACA – the markets survived. BUT, without the individual mandate the markets will not operate at optimal efficiency, and we will *never get costs down*. Just look at costs since 2017. Even though the number of Americans with health insurance has increased, *health care costs have continued to explode*.

Solving our health care challenges cannot happen without coming to terms with some pretty brutal realities – something that politicians don't want to deal with because it's not what voters want to hear.

What lawmakers need to understand, however, is that trying to disguise these facts or sugarcoat the uphill battle we face does nothing

more than waste precious time. Yes, there are tough pills to swallow, but Americans can handle the truth.

See 1787's entire Plan of Action for Health Care Reform on p. 134 of the Policy Guide.

Bad Habit Eight

Foolishly Believing, for years, Promises Made by Politicians Who Have Zero Intention of Keeping Them. Then, if they do finally keep a promise, they wildly overreact and overcompensate – making the problem infinitely worse.

One of the worst habits we must break is foolishly believing, for years, promises made by politicians who have zero intention of keeping them. Then, if they do finally keep a promise, they wildly overreact and overcompensate – making the problem infinitely worse.

Sure, maybe hearing some of the pie-in-the-sky b.s. our politicians throw at us may help us sleep better *tonight*, but the perpetual charade of political theatre in this country depletes us of two things we simply don't have: time and money.

We have to start clearing the deck on some of this stuff once and for all. The Trump/Vance administration's immigration spectacle is a perfect example…

You can find 1787's Plans of Action for Immigration and Secure Borders on p. 662 and p. 389 of the Policy Guide.

On January 27, 2026, the Trump/Vance administration announced that Border Patrol commander Gregory Bovino would be leaving

Minneapolis – and be replaced by border adviser Tom Homan – and that they would be scaling down the surge of federal agents to the city.

Although President Trump tried to frame this as a victory – – "The Twin Cities of Minnesota in general are and will continue to be much safer for the communities here because of what we have accomplished under President Trump's leadership," Mr. Homan said – – it was really the closest thing we have seen yet to Donald Trump admitting a massive misstep. In truth, the heavy-handed immigration operation that had been playing out in Minneapolis – which included the fatal shootings of two U.S. citizens – encapsulated a misguided, stomach-turning deportation approach that had become politically toxic.

Weeks later, on March 5th, the admission was complete when President Trump fired Kristi Noem as Secretary of Homeland Security.

So, what circumstances led to this extraordinary shift? Let's review.

From practically the beginning of the Trump/Vance administration, American cities had been crawling with federal agents – working under muddled lines of authority – who shackled people without due process and forced them, citizen or not, into unmarked SUVs.

These federal agents – who were often dressed in everyday clothes and rarely showed any identification – wore masks and grabbed people they determine look "illegal," which is blatant ethnic profiling that has, astonishingly enough, been temporarily permitted by the U.S. Supreme Court when they ruled that appearance, location and workplace can be factors used to identify suspected illegal migrants.

< In May 2025, Todd Lyons, the acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued guidance saying agents could enter homes having only an administrative warrant, with no need for a judicial one. By January 2026, ICE was telling agents that they have even broader power to arrest people without a warrant. Essentially, low-level ICE agents can now execute sweeps rounding up people they suspect are undocumented immigrants, rather than carrying out targeted enforcement operations in which they, with a warrant, set out to arrest a specific person(s). >

People with every shade of brown skin are terrified – even if they are American citizens – as Latinos are increasingly under siege. Families are afraid to go to the grocery store and even church. Parents stay home from work. Kids stay home from school. If kids do go to school, parents ask family friends who have white skin to pick them up.

With good reason. Analysis from the Brookings Institution revealed that, by the fifteenth month of the Trump/Vance administration's immigration onslaught, over 100,000 children had been separated from their parents, *three-quarters of whom are likely U.S. citizens* (the researchers most conservative estimate for the number of U.S.-born children with a parent detained is about 117,400, while their highest estimate is approximately 175,000. They consider 145,000 to be their most accurate estimate). Roughly 205,000 children have had a parent detained, including about 145,000 who are U.S. citizens.

The number of people of all ages being detained reached an all-time high of over 73,400 in January 2026. These people are being held in facilities that reportedly have unsanitary and at times unsafe conditions, including rotting food, broken showers and toilets, and limited access to medical care and other essential services.

A New York Times investigation released in March 2026 found that "pregnant women who have been swept up in President Trump's immigration crackdown have been held in detention centers as late as eight months into their pregnancies without adequate food or medical care… In those cases, the Department of Homeland Security violated longstanding agency guidelines for how to treat pregnant women in detention, subjecting them to conditions that medical experts say can jeopardize the health of mothers and their babies."

"Pregnant women said they were served food covered in cockroaches and water that tasted like bleach. They described how ICE agents shackled their hands and feet, refusing to believe that they were pregnant until a bump appeared. One woman said ICE agents ignored her as she lay on the floor screaming in pain and took her to the emergency room only after her fellow inmates began banging on the door for help."

"In five cases identified by The Times, ICE agents cuffed a pregnant woman's hands and ankles, even after learning about their

pregnancies, according to the women, their lawyers, their family members and legal briefs. Two said the agents wrapped chains around their bellies, refusing to remove them even after one woman began bleeding on the airplane bound for a detention center."

Djeniffer Benvinda Semedo, who was 22 years old and around six months pregnant, "spent three days in a holding cell with no beds at an ICE office in Burlington, Massachusetts. At 2 a.m. on her third night in the facility, Ms. Semedo felt abdominal pain so intense that she started screaming and crying on the holding room floor."

"The ICE agents, she said, 'were sitting right there, watching TV' for about 10 minutes before they came to check on her. When an officer eventually appeared, she said, he surveyed the room and asked, -Which one of you needs help?' 'He could see me. I was literally lying down on the floor in front of him,' said Ms. Semedo. 'It was just terrifying.'"

At least 32 people died in ICE custody in 2025 – more than the number in President Biden's entire four-year term – and 2026 is on pace to exceed even that. A May 2026 CNN investigation found that at least a dozen deaths were directly attributable to inadequate medical care and severe understaffing, and many could have been prevented with proper medical care and attention.

Then there is the blatant abuse. In one case, a fellow detainee says he witnessed 55-year-old Cuban immigrant Geraldo Lunas Campos being choked to death by ICE guards on January 3, 2026 at Camp East Montana, a massive makeshift tent encampment on the Mexican border where detainees have reported sketchy conditions and physical abuse (in September 2025, ICE inspectors found that the tent facility was violating at least sixty federal standards for immigrant detention, including failing to properly monitor and treat detainee's medical conditions; lacking basic procedures for keeping guards and detainees safe; and failing to provide a way for many detainees to contact their attorneys, inquire about their cases, or file complaints).

In an announcement, ICE said that staff observed Geraldo Lunas Campos "in distress" but gave no cause of death. When pressed for details, then assistant secretary for the Department of Homeland Security Tricia McLaughlin said that Mr. Campos died after attempting

to take his own life: “Campos violently resisted the security staff and continued to attempt to take his life. During the ensuing struggle, Campos stopped breathing and lost consciousness. Medical staff was immediately called and responded. After repeated attempts to resuscitate him, EMTs declared him deceased on the scene.”

Unfortunately for Ms. McLaughlin, the El Paso County Office of the Medical Examiner disagreed: “Based on the investigative and examination findings, it is my opinion that the cause of death is asphyxia due to neck and torso compression,” Adam C. Gonzalez, deputy medical examiner for El Paso County, said in the report. “The manner of death is homicide.”

Meanwhile, the United States is deporting people to repressive regimes, even if they have no ties to the country. This includes El Salvadore’s Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT) – even though Amnesty International has made it clear that the facility “faces critical levels of overcrowding, reaching a 300 percent occupancy rate, equivalent to more than 100,000 inmates… Many detainees report being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including restrictions on food, water and access to sanitary facilities, lack of adequate medical care, and excessive use of force by prison guards.”

In February 2026, The Wall Street Journal reported that fifteen migrants the Trump/Vance administration deported to Cameroon were being held in a secret detention facility under prison-like conditions, according to attorneys for some of the deportees.

< Being in America illegally is a civil offense under U.S. law, and not punishable by imprisonment. Also under U.S. law, migrants considered to be in danger of persecution in their home countries can only be sent to a third country if an immigration court issues a special order authorizing the move. One of the attorneys for the detainees claims a U.S. court had previously barred the government from sending the migrants to their home countries, but the government did not give them the required opportunity to contest deportation to Cameroon. >

In July 2026, Politico reported that “federal judges have spent a full year overwhelmingly rejecting ICE’s effort to lock up people the Trump administration is seeking to deport – finding a combination of

illegality, unconstitutionality, incompetence and cruelty at a shocking scale… more than 15,000 times."

"The Trump administration has now been shot down by at least 464 federal judges, with just 54 – overwhelmingly appointed by Trump – ruling in the administration's favor."

Although hundreds of U.S. judges have ruled time and time again that the Trump/Vance administration is unlawfully detaining people, the administration continues to jail people indefinitely – prompting the chief federal judge in Minnesota Patrick Schiltz to say on February 26th "one way or another, ICE will comply with this court's orders."

"The court is not aware of another occasion in the history of the United States in which a federal court has had to threaten contempt – again and again and again – to force the United States government to comply with court orders." < Judge Schiltz identified 210 orders issued in 143 cases in Minnesota in which he claimed ICE had not complied with court orders. >

Aggressive and at times violent videos circulating on social media are shocking – women being pulled kicking and screaming from their cars; children being taken from day care centers and their schools without a parent present; an apartment complex in Chicago being raided as helicopters hover overhead and U.S.-born children in their pajamas are zip tied and led hysterically crying into the street; an American couple and their baby leaving a Sam's Club as a passing dark SUV of federal immigration agents spray pepper spray into their car, hitting the 1-year-old baby squarely in the face (video shot before, during and after this episode was released by the family).

This last example is not an isolated incident. Immigration officers are using chemical irritants in ways that grossly violates U.S. policing norms, testing the boundaries of use-of-force laws. In Chicago, for instance, ICE agents shot pepper balls directly into multiple protests (which were, by almost all accounts, peaceful), including one outside an ICE facility where Reverand David Black – a man of the cloth who was there offering to pray with people – was shot in the head with one.

In addition to spraying babies in the face with them and hitting pastors in the head with them, federal officers have thrown chemical agents out of vehicles and onto city streets – creating a hazard for

motorists – and have thrown tear-gas canisters near stores and schools, exposing children, pregnant women and the elderly to the toxic fumes.]

A Minneapolis couple recounts that, while they were driving home from their son's basketball game, ICE agents deployed tear gas and stun grenades around them and their six children – ages eleven years to six months – after they found themselves caught in a conflict between protesters and federal agents. One of the blasts shook the vehicle to the point that the airbags deployed.

The mother, Destiny Jackson, told The New York Times that, "My baby was completely unconscious, not breathing." Emergency services gave her instructions over the phone on how to perform CPR, while bystanders soaked the other children with milk to help neutralize the tear gas. The Jackson family was then treated by emergency medical services, who took the parents and three of the children to the hospital.

This got so out of control that residents of an apartment complex in Portland – who live within 100 feet of an ICE office – are suing the Trump/Vance administration, claiming they knowingly and recklessly released poison gas into the homes of American citizens. The chemicals – which soak into carpets, clothes, furniture, walls and children's toys – create a toxic environment, they say, posing a serious threat to their health.

One of the plaintiffs, Mindy King, says that she and her 13-year-old son have had to wear gas masks in their home and her neighbor, Diane Moreno, has been forced to go twice to urgent care with tightness in her chest and bloody discharge from her nose.

All of this was unsurprisingly upsetting lots of people so, naturally, here came the lies. On CBS's Face the Nation on January 18, 2026, former DHS head Kristi Noem denied her department had used pepper spray after a federal judge issued an order not to use it, or any other "crowd dispersal tools," at protests: "That federal order was a little ridiculous," she said, "because that federal judge came down and told us we couldn't do what we already aren't doing."

Unfortunately for Ms. Noem, she was then confronted with a video that showed ICE deploying chemical agents. What she had *meant* to say, she revised, is that *protesters* were to blame for *ICE*'s use of force,

and federal officers "only use those chemical agents when there's violence happening and perpetuating."

Far from being embarrassed and/or horrified by anyone seeing or hearing these thing – or even when they are caught red-handed in a lie, which is happening more and more – the Trump/Vance administration seems to relish in it, still gleefully broadcasting raids on social media and sending in-house video producers on raids with ICE agents to capture every nasty second of them. With these guys, fear and cruelty seem to be the entire point… well over a year into this.

As The Economist so perfectly predicted in January 2025, the Trump/Vance administration is focusing "on theatrical cruelty as a substitute for real action. Expect workplace raids with camera crews in tow, harsh internment in border states and ICE agents surging in sanctuary cities… the point is partly to deter would-be migrants. It is also to persuade voters that the government is serious." Then they nailed their conclusion: "Cruelty for its own sake is wrong. By denying migrants' humanity, it coarsens American values."

What makes all this chaos so much worse is that – despite all the cruelty and terror and egregious erosion of rights – *we are making our overall situation worse, not better.*

We are surrendering the moral high ground and sacrificing our global reputation…. for what?

Without question, far, far fewer people are entering the country. According to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), in May 2026 there were 11,913 nationwide total apprehensions and 9,998 total apprehensions at the southwest border. From January 21, 2025 (the first full day of the Trump/Vance administration) through the end of November, CBP says there were 117,105 total enforcement encounters along the southwest border.

< This "encounters" thing can be confusing and counterintuitive. A lower "encounters" number is generally considered a positive outcome by government officials because ostensibly fewer people are trying to cross the border, suggesting successful enforcement and more secure borders. >

How do these numbers along the southwest border compare to years past? The average annual number of encounters down there during Bill Clinton's eight years in office was 1,379,558; the average annual number during George W. Bush's eight years as president was 1,002,111; and the average annual number during Donald Trump's first four years as president was 488,163. It may surprise Republicans to learn that the lowest average annual number of encounters at the southwest border over the past three decades was 413,377 during Barak Obama's eight-year presidency.

Then came President Joe Biden, who allowed our southern border to descend into total disarray. Illegal crossings at the southwest border skyrocketed during Biden's presidency – to the highest level they had been in over 60 years.

In FY2021, CBP encountered 1,734,686 migrants at the southwest land border, and in FY2022, that number jumped to 2,378,944. In FY2023, the total number of encounters down there was 2,475,669 (in December 2023, encounters hit the highest monthly total ever recorded, reaching 301,981. Arrests for illegal border crossings from Mexico also reached a record high, hitting 249,785. That was a 31 percent increase from November). In FY2024, the total number of encounters at the southwest land border was 2,135,005.

So, the fact that there were only 117,105 total encounters along the southwest border during the first ten months of the Trump/Vance administration obviously represents a dramatic shift.

But at what cost?

Let's break this question down into three things: the actual cost, the cost to our economy, and the moral cost to society.

The Actual Cost

Back in 2019 – during Donald Trump's first term when the average annual number of encounters at the southwest border was

488,163 – Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) were already struggling to keep up.

In its Enforcement and Removal Operations report, ICE reported its operations were "significantly impacted" by the "high volume of migration, including unprecedented numbers of family unit and Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) arrivals." This, the report said, "stretched both Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) resources and those of the entire U.S. government to the breaking point and created a severe humanitarian crisis and border security crisis that continues to cripple the immigration system."

So, naturally, the kneejerk reaction from Donald Trump. JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Stephen Miller, and most other Republicans in Washington was – not to come up with a common-sense, long term comprehensive strategy – but to just throw tons more money at the problem. GET PEOPLE OUT AT ANY COST!

Before the One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBBA), the Department of Homeland Security's annual budget for FY2024 was $103.2 billion, with $41 billion going to immigration. After the Republicans passed their monster legislation, the budget for border and interior enforcement increased to over $170 billion over four years – more than the annual budget for all local and state law enforcement agencies in all 50 states and the District of Columbia combined.

Then, on June 10, 2026, President Trump signed into law the *Secure America Act*. For the second time in less than a year, Congress used a budgetary process called "reconciliation" to allocate billions of additional dollars for immigration enforcement. The *Secure America Act* gives ICE and CBP $69.5 billion dollars over the next three years, adding to the $170 billion dollars that DHS got through the OBBBA. *This equals almost a quarter of a trillion dollars for DHS through the budget reconciliation process in less than one year, nearly all of which is for immigration enforcement.*

I'm sorry to report that this massive influx of money is still not enough to carry out the Trump/Vance administration's immigration deportation delusion. As a result, budgets for real national security threats have been slashed and thousands of federal agents have been

redirected from investigating cybercrimes, drug smuggling, sexual exploitation and organized crime to immigration enforcement.

Almost 1,000 employees of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) were fired; election security programs have been dismantled; and funding for the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center – a core cyber threat sharing service that improves the overall cyber-security posture of state, local, tribal, and territorial government organizations through coordination, collaboration, cooperation, and increased communication – has been decimated.

Federal agents from Homeland Security Investigations; the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the U.S. Marshals Service; the FBI; and even the Postal Service have been pulled from their traditional duties and enlisted to help find, arrest and deport undocumented immigrants. This is no small thing since the ATF only had 2,572 special agents in the first place.

Almost a quarter of the roughly 13,000 FBI agents across the country have been reassigned to immigration enforcement, with the number reaching over 40 percent in the nation's largest field offices… and this number doesn't even reflect the agents that get pulled in less than full-time.

The Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University reports that federal referrals for prosecution are decreasing across agencies. Between May and June 2025 alone, the DEA referred 10 percent fewer cases; the U.S. Marshals Service 13 percent fewer; and the ATF 14 percent less.

Based on internal DHS documents The New York Times received after the paper filed a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit, "Homeland Security investigators worked approximately 33 percent fewer hours on child exploitation cases from February through April compared to their average in prior years." They reported this disturbing example:

"Earlier this year, special agents at Homeland Security Investigations found online videos showing violent sexual abuse of an unidentified young child. Trained to hunt down pedophiles who use the internet to distribute illegal imagery, the H.S.I. agents spent weeks analyzing the footage to try to identify the child and infiltrate the online

networks that had shared and may have directed the abuse, according to a person with knowledge of the investigation."

"But the agents working the case have since been asked to go out in the field and help arrest undocumented immigrants. The re-assignment has hindered progress toward identifying and rescuing the child, said this person, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive investigation. The person said that the agents, no longer able to spend as much time undercover online, had lost contact with a key source they had cultivated over years in the online world of abusers."

The report continued: "(Homeland Security Investigators) that investigate sex crimes against children in cities including Newark and Los Angeles have had significant numbers of special agents dragooned into immigration work, according to people with knowledge of the changes. At one point, an entire unit of roughly 5 people investigating child exploitation in Los Angeles was working immigration duty, with agents trying to advance their cases on nights and weekends, one of those people said."

The New York Times also reported that one of the cases that had been put on the back burner is "a national security probe into the black market for Iranian oil sold to finance terrorism has been slowed down for months because of the shift to immigration work, allowing tanker ships and money to disappear."

The Wall Street Journal too reported on agents being redirected: "Child-exploitation cases are among those affected. Several current and former agents said investigations that require subpoenas, warrants or grand-jury testimony have been postponed or canceled outright."

"Informant networks are also fraying. Building trust with sources inside drug gangs or child-trafficking rackets takes time in the field, investigators say – time they no longer have. In some cases, agents said that it has become more difficult to offer the visas that once kept informants inside the U.S. Some have resorted to asking informants to be extra careful, avoid incidents that could draw attention and to call them if they get caught up in a traffic stop."

"In Arizona and Texas, highway checkpoints run by CBP have gone unstaffed, including one on Arizona's State Route 82, a prominent fentanyl trafficking route. Many CBP agents who used to staff them

have been redirected to other states to detain migrants far from the border, said one person familiar with the situation. Ports of entry are understaffed. Some border patrol sectors are stretched thin, this person says."

The Cost to Our Economy

The Trump/Vance administration's draconian immigration policies are threatening vital U.S. industries, including agriculture; construction; manufacturing; leisure and hospitality; and elder care, child care and long-term health care – mainly because our economy has become so dependent on immigrant labor. Over the past decade, just under half of all new civilian workers (roughly 6 million) have been immigrants, the majority of whom entered the U.S. legally.

ICE raids – coupled with crippling tariffs, a new uncontained parasite that threatens cattle, and price spikes in fuel and fertilizer thanks to the war in Iran – have helped exacerbated the agriculture crisis to a degree that farms are increasingly going under (bankruptcies were up 46 percent in 2025 and 70 percent by May of 2026).

Farms of all kinds have been raided by agents as they detain and deport agricultural workers (the U.S. agricultural workforce fell by an estimated 155,000 to over 200,000 workers between March and July 2025 alone).

This was always going to cause major problems since, pre-Donald Trump and JD Vance, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reported that over 68 percent of hired crop farmworkers were foreign born. In 2020–22, 32 percent of these workers were born in America, 7 percent were immigrants who had obtained U.S. citizenship, 19 percent were other authorized immigrants (i.e., permanent residents or green-card holders), and the remaining 42 percent held no work authorization.

In California – the largest food producing state with an agricultural economy worth almost $60 billion – over 80 percent of hired farm workers came from Mexico before 2025, and more than half of those held no work authorization.

Sure enough, by June 2026, the Trump/Vance administration was forced to open a new legal pathway for migrant farm workers.

Aggressive raids on construction sites have led to substantial delays and major economic disruption, including a significant loss in sales and even more bankruptcies.

To make matters far worse, immigrants with legal authorization are also being detained, and even workers with valid work permits are forced to wait weeks to see a judge before being released – creating insurmountable fear among all workers. So, they're not going to work either, bringing the industry to essentially a standstill.

From Texas cattle ranchers to Nebraska meat packing facilities to corporate giants like Disney, Walmart and Amazon, businesses are scrambling to replace workers after aggressive actions by the Trump/Vance administration have taken both legal and illegal immigrants out of the work force.

Companies that operate nursing homes and home care agencies, for example, have lost tons of staff because of the administration's efforts to halt deportation protections for hundreds of thousands of migrants with temporary legal status. This is another huge problem since 28 percent of the long-term care work force are immigrants.

This is going to be made worse by the U.S. Supreme Court's June 2026 decision upholding the Trump/Vance administration's authority to end protections for Temporary Protected Status (T.P.S.) holders from Haiti and Syria, since thousands of T.P.S. recipients from Haiti work in the health care sector and as caregivers to older Americans.

Likewise, since many health care specialists who work in rural America come from other countries, the administration's new rule that companies pay a $100,000 fee to hire an immigrant worker using an H-1B visa has put a significant dent in the rural health care workforce, putting patients who need timely care at risk.

< On June 8, 2026, the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts vacated the Presidential Proclamation that imposed the $100,000 fee. The government appealed and successfully obtained a temporary stay of that order, meaning the fee remains in effect while litigation proceeds.

The H-1B visa program allows U.S. employers to hire workers with specialized training, usually when they cannot find American workers to fill the jobs. The workers from abroad that work in the health care sector fill crucial gaps in underserved regions. Before the change to $100,000, it cost employers between $2,000 to $5,000 per petition, depending on the size of the employer. >

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Essentially, the story the Trump/Vance administration is trying to sell is that the United States can have a strong, robust economy while, at the same time, have "mass deportations." In their version, this will allow us to maintain three percent economic growth, increase wages, lower budget deficits, and reinvigorate manufacturing – ushering in a new "Golden Age" for Americans on every level. America first, baby!

This is a fairytale. The truth is that a strong, robust U.S. economy requires not only higher productivity on the part of working Americans but also smart and willing new people to help fill the demand for labor and help round out our pool of available domestic labor that is slowly depleting thanks to declining birth rates.

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The Migration Policy Institute reports that, between 2022 and 2023, immigration accounted for the *entire* American population growth for the first time since meaningful census data began being collected in 1850. This is serious: Our population is aging at a fast rate. SO, more Americans than ever are leaving the workforce and entering Social Security and Medicare. SO, since America's birth rate is below the replacement rate, we need immigration to replenish the workforce – because *those tax contributions are what fund those earned benefits.*

A 2025 study by the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School found that a four-year immigration policy in which just 10 percent of the unauthorized immigrants in the United States were removed every year reduces GDP by one percent and decreases the average worker's

wages. Federal deficits *increase* by $350 billion thanks to lost revenue and the new spending it will take to enable mass deportations.

The researchers estimate that if these immigration policies last ten years, the cost to the U.S. government would rise to $987 billion, GDP would shrink by 3.3 percent, and wages would plummet by 1.7 percent.

Like it or not, we need workers, wherever they may come from. Two economists from Brookings Institution, together with one from the conservative American Enterprise Institute, report that, for the first time in at least half a century, more immigrants left the United States than entered in 2025 (net migration was between negative 10,000 and negative 295,000).

< Note: The Congressional Budget Office estimates that while U.S. net migration – the difference between the number of people entering a country and the number of people leaving – fell sharply in 2025, to 410,000, it remained positive. The difference between the two is that the CBO figures assume that fewer immigrants were deported and/or voluntarily left the country than the Brookings model. We'll get to the number of 2025 deportations in a minute. >

The three economists conclude that "net migration is likely to be very low or negative in 2026 as well," and that "reduced migration will dampen growth in the labor force, consumer spending, and gross domestic product (GDP)."

The last time our net immigration was this low was the 1960s. But back then, Baby Boomers were entering the workforce, helping turbocharge the economy. Today, we face a complete opposite set of circumstances. Instead of the dramatic increase in birth rates that happened in the wake of World War II, U.S. fertility rates are near record lows – to the point where the Congressional Budget Office estimates that American deaths will outpace births by 2033, seven years earlier than they previously expected.

While economies can function with tight labor markets, there tends to be less innovation, less dynamism, limited productive capacity, a lower tax base, less income per capita, and less expansive economic activity overall.

The U.S. Labor Department seemed to acknowledge this when it said in a 2025 document that "the near total cessation of the inflow of

illegal aliens combined with the lack of an available legal workforce results in significant disruptions to production costs and threatens the stability of domestic food production and prices for U.S consumers."

Even some people in the Trump/Vance administration seem to be grasping the potential peril. One full year before the administration was forced to open a new legal pathway for migrant farm workers in June 2026, President Trump suggested that ICE agents would no longer pursue immigrant workers in agriculture or hospitality, writing on social media that, "Our great Farmers and people in the Hotel and Leisure business have been stating that our very aggressive policy on immigration is taking very good, long time workers away from them, with those jobs being almost impossible to replace." (he later backtracked on this when some MAGA diehards freaked out)

Months into his second administration, he also said that foreign students who graduate from U.S. colleges should automatically receive a green card to stay in the country because the U.S. doesn't have workers with "certain talent," and that he would allow 600,000 Chinese students into U.S. universities because if he didn't, "our college system would go to hell very quickly." (this *really* freaked some of those MAGA diehards out)

In May 2026, the Trump/Vance administration announced it would require most foreigners seeking green cards to apply from outside the United States. However, the administration did a major U-turn on this as well, after hearing an earful from business leaders – including many from tech and A.I. companies – and industry groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce about the significant harm this policy would inflict on their workforces.

Also, for all the Trump/Vance administration's ranting and raving about illegal immigrants, why haven't they focused on the ***American*** businesses that hire undocumented workers? Why are the leaders of *these* businesses not being accused of violating the U.S. "rule of law" and not being called ugly names by Republicans? After all, they are actual ***Americans*** breaking ***American*** laws. Not only are American companies that hire undocumented workers for below-market wages breaking the law, but they are also committing unfair trade practices against their competition. They are cheating – straight up.

Is the Trump/Vance administration not targeting these companies an accidental admission that we need the labor? After all, hitting these businesses with harsh fines would probably solve "illegal" immigration faster than anything else because while it's true some people come to America to flee the terror of their own countries, many come for the same reason they always have: Economics.

An analysis of the migration patterns of people from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras by the Inter-American Development Bank found that "seven of every ten migrants (74 percent) list economic reasons as one of the main motivations behind their decision." In the case of Guatemalans, that number was 87 percent. Guatemalans also tend to regard migration to the United States as temporary. Only 34 percent said they intended to stay in the United States.

While we're on the subject, let's talk about those jobs for a minute. Donald Trump, JD Vance, and some of their followers are convinced that "illegal" immigrants steal job opportunities from native-born Americans. As they do with practically everything, they seem to consider immigration a *zero-sum game*: If a job is taken by someone foreign-born, that's one less job for a person who was born in America.

A perfect example of this came at the disastrous Trump/Biden presidential debate when, acting like he gives a flip about black unemployment, Trump said, "(Biden's) big kill on the black people is the millions of people that he's allowed to come in through the border. They're taking black jobs now and it could be 18, it could be 19 and even 20 million people. They're taking black jobs and they're taking Hispanic jobs."

Setting aside the "18, 19, even 20 million people" ridiculousness, Donald Trump's logic doesn't add up. Even though illegal immigration surged during the Biden administration, black unemployment fell to a new record low. Fact is, unemployment for black Americans increased to 8.3 percent by November of President Trump's second term, well into his "mass deportation" push.

Throughout 2025, the Trump/Vance administration kept trying to use federal data to show that there had been an increase in employment for U.S.-born workers and a decrease in employment among foreign-

born workers, claiming "all net job creation" since inauguration day had been for citizens.

This is inaccurate because the figures they used were based on predetermined population estimates for 2025 that the Census Bureau had calculated in 2024. Plus, the administration tried to make "foreign-born employment" synonymous with "migrant workers" and/or "illegal aliens" – but the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) foreign-born category also includes large numbers of naturalized citizens, permanent residents, refugees, and temporary residents (i.e., students and temporary workers).

The TRUTH is that American-born workers are not entering jobs vacated by immigrants who have been forced out – as evidenced by the fact that job growth in industries that rely heavily on immigrants has been hit the hardest. By the end of 2025, not only were U.S.-born workers more likely to be unemployed than the year before, but the unemployment rate was higher among U.S.-born workers than among foreign-born workers.

A study released in May 2026 by the Brookings Institution confirmed that, not only is the Trump/Vance administration's claim that mass immigration enforcement will unlock millions of jobs for Americans 100% false, but the exact opposite is true.

Marcela Escobari, a senior fellow and research vice president at Brookings, summarized her and her colleagues' findings this way: "Immigrant and native workers are not simply substitutes for each other. They are complements. When you remove one, you often undermine the other."

"In much of the economy, immigrants aren't competing for jobs held by American-born workers; they make other jobs possible. Immigrants tend to take on more physically demanding tasks, which allows American-born workers to shift into communication-intensive, supervisory and coordination roles. Immigrants also help drive American innovation and patents, and they are about 80 percent more likely than American-born workers to start a business, which could then hire Americans."

Analysis by economists at the University of Colorado, Boulder, published May 4, 2026 by the National Bureau of Economic Research,

also debunks the Trump/Vance administration's claim that deporting undocumented immigrants improves economic opportunities for U.S.-born workers.

Chloe East, associate professor of economics at CU Boulder, put it this way: "We show that heightened ICE activity is harming the labor market overall, and we find no evidence that it is benefiting U.S.-born workers. If anything, job opportunities for U.S.-born workers are going down as a result."

To that point, the study found that employment among American-born men with less formal education fell by 1.3 percent in areas with more ICE arrests, and that industries that experienced the largest adverse effects from ICE arrests on undocumented workers are also "where we see negative effects for U.S.-born male workers." Meaning, deporting undocumented workers *reduces* job opportunities for American workers – largely because, as Ms. Escobari from Brookings found, they perform *complementary* jobs.

The bottom line is that the U.S. labor market lost substantial momentum in 2025. For the first time since 2021, the number of people looking for work was more than the number of job openings. By the end of 2025, the number of Americans who had been unemployed for 27 weeks or more rose almost 400,000 from a year earlier, and the number of people who were working part time but wanted a full-time job had risen by almost a million.

Wage gains slowed and the unemployment rate rose, hitting its highest level in four years. In the end, the number of unemployed Americans increased by over 700,000 to 7.8 million. Despite Donald Trump's promises to reinvigorate it, the manufacturing sector alone lost over 70,000 jobs in the one-year period ending in November 2025.

The American people are – and will always be – my number one priority. So, it's super important that we all thoroughly understand the impact immigrants have on the American workforce in terms of jobs and wages – and really on the overall economy – to make sure *every single American* is protected to every extent possible.

This is tricky to measure, but some super smart people have tried. A report released during the first Trump administration by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) – which

was created in 1863 by President Lincoln to be the collective scientific national academy of the United States – concluded "that the long-term impact of immigration on the wages and employment of native-born workers overall is very small, and that any negative impacts are most likely to be found for prior immigrants or native-born high school dropouts… First-generation immigrants are more costly to governments than are the native-born, but the second generation are among the strongest fiscal and economic contributors in the U.S." Their conclusion was that "immigration has an overall positive impact on long-run economic growth in the U.S."

In February 2026, the Cato Institute updated the NASEM report and found the following:

- For each year from 1994 to 2023, the U.S. immigrant population generated more in taxes than they received in benefits from all levels of government.

- Over that period, immigrants created a cumulative fiscal surplus of $14.5 trillion in real 2024 U.S. dollars, including $3.9 trillion in savings on interest on the debt.

- Without immigrants, U.S. government public debt at all levels would be at least 205 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) – nearly twice its 2023 level.

Cato reiterates that, since these results don't account for any of immigration's "indirect, tax-revenue-boosting effects on economic growth," they represent the lower end of the positive fiscal effects. But, they say, "even by this conservative analysis, immigrants may have already prevented a fiscal crisis.

A study from the nonpartisan National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) revealed that "H-1B-driven increases in STEM workers were associated with significant *increases* in wages paid to college educated natives. Wage increases for non-college educated natives were smaller but still significant."

From a broader perspective, two studies from IZA World of Labor – a German-based economic research institute – addressed the question of whether immigrants take the jobs of native-born workers.

The first study, conducted with George Washington University and Temple University, found that "immigrants – of all skill levels – do not significantly affect native employment in the short term and boost employment in the long term."

The report goes on to say that "immigrants who are self-employed or entrepreneurs directly create new jobs. Immigrant innovators create jobs indirectly within a firm, leading to long-term job growth. New immigrants fill labor shortages and keep markets working efficiently. High-skilled immigrants contribute to technological adaptation and low-skilled immigrants to occupational mobility, specialization, and human capital creation; both create new jobs for native workers. By raising demand, immigrants cause firms and production to expand, resulting in new hiring."

The second study, conducted jointly with the Univ. of California, Davis, said this: "Politicians, the media, and the public express concern that immigrants depress wages by competing with native workers, but thirty years of empirical research provide little supporting evidence to this claim. Most studies for industrialized countries have found no effect on wages, on average, and only modest effects on wage differentials between more and less educated immigrant and native workers. Native workers' wages have been insulated by differences in skills, adjustments in local demand and technology, production expansion, and specialization of native workers as immigration rises."

"Immigration has a very small effect on the average wages of native workers. There is little evidence of immigration lowering wages of less educated native workers. In the long term, immigration, especially of high-skilled workers, increases innovation and the skill mix, with potentially positive productivity effects. In many countries, the share of graduate workers is higher for immigrants than for native workers. Firms have absorbed immigrants by adopting appropriate technologies, expanding production, and moving native workers into more communication-intensive jobs."

Researchers from UC Davis released another report in April 2024, this time as a NBER working paper series, that "extended and updated a framework that has been broadly used since the 2000s-2010s, to enrich and update our understanding of the recent national effects of immigration on U.S. wages, employment and labor markets."

They concluded that "immigrants have a substantial degree of productive complementarity (i.e., a complementary relationship) with natives. This offsets the competition effect, resulting in a boost of native wages and in an increase of natives' employment-population ratio in response to inflows for most native workers."

The researchers continued: "We also show that after the year 2000, inflows of immigrants became more concentrated among college educated compared to the past, and that their complementarity with skilled natives was large enough not to harm, but rather to boost the wages of less educated American workers. Additionally, we find that one possible mechanism through which immigration results in a positive complementarity and a wage boost for natives is through positive occupational responses among natives. This is consistent with specialization between natives and immigrants along the lines of comparative advantage, so that an increase in immigration prompts natives to upgrade and specialize in terms of occupations."

In July 2024, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released a report saying that the immigration surges the United States experienced under President Biden "boosted federal revenues as well as mandatory spending and interest on the debt in CBO's baseline projections, lowering deficits, on net, by $0.9 trillion over the 2024–2034 period. Some of the effects on the budget result from the increase in the number of people paying taxes and collecting federal benefits. Other budgetary effects stem from changes in the economy over that period that are brought on by the surge, including increases in interest rates and in the productivity of workers who are not part of the surge."

Lastly, a 2024 analysis by the nonpartisan think tank Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy discovered this:

† Undocumented immigrants paid $96.7 billion in federal, state, and local taxes in 2022. Most of that amount, $59.4 billion, was paid to

the federal government while the remaining $37.3 billion was paid to state and local governments.

- Undocumented immigrants paid federal, state, and local taxes of $8,889 per person in 2022. In other words, for every 1 million undocumented immigrants who reside in the country, public services receive $8.9 billion in additional tax revenue.
- More than a third of the tax dollars paid by undocumented immigrants go toward payroll taxes dedicated to funding programs that these workers are barred from accessing. Undocumented immigrants paid $25.7 billion in Social Security taxes, $6.4 billion in Medicare taxes, and $1.8 billion in unemployment insurance taxes in 2022.
- At the state and local levels, slightly less than half (46 percent, or $15.1 billion) of the tax payments made by undocumented immigrants are through sales and excise taxes levied on their purchases. Most other payments are made through property taxes, such as those levied on homeowners and renters (31 percent, or $10.4 billion), or through personal and business income taxes (21 percent, or $7.0 billion).
- Six states raised more than $1 billion each in tax revenue from undocumented immigrants living within their borders. Those states are California ($8.5 billion), Texas ($4.9 billion), New York ($3.1 billion), Florida ($1.8 billion), Illinois ($1.5 billion), and New Jersey ($1.3 billion).
- In a large majority of states (40), undocumented immigrants pay higher state and local tax rates than the top 1 percent of households living within their borders.
- Income tax payments by undocumented immigrants are affected by laws that require them to pay more than otherwise similarly situated U.S. citizens. Undocumented immigrants are often barred from receiving meaningful tax credits and sometimes do not claim refunds they are owed due to lack of awareness, concern about their immigration status, or insufficient access to tax preparation assistance.

† Providing access to work authorization for undocumented immigrants would increase their tax contributions both because their wages would rise and because their rates of tax compliance would increase. Under a scenario where work authorization is provided to all current undocumented immigrants, their tax contributions would rise by $40.2 billion per year to $136.9 billion. Most of the new revenue raised in this scenario ($33.1 billion) would flow to the federal government while the remainder ($7.1 billion) would flow to states and localities.

The Moral Cost to Society

Now we know the actual cost of the Trump/Vance administration's immigration policy as well as the cost to the U.S. economy. Let's now tackle the moral cost of the policy to society – which is sky high for several reasons: 1) It's mean. 2) It gives Donald Trump, JD Vance, and their posse a chance to divide Americans by altering reality through blatant lies. 3) It erodes our rights. 4) It promotes bigotry.

1. It's Mean.

I desperately wish that every person on the planet could live in a place like the United States of America. But not everyone can, and I get that. At the end of the day, even with the most open-armed proposals, there is simply no choice but to turn people away from this magnificent country.

But that DOES NOT mean that we have to be jerks about it. That DOES NOT mean that unqualified masked men have to snatch people from the street to look tough. That DOES NOT mean that we have to terrify people, separate children from their families, and trample on constitutional rights – making a total mockery of what we say this country is all about.

That DOES NOT mean that we cannot have compassion for every single non-criminal person who risks their lives to come to this country. That DOES NOT mean that we can't show a little empathy for those whose only crime was to not be blessed with the circumstances of our births. Almost all these HUMAN BEINGS come from countries that have been mired in violence and economic and humanitarian crises for decades. THIS IS NOT WHO WE ARE.

Donald Trump, JD Vance and many of their followers say that since it's against American law to be an undocumented worker in this country, these people are inherently criminals. That is absurd.

Universally, our deepest desire is to create the best life possible for our families. Every person who was born in America needs to answer this question, truthfully: If you were born in Mexico and your children were living in abject poverty [making $13.76 a day, feeding your family nothing but rice for the second month in a row, living in a house with no running water, all while dodging bullets from dangerous drug cartels] – what would you do to create a better life for them?

Easy answer: Every one of us would do anything – *anything* – necessary to provide them a better future. Build a wall…we would dig a tunnel. And that WOULD NOT make us criminals.

2. It gives Donald Trump, JD Vance, and their posse a chance to divide Americans by altering reality through blatant lies.

On January 7, 2026, 37-year-old mother of three Renee Nicole Good was shot dead by an ICE agent in the streets of Minneapolis. Multiple videos are all over the Internet and, if you haven't seen them, you should. I watched them from every angle, in slow motion, and this is what I saw.

The 47-second cellphone video recorded by Jonathan Ross, the ICE agent who shot Renee Good, shows her sitting inside her Honda Pilot SUV speaking to him in the moments before he shot her. As he passes her driver's side door, she says to him through her open window, "That's fine dude, I'm not mad at you."

As Agent Ross walks behind the SUV, Renee's wife Rebecca says, "We don't change our plates every morning. Want to come at us? I say go get yourself some lunch, big boy." (another video angle shows Ross and Rebecca both pointing phones towards one another, apparently recording each other)

Additional agents arrive on the scene and tell Renee to get out of her vehicle (on another video, a voice can be heard saying to "get out" of the car at least two times). Rebecca then attempts to open the front passenger side door, but the door does not open. One of the agents attempts to open Renee's door. Renee puts the vehicle in reverse and Rebecca says, "Drive, baby, drive."

As Renee talks with agents at her window, Agent Ross crosses in front of the vehicle as it moves into reverse and Renee turns and looks through the windshield. She then looks down and shifts the vehicle into drive before looking up again as she turns the steering wheel to the right, away from Ross.

Ross is standing near the driver's side front corner as the vehicle moves forward and someone yells, "Whoa." Ross's camera then turns skyward but does not fall to the ground. One shot can then be heard before two more shots in rapid succession. Ross' camera then refocuses on the SUV right before the vehicle crashes into a car parked on the opposite side of the street a short distance away. At that point, a male voice says: "Fucking bitch."

From what I could tell, the 47-second cellphone video recorded by Jonathan Ross doesn't show whether Renee's SUV comes into contact with him. However, a video shot from another angle shows that, although Renee's SUV did move toward Ross as he stood in front of it, he was able to move out of the way before firing at least two of the three shots from the side of the vehicle as it veered past him.

The Minneapolis Fire Department incident report said that, when emergency responders first arrived on scene, Good was in the driver's seat with blood on her face and torso. She was "unresponsive, not breathing, with inconsistent, irregular, thready pulse activity." Officials reported finding two gunshot wounds to Renee's right chest, one to her left forearm, "a possible wound with protruding tissue on the left side

of the patient's head, bulging eyes with dilated pupils and blood discharging" from her left ear.

Emergency responders "continued the patient assessment" but found Renee was still not breathing and had no pulse. Renee Nicole Good was taken to the hospital in an ambulance, where "resuscitative efforts were discontinued" at 10:30 a.m.

Putting it all together, the footage shows Jonathan Ross filming with his phone at the front corner of an SUV that is trying to make a three-point turn to get out of a tight space. Ross is positioned to the side of the SUV's hood, and the wheels were turned away from him as Renee drove forward. Ross leans over the hood from a side angle to shoot through the windshield, before firing the second and third shots into the car from the side. After he fired, the officer is clearly shown walking around, uninjured.

Eyewitnesses seem to back my assessment. One recounts the incident this way: "It appeared to me that she was endeavoring to kind of adjust her car so that it was facing more south. And then it was clear at one point that she started to accelerate, trying to move her vehicle out of the cluster of cars south on Portland Avenue." The witness continued: "It was such a betrayal, and the woman who was driving the car… I just can't be more clear that she posed absolutely no threat at all. From what I could tell it looked like she was attempting to leave."

Another eyewitness, who observed the scene from a second-floor window in his home, said, "It looked solidly like she was attempting to escape." He also said that he saw agents run to the car after it crashed, but none tried to help Renee.

This is another disturbing thing. Video footage also shows that the federal agents appear to be in no hurry to provide Renee medical care and even prevent bystanders from helping her – even though one repeatedly tells them he is a doctor: "Can I go check a pulse?," the man asks. "No," an agent says and tells him to back up. "I'm a physician," the man replied. "I don't care," one agent says, while another says that EMS is on the way and that they had their own medics on scene. A woman then yells, "Where are they?" and is told to relax. "How can I relax when you just killed my fucking neighbor?" she responds.

The shooting of Renee Good was unjustified. Period. This is not a commentary on law enforcement overall. It's a commentary on *this one incident*. The idea that every law enforcement agent must be supported without accountability is not only irrational; it's extremely dangerous. Believe me, you don't want to live in that country.

It has been reported that Agent Ross was seriously injured several months before he shot Renee when he hooked his arm into a car window as the suspect sped off and dragged him down the street. If that's the case, I'm sorry that happened. But if it's true that, as DHS spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin said, that is "why he would be in fear of his life," it was obviously too soon for him to be back in the streets.

It has also been reported that Renee and Rebecca Good were part of a network of so-called "ICE watchers," or citizens who use cameras, text alerts, whistles and Google documents to shadow federal agents. In fact, Rebecca said in a statement that, before the fatal shooting, she and Renee had "stopped to support our neighbors" after they dropped their son off at school.

To that end, President Trump said that, "At a very minimum, that woman was very, very disrespectful to law enforcement" and Vice President JD Vance said Renee was "there to interfere with a legitimate law enforcement operation" and was "part of a broader left-wing network" that is trying to "make it impossible for our ICE officers to do their job," which – even if that were true, which it wasn't – is a strange thing for our vice president to say because surely an attorney who went to Yale Law School understands that being disrespectful or being "part of a broader left-wing network" does not carry the death penalty.

This whole thing is just tragic. But it brings up troubling issues that extend far beyond that street in Minneapolis.

For one, to rapidly ramp up its workforce – which included hiring 20,000 to 30,000 agents – ICE reduced its training time and watered-down its hiring requirements, including lowering age minimums and offering signing bonus of up to $50,000 for anyone and everyone.

In an interview with Politico in August 2025, ICE Deputy Director Madison Sheahan revealed that, out of 110,00 ICE applications, only 30 percent of the respondents were military veterans and only around 10 percent came from other federal law enforcement agencies.

In August 2025, The Atlantic's Nick Miroff reported that "new deportation officers at ICE used to receive about five months of federal-law-enforcement training. Administration officials have cut that time roughly in half." "Academy training was shortened to 47 days," three officials told Miroff, "the number picked because Trump is the 47th president." Oh, good Lord.

Ryan Schwank, an ICE attorney who worked at the government's law enforcement training academy, resigned in February 2026 from his job instructing new recruits and came forward as a whistleblower. He described a "deficient, defective and broken" training program with a scaled-back curriculum.

For example, ICE eliminated 240 hours of "vital classes" from a mandatory 580-hour training program, including how to safely handle firearms; instruction about the legal boundaries for the use of force; and the appropriate way to detain and arrest immigrants.

He also accused the administration of lying: "Law enforcement is a deadly serious business. It is not a place for shortcuts. Deficient training can and will get people killed. … ICE is lying to Congress and the American people about the steps it is taking to ensure that 12,000 officers can faithfully uphold the Constitution and perform their jobs."

Naturally, the Department of Homeland Security quickly denied any reduction in the amount or quality of training provided to ICE recruits; however, dozens of pages of internal ICE records corroborate Mr. Schwank's account.

ICE's rushed approach has led to trouble on several levels. An A.I. tool used to help the agency identify recruits who already have law enforcement experience, for instance, wrongly categorized hundreds of applicants. So, new recruits with no law enforcement experience were mistakenly placed in ICE's "LEO" program, a program for people who are already Law Enforcement Officers. < The LEO program requires only four weeks of online training while applicants without law enforcement backgrounds are required to take an in-person course at ICE's academy in Georgia. >

A DHS spokesperson called the A.I. debacle a "technological snag." I call it a disaster waiting to happen.

Even congressional Republicans started to understand that more training is needed. “The more training they could have, the better it’ll be, because they’re dealing with some strange stuff going on that’s coming at them in a lot of different directions,” said Senator Jim Justice (R-WV). Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) expressed that, “They need to show more balance in enforcement and more compassion and empathy in enforcement.”

Beyond law enforcement tactical concerns, the shooting of Renee Good perfectly exemplifies the rage and division the Trump/Vance administration’s incendiary policies have caused in many cities, stoking strong resistance and widespread protests.

I don’t use the word “incendiary” as commentary; I think the entire administration would be very proud of being described by this term.

It feels like, in almost everything they do, their goal is to divide us. This was never clearer than when the administration declared they were deploying federal troops to Democratic-led cities to conduct civilian law enforcement – portraying American cities as lawless, depraved, and out-of-control… expertly exploiting anger and fear to perpetuate and intensify the growing divide between progressives and conservatives.

These actions – taken under the false pretense of “emergencies” and against the wishes of state governors and without congressional authorization – corrode civil liberties, destabilize communities, stoke instability, escalate tensions, and erode public trust. They are also highly damaging to our military, which has a long-standing history of being non-political and certainly non-partisan. Using the military as pawns in political games hurts morale and drives out experienced service members.

It certainly didn’t help matters when President Trump posted things on social media like these cities “are the core of the Democrat Power Center, where they use Illegal Aliens to expand their Voter Base, cheat in Elections, and grow the Welfare State,” or when he suggested to military leaders that “some of these dangerous cities” should be “used as training grounds for our military.”

So, it’s easy to see why, even before Renee’s death, Minneapolis was already on edge after lurching from crisis to crisis for months, dealing with the shooting of state senator John Hoffman and his wife,

Yvette and the assassination of state representative Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark; a shooting at a school mass at the Church of the Annunciation, where two children died and thirty others were injured; and a sprawling welfare fraud scandal that caused President Trump to become fixated on the city's Somalian population and made Minneapolis the new epicenter of the Trump/Vance administration's immigration crackdown (2,000 *more* agents were sent to Minneapolis in the days before Ms. Good's death, and then Secretary Noem announced more were on the way *after* her death).

Much of the anger in the streets of Minnesota was driven by the fact that the people who live there didn't understand why ICE was there in the first place – because the reality on the ground didn't match the Trump/Vance administration's rhetoric and response. In the eyes of many of the citizens of Minnesota, the federal government was unfairly targeting their friends and neighbors – and that understandably upsets people terribly.

While federal officials were saying ICE was there to find "criminal illegal aliens hurting Americans" – supposedly because the state's welfare-fraud scandal involved Minnesotans of Somali descent – Minnesota's population of illegal immigrants was just an estimated 2.2 percent, about half the national average. Out of around six million residents, Minnesota has roughly 130,000 who are in the U.S. illegally – far fewer than many states. Plus, over 90 percent of the Somali population in the state have some kind of permanent legal status.

Add to the mix the little to no coordination immigration officials had with state and local officials and law enforcement agencies – a scenario that is still playing out across America – and the violent collision seems almost inevitable… with hundreds of infuriated citizens flooding the streets and Mayor Jacob Frey demanding that the feds "get the fuck out of Minneapolis" and condemning the "garbage narrative" and "bullshit" from the Trump/Vance administration.

True to form – before any investigation had a chance to even start much less finish – instead of helping dial down the temperature like real leaders do after a shocking tragedy like the death of Renee Good, our president and vice president did just the opposite. In addition to his comments I shared earlier, Vice President JD Vance said Renee's death

was a "tragedy of her own making" and that she was a "victim of left-wing ideology," and President Trump posted on social media that Renee "violently, willfully, and viciously ran over the ICE Officer, who seems to have shot her in self defense."

"The reason these incidents are happening," he said, "is because the Radical Left is threatening, assaulting, and targeting our Law Enforcement Officers and ICE Agents on a daily basis. They are just trying to do the job of MAKING AMERICA SAFE."

Escalating things even further, President Trump then threatened that a "DAY OF RECKONING & RETRIBUTION" was coming to Minnesota before announcing that the U.S. Justice Department was criminally investigating Governor Tim Walz and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey and threatening to invoke the Insurrection Act in response to Minneapolis protests.

At the same time, the Trump/Vance administration declared that state and local officials would be blocked from accessing evidence and investigating Renee Good's shooting themselves.

Vice President Vance confirmed this when he said that "the idea that Tim Walz and a bunch of radicals in Minneapolis are going to go after and make this guy's < Agent Ross > life miserable because he was doing the job that he was asked to do is preposterous."

After Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Harmeet Dhillon – who heads the Civil Rights Division's criminal section, the division of the Justice Department that regularly handles investigations of police shootings – decided not to investigate Renee's shooting, at least six leaders of the department resigned in protest. The departures included the chief of the section, the principal deputy chief, deputy chief and acting deputy chief.

Likewise, multiple prosecutors from the U.S. attorney's office in Minneapolis, including the second-in-command, announced they were leaving the department over the Justice Department's refusal to include state officials in the investigation, the push to investigate Renee's widow Rebecca, and the department's reluctance to investigate Jonathan Ross.

Five days after the shooting, the state of Minnesota and the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul filed a lawsuit demanding an end to the

Trump/Vance administration's immigration enforcement actions there. At a press conference, Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison accused the federal government of an "unlawful, unprecedented surge of the federal law enforcement agents into Minnesota" and said that the cities and state were suing "because this has to stop. It just has to stop."

< Note: In July 2026 – *six months* after the incidents occurred – the Trump/Vance administration finally shared evidence with Minnesota authorities related to three January shootings by immigration officers in Minneapolis. >

Stoking an already roaring fire is bad enough. But, as I have already demonstrated in this book multiple times, many high-ranking Trump/Vance administration officials also *outright lie*. *Repeatedly*.

Immediately after Renee's death – again, before any investigation had a chance to even start much less finish, and in addition to all their other vile comments – then DHS Secretary Kristi Noem, the president, vice president, and many other members of the administration twisted themselves into pretzels trying to frame the tragedy as "domestic terrorism."

Then DHS assistant secretary for public affairs Tricia McLaughlin – yes, her again – said that Renee "weaponized her vehicle, attempting to run over our law enforcement officers in an attempt to kill them – an act of domestic terrorism" and JD Vance called the incident "classic terrorism."

Even though Jonathan Ross was clearly seen on video walking around after the shooting, uninjured, Noem said he was "treated" for "injuries" and Donald Trump posted, "It is hard to believe he is alive, but is now recovering in the hospital." A total lie.

This gaslighting technique was already a despicable habit of theirs.

In September 2025, ICE agents pulled over a Mexican immigrant named Silverio Villegas-Gonzalez – a father of two who had lived in Chicago for nearly two decades. He was shot in the neck and killed less than a minute later. The officers involved claimed that Mr. Villegas-Gonzalez had hit and dragged one of the officers with his car, causing "serious injury."

But – again – video footage and interviews contradicted their account.

Although Mr. Villegas-Gonzalez did back up around 50 feet and then began to drive forward, none of the videos show him hitting any officer with his car. Plus, after the incident, the officer who supposedly had "serious" injuries said they were actually "nothing major."

In January 2026, an immigration agent shot Julio C. Sosa-Celis, a Venezuelan immigrant, in the leg in Minneapolis. Two hours later, a DHS spokeswoman claimed that three people had attacked an agent with a broom and snow shovel, and that the agent "fired a defensive shot to defend his life" because he was "being ambushed." The next day, then DHS Secretary Kristi Noem accused the three men of trying to kill the agent, saying agents had fended off an "attempted murder" and that one officer had fired in self-defense.

Within days, the government's story had unraveled. A federal prosecutor asked a judge to drop the case, saying "newly discovered evidence in this matter is materially inconsistent with the allegations." The following month, acting director of ICE Todd Lyons said two agents had been placed on leave for providing accounts that appeared to conflict with video footage of what actually happened, confirming they could eventually face termination and prosecution.

In fact, analysis by The New York Times of the 16 shootings by on-duty federal immigration agents patrolling American cities and towns from inauguration day to February 10, 2026 revealed that claims by Trump/Vance administration officials "fell apart quietly when the cases went to court."

From the report: "In four of the shootings where prosecutors brought assault or other charges, the cases fizzled after evidence emerged that contradicted the administration's initial description of events. The charges were either dismissed or prosecutors dropped the case. Charges against six other people who were shot at by immigration agents are pending. Five of the defendants have denied aspects of the DHS accusations or presented differing accounts in court. Two cases are going to trial in April 2026."

Likewise, in March 2026, The Wall Street Journal analyzed over 1,400 social media posts from U.S. government social-media accounts

that said federal law-enforcement officers were under attack by terrorists, rioters and agitators. They found that most people accused in these posts were Americans, including Renee Good and Alex Pretti, both killed by federal agents in January.

The WSJ discovered that under the Trump/Vance administration, immigration law-enforcement agencies have pursued federal assault charges against U.S. citizens more frequently (an increase of more than 300 percent compared with the previous year). Also, they found that most of the accusations against U.S. citizens for attacking immigration officers were unsubstantiated:

"The Journal reviewed more than 100,000 posts on X from the Trump administration and found that of 279 people accused of attacking federal officers in the past year, 181 were U.S. citizens. Close to half of the accused Americans were never charged with assault. *None have been convicted at trial*."

"As in other federal assault cases, bystander videos as well as police-camera and surveillance footage cast doubt on agents' claims, in some cases leading to the exoneration of citizens. *Yet unlike the accusations posted on X, the outcome of those cases wasn't mentioned on government X accounts.*"

Every single time this happens is horrific, but perhaps the most clear-cut example is the shooting of 37-year-old Alex Jeffrey Pretti, an intensive-care nurse, in Minneapolis – which ended up being the straw that broke the camel's back in the state.

Within hours after Alex died, then Secretary Kristi Noem declared – with zero evidence – that he had "committed an act of domestic terrorism." Gregory Bovino, the then commander of the U.S. Border Patrol who likes to wear olive wool, double-breasted overcoats that make him look like a Nazi, then offered his own assessment: "This looks like a situation where an individual wanted to do maximum damage and massacre law enforcement." In a separate statement, DHS said, "The officers attempted to disarm the suspect, but the armed suspect violently resisted."

It was immediately apparent to anyone with eyes and a brain that these were outright lies. Multiple videos from multiple angles clearly show what happened:

Alex was standing in the street with a small group of civilians, where a person was detained on the ground. Members of the group were speaking to federal agents, and Alex was filming the scene with his cellphone. After other people approached the agents, he approached the group, shouting, “Hey!” As he continued to film, an agent shoves two civilians from one side of the street to the other, pushing them toward a white SUV. Alex and two other civilians then walk away. One of the agents follows them.

The agent that followed Alex and the two other civilians pushed one of them down. Pretti quickly put himself between the person on the ground and the officer, who appears to spray something on all three of them. Alex is holding his phone in one hand while he holds his other hand up to shield himself from the spray.

Alex then appears to try to help the civilian on the ground stand back up as the agent continues to spray the group. Agents then pull Alex, who is still holding his cell phone, from the others and at least seven DHS agents surround him and force him to the ground. One agent draws his firearm and points it at Alex while another agent strikes Mr. Pretti repeatedly with the spray canister.

An eighth agent joins the fray while another appears to pull a gun from near Alex’s right hip. The agent with Alex’s gun begins to move away from the scene with the weapon. At the same time, another agent unholsters his firearm and points it at Alex’s back.

Then, while Alex is clearly on his knees and restrained, the agent standing directly above him fires one shot at him at close range, before firing three additional shots. As several agents move away, another agent (the same one who shoved the civilians into the street and sprayed Alex) unholsters his gun and fires at Alex while he lies motionless on the ground. At least ten shots appear to have been fired within five seconds.

The fact that Gregory Bovino flat out lied should have come as no surprise. In November 2025, U.S. District Judge Sara Ellis called him out – when he was still a senior U.S. Border Patrol commander in charge of Operation Midway Blitz in Chicago – saying he “admitted that he lied” under oath about getting struck by a rock in the head before deploying tear gas. Bovino originally claimed he used tear gas

on protesters only because he was hit by a rock, but video evidence and his own later admission proved that story was total b.s.

"I find the defendants' evidence simply not credible. Overall, this calls into question everything the defendants are doing," Judge Ellis said, adding that the government is using force "untethered" to any specific threat: "I see little reason for the use of force that the federal agents are currently using. I would find the use of force *shocks the conscience*."

Emails reviewed by The Washington Post make clear that many ICE videos are edited to support the administration's false narratives – many of which revolve around the lie that the administration is only using aggressive tactics against "the worst of the worst" criminal illegal aliens (i.e., murderers, rapists, gang members, child predators, drug traffickers, etc.).

In one message, Emily Covington, ICE's assistant director for public affairs, asked on behalf of the White House if a video of a deportation flight could be re-edited so that the clips "don't feature tons of females?" Of course, an ICE official responded!... reassuring her that a video producer would "re-edit the b-roll to exclude the females."

A former Department of Homeland Security media team member told the Post that the LA immigration protests were "the turning point to get even more aggressive with their messaging, and to paint pictures of these places as war-torn. There was a much more blustery edge, and a need to put stuff out as quickly as you can. You're steamrolling everything."

Retired Marine Corps Colonel David Lapan, President Trump's initial DHS press secretary in his first term, highlighted the difference between Trump's first term and now: "We were supposed to present the facts, not hype things up. But this veers into propaganda, into creating fear. We didn't have this meme-ification of various serious operations, these things that are life or death… It's not a joking matter. But that's the way they're treating it now."

Time after time in situation after situation, it's evident that truth and accuracy matter little to the Trump/Vance administration. In yet another example, they repeatedly use videos that supposedly show "recent" immigration operations, but the footage is sometimes months

old or not even recorded where they claim. The Washington Post reports that one video that has been viewed over 1.4 million times on Instagram, TikTok and X declared Chicago was “in chaos” but used footage from other states.

In another example, the Department of Homeland Security “posted a swaggering montage to social media in August declaring it had triumphed in its takeover of Washington, D.C. It showed footage of federal agents fighting what a DHS official called a ‘battle for the soul of our nation’ and working ‘day and night to arrest, detain and deport vicious criminals from our nation’s capital.’”

However, “there was one problem. Several of the clips had been recorded during unrelated operations months earlier, in Los Angeles and West Palm Beach, Florida. The official’s sound bite about deportations in D.C. played over a clip from May showing detainees on a Coast Guard boat off the coast of Nantucket, the Massachusetts island 400 miles away.”

After ICE left Minneapolis on January 27, 2026 – and after the Trump/Vance administration announced that Gregory Bovino would be replaced by Tom Homan – there were a few months of relative calm.

Then suddenly, in July, as the Trump/Vance administration started yet another surge of aggressive immigration arrests, ICE exploded back into America’s consciousness with one horrific tragedy after another, within a span of just one week. These included ICE officers killing two people in their vehicles – in Houston and Biddeford, Maine – and a 28-year-old man dying when he was hit by a tractor-trailer while fleeing ICE agents in Florida.

In Houston, an ICE agent shot and killed Lorenzo Salgado Araujo during a traffic stop while he was driving to work at a construction site with his brother and two other passengers. Mr. Araujo was a husband, father of three, and business owner who had been in the country for 35 years and was working to obtain legal residency. He was not the intended target of the ICE operation.

In Maine, an ICE agent shot and killed 26-year-old Johan Sebastián Durán Guerrero, a Colombian citizen who worked two jobs, cleaning a veterinarian office in the mornings and making food deliveries in the afternoons. According to a statement from the U.S.

Department of Homeland Security, he entered the United States via the southern border in September 2023 and received valid work-authorization documents in May 2025. He also was not the intended target of the ICE operation.

His family had just celebrated his daughter's third birthday, with him writing "I love you my beautiful princess" in Spanish on a Facebook post celebrating the special occasion. "His dream was to give his daughter a better future," said his childhood friend Cristian Joyaia. "It was the American Dream. And now it's no longer a dream."

In the Houston and Biddeford cases, federal officials said the victims had tried to flee the traffic stops, although they provided ZERO video or other evidence to support those claims. In both shootings, the officers were conveniently not wearing body cameras, even though the Department of Homeland Security announced in February 2026 they were committed to equipping all ICE officers with them (and as we know, they have been handed over $200 billion to help pay for them).

In an uncharacteristic nod toward accountability, the deaths in Houston and Maine led the leadership of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to instruct its officers to halt most vehicle stops while carrying out operations across the country – only to have President Trump reverse the decision within days.

< In another uncharacteristic move, border czar Tom Homan admitted that David Brouillette, the ICE agent who fatally shot Johan Sebastián Guerrero, should not have cleared the ICE vetting process, after a long history of abuse documented in the family court system emerged after the shooting. Two of Brouillette's ex-wives claimed stalking, harassment, and physical and verbal abuse, with one accusing him of throwing boiling water on her while she was holding their child and pointing a gun at her while she was in the shower.

She also shared a voicemail she received from Brouillette with the Associated Press: "And all of you should have your f---g throats cut. Yeah, you should. Am I threatening that I'm gonna do that? Nope. Nope. But do I think that you should have your f---g throats cuts? Or should have had them cut? Yep." >

The U-turn on the decision to halt the vehicle stops was highly irresponsible because ICE officers clearly could use more training in

this area, to say the least. In the first 18 months of the Trump/Vance administration alone, at least 17 motorists had been shot during immigration operations (six people, including two American citizens, died in these shootings).

These tragedies also led Roberto Velasco Álvarez, Mexico's foreign affairs minister, to announce his country's plans to file criminal complaints with U.S. state prosecutors and the U.S. Department of Justice, requesting criminal investigations into the deaths of 14 Mexican citizens in immigration detention centers and of three others during enforcement operations under the Trump/Vance administration.

Mr. Velasco also informed Volker Turk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, of the deaths and asked his office to collect information from American authorities to assess whether the U.S. was complying with international obligations and to issue any appropriate recommendations on the matter.

When asked about Mr. Araujo's death, Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum said, "We cannot allow our brothers and sisters in the United States to be mistreated. His only offense was lacking immigration documents."

… and now for the narrative that the Trump/Vance administration is only going after "the worst of the worst" criminals? Yep. Surprise, surprise, surprise. Just another blatant lie.

Most immigration arrests have been parents, students, asylum seekers, construction workers, etc., that have been mainly carried out at street vendor spots, car washes and in Home Depot parking lots.

When President Trump seized control of the Washington, D.C. police department and deployed the National Guard because of the crime "emergency" that involved "violent gangs" and "bloodthirsty criminals," over 80 percent of the immigrants arrested had no prior record (and most of the convictions for those who did were for immigration, traffic, or nonviolent offenses). The same pattern emerged during the Chicago, Massachusetts and Los Angeles crackdowns.

In February 2026, CBS News obtained an internal DHS document that said less than 14 percent of almost 400,000 immigrants arrested by ICE in the first year of President Trump's second term had charges or convictions for violent criminal offenses.

The internal DHS data revealed that less than 2 percent of those arrested by ICE during that time had homicide or sexual assault charges or convictions, and just 2 percent of those taken into ICE custody were accused of being gang members.

Four months later, The New York Times obtained internal federal government documents that showed people with criminal convictions accounted for just a fraction of the detainees at the Delaney Hall facility in Newark, New Jersey.

According to ICE, when people are detained, and throughout their detention, they are divided into categories – low, medium low, medium high and high – which reflects the level of security risk they pose. These categories are based on factors like previous convictions, disciplinary records, and "special management concerns." The government documents revealed that, as of April 2, 2026, just ONE Delaney Hall detainee was considered a high security risk, while just under 90 percent were classified as low risk.

ICE also assigns detainees an "ICE threat level" – ranked on a scale of 1 to 3 – based on their "criminality," including "the recency of the criminal behavior and its severity." As of April 2nd, just six detainees were given the highest threat level, while around 90 percent were said to be "no ICE threat level" (meaning they have no criminal convictions).

Hmmm…. Isn't it weird that the Trump/Vance administration has caught so few hardened criminals? Answer: Not really, because there weren't that many illegal criminals here to begin with. This is a classic example of how campaign lies can eventually backfire and make you look bad (Epstein files, anyone?).

Without question, one thing Donald Trump is genius at is tapping into the deep, pervasive fear in some Americans that something catastrophic is going to happen if we allow people into our country who talk, dress, worship or look different than we do. But in the context of immigration – authorized or unauthorized – this makes no sense.

Lest we forget, millions and millions of undocumented immigrants live here already – and have for decades – and things have been going pretty smoothly between us.

Obviously, this is not the narrative many Republican politicians sling – where they find the one man from Mexico who murdered someone in the Midwest, then plaster the horrific story all over the television in election years. Okay, maybe that *one* man did murder someone but, in a broader sense, this narrative is just not true.

On June 16, 2015, the day he announced his first run for the White House, Donald Trump famously said: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists."

Several weeks later, he doubled down on those comments saying, "What can be simpler or more accurately stated? The Mexican government is forcing their most unwanted people into the United States. They are, in many cases, criminals, drug dealers, rapists, etc."

On the 2024 campaign trail, he said things like undocumented immigrants were "poisoning the blood of our country" and that they come "from prisons and jails, insane asylums" and "savage gangs." He claimed there are probably more like 21 million immigrants that had "invaded" and "occupied" America.

This is just nonsense. Out of the 2,901,142 migrant enforcement encounters by U.S. Customs and Border Protection nationwide in FY2024, 17,048 of them were arrested as "criminal aliens," meaning they had been convicted of one or more crimes (whether in the U.S. or abroad) before being intercepted. That's just 0.59 percent.

It's also important to remember that the criminal records of these people include both violent and nonviolent offenses, including "Illegal Entry/Reentry" into the United States, which is what 10,935 – or 64 percent – of them had been arrested for. Only 1,084 of them had been convicted of "Assault, Battery, and/or Domestic Violence" and only 29 had been convicted of "Homicide or Manslaughter" – which means that the percentage of these criminals coming into the United States in FY2024 was 0.04 percent and 0.0009 percent, respectively.

** I want to be clear about what I'm saying here. Obviously one person who has been convicted of assault, battery, domestic violence,

homicide or manslaughter is one too many crossing our border. And without question every single violent crime is devastating. But it's super important that we keep *proper perspective* on these things. If we don't, we won't be able to distinguish between our various challenges, and they will all blur right into one another. The more tangled and convoluted these issues get, the more impossible they seem to solve. **

Oh! And while we're on the subject, although we definitely need to keep a close eye on them, there is also no "infestation" of the street gang Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) or other violent street gangs coming through our borders – or even terrorists for that matter.

In FY2024, U.S. Border Patrol agents apprehended 523 non-Americans nationwide who were affiliated with *any* gang, 72 of whom were allegedly affiliated with MS-13. That means that just 0.02 percent of the 2,901,142 migrant enforcement encounters that year were with gang members, and only 0.002 percent were affiliated with MS-13.

And President Trump was just flat wrong when he claimed on the 2024 campaign trail that "more terrorists have come into the United States in the last three years. And I think probably 50 years."

In FY2024, there were 410 encounters with people who matched records in the federal government's terrorist screening database at official ports of entry and 106 encounters between ports of entry – for a grand total of 0.02 percent of total USBP encounters. These encounters involved both U.S. citizens and noncitizens.

In the 2021 Country Reports on Terrorism, the State Department found "there was no credible evidence indicating international terrorist groups established bases in Mexico, worked directly with Mexican drug cartels, or sent operatives via Mexico into the United States in 2021… to date there had been no confirmed cases of a successful terrorist attack on U.S. soil by a terrorist who gained entry to the United States through Mexico."

Three years later, the 2024 report said there was still "no credible evidence indicated that international terrorist groups established bases in Mexico" and that "no one who gained entry to the United States through Mexico carried out a terrorist attack in the United States."

In fact, in the 25 years since 9/11, there has only been ONE case of a jihadist foreign terrorist organization coordinating a fatal attack inside the United States or of a lethal jihadist attacker receiving training or other support from terrorist groups abroad (every other jihadist who conducted a lethal attack inside the U.S. since 9/11 was a citizen or legal resident)…. and guess who the president was when that one incident happened at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida, when a Saudi Air Force officer in the U.S. for military training killed three U.S. sailors. Yep, Donald Trump.

A risk analysis of terrorism and immigration from 1975-2023 conducted by the Cato Institute found that "a total of 230 foreign-born terrorists were responsible for 3,046 murders on U.S. soil from 1975 through the end of 2023." The report goes on to say that "nine of them entered the U.S. as illegal immigrants; 79 were lawful permanent residents; 24 were students; 1 entered on a K-1 fiancé(e) visa; 29 were refugees; 13 were asylum seekers; 43 were tourists on various visas; 15 were from Visa Waiver Program countries; 1 entered on an A-2 visa for government business or military training; and 1 was on an H-1B visa for skilled temporary foreign workers. The visas for the remaining 15 terrorists could not be determined and are recorded as 'unknown.'"

The report concludes with this: "The chance of a person perishing in a terrorist attack committed by a foreigner on U.S. soil over that 49-year period was about 1 in 4.5 million per year. The hazard posed by foreigners who entered in different ways varies considerably. For instance, the annual chance of being murdered in an attack committed by an illegal immigrant was zero."

Tons of other research on immigration and crime consistently show that immigrants – including those who are unauthorized – have either no impact or a diminishing effect on crime. Multiple studies have found that unauthorized immigration not only does not increase violent crime, but in some cases *decreases* it. Studies have shown that unauthorized immigration is associated with a reduction in drug arrests, drug overdoses, and driving under the influence, and others have found that it reduces rates of property crime, larceny, and burglary.

A study published in the Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice, conducted jointly by four universities, discovered that "research has

shown little support for the enduring proposition that increases in immigration are associated with increases in crime. Although classical criminological and neoclassical economic theories would predict immigration to increase crime, most empirical research shows quite the opposite."

"We investigated the immigration-crime relationship among metropolitan areas over a 40-year period. Our goal was to describe the ongoing and changing association between immigration and a broad range of violent and property crimes. Our results indicate that immigration is consistently linked to *decreases* in violent (e.g., murder) and property (e.g., burglary) crime throughout the time period."

The Marshall Project – a nonprofit journalism organization that has won two Pulitzer Prizes – extended the study's data six years, finding that "crime fell more often than it rose even as immigrant populations grew almost across the board. In general, the study's data suggests either that immigration has the effect of reducing average crime, or that there is simply no relationship between the two."

Another study by prominent sociologists David Light and Michael Miller, published in the journal Criminology, confirms those findings: "Undocumented immigration does not increase violence. Rather, the relationship between undocumented immigration and violent crime is generally negative, although not significant in all specifications. Using supplemental models of victimization data and instrumental variable methods, we find little evidence that these results are due to decreased reporting or selective migration to avoid crime. We consider the theoretical and policy implications of these findings against the backdrop of the dramatic increase in immigration enforcement in recent decades."

Another study by these two found that "increased undocumented immigration was significantly associated with *reductions* in drug arrests, drug overdose deaths, and DUI arrests, net of other factors." They concluded that "there was no significant relationship between increased undocumented immigration and DUI deaths, and that their study "provides evidence that undocumented immigration has not increased the prevalence of drug or alcohol problems but may be associated with *reductions* in these public health concerns."

The Cato Institute found that "all immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated than natives relative to their shares of the population. Even illegal immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans."

In another report focused on Texas, the Cato Institute said this: "Whether one focuses on criminal convictions, arrests, or the number of individuals convicted or arrested, the results are the same: illegal immigrants have a lower crime rate than native-born Americans in Texas. Legal immigrants have the lowest rates of all, except for some measures of property crime where illegal immigrants are *even less* crime prone. Native-born Americans living in Texas have the highest criminal conviction and arrest rates. Even on the margin, there is no statistically significant effect of the illegal immigrant population on the rate of criminal convictions, either overall or for illegal immigrants specifically."

"Crime, at least in the state of Texas, is a domestically produced problem and not an imported one. Texas is one of the states where we would expect higher illegal immigrant crime rates if they were an especially crime prone subpopulation. Texas' proximity to Mexico, the reputation of its criminal justice system, and the state-level politics all militate toward increasing the illegal immigrant crime rate relative to legal immigrants and native-born Americans."

Likewise, a study that compared the undocumented foreign-born population in U.S. metropolitan areas data with FBI Uniform Crime Report data found "negative effects of undocumented immigration on the overall property crime rate, larceny, and burglary; effects in models using violent crime measures as the outcomes are statistically non-significant."

3. It Erodes Our Rights.

Unsurprisingly, thanks to all the chaos these immigration policies have created, U.S. citizens are getting caught up in this mess big time – as the deaths of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, and the other examples I have already given, prove.

In October 2025, a ProPublica investigation found over 170 cases where U.S. citizens had been detained at raids and protests. Over 20 citizens reported being held for over a day without being able to call their families or a lawyer. In some cases, their loved ones couldn't even find them.

ProPublica's story led to an investigation by Senate Democrats, where "citizens told congressional investigators that immigration officers had dragged them from cars, detained them for days, fabricated claims of assault, routinely used excessive force and denied medical care. The investigation also found that agents 'treated children with reckless disregard for their safety and wellbeing.'"

"One citizen recalled that federal agents pointed guns at her youngest children, ages 6 and 8, and dragged her 14-year-old daughter out of a pickup and zip-tied her. The citizen, Anabel Romero, told investigators that an agent threatened to 'fucking blow your head off' during the chaotic raid at a rural Idaho racetrack. Romero also said agents 'wouldn't let people get diapers or food for their kids.' Romero and her children were born in Idaho."

What makes this even more chilling is that – lying yet again – the Department of Homeland Security has repeatedly claimed they never arrest or hold noncitizens. Former DHS Secretary Noem herself said, "No American citizens have been arrested or detained. We focus on those that are here illegally. And anything that you would hear or report that would be different than that is simply not true and false reporting."

The examples of American citizens being harassed and/or detained are endless. Fifteen-year-old Diego Rosales, an American citizen born in Chicago, was ambushed in Bedrosian Park by three white men with pistols on their hips and clad in fatigues, masks, and body armor as part of Operation Midway Blitz (this episode was all caught on camera lest you believe the Trump/Vance administration's b.s. denials that it even happened).

Also caught on video was the ambush of Dayanne Figueroa, a paralegal born and raised in the United States. The Washington Post describes the incident this way: "(Figueroa) honked at a vehicle blocking her path. Seeing her lane clear, she said she accelerated forward to steer clear of the action. Video of the incident shows an

unmarked SUV swerve to the right as Figueroa's vehicle moves forward and then crashes into the driver's side."

"A moment later, immigration agents exited the SUV with guns drawn. They pulled Figueroa out of the car by her shoulders and handcuffed her as she thrashed on the pavement. Figueroa was placed in the third row of a red van between two trembling Hispanic men also in handcuffs. A supervisor, she said, made eye contact with her in the rearview mirror as she begged the masked agents to identify themselves and their agency. She said she told them she was a U.S. citizen. 'No one is going to help you,' she recalls the supervisor saying. 'You're all criminals.'" Figueroa was held for four hours and released without charges.

Naturally, the Trump/Vance administration has pushed back on claims that people are suddenly being "disappeared" – meaning that people are vanishing, often clandestinely, so those in charge can create a climate of fear and to silence dissent. But is that such an outlandish claim after what you've read so far?

Regardless of what you think of this administration's tactics, it's hard to deny that there is an enormous difference in what used to be an ordinary everyday arrest and what is happening today. It's not hard to understand why Americans freak out when they are sent to a place far from their homes and aren't given access to their attorney.

Another fabulous new thing is that, to make certain they are not in violation of the Trump/Vance administration's new decree that people visiting America – and those who have already arrived – must "not bear hostile attitudes toward its citizens, culture, government, institutions, or founding principles," tourists from the 42 countries who are allowed to come to the U.S. without a visa (like Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom and South Korea) are now required to share their social media activity from the past five years; their email addresses that have been active for the past ten years; and the names, birth dates, places of residence and birthplaces of parents, spouses, siblings and children.

When you first hear this, it may not seem like such a bad idea. But let's really think this through. These are things that China and Russia have been doing for years. If that's not enough to give you pause, think about the impact this has on free speech.

Already, Óscar Arias Sánchez, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and two-time president of Costa Rica, had his visa revoked because of his alleged close ties to China. In truth, his real crime was saying on social media that Donald Trump was like a "Roman emperor, telling the rest of the world what to do."

Rumeysa Öztürk, a Turkish doctoral citizen studying at Tufts University, was arrested on a Boston street by masked agents as she walked to dinner because of an op-ed she wrote in the school newspaper criticizing Tufts' response to the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

After being detained for over six weeks in Louisiana, U.S. District Court Judge William Sessions ordered her release, saying, "I suggested to the government that they produce any additional information which would suggest that she posed a substantial risk. And that was three weeks ago, and there has been no evidence introduced by the government other than the op-ed. That literally is the case. There is no evidence here."

Calling her arrest a "traumatic incident," he continued: "The court finds that Ms. Öztürk has raised a substantial claim of a constitutional violation. Her continued detention potentially chills the speech of the millions and millions of individuals in this country who are not citizens."

At Columbia University, Indian Fulbright scholar and doctoral student Ranjani Srinivasan's student visa was revoked after the Department of Homeland Security accused her of being "involved in activities supporting Hamas, a terrorist organization" – even though she vehemently denied this from the start.

This all seemed to start when Ms. Srinivasan happened to return to her university housing after a picnic with friends the same day pro-Palestinian protesters occupied Columbia's Hamilton Hall. Although she was adamant that she wasn't part of the protest, she was arrested at the entrance of her building. A judge soon recognized Ms. Srinivasan wasn't involved and dismissed all charges against her.

Let's talk about the Hamilton Hall takeover in the context of free speech for a minute. In late April 2024, pro-Palestinian activists broke into the historic building that is home to key administrative offices for

the university, smashing windows and barricading themselves inside using rope, zip ties, bike locks and furniture.

They then unfurled a banner renaming the building "Hind's Hall" after a Palestinian child killed in Gaza and demanded the university divest from Israel-linked companies and give amnesty to suspended students (similar events happened at Hamilton Hall during both the 1968 anti-war and 1985 anti-apartheid demonstrations).

Over 20 hours later, police finally intervened, clearing Hamilton Hall and arresting over 100 protesters inside and outside the building. The incident resulted in 46 protesters being charged with criminal trespassing, a class B misdemeanor.

… as they absolutely should have been if they were involved in this destructive behavior in any way. If people who study from abroad were involved in this mayhem, Columbia had every right to suspend them, and the United States had every right to expel them from the country. Visas have conditions, as they should.

Visitors to America don't have an automatic right to every single one of our constitutional rights. When visitors are asked to leave, they need to leave and, as a result, no longer enjoy the protections under our legal system. The Supreme Court has made this pretty clear. Therefore, students and outside groups and individuals who engaged in damaging and violent behavior during the Hamilton Hall protest are fair game.

That said, when visitors come to America with America's consent and an intent to obey the law, they should enjoy rights under our laws. Under the current administration, that's not always happening.

In September 2025, U.S. District Judge William Young – who was nominated by President Reagan in 1985 – ruled that the efforts of senior administration officials to arrest and deport noncitizen student activists, particularly pro-Palestinian students, was an unconstitutional infringement on the First Amendment. In a scathing 161-page ruling, he called the administration's crackdown a "truly scandalous and unconstitutional suppression of free speech." He continued, "We are not, and we must not become, a nation that imprisons and deports people because we are afraid of what they have to tell us."

Judge Young took special aim at ICE: "ICE goes masked for a single reason – to terrorize Americans into quiescence. In all our

history we have never tolerated an armed, masked secret police." Comparing immigration agents to "cowardly desperados and the despised Ku Klux Klan," Judge Young declared that federal efforts to deport protesters amounted to a "full-throated assault" on freedom of speech. "Carrying on in this fashion, ICE brings indelible obloquy to this administration and everyone who works in it."

In January 2025, during a hearing to determine the appropriate remedies for the Trump/Vance administration's illegal effort, Judge Young again ripped into the administration and those who lead it. Denouncing what he called "breathtaking" constitutional violations and calling the president an "authoritarian" who expects everyone to "toe the line absolutely," he said that President Trump and his senior officials have a "fearful approach" to freedom of speech that seeks to "exclude from participation everyone who doesn't agree with them."

He also said that former DHS Secretary Kristi Noem and Secretary of State Marco Rubio engaged in an "unconstitutional conspiracy" to deny people their rights. At one point, Judge Young, his voice dripping with incredulity, said, "The secretary of state, the senior Cabinet officer in our history, involved in this."

< Sidebar: During the trial Judge Young was ruling on – American Association of University Professors v. Rubio – it was revealed that top administration officials directed DHS staff who usually analyze transnational criminal networks to instead compile reports on students involved in pro-Palestinian protests. The main source of information the analysts used was thousands of profiles created by Canary Mission, a nontransparent pro-Israel group that says it documents individuals who "promote hatred of the USA, Israel and Jews" on college campuses to "combat the rise in anti-Semitism on college campuses." After generating the reports, DHS would then refer them to the State Dept. to revoke the visas and green cards of the people involved. >

"Talking straight here," the Judge said. "The big problem in this case is that the Cabinet secretaries and, ostensibly, the president of the United States, *are not honoring the First Amendment*."

To open the September proceedings, Judge Young shared an image of a handwritten postcard that he had received, which said, "Trump has pardons and tanks.…What do you have?" The Judge responded:

"Alone, I have nothing but my sense of duty. Together, we the People of the United States … have our magnificent Constitution."

It may be tempting to believe – despite all the evidence – that these atrocities are mainly being directed toward people who weren't born in the United States and that's where it will likely end. But please believe me when I say this is NOT a thread we should pull on – especially considering all the other infringements on free speech the Trump/Vance administration have tried.

What's next? What's going to be the next offense that is simply too ghastly to abide, whether you're an American or not? Protesting the Venezuela coup d'état? Making a joke about the president's hair or him being weirdly orange? Who's next? Atheists? Catholics? Democrats? Republicans? If you don't think this can happen, THINK AGAIN.

Police states aren't created overnight. They are created by citizens almost sleepwalking into them by slowly and quietly conceding their freedoms.

That's just the First Amendment. What about the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments? This administration is also overtly trampling on due process and that should terrify us as well.

The very thought that an American citizen can be detained without due process is outrageous …and Justice Brett Kavanaugh saying in a Supreme Court opinion that immigration stops of individuals legally present in the U.S. is just a "typically brief" and "minor inconvenience" as opposed to the slipperiest of slippery slopes is an absurd thing for a fifth grader to say, much less a Supreme Court Justice.

In the United States of America, you can't just say someone is guilty, you must *prove* it. In the United States of America, someone somewhere must *prove* something to be true before it is. Thank God.

4. It Promotes Bigotry.

American citizenship and, as an extension, immigration have been highly debated issues since the beginning of the Great Experiment we

call the United States of America. First there was the Naturalization Act of 1790 which offered citizenship to "free white people," then the Naturalization Act of 1870 which extended citizenship to African slaves not born in America.

Sprinkled throughout 1812 to 1902, there were political parties like the Know Nothing Party, which was anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant, and laws like the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act which, if you didn't quite get it from the name, excluded Chinese immigrants from entering the United States. There were also the Wars of Expansion and other brutal conflicts fought to expand our nation's territory: Creek Indian War (1813-1814); Trail of Tears (1838); Mexican War (1846-1848); Bleeding Kansas (1854-1856); Battle of Little Bighorn (1876); and the Spanish-American War (1898).

This all led to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, also known as the Hart–Celler Act. The Hart-Celler Act abolished the 1920s-era National Origins Formula, a series of qualitative immigration quotas based solely on national origin. These quotas severely restricted immigration from the Eastern Hemisphere. Or, to put it more bluntly, the National Origins Formula blatantly discriminated against Southern and Eastern Europeans, Asians, and other non-Western and Northern European ethnic groups.

It's the age-old question. *Who belongs here*?

Here is how I answer that question: America is the only country on earth that was built on *an idea*… a country built on the profound and powerful belief of brave, beautiful dreamers who knew deep in their hearts that we could be an exceptional place of endless freedoms that allow us to pursue every happiness. A country where all men and women are created equal, endowed with certain unalienable rights, and one where the governments derive "their just powers from the consent of the governed." We and <u>*we*</u> <u>*alone*</u> are in control of our own destinies.

American identity is based on a set of universal ideals that were set forth in the United States Constitution. As the U.S. Supreme Court just confirmed, you are a citizen when you are born here, or if you choose to come here after you follow the established rules, promising to

support and defend the U.S. Constitution and U.S. laws, and pledging to bear true faith to the United States.

To me, you do those things and you are every bit as American as those who came over here on the Mayflower. In my mind, this is what makes America truly exceptional.

In his farewell speech, President Reagan said: "Since this is the last speech that I will give as president, I think it's fitting to leave one final thought, an observation about a country which I love. It was stated best in a letter I received not long ago. A man wrote me and said: "You can go to live in France, but you cannot become a Frenchman. You can go to live in Germany or Turkey or Japan, but you cannot become a German, a Turk, or a Japanese. But anyone, from any corner of the Earth, can come to live in America and become an American."

On the other hand, it's clear from their words and deeds that some people in the Trump/Vance administration disagree with me on who does and doesn't belong here (please note, I said <u>some</u>, not <u>all</u>).

At the infamous rally at Madison Square Garden a month before the 2024 presidential election, Donald Trump's top policy adviser Steven Miller said, "America is for Americans and Americans only."

Well, it certainly didn't take long to figure out what he meant by that. It appears some of these guys believe that citizens with ancestors who go back to the Mayflower have a stronger claim to this country than any of the people who came after them. If your ancestors were on that boat or fought in the Revolution you are <u>*AMERICAN*</u> American.

Certain phrases that many of them use now – like "Heritage Americans" – signal this loud and clear. They seemingly believe that Heritage Americans are <u>*AMERICAN*</u> Americans… people who can go on Ancestry.com and trace their ancestral roots to the Anglo-Protestant, Scotch-Irish settlers of the original colonies…. people who, of course, happen to be white.

I'm not making unfounded assumptions about these guys. Vice President JD Vance came out and said this at a 2025 speech at the conservative think tank the Claremont Institute: "I think the people whose ancestors fought in the Civil War have a hell of a lot more claim over America than the people who say they don't belong."

He also said, “America is not just an idea. We’re a particular place *with a particular people* and a particular set of beliefs and way of life.” After marveling over the fact that “our ancestors” could “tame a wild continent,” he concluded, “That is our *heritage as Americans*.”

Elsewhere, in July 2025, an oil painting of a white pioneer couple cradling a baby in the back of a covered wagon was posted on the Department of Homeland Security’s official X account, along with the caption: “Remember your Homeland’s *Heritage*.”

In response to questions about the post, then DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin wrote, “If the media needs a history lesson on the brave men and women who blazed the trails and forged this Republic from the sweat of their brow, we are happy to send them a history textbook. This administration is unapologetically proud of American history and American *heritage*.” Are you sensing that everyone on their team got the memo?

Some of this crew believes our refugee system should also reflect this view, severely restricting travel and visas for countries where people have darker skin while favoring white Afrikaners – the white minority that once ran South Africa’s brutal apartheid system – and conservative Europeans who have been, as a presentation to the White House by officials in the State and Homeland Security Departments put it, “targeted for peaceful expression of views online such as opposition to mass migration or support for ‘populist’ political parties.” < That last one appears to be a reference to the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) political party, an organization that JD Vance has vigorously defended but that many accuse of aligning, at least on some level, with Nazism. >

Their strategy also includes stripping some naturalized Americans of their citizenship. To that end, the Trump/Vance administration issued guidance to field offices for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, telling them to “supply Office of Immigration Litigation with 100-200 de-naturalization cases per month” in 2026. < Under current federal law, individuals can only be denaturalized if they committed fraud while applying for citizenship, or in very few other limited circumstances. >

The most ironic part of trying to define who is and who is not a "Heritage American" is that Americans have never been a homogenous group of people. Differences and diversity have defined this country from the start. While those in the colonies shared a British heritage, they didn't have common histories or a shared cultural heritage. From the beginning, there were huge differences in their origin stories and very diverse histories, traditions, backgrounds, faiths, languages and socioeconomic disparities. Colonists identified far more as citizens of their own colonies than they did as "Americans."

This is the very reason the United States Constitution is such a remarkable document. Its architects had to find a way to build a fair and cohesive government *despite* these vast differences.

American exceptionalism at its finest!

There is a much better way to do this. A way that is humane, dignified, and honors the rule of law we claim to cherish.

It's beyond time to *stop the nonsense and get realistic about our situation*. Immigration is one of those issues where we desperately need to *move beyond ideology and just do the math*.

The last substantial immigration bill to pass in Congress was the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986…. 40 years ago!

The main reasons our immigration situation has gotten so out of control is Congress' inability to craft an intelligent, long-term strategy – as it is with almost every challenge we face – together with a chronic lack of political will… and make no mistake, rounding up thousands of people and throwing them out of the country is not an intelligent, long-term strategy. It's just made-for-TV theatre designed to look like they are doing something.

Even though Donald Trump has taken this reality television show to an entirely new level, immigration has always been the poster child of our nation's fly-swatting-policymaking approach. For decades, this

topic has given our politicians the perfect opportunity to pander to their base with deeply flawed rhetoric and fearmongering.

Instead of constructing intelligent and thoughtful ideas, many in Washington have repeatedly lobbed a rhetorical Molotov cocktail of fear, anger, frustration, and blame.

Because they have very few ideas beyond making America a cement-walled compound, they try to make the issue as complicated as possible by adding domestic disorder, national security, and America's "rule of law" into the mix. This is an effective means for them to gain support, because between cultural chaos, terrorism, and "illegal" aliens, almost every fear that Americans harbor can be exploited.

This tactic is extremely dangerous, however, because it prevents accurate, independent definitions of the prevailing challenges and further distorts the already blurry line that exists between them. The more tangled and convoluted these problems get, the more impossible they seem to solve.

But, believe me, they can be solved! Once we untangle all the concerns, we can appropriately break down the elements of each and finally assign them achievable solutions.

And remember, when it comes to immigration reform, it doesn't really matter what we believe *should* happen, or even what is *fair*. We have a majorly complicated challenge on our hands, and the only way to find long-term, sustainable solutions for majorly complicated challenges is to build strategies within the context of the realities of the situation, *not what we wish the realities were.*

The 1787 Plan of Action: Immigration

The 1787 plan shifts the United States to an employment-based immigration system to determine who becomes a Permanent Resident, which means no more random lottery.

The plan takes age, education, job skills, work experience, work specialization, and English language proficiency into consideration. Family ties will only be considered in a separate category called *Family*

Sponsorship (which includes children, spouses/partners, parents, and grandparents), but this will be far more limited than it is now.

To succeed, it's critical we find an optimal *balance*. It's just like Goldilocks and those bowls of porridge. Too little immigration will stunt our economic growth and global competitiveness. Too much will increase inequality, stress our social systems, and ultimately become counterproductive. So, we must find the balance that is *just right.* (See the balance 1787 proposes at the end of this section.)

Step One:
Create a welcoming and entrepreneurial climate that attracts international talent.

Immigrants established and literally built the United States, and they continue to enhance America – both culturally and economically – adding tremendous value to our country. They strengthen our academic communities, lead in scientific and technological innovation, and elevate our economic development by starting new businesses, creating new jobs, and patenting intellectual property.

Immigrants are over 23 percent of our STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) workers. Since 2000, immigrants have been awarded 40 percent of the Nobel Prizes won by Americans in chemistry, medicine, and physics. In 2025, three of the six winners from the United States in the three Nobel Prize science categories were immigrants. The only U.S. winner of the Nobel Prize in chemistry was an immigrant, and two of the three U.S. recipients of the Nobel Prize in physics were immigrants.

The American Immigration Council – which merged with New American Economy, a bipartisan research fund founded by Michael Bloomberg – revealed the following in its 2025 New American Fortune 500 report:

† More than 46 percent of Fortune 500 companies in 2025 (231 out of 500) were founded by immigrants or their children (109

companies founded by immigrants; 122 companies founded by children of immigrants).

- In fiscal year 2024, these 231 Fortune 500 companies generated $8.6 trillion in revenue, an amount that, if compared with national GDPs, would rank as the third-largest economy globally.
- Among the 14 companies that appeared on the Fortune 500 list for the first time in 2025, ten were founded by immigrants or their children.
- These 231 Fortune 500 companies employed over 15.4 million people worldwide, a number that's comparable to the population of the fifth-largest U.S. state.
- Immigrants and their children founded 80 percent of the Fortune 500 companies in professional and other services, 65.6 percent in manufacturing, and 57.5 percent in information.

Those are incredible numbers. To ensure our long-term economic health; to remain globally competitive; and to replenish our aging workforce, we should offer a Permanent Resident Card (Green Card) to *every* international student who receives a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) degree from an American university.

We're just leaving money on the table if we don't. Why in the world would we educate smart, talented people *over here*, then send them back home to use their skills and knowledge to *compete with us*? That makes zero sense.

This is an important move for many reasons, but a major one is that the National Foundation for American Policy warns that "without international students, the number of students pursuing graduate degrees (master's and PhD) in fields such as computer science and electrical engineering would be small given the size of the U.S. economy." They also warn – as the earlier studies I mentioned do – that "without continued net inflow of immigrants, the U.S. working-age population will shrink over the next two decades and by 2040, the

United States will have over 6 million fewer working-age people than in 2022."

"A shrinking working-age population can easily lead to economic stagnation or even falling living standards for a nation. A shrinking population means fewer people to generate new ideas that lead to technological progress and long-term growth. A shrinking population also means fewer workers to produce goods and services. When combined with an aging population that continues to demand labor-intensive goods and services, the result is likely to be price pressures and shortages."

Not to mention the money the more than 1.1 million international students studying at our colleges and universities contribute to our economy – which was roughly $44 billion through tuition, room and board, transportation and other spending during the 2023-2024 school year. They also supported 378,175 jobs in the American economy.

NAFSA, a nonprofit dedicated to global education and exchange, says that declines in new international student enrollment and actions like visa bans and disruptions in admissions processing could result in almost $7 billion in lost revenue and over 60,000 fewer jobs.

In the 1787 plan, whatever visas we extend to international STEM graduates will go against the new yearly national limit we set for all immigration categories.

The number of these visas will obviously change every year but, as a reference, in the 2024-25 school year there were 1,177,766 students from abroad studying in our higher education institutions (488,481 of these were graduate students). Fifty-seven percent studied in the STEM fields, and math and computer science continued to increasingly be the leading field of study for these students.

Step Two:
Implement a Common-Sense Plan for Unauthorized Immigrants

Can we please get real here?

During Donald Trump's first term, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

combined carried out 287,093 removals in FY2017; 327,240 in FY2018; and 347,230 in FY2019.

Republicans may be surprised (again) to learn that the 287,093 removals in FY2017 under President Trump were much lower than the removals in *every single year* of the Obama presidency, and the number of removals in FY2018 and FY2019 were lower than six of the eight years under President Obama. Also, most of Trump's removals were people trying to get *into* the country, not people who were already here.

Cut to today.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) claims that from President Trump's second inauguration day to the end of December 2025, roughly 605,000 people had been deported.

< Several nonprofits and news outlets report numbers lower than this. For example, the Center for Immigration Studies, an independent, nonpartisan research organization, points out that immigration judges issued around 500,000 removal orders in FY2025. This number tracks with numbers reported by The New York Times. >

Former DHS Secretary Kristi Noem also claimed that 1.9 million people voluntarily self-deported in 2025.

< Although Secretary Noem name-dropped the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the agency itself never verified her figures. In August 2025, when her number was at 1.6 million, she cited a chart from the Center for Immigration Studies, but the Center was careful in their report to emphasize that their numbers were estimates. They pointed to several research limitations, including an absence of official government data and a potential unwillingness by immigrants to complete a survey in these volatile times. Steven Camarota, director of research at the Center and one of the report's authors, told PolitiFact, "There is always some uncertainty in research of this kind, which we point out in our report." He advised he would refer to the number as an estimate "based on the best data available." >

Since I can't imagine the Trump/Vance administration would lie about their deportation numbers – insert eye-roll emoji – we'll use their number of 605,000 from January 20, 2025 to the end of the year (for

the sake of math, let's call it eleven months). Using those numbers, the Trump/Vance administration deported an average of 55,000 people a month in 2025. That's a significant increase from the previous record held by President Obama who, in FY20212, deported an average of 34,154 people a month.

Okay, now let's do some quick math.

The Pew Research Center estimates that the U.S. unauthorized immigrant population reached a record 14 million in 2023. So, using the Trump/Vance administration's total 2025 numbers – 605,000 deportations and 1.9 million people who self-deported – the Trump/ Vance administration's immigration policies successfully disposed of 18 percent of the "illegal" immigrants that plague America.

With all the drama, the angst, the terror… with the disruptions to the labor market and overall economy… 18 percent.

And here's the problem for the administration: Even this pace is going to be very difficult to sustain for several reasons. In addition to legal and judicial challenges and domestic opposition, *people can only self-deport once*. PLUS, ICE has already picked the low-hanging fruit by targeting people who are relatively easy to find. PLUS, the number of people in detention is now over 70,000 and it's already straining capacity to its limits. The administration has announced plans to increase capacity, but that takes time. < I'm not exactly sure where this expansion plan stands anyway because, as of June 2026, ICE is reportedly planning to sell or just give away at least seven of the 11 warehouses it spent over $700 million on to detain migrants?!?).

But let's be generous and say they do miraculously keep up and somehow meet their target of removing an average of 1,000,000 people a year. That's 4,000,000 people. That's only 29 percent of the "illegal" population.

With all the drama, the angst, the terror… with the disruptions to the labor market and overall economy… 29 percent.

This makes no sense. A policy of just throwing people out of the country is not a well-designed, effective policy. Millions of people are *not going anywhere* – that's just a *fact.* Like it or not, that is the reality of our situation.

The bottom line is that we can't fix our immigration situation unless we clear the deck. The best way – actually, the only way – to do this is to offer a one-shot deal (à la President Ronald Reagan) to every single unauthorized**,** non-criminal person who is already here.

Don't freak out yet! Please just hear me out.

I am excited to introduce you to 1787's common-sense plan for unauthorized immigration. It's called the

"Allow Millions of People to Pay Taxes Since They Are in Our Country Anyway" Plan

In 1986, Congress passed – and President Reagan signed – the Immigration Reform and Control Act. This is a great template to use. If unauthorized immigrants can establish that they have resided in the U.S. for five continuous years, they will be granted temporary resident status. This status will allow previously unauthorized immigrants to live, work and travel in the United States legally. The status moves from temporary resident status to permanent residency status after eighteen months and then to citizenship five years later.

Every person will undergo a thorough background check to identify any criminals to be deported (individuals with convictions for a felony or three misdemeanors are ineligible for the program and will be deported right away). Those deemed eligible are required to register for military selective service and will be granted amnesty, which forgives their acts of illegal immigration and other related illegal acts such as driving and working with false documents.

Unlike Reagan's 1986 plan, those granted temporary resident status will not be required to pay back taxes or pay any fines. These requirements are just not realistic. We're not doing this for the fun of it; *we are trying to solve a problem*. We *want* people to take advantage of

this program and most of them simply cannot afford back taxes and fines. For now, the only cost associated with the new status should be the actual cost involved to process the applications.

This offer is a one-shot deal. After we launch our "Allow Millions of People to Pay Taxes Since They Are in Our Country Anyway" plan, we will drastically crack down on any remaining undocumented people who live and work in this country, which will be much easier because there will be fewer people to deal with. Those who choose not to participate in the program will be deported immediately when identified, and they will never again be given the chance to receive legal status in America.

Some people say President Reagan's amnesty plan was a "magnet" that increased the number of undocumented workers. Critics of his plan say his actions led to the quadruple-the-size problem we face today. Their logic seems to be that Reagan's decision made us look soft on undocumented workers and, therefore, enticed a brand-new wave of them to flood through our borders.

Although the number of undocumented workers did significantly increase in the years after Reagan's plan, it was not due to the amnesty component of the plan. The main flaw in the 1986 plan was this: Companies continued to hire undocumented workers and were not appropriately penalized. *Simply put, the law was not enforced*.

After Reagan's law passed, it quickly became clear that businesses had become dependent on migrant labor and continued to have a huge appetite for undocumented workers and their low pay scale.

Unfortunately – and for a variety of reasons, including lobbying by powerful industries like hospitality, agriculture, and construction – law enforcement on every level chose to look the other way. Basically 2.9 million unauthorized immigrants were granted amnesty without a serious plan to stop history from repeating itself. *That cannot – and will not – happen again.*

See, you read that without having a heart attack! That wasn't so hard!

Step Three:
Implement Other Common-Sense Measures

It's critical we don't get into this position again and we need to take extensive measures to ensure that we won't. To that end, we will implement strict prevention mechanisms – including harsh financial fines on employers who employ unauthorized immigrants – and a smart, comprehensive border security strategy.

The 1787 plan also includes things like establishing a hard-core vetting process to identify unauthorized individuals with convictions for a felony and/or three misdemeanors; investing in a biometric entry-exit tracking system; passing a federal mandate requiring all states to use E-Verify; and reforming our overwhelmed immigration courts.

You can find 1787's entire Plan of Action for Immigration on p. 662 of the *Policy Guide*.

This is the Immigration Balance 1787 Proposes:

- A Permanent Resident Card (Green Card)

  Allows someone to live and work permanently in the U.S.

  The Yearly Number: 1,000,000 MINUS the number of STEM graduates who accept a Green Card MINUS the number of H-2A and H-2B visas awarded MINUS the number of refugees and asylum-seekers visas given.

- Family Sponsorship (New Category of Green Card)

  Allows someone to live and work permanently in the U.S.
  The Yearly Number: 100,000/year

† Permanent Workers (EB1 – EB5)

EB-1
Persons of extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business, or athletics; outstanding professors or researchers; and multinational executives and managers.
EB-2
Persons who are members of the professions holding advanced degrees or for persons with exceptional ability in the arts, sciences, or business.
EB-3
Professionals, skilled workers, and other workers.
EB-4
Certain religious workers, employees of U.S. foreign service posts, retired employees of international organizations, alien minors who are wards of courts in the United States.
EB-5
Business investors who invest $1 million or $500,000 (if the investment is made in a targeted employment area) in a new commercial enterprise that employs at least 10 full-time U.S. workers.

The Yearly Number: Unlimited, BUT all categories will require a Labor Certification (i.e., a job offer from U.S. sponsor or, for EB-5, proof of investment and at least ten full-time U.S. workers).

† STEM Graduates (Green Card)

Allows someone to live and work permanently in the U.S. (note: this is a separate category that will open space in the EB categories for other important disciplines).

The Yearly Number: Unlimited, <u>BUT</u> this number goes against the yearly national limit set for all immigration categories.

† Temporary Workers

H-1B	Person in Specialty Occupation
H-1B1	Free Trade Agreement
H-3	Trainee or Special Education
L	Intracompany Transferee
O	Individual with Extraordinary Ability or Achievement
P-1	Individual or Team Athlete, or Entertainment Group
P-2	Artist or Entertainer (Individual or Group)
P-3	Artist or Entertainer (Individual or Group)
Q-1	Participant in an International Cultural Exchange Program

The Yearly Number: Unlimited, BUT all these categories will require a Labor Certification (i.e., a job offer or specific event).

† H-2A Temporary Agricultural Worker

For temporary or seasonal agricultural work.

U.S. employers/agents who meet specific regulatory requirements can bring foreign nationals to the United States to fill temporary agricultural jobs. A U.S. employer, agent, or an association of U.S. agricultural producers named as a joint employer must petition on a prospective worker's behalf.

The Yearly Number: 225,000/year, BUT this number goes against the yearly national limit set for all immigration categories.

† H-2B Temporary Non-Agricultural Worker

For temporary or seasonal non- agricultural work.
U.S. employers/agents who meet specific regulatory requirements can bring foreign nationals to the United States to fill temporary

non-agricultural jobs. A U.S. employer or agent must petition on a prospective worker's behalf.

The Yearly Number: 100,000/year, BUT this number goes against the yearly national limit set for all immigration categories.

† Refugees & *Legitimate* Asylum Seekers

The Yearly Number: 100,000/year, BUT this number goes against the yearly national limit set for all immigration categories.

To be granted asylum in the United States, the qualifications are very specific. A person must need protection because they have suffered persecution or fear that they will suffer persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, being a member of a particular social group, or because of a political opinion. These parameters must be strictly followed at all times.

† Study & Exchange, Temporary Business, Tourism & Visit

Before applying for a visa, students and exchange visitors must be accepted by their schools or program sponsors. The Temporary Business and Tourism & Visit visas will use the same process as the *Visa Waiver Program*, which enables most citizens or nationals of participating countries to travel to the U.S. for tourism or business for stays of 90 days or less without having to obtain a visa.

The Yearly Number: As Needed

I recognize unauthorized immigration remains one of our country's most heated issues and that some of the ideas I just put forward are particularly flammable.

But sometimes we are confronted with a problem that has no great solution. So, we simply must do the best we can under extremely challenging circumstances.

So often, when controversial topics are raised, our deeply ingrained, robotic reflexes kick in and inhibit the constructive, open-minded conversations that are essential to finding creative, sustainable solutions. We need to fight against this instinct here.

With issues like immigration, alternatives that get us the biggest bang for our buck – things like offering financial and governance assistance to countries destabilized by violence and poverty and, as a result, improving the lives of people within their *own* countries – are key to our success.

Oh boy! Now people may *actually* have a heart attack! :)

I can practically hear the outrage this idea is causing throughout some MAGA circles. Those knee-jerk reactions are kicking in so fast people are practically tripping over themselves. Why in the world would we give money to El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala when we have tons of our own troubles over here? We've got our own problems, crazy liberal lady!

That argument is certainly valid, but think about it: At a time when the number of Central Americans trying to cross our southwest border was increasing, at least partially because of turbulent conditions in their own countries, was it smart to *cut* their foreign aid? …which only makes the problem in those countries *worse*? … which will eventually surely send *even more* people our way (after all, Donald Trump won't be president forever). Does that make sense to you?
#TheButterflyEffect

Have you ever asked yourself why we don't we have immigration issues with Canada? Canadians just sit up there, calmly behaving themselves.

Easy answer: Unlike Mexico, 36 percent of the Canadian population doesn't live in poverty. One thing is for certain, if a poorer country with willing, cheap labor borders a richer country that provides

a market for that labor, workers will try to cross the border eventually. And that extends to countries south of Mexico. It's just that simple.

Typically, if jobs are available, workers will try to come fill them. If jobs aren't, workers stay home. It's certainly no coincidence that apprehensions at our border declined significantly in 2007 – the very same year the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis hit the United States.

We seem to forget that, even though living in America is wonderful, many of those who cross the border would likely prefer to create a comfortable life in their own countries, with their own families.

This approach would not only slow the flow of immigrants coming to America – helping untangle things at the border and strengthening our national security – but we would also reap countless benefits of being deeply surrounded by stronger, more stable economies.

This idea is not just about immigrants coming into America. It's also about stabilizing countries around us – and neighborly compassion.

The most concerning part of the climbing migration numbers during the Biden administration was the substantial increase in the number of families and unaccompanied children crossing our southern border – which meant that more and more children were being put in significant danger to travel to the United States. < In FY2021, there were 478,492 Individuals in a Family Unit (FMUA) and 146,054 Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC). >

One of the main drivers behind this was how lucrative of an industry it had become. The business of moving people north – particularly through the Darién Gap, the only land route from South America to the United States – had become a modern-day Gold Rush.

For decades, this unforgiving, arduous terrain acted as a natural barrier between North and South America, but then "entrepreneurs" made this dangerous, dense jungle passable, providing boat rides, camps, porters, guides, restaurants, and even all-inclusive packages to make the entire experience easier. "Like a ticket to Disney," one Venezuelan construction worker told The New York Times.

When you imagine migrants being "smuggled" into the United States, you may picture old-school, thuggish "coyotes" hiding people in

the bottoms of battered trucks or walking them through the hot desert or across rapid rivers or helping them creep through secret tunnels. But that's no longer the case.

In 2023, 520,085 people crossed through the Darién Gap, shattering 2022's record of 250,000. The New York Times reported in 2023 that the people shepherding migrants through the dangerous jungle were "politicians, prominent businessmen and elected leaders, now sending thousands of migrants toward the United States in plain sight each day – and charging millions of dollars a month for the privilege… today, that profit is greater than ever, with local leaders collecting tens of millions of dollars this year alone from migrants in an enormous people-moving operation – one that international experts say is more sophisticated than anything they have seen."

One of the things, among many, that made this so dangerous was that the Gaitanist Army of Colombia (EGC), often called the Gulf Clan – an uber powerful drug-trafficking group – essentially ruled the Urabá region of Antioquia, which includes the entrance to the jungle… to such an extent that the Colombian government considered the Gulf Clan to have "criminal governance" over the area. Colombian President Gustavo Petro estimated that the group was earning $30 million a year or more from the migration business alone.

In April 2023, the United States, Colombia, and Panama signed an agreement to "end the illicit movement of people" through the Darién Gap, a practice that they warned "leads to death and exploitation of vulnerable people for significant profit."

These are the types or deals and relationships that we should be focusing on. Solutions that kill one, two or three birds with one stone. For one, we desperately need the support of Colombia's President Gustavo Petro now that we have invaded Venezuela (a fact that I wish President Trump had the foresight to realize before he called President Petro a "lunatic who has many mental problems" and "an illegal drug leader" two months before the Venezuela raid).

< In December 2025, the U.S. classified the Gaitanist Army of Colombia a foreign terrorist organization (FTO). While this designation could help authorities unravel the EGC's financial structure, experts

say it may threaten the ongoing peace talks in Qatar between the EGC and the Colombian government that started in September 2025. >

All I'm saying is that it's never a bad idea to at least consider adventurous alternatives as opposed to consistently going back to ideas that were lame in the first place. Just consider Donald Trump's beloved "Wall."

Let's be real, even if you're all in on "The Wall," you must admit that it wasn't that difficult to dream up. That concept is one of the first things preschool kids figure out with their Legos.

But even beyond that, Donald Trump's version of "The Wall" in his first term was ridiculous in its ineffectiveness. During his first administration, we spent billions and billions and billions on just 458 miles of this damn thing, never mind that smugglers repeatedly cut through it with a basic saw that you can buy at Walmart. < By the way, only 52 miles of this were new primary border barriers… the rest were replacements of old, dilapidated barriers. >

In fact, according to data from U.S. Customs and Border Protection that The Washington Post demanded under the Freedom of Information Act, as of March 2022 the fragments of "The Wall" built during that time had been breached by Mexican smugglers 3,272 times over the previous three years. In fact, we Americans had to pay $2.6 million just to repair the various breaches.

< That's another thing! Remember when Donald repeatedly told us that it didn't really matter how much his "Wall" cost because Mexico was going to pay for it. ¡Gracias México! Oh, wait… they didn't? >

Not to mention the construction was just shoddy. At one point, engineers noticed that a section of "The Wall" that was meant to be a "showcase" model for future projects – built for $42 million by a private company that had been awarded around $1.7 billion in federal contracts for border wall construction – had erosion at its base and may very well fall into the Rio Grande River.

Better still, this particular "Wall" design required hundreds of storm gates be installed to prevent flash floods from literally knocking it over. Because of weather patterns, these storm gates must be left open for practically the entire summer, which kind of defeats the purpose, don't ya think?

A 2020 joint ProPublica/Texas Tribune review of federal spending data showed that "more than 200 contract modifications, at times awarded within just weeks or months after the original contracts, increased the cost of Trump's border wall project by billions of dollars" over the previous three years.

"The cost of supplemental agreements and change orders alone – at least $2.9 billion – represented about a quarter of all the money awarded and more than what Congress originally appropriated for wall construction in each of the last three years… Experts say the frequent use of so-called supplemental agreements to add work or increase the price has amounted to giving no-bid contracts to a small group of pre-selected construction firms, many with executives who have donated to Trump or other Republicans."

In the end, Donald's Swiss cheese of a "Wall" ended up costing about "five times more per mile than fencing built under the Bush and Obama administrations."

The Government Accountability Office saw this coming before the "Wall" construction even began: "Department of Homeland Security (DHS) plans to spend billions of dollars developing and deploying new barriers along the southwest border. However, by proceeding without key information on cost, acquisition baselines, and the contributions of previous barrier and technology deployments, DHS faces an increased risk that the Border Wall System Program will cost more than projected, take longer than planned, or not fully perform as expected."

A billion here, a billion there. It's beyond insane we let them get away with this year after year. This nation has got to learn that just because our leaders approve the money for their next great idea, we're not suddenly on the fast track to resolution. In fact, it usually means just the opposite. Throwing good money after bad is a habit this country can no longer afford.

Bad Habit Nine

Being an Unreliable partner.

In 2014, ISIS – also called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or Daesh, its name in Arabic – captured the Syrian city of Raqqa to establish a caliphate (i.e., a "political-religious state comprising the Muslim community and the lands and peoples under its dominion in the centuries following the death (632 CE) of the Prophet Muhammad").

In his book *Caliphate: The History of An Idea*, professor of Arabic at the University of London Hugh Kennedy makes the concept of a caliphate a little easier to understand: "You can choose what you want to take from this tradition, but the choice is yours. If you want a caliphate which is aggressive and fiercely controlling of the Muslim population, you can find precedents in the vast historical records. If you want a caliphate which is generous and open to different ideas and customs while, of course, remaining true to its vision of God's will and purpose, then you can find that in the historical tradition too."

"The past bears many different messages. There are those who see caliphate as a vehicle for imposing their particular and often very narrow view of Islam on the umma (i.e. the whole community of Muslims bound together by ties of religion); there are others who see caliphate as a justification for aiming at world conquest; but there are equally those who see caliphate as simply providing a framework in which Muslims can strive to live a godly life and make up their own minds about the best way to this."

Unfortunately, the aggressive, fiercely controlling type is what ISIS had in mind in Syria in 2014. Through the next few months, ISIS stampeded across eastern Syria and northwestern Iraq gaining territory – including Mosul, Iraq's second largest city. ISIS finally declared its self-styled caliphate in June. At its peak, ISIS had engaged over 40,000 recruits from 100 countries.

Almost five years later, in March 2019, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – the Syrian Kurdish militia led by the Kurdish YPG (People's Protection Units) – declared victory over ISIS.

Serving as America's primary ground ally, the SDF liberated five million people from terrorism and 52,000 square kilometers of Syrian territory at the cost of 11,000 of their soldiers' lives. Although ISIS was not entirely defeated, the collapse of the caliphate was a massive victory for the SDF and the United States.

At the same time, in Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was on a tyrant roll, increasingly favoring more radical versions of Islam and becoming a growing threat to Israel; meeting with Hamas leaders that were on pretty much every terrorist watch list, including ours; arming the Muslim Brotherhood in Africa; and expanding Turkey's military presence into thirteen countries, including Libya where he unilaterally claimed large natural gas deposits.

Erdoğan was also busy provoking important friends of America. He was fighting with Greece, a U.S. NATO ally, over gas reserves and maritime rights; he was taunting France by violating an arms embargo against Libya; and he was threating the United Arab Emirates because they normalized ties with Israel.

But the biggie was that, for years, Erdoğan had been threatening to invade northern Syria as tensions increased over 1) a "safe zone" between the SDF and southern Turkey, as well as the Syrian town of Manbij, and 2) Turkey's acquisition of a $2.5 billion Russian-made missile system – the S-400 air defense system – that the West saw as a threat to NATO security.

< The main problem with the S-400 is that it's not fully compatible with the broader NATO air defense system, which several member countries believe would weaken the entire NATO defense framework. That said, since then, the S-400 has faced significant, publicized failures in Ukraine, exposing tactical vulnerabilities. >

Erdoğan claimed he was forced to buy the missile system from Russia because the Obama administration would not sell him Patriot missiles, but that was a lie. Both the Obama and Trump administrations approved weapons sales to Turkey.

Because of Erdoğan's S-400 deal with Russia, in July 2019 the United States kicked Turkey out of its F-35 fighter jet program over safety concerns (the F-35 is an advanced aircraft that is going to be used in several NATO-member air forces). Essentially, American

officials thought the new Russian system would compromise U.S. stealth technology – or more to the point, that the Russians implementing the new S-400 defense system on the ground in Turkey would steal our stealth technology, which was probably a good bet.

This move by the United States prompted Erdoğan & Co. to tell anyone with a microphone that, if the U.S. showed aggression toward Turkey in any way, they would not hesitate to retaliate. This was not just talk. Erdoğan had been amassing troops along the borders of northern Syria and northern Iraq for over a year.

Meanwhile, in April 2019 Russia and Syria unleashed brutal attacks in the northern province of Idlib, an area located on the Turkish border in northwest Syria – even though there had been a long-standing truce between Turkey and Russia that would ostensibly protect Idlib (called the Sochi agreement, signed in 1992).

This outright slaughter of innocent civilians eventually led to the displacement of over 100,000 people. This, in addition to the over 5 million Syrians who had already been forced to leave the country and the more than 6 million who were already internally displaced.

Amnesty International recounted scenes from this nightmare (I know this account is long and likely upsetting, but it's difficult for many of us in America to truly picture the atrocities involved here – and it's important that we do, at least occasionally):

"The Syrian government, backed by its ally Russia, subjected civilians in opposition-held areas in northwest Syria to a new wave of horrors. In an all-too-familiar pattern, attacks from the air and the ground repeatedly struck residential areas and crucial infrastructure. Yet even by the standards of this calamitous nine-year crisis, the resulting displacement and humanitarian emergency were unprecedented.

In towns and villages in Idlib and western Aleppo governorates, the barrage of attacks emptied out entire communities; the escalation was evidently a continuation of an offensive that began in April 2019 targeting the last pocket under the control of armed opposition groups. Cornered, and with nowhere left to go, civilians flooded already

overstretched displacement camps, pitched tents in farms and schools, or ended up in the open in brutal weather.

Amnesty International documented a total of 18 attacks on medical facilities and schools that happened between May 5, 2019 and February 25, 2020 in Idlib, northwestern Hama and western Aleppo governorates. Of those, Syrian government forces carried out three ground attacks and two-barrel bomb attacks. The remaining 13 attacks were air strike attacks: two by Syrian government forces, seven by Russian government forces, and four by Syrian or Russian government forces.

A doctor who survived one of the documented attacks – three air strikes in the vicinity of al-Shami hospital in Ariha on January 29, 2020 – told Amnesty International how the strikes flattened at least two residential buildings around the hospital, killed 11 civilians including one of his colleagues, and injured more than 30 others. 'I felt so helpless. My friend and colleague dying, children and women screaming outside… We were all paralyzed,' he said. 'It took the civil defense two days to remove the bodies' from underneath the rubble of one the flattened buildings, he added.

Based on corroborating witness statements and other credible information, particularly observations by flight spotters, Amnesty International concluded this unlawful attack was carried out by Russian government forces.

A teacher who witnessed an attack on a school in Idlib city on February 25, 2020 described to Amnesty International how a cluster munition explosion injured her and killed a student before her eyes. As soon as she had finished teaching the first period that day, the principal ordered everyone to evacuate the school due to a wave of attacks on the city.

She and others who evacuated were walking past another nearby school when it was hit by a cluster munition. 'A bomblet exploded close to my feet, blowing the flesh off… The pain was unbearable… Two students were walking in front of me. One died instantly and the other one, miraculously, survived… I know the sound of a cluster munition attack very well. You hear a series of small explosions. As if

the sky were raining shrapnel instead of water,' she said. In total, three people were killed, and five others injured.

Amnesty International concluded this unlawful attack was carried out by Syrian government forces; it identified the remnant as a surface-fired, 220mm 9M27K cargo rocket, manufactured in Russia and transferred to the Syrian army, containing 9N210 or 9N235 cluster munitions, which are prohibited under international law.

Evidence shows that, in their entirety, the documented attacks by Syrian and Russian government forces entailed a myriad of serious violations of international humanitarian law. To name a few, the attacks were not directed at a specific military object, and they violated the immunity from direct attack of civilians and civilian objects, as well as the special protection afforded to specific persons and objects, particularly medical facilities, medical personnel and children.

These violations amount to war crimes. The attacks must also be viewed in the context of the well-established pattern of Syrian government forces targeting civilian infrastructure and civilians in areas under the control of armed opposition groups as part of a widespread and systematic attack on the civilian population, therefore constituting crimes against humanity."

It was against this highly volatile and murderous backdrop that, reportedly bored in the White House on a Sunday in October, Donald Trump decided to insert himself into the drama – which, as we all know, is always super helpful.

Nine months prior to this day, in December 2018, President Trump randomly announced that the U.S. was going to pull 2,000 troops out of Syria – a proclamation that came as such an offense to some people in his administration that two of them resigned (Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Special Presidential Envoy to the Coalition Fighting the Islamic State Brett McGurk). The primary reason for their adamant dissent was the immense danger the Syrian Democratic Forces – our fearless and faithful allies – would face if America abruptly left Syria.

Thankfully, President Trump was talked out of this monumentally terrible idea and around 1,000 U.S. Special Operations forces remained.

Fast forward nine months to that boring October Sunday in the White House. In typical schizophrenic fashion, Donald Trump again announced that U.S. forces would withdraw from the border between Syria and Turkey – an out of the blue, unilateral announcement that, without question, is one of the single most ill-informed, irresponsible, and shameful foreign policy failures of Donald Trump's first term (and that's saying something).

It cannot be overstated what an amateur move this was. Clearly, the sitting president of the United States knew ***nothing*** about the situation on the ground in Syria and cared about ***nothing*** more than making his boyfriend Erdoğan happy, which he certainly did by handing Erdoğan exactly what he had always longed for… American allies and soldiers be damned.

President Trump's Sunday Surprise also gave Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his Iranian and Russian allies – who had already proven they would go to any lengths necessary to regain total control of Syria – free rein to continue committing mass murder and other vicious war crimes.

But, ***BY FAR***, the absolute worst – and most heartbreaking – part of this insanely irresponsible decision was the immeasurable danger the Syrian Democratic Forces were immediately put in by Donald Trump.

It's impossible to imagine how betrayed they felt by his actions. It physically makes me sick to my stomach to think that *any* leader of my beloved country could do this to such dedicated and faithful allies.

< Note: At the time, I thought this would surely be one of the most disgraceful foreign policy actions in U.S. history, at least in my lifetime. I never imagined that this shameful episode would be matched by the actions of the very next American president, who outright abandoned many of our dedicated and faithful allies in Afghanistan with what seemed like zero conscious or compassion. More on this in a few minutes. >

To make matters far worse, American troops were standing ***right next to SDF forces*** when they learned of their commander-in-chief's decision, placing our service members squarely in the crosshairs of an incredibly hostile and dangerous situation. The entire episode is just outrageous.

Almost immediately – and entirely predictably – the Islamic State started murdering local SDF leaders, and within three days, Turkey launched air and ground operations against them. To protect themselves – and given no other choice by the United States – the SDF, one of the most loyal partners America has even known, was soon forced to announce a partnership with the Russian and Iran-backed government in Damascus.

To add insult to injury, over a hundred extremely dangerous ISIS fighters that were previously being held by the SDF escaped, a consequence that SDF leadership had long warned of in the event of an American exit.

Well, my fellow Americans, after having lived through almost an entire term under President Trump by then, we should have guessed where this was heading. After creating colossal chaos, his specialty, President Trump – under enormous domestic pressure and international outrage – suddenly changed his mind and reversed course yet again.

Within two months of his Sunday Surprise troop-withdrawal proclamation, the U.S. military resumed large-scale counter-terrorism missions against the Islamic State in northern Syria.

… which brings us to Afghanistan.

American boots hit the ground in Afghanistan (again) on October 19, 2001. The war that followed cost the United States trillions of dollars and thousands of lives. At one point, over 100,000 U.S. troops were stationed there.

Then came August 15, 2021, the day the Taliban took control of Kabul, the capital.

We just covered President Trump's betrayal of our faithful allies, the Syrian Democratic Forces. But not long after, one of the worst foreign policy failures in American history took place in Afghanistan – starting from the moment the first Trump administration started its sham "peace" talks with the Taliban, to the shame of August 15th, when the Taliban completed their takeover of the country and we straight-up abandoned our faithful allies yet again.

… and America's shameful behavior continues today.

For two decades, hundreds of thousands of Afghans risked their lives to serve alongside us, whether it be cooking, driving, providing security, or serving as journalists, interpreters, or cultural advisers.

In exchange for their invaluable help, the United States promised these brave men and women that we would not leave them behind to suffer for their loyalty to us.

And suffer we knew they would. Terribly. Even as they were negotiating their joke of a "peace" agreement with the first Trump administration, the Taliban made it clear that anyone who had helped the U.S. during the war would be put to death, and they wasted no time acting on that threat.

The Norwegian Center for Global Analyses – an organization supported by the United Nations – reported well before America's final withdrawal deadline that the Taliban had been "intensifying the hunt-down of all individuals and collaborators with the former regime," going door-to-door to find and kill our faithful partners. If their original target wasn't around, they just harassed and/or harmed their target's family members until they finally arrived to face their fate.

American veterans, refugee advocates, members of Congress, and human rights organizations had also been sounding the warning – loudly – for months and months that these faithful Afghans were in danger of being left for dead.

The 2024 presidential election had its share of twists and turns but, Joe Biden, Kamala Harris – who prided herself as being the "last person" in the room when Biden decided to withdraw from Afghanistan – and Donald Trump should have *all* been disqualified from being the commander-in-chief. Through their actions and inactions, they sealed the fates of our loyal allies – and Donald Trump continues to sign many of their death certificates today.

When we left, over 60,000 of these brave souls were still left in Afghanistan, even though at least 33,000 of them had already been vetted and approved for evacuation. Today, five years later, tens of thousands of them are still waiting for the United States to make good on our promise.

Our pledge took yet another leap backward when, on the first day of his second term, President Trump signed an executive order named *Realigning the United States Refugee Admission Program*, which stopped refugee flights for these Afghans. According to AfghanEvac, a volunteer group that offers aid to these Afghans and their families, over 2,000 Afghans would have been resettled in the United States over the three months following the order.

One of these Afghan partners – a man named Nasir, a lieutenant colonel who was a legal adviser to the Afghan Air Force during the war, and who has been in Afghanistan living in hiding – said in a text message to The New York Times that Donald Trump had "not only disregarded the interests of Afghans in this decision, but also failed to consider the interests of the United States."

How, he wondered, "can the world and America's allies rely on the U.S. government?"

Four months after Donald Trump returned to the Oval Office, the Department of Homeland Security announced that the United States would terminate the temporary protected status (TPS) for Afghans in the United States, saying there had been "notable improvements" in Afghanistan and that conditions there no longer meet statutory requirements (this is a ludicrous thing to say, which I'll prove later in this section).

This meant that over 9,600 Afghans now faced deportation back to a place where their lives are in imminent danger *only because they helped the United States*. Even Afghans who were allowed to stay until their asylum cases or Special Immigrant Visas are processed are now required to pay thousands of dollars a year in fees.

I guess we shouldn't be surprised by the callousness of our leaders because it's not like they haven't done this type of thing before. After we left Vietnam, for example, the North Vietnamese communists threw 300,000 of our South Vietnamese partners in prison, subjecting them to horrendous treatment, including starvation, torture and death.

After the first Gulf War, we abandoned the Kurds, leaving them to be slaughtered by Saddam Hussein. In 2011, when our combat troops

left Iraq, our government failed to issue even a fraction of the U.S. visas authorized for the loyal allies who helped us. After our exit, an estimated 1,000 Iraqi interpreters were murdered in retribution.

During those first days after the Taliban takeover, it was upsetting enough to see/hear the heartbreaking images/stories coming out of Afghanistan – but President Biden's speech on the following Monday was downright disgraceful.

…you know, the speech where he said, "I am the President of the United States of America, and the buck stops with me," but then proceeded to blame everyone and everything else for the chaos and drama, from U.S. intelligence agencies to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, the leader of the Afghan High Council for National Reconciliation, to the Afghan people themselves.

Biden also blamed the Afghan military forces, which he claimed had 300,000 active troops but, according to the International Institute of Strategic Studies, really had less than 178,800 (the White House later explained that Biden's number included the Afghan National Police, whose responsibilities were very different from those of the military).

Regardless of how surprised he seemed to be by the pandemonium of the withdrawal, it should have come as no shock to Biden because the Center for Strategic and International Studies had been warning for months that, of those less than 178,800 troops, only a "small fraction" could be used "effectively" – an assessment that certainly came as no surprise to our military brass, who had known this for a very long time.

In fact, *six years* before we left, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) was already warning that, thanks to a reduction of U.S. military and civilian personnel on the ground, neither the United States nor its Afghan allies knew exactly how many Afghan soldiers and police were available for duty, or what their operational expertise and capabilities were.

Sadly, the manipulation of this very important fact fit a pattern that the Biden administration repeatedly fell into while desperately trying to deflect responsibility for the latest tragedy to befall Afghanistan. In the months before the Taliban takeover, for example, Biden administration officials gave at least nine different explanations for the excruciatingly slow – and now completely failed – process of the evacuation of our faithful Afghan partners.

Not to toot my own horn, but long ago I devised a failsafe solution to our predicament in Afghanistan: Have those smart tech guys invent a time machine and travel back to 2001. Once there, make the decision to significantly limit U.S. ground forces in Afghanistan and instead focus on air strikes on al-Qaeda and Taliban forces – in partnership with the Northern Alliance, Pashtun, and other anti-Taliban forces – much like we did at the very beginning of *Operation Enduring Freedom*.

Meanwhile, the CIA and U.S. Special Forces would focus on hunting down Osama bin Laden and the others responsible for the 9/11 attacks, keeping a laser-focus on terrorists and those who harbor them.

We wouldn't go into Iraq, of course, which would only divide our resources and focus. We would help Afghanistan stabilize and become a civil society, but we would not tolerate corruption on any level from the new Afghan government. We would have a smart fiscal strategy and not waste billions and billions of dollars.

But, unfortunately, even the smartest tech guys can't invent time machines, So, like it or not, we have no choice but to play the hand we are dealt by those who come before us (which means we better start electing better leaders).

The inconvenient truth is that we ***did*** go into Afghanistan and with that lethal decision comes responsibility, whether Joe Biden, Kamala Harris or Donald Trump like it or not.

Beyond question, there were many, many, MANY mistakes made in Afghanistan. Earlier, I introduced you to John F. Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) from 2012 to 2025. Thanks to his preparing the *Afghanistan Papers* – a set of

interviews related to the war there – we now know that the American people were blatantly lied to, over and over.

In a January 2025 guest essay for The New York Times, Mr. Sopko outlined a list of systematic problems with the Afghanistan conflict – including that the U.S. government "struggled to carry out a coherent strategy, fostered overly ambitious expectations, started unsustainable projects, and did not understand the country or its people." He also made clear that there had been "a gaping disconnect between reality and what senior U.S. officials had been telling Americans for decades."

He then asked this question: "Why did so many senior officials tell Congress and the public, year after year, that success was on the horizon when they knew otherwise? For two decades, officials publicly asserted that continuing the mission in Afghanistan was essential to national interests, until, eventually, two presidents – Donald Trump and Joe Biden – concluded it was not."

I want to be clear: My problem with President Biden and President Trump is not that they concluded the mission in Afghanistan was no longer essential to our national interests. After all, they, like me, may not have made the decision to go into Afghanistan in the first place.

My problem is that we had already spent a fortune there in blood and treasure and they didn't even try to salvage any of it.

According to the U.S. Department of Defense, the total military expenditure in Afghanistan, from October 2001 to December 2020, was $825 billion, with another $130 billion spent on reconstruction projects.

The *Costs of War* project at the Watson Institute of International Affairs at Brown University estimates the actual cost is much higher:

"Through FY2022, the United States federal government has spent and obligated $8 trillion dollars on the post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and elsewhere. This figure includes direct Congressional war appropriations; war-related increases to the Pentagon base budget; veterans care and disability; increases in the homeland security budget; interest payments on direct war borrowing; foreign assistance spending; and estimated future obligations for veterans' care."

Keep in mind that "this total omits many other expenses, such as the macroeconomic costs to the U.S. economy; the opportunity costs of

not investing war dollars in alternative sectors; future interest on war borrowing; and local government and private war costs."

Regarding the human toll, the *Costs of War* project says that "at least 940,000 people have been killed by direct war violence in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Pakistan. The number of people who have been wounded or have fallen ill because of the conflicts is far higher, as is the number of civilians who have died indirectly because of the destruction of hospitals and infrastructure and environmental contamination, among other war-related problems."

"Thousands of United States service members died in combat, as have thousands of civilian contractors. Many have died later from injuries and illnesses sustained in the war zones. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers and contractors have been wounded and are living with disabilities and war-related illnesses. Allied security forces have also suffered significant casualties, as have opposition forces."

"Far more of the people killed have been civilians. More than 432,000 civilians have been killed in the fighting since 2001. Millions of people living in the war zones have also been displaced by war. The U.S. post-9/11 wars have forcibly displaced at least 38 million people in and from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya and Syria. This number exceeds the total displaced by every war since 1900, except World War II."

Despite these mindboggling figures, America's twenty-year war in Afghanistan collapsed in just weeks. On July 1, 2021, U.S. forces left the major facility of Bagram Airbase. On August 6th, the Taliban seized control of Zaranj (the capital of Nimroz Province on the border with Iran); on August 12th and 13th, Afghanistan's second- and third-largest cities, Kandahar and Herat, fell to the Taliban; and, two days later, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani left the country, and the Taliban took control of Kabul and its government buildings.

On August 31st, the last American evacuation aircraft left Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport and the United States Embassy in Kabul posted this notice on its website: "The U.S. Embassy in Kabul suspended operations on August 31, 2021. We will continue to assist U.S. citizens and their families in Afghanistan from Doha, Qatar."

Almost immediately, the Taliban started hanging the bloody corpses of executed “criminals” in town squares and announced they would bring back not only public executions, but amputations as well.

They started trolling the streets, going door-to-door to search for Afghans who helped America. Human Rights Watch reported that Taliban forces were systematically executing or forcibly “disappearing” former police and intelligence officers. Thousands upon thousands of Taliban fighters were swarming into Afghanistan from Pakistan at the urging of clerics and commanders.

The Afghan economy was in shambles and twenty-three million Afghans were experiencing extreme food insecurity. Early on, the United Nations Secretary General António Guterres said that “ninety-five percent” of the country “did not have enough to eat.” He also said that Afghan families had resorted to selling some of their children to feed the rest of the family.

Practically overnight, images started to emerge of women and children who had very obviously been beaten. An incredibly brave group of women who staged a protest for women’s rights were reportedly attacked with rifle butts and metal clubs.

Females of all ages were banned from what was once their schools and universities, women’s health clinics were closed indefinitely, and not only were jobs for women strictly restricted but, in some provinces, they were suddenly expected to wear head-to-toe burqas.

By September 2024, new religious codes banned women from raising their voices, reciting the Quran in public and looking at men other than their husbands or relatives. By then, “religious morality officers” from the Ministry of Vice and Virtue, known for their white robes, were on the streets actively searching for violations.

Men were ordered to grow beards and wear traditional Afghan clothes, including prayer caps. Things for them also got much worse after the 2024 new religious codes. Now, men cannot look at women other than their wives or relatives, and they are prohibited from resembling non-Muslims in appearance or behavior in any way, which most take to mean a ban on jeans and Western-style haircuts.

Men and women could not sit in the same sections at restaurants and in other public spaces, and women could not travel without a male

relative. Music was banned and all foreign news broadcasts, television shows, and movies were shut down.

Afghanistan's drug trade exploded. Already, Afghanistan supplied around 80 percent of global opiate users, but now the Taliban was positioned to expand their operations even more, especially with the discovery of a native plant called ephedra (known locally as oman). Ephedra is a natural source of the key ingredient used in meth.

General Mark Milley, the Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, said it best: "It is obvious to all of us that the war in Afghanistan did not end on the terms that we wanted, with the Taliban now in power in Kabul. The war was a strategic failure."

This entire thing is just surreal to me. Did we really willingly relinquish twenty years of admirable progress to *the Taliban* for them to destroy in an instant? The realization that we have done exactly that makes me sick to my stomach.

Biden said in his speech that "we have to be honest: our mission in Afghanistan has taken many missteps over the past two decades… I will not mislead the American people by claiming that just a little more time in Afghanistan will make all the difference."

But, despite the mistakes of the past, the truth is MORE TIME *WOULD HAVE* MADE A DIFFERENCE. A REALLY, REALLY BIG ONE. America and the Afghan government made countless missteps. Not many people, if any, deny that.

However, we were JUST arriving at the point where the first generation of Afghans who were born into a world with freedom and without fear were coming of age. *THEY* are the ones who would have made all the difference.

At the time of the U.S. withdrawal, the average Afghan was 18 years old and almost two-thirds of the country was under 25. Living under the protection of America and NATO forces were all this generation had ever known. But, instead of using this huge advantage as a force of momentum, we ripped the rug out from under them, never even giving them the chance to lead.

THIS MAKES NO SENSE! We helped Afghanistan build schools and a health care system, a security force, infrastructure like roads and airports, and institutions like parliament and a justice system. Slowly,

Afghanistan was becoming a civil society, finally on the right path in areas like health, education, communications, and improved living conditions.

Though, before the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan was still looking for sustainable sources of growth – and was still heavily dependent on foreign aid – the country's GDP before the pandemic was $19.3 billion and the economy grew by 3.9 percent in 2019, according to the World Bank. The World Bank alone had committed over $4.7 billion for development projects, and the bank administered the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund which had raised over $12.27 billion.

America had spent $780 million to promote the rights of Afghan females. In 2006, First Lady Laura Bush was on hand to open the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF). The AUAF – established by a $100 million grant from the United States – became the country's only coeducational school of higher education.

As a result of our efforts, 40 percent of all students were female, and many had gone on to be government officials, doctors, lawyers, engineers, computer scientists, police officers, teachers, artists, small business owners and professional athletes. There was an Afghan female soccer team and mountaineering team, not to mention the Afghan Girls Robotics Team – made up of 25 girls, ranging in age from 12 to 18, who had captured the hearts of entire countries around the world.

These hopeful little girls, inspired teens, and empowered women <u>trusted</u> us. They <u>believed</u> in America and the principles we convinced them we stood for.

…and every step of the way, they fought so hard for their freedom. On August 24, 2016, the Taliban, armed with guns and explosives, attacked the AUAF. The ten-hour attack killed 15 people, ten of them students. Just weeks earlier, the Taliban had kidnapped two of the school's English teachers, one from America and one from Australia (the teachers were finally released, in exchange for Taliban leaders, three years later). But the AUAF would not be denied! The resilient students and staff refused to cower in the face of terror and reopened, better than ever, less than one year later.

Now, however, we have stripped these same girls, teens and women of their hope and freedom and sentenced them to a life of draconian rules and abject misery.

We left at least 600 AUAF students behind. After several attempts were made to escape the country, their fates were sealed with a final email: "I regret to inform you that the high command at HKIA in the airport has announced there will be no more rescue flights."

The Taliban promptly took over the entire campus and started the hunt for the students who dared attend there. The school's vice president of academic affairs Victoria Fontan told the radio network FranceInfo that, before school officials and faculty left, they "burned the university's servers [and] all the documents we were able to take before leaving, such as the lists of professors, students."

After the students were told their names had been given to the Taliban, a 24-year-old sophomore named Hosay, who was studying business administration, told *The New York Times*, "We are all terrified. There is no evacuation, there is no getting out." Hosay's plan before the Taliban took control of her life was to get an M.B.A. and start an all-female engineering firm.

Statistically speaking, Hosay likely did not make it out of this alive, and I'm not being overdramatic. For obvious reasons, AUAF students were at the top of the Taliban's death list. At an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council right after the Taliban takeover, the UN secretary general António Guterres said he was already "receiving chilling reports of severe restrictions on human rights" in Afghanistan and was "particularly concerned by accounts of mounting human rights violations against the women and girls of Afghanistan."

It didn't have to be this way.

Months before the American withdrawal, I wrote, "Having no U.S. troops in Afghanistan is just not feasible unless we are cool with a resurgence of terrorism and the Taliban slaughtering people as they overthrow the Afghan government to establish Sharia law – which is

exactly what we found when we stormed into Afghanistan twenty years ago. Not to mention that, because we will no longer have a CIA presence in Afghanistan, we will lose all ability to gather intelligence and carry out counterterrorism strikes – a decision that I promise we will live to regret."

I stand by those words 1000%. Even a modest American presence would have helped protect the enormous investment we had made.

Despite what Joe Biden said in his speech, maintaining an American presence in Afghanistan was not analogous with America continuing to fight an "endless war."

In the years before the withdrawal, our Afghan war strategy had transitioned from a conventional "troops on the ground" mission to one that relied heavily on U.S. Special Forces and missile and drone strikes. Our presence in Afghanistan was finally beginning to look like the light-footprint, low-cost operation formula that had been successful in Syria and Iraq.

I recognize these are all very different places – and I don't pretend to know exactly how many U.S. troops it would have taken to maintain order in Afghanistan – but, in Syria, 900 U.S. troops had been able to successfully help hold back Russians, Turks, Iranians and ISIS.

American troops being stationed around the world to maintain stability in certain regions is nothing new for the United States. I mean, that's kind of what we do, right? After all, this is the strategy we followed in South Korea and Western Europe after World War II (except, in those cases, we left *way* more troops).

After World War II, we left almost 30,000 troops in South Korea and almost 40,000 troops in Western Europe. To this day, the United States has roughly 36,000 troops in Germany, 54,000 in Japan, and 25,000 in South Korea. Obviously, we have not been "at war" in any of these places for decades, but we still have a vested interest in maintaining peace and prosperity in those regions.

There are two very distinct questions involved here and, even though the Biden administration tried hard to muddy the waters by merging the two, they must be kept separate: 1) Should the United States have completely withdrawn from Afghanistan, and 2) After the

decision was made to leave, how and why did our withdrawal go so horribly wrong.

First up, should we have completely withdrawn from Afghanistan in the first place? Again, my answer is a resounding NO for two reasons (the first being that we had already spent a fortune there in blood and treasure, which we've already covered). The second reason is the persistent threat of terrorist activity.

To help us break this one down, let's take a closer look at the head-exploding speech President Biden gave that Monday after the Taliban takeover:

President Biden: "So I'm left again to ask of those who argue that we should stay: How many more generations of America's daughters and sons would you have me send to fight Afghanistan's civil war when Afghan troops will not? How many more lives – American lives – is it worth? How many endless rows of headstones at Arlington National Cemetery?"

This is a completely disingenuous argument. For one, American military casualties in Afghanistan had been steadily declining for years. The U.S. Department of Defense reported there were 13 U.S. combat deaths in 2018, 17 U.S. combat deaths in 2019, 4 combat deaths in 2020, and zero combat deaths in 2021…until, that is, the unspeakable tragedy on Thursday, August 26th – after our withdrawal – when we lost 13 of our brave soldiers.

For another – regardless of whether we should have gone in the first place – we were never in Afghanistan to "fight Afghanistan's civil war." We were there, at least in part, to prevent terrorism from once again rising to the point where it can harm America and our allies.

At some point during the withdrawal process, I heard an American veteran of the Afghan war say that our leaving U.S. troops stationed around the world to maintain stability after World War II doesn't make sense in terms of Afghanistan; rather, a more appropriate comparison would be our experience in Vietnam.

With the greatest respect, I disagree with his assessment. Although the entire thing devolved into a holy mess, our mission in Vietnam was to ostensibly prevent the spread of communism, a problem relatively contained to just a few clearly identified countries.

The challenge we face today is completely different. The United States continues to battle a *global* war on terror, a fact President Biden acknowledged when he said in his speech, "Today, the terrorist threat has metastasized well beyond Afghanistan: al Shabaab in Somalia, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, al-Nusra in Syria, ISIS attempting to create a caliphate in Syria and Iraq and establishing affiliates in multiple countries in Africa and Asia." Biden's position seemed to be that leaving Afghanistan was necessary because these new threats warranted "our attention and our resources."

My position is the exact opposite. Given these emerging threats around the world, doesn't it make lots of sense to have a relatively small number of troops *hold what we've got* in Afghanistan – especially since we had already invested trillions of dollars and thousands of precious lives – instead of giving the Taliban a wide-open field to turn Afghanistan back into a cornerstone of terror?

Joe Biden, again: "We went to Afghanistan almost 20 years ago with clear goals: Get those who attacked us on September 11, 2001, and make sure al-Qaeda could not use Afghanistan as a base from which to attack us again. We did that. We severely degraded al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. We never gave up the hunt for Osama bin Laden, and we got him. That was a decade ago…our only vital national interest in Afghanistan remains today what it has always been: *Preventing a terrorist attack on American homeland*."

Exactly! That's why we should have maintained a presence there! Did anyone really believe for one second that empowering the freak'n *Taliban* was going to move us *closer* to *preventing* a terrorist attack on the American homeland? Seriously?

At the time it was great news that, over a decade after we finally got Osama bin Laden, the threat from terrorism had weakened around the world.

In the Institute for Economics and Peace's 2020 Global Terrorism Index, they reported that, "In 2019, deaths from terrorism fell for the fifth consecutive year, after peaking in 2014. The total number of deaths fell by 15.5 percent to 13,826. The fall in deaths was mirrored by a reduction in the impact of terrorism, with 103 countries recording an improvement on their Global Terrorism Index (GTI) score,

compared to 35 that recorded a deterioration (the full GTI score considers not only deaths, but also incidents, injuries, and property damage from terrorism, over a five-year period.)"

Again, great news! And it's also my entire point. Momentum was *finally* going in our direction. We should have taken the opportunity to diminish terror organizations even more, not given them a chance – on a silver platter – to regroup and once again thrive. Why in the world would we let up on the gas *when things were finally going our way*?

But we did.

Predictably, Afghanistan is once again a refuge for ISIS-K, al-Qaeda, and other jihadists.

In 2023, The Washington Post reported – based on highly classified documents that airman in the 102nd Intelligence Wing of the Massachusetts Air National Guard Jack Teixeira leaked online – that Afghanistan "has become a significant coordination site for the Islamic State as the terrorist group plans attacks across Europe and Asia, and conducts 'aspirational plotting' against the United States."

"The attack planning reveals specific efforts to target embassies, churches, business centers and the FIFA World Cup soccer tournament, which drew more than two million spectators last summer in Qatar. Pentagon officials were aware in December of nine such plots coordinated by ISIS leaders in Afghanistan, and the number rose to 15 by February."

"ISIS has been developing a cost-effective model for external operations that relies on resources from outside Afghanistan, operatives in target countries, and extensive facilitation networks. The model will likely enable ISIS to overcome obstacles – such as competent security services – and reduce some plot timelines, minimizing disruption opportunities."

ISIS' plans should benefit mightily from the 15,000 to 20,000 people that escaped from the al-Hol camp in Syria in February 2026.

For years, counterterrorism experts have warned about the dangers of the al-Hol camp, which housed Islamic State fighters and their

families. Colin P. Clarke, executive director of the Soufan Center, put it this way:

"The conditions in the camp were deplorable – a lack of basic sanitation, limited medical supplies and few educational services for children – and served as a petri dish for further radicalization. Moreover, many detainees, especially the wives of Islamic State fighters, are hardcore extremists who saw their job as raising the next generation of jihadists, or what they call 'the cubs of the caliphate.' Women have long played an important role in militant groups: serving on the front lines, launching suicide attacks and performing crucial intelligence functions."

"The children present a more complicated problem. Through no fault of their own, they were either born in al-Hol or ended up there after their families became involved with the Islamic State. These kids were raised in dire conditions, and many were indoctrinated from an early age in the Islamic State's apocalyptic ideology."

… which is exactly why we should have implemented other ways to take advantage of the momentum that was ***finally*** going in our direction. For example, one awesome tactic we could have used is one I rarely hear anyone talk about: Counter-Ideological Warfare.

For decades, the United States has allowed terrorist organizations to frame our image for a vulnerable portion of the Muslim world. These terrorists have done a masterful job of making sure their audience knows all about the "evil" that is America: The brutal, wealthy bully that uses power, might and military strength to repress Muslims on a global scale. Naturally, the terrorists are the good guys who fight bravely and unselfishly to protect Islam and Muslims around the world.

Terrorists have achieved great success with their *America is Evil* narrative using Information Warfare (i.e., "using truth, intelligence, propaganda, psychological warfare, and media in a unified effort to control the way an enemy's own ideology or policies are perceived by the global public"). They base their storylines on half-truths or outright lies, then fill in the blanks with America's actual failures – like the catastrophes of U.S. waterboarding and the treatment of prisoners at Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib. And now – add to the list, of course – our humiliating capitulation to the Taliban.

Conspiracy theories like *The Protocols of the Meetings of the Learned Elders of Zion* (a fraudulent document that served as a pretext and rationale for anti-Semitism in the early 20th century) and the 9/11 Truth movement (a conspiracy theory that disputes the conventional wisdom of the 9/11 accounts, specifically the part where al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four airliners and crashed them into the Pentagon and Twin Towers) are exploited mightily.

Terrorists wage their propaganda war by using everything from CDs to television to radio. Now they have the enormous benefit of the Internet, which gives them the opportunity to reach into unlimited parts of the world. It's imperative we fight back – in real time – and reframe this highly damaging, globally destructive narrative.

A smart counter-ideological warfare strategy goes way beyond the standard "winning hearts and minds" campaign. Abu Yahya al-Libi, a senior al-Qaeda leader, scholar, and strategist, once laid out the outlines of a successful campaign in an interview. His advice:

"Start a social epidemic of rejection. Create a social epidemic of personal revulsion against the "cult;" Identify the criminality to al-Qaeda's target audience. Appeal to the universal value placed on stability, law and order, and justice."

"Make al-Qaeda answer publicly for killing innocents, particularly children; Make the terrorists' community and families fear for the spiritual safety of recruits; Make people remember they can't depend on terrorists; Reframe al-Qaeda as political opportunists; Encourage positive ideological fitna (civil war). Support former militants who recant terror and speak out against it; and demand al-Qaeda pay blood debts (wrongful deaths they have caused) to Muslims and Non-Muslims, as proscribed in the Qur'an."

The timing for this approach was perfect in 2021 – especially when the Muslim world was becoming as concerned about Islamic extremism as we were.

Even as far back as 2013, the Pew Research Center found that "concern about Islamic extremism remains widespread among Muslims from South Asia to the Middle East to sub-Saharan Africa. Across 11 Muslim publics surveyed, a median of 67 percent say they are somewhat or very concerned about Islamic extremism. In five countries

– Pakistan, Jordan, Tunisia, Turkey and Indonesia – Muslim worries about extremism have increased in the past year."

"In many of the countries surveyed, clear majorities of Muslims oppose violence in the name of Islam. Indeed, about three-quarters or more in Pakistan (89 percent), Indonesia (81 percent), Nigeria (78 percent) and Tunisia (77 percent), say suicide bombings or other acts of violence that target civilians are never justified."

In 2019, The Economist revealed that, across Arab countries, "The share of people expressing much trust in political parties, most of which have a religious tint, has fallen by well over a third since 2011, to 15 percent. (The share of Iraqis who say they do not trust parties at all rose from 51 percent to 78 percent). The decline in trust for Islamist parties is similarly dramatic, falling from 35 percent in 2013, when the question was first widely asked, to 20 percent in 2018."

"The doubts extend to religious leaders. In 2013 around 51 percent of respondents said they trusted their religious leaders to a 'great' or 'medium' extent. When a comparable question was asked last year, the number was down to 40 percent. The share of Arabs who think religious leaders should have influence over government decision-making is also steadily declining."

Employing strategies like Counter-Ideological Warfare is more important than ever because there are plenty of menacing groups chomping at the bit to fill the vacuum created by the exit of U.S. forces from the region – first from Afghanistan, and now Iraq and Syria.

But – surprise, surprise – we let the opportunity pass us by.

Onward we go through President Biden's Monday speech. Next, again in defense of his opting for a full withdrawal, Biden said, "We conduct effective counterterrorism missions against terrorist groups in multiple countries where we don't have a permanent military presence. If necessary, we will do the same in Afghanistan."

Wait, what? Mr. President, what do you mean by "if necessary?" Less than one week after the Taliban captured Kabul, your own national security adviser Jake Sullivan said that the threat of the Islamic State "is real. It is acute. It is persistent."

Again, no Monday morning quarterbacking here – *he knew*! It wasn't even necessary to have a high-level security clearance. Anyone with eyes and a television could see that U.S. counterterrorism missions were already needed in Afghanistan right then. *That very day*!

It was also beyond clear that the Taliban remained thicker than thieves with other terrorist groups, and they had been from the moment the Trump administration started its bogus negotiations with them for a "peace" agreement.

From the beginning, these terrorists were ten steps ahead of Presidents Trump and Biden the entire time. Being outfoxed by a bunch of radical fanatics is humiliating enough but, to make matters worse, by then terrorists had become so indifferent to the United States that they didn't even try to disguise the cozy relationships among themselves.

This charade of a "peace" deal was signed in February 2020 by the Taliban and Trump administration officials in Doha, Qatar. Several points of agreement were supposedly established, but the essence of the deal was this: Taliban insurgents assured U.S. officials that Afghanistan would never again be a harbor for international terrorism in exchange for a full withdrawal of American troops. Yeah, right.

Obviously, the Trump administration officials weren't paying close attention – or, more likely, they didn't care – but the agreement was countersigned by an organization led by the Haqqani Network. At the time, the Haqqani Network's leader, Sirajuddin Haqqani, was the Taliban's deputy leader and military commander. After the Taliban takeover, he was announced as their new Interior Minister.

The Haqqani Network, then and now, was/is designated as a foreign terrorist group by the United States, and Sirajuddin Haqqani – who is on multiple sanctions lists and who had a $10 million U.S. bounty on his head until it was removed by the Trump/Vance administration in 2025 in exchange for the release of an American hostage – is still wanted for questioning in conjunction with, among other murderous acts, a hotel bombing in Kabul, a failed assassination attempt on former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, and attacks on the Afghanistan U.S. embassy and NATO bases.

Because of their close ties to the Haqqani Network, members of al-Qaeda were on hand to coach the Taliban throughout the negotiations,

even though part of the Taliban's agreement with the United States was that they would sever all ties with them. Yeah, right.

It's understandable that war weary Americans were encouraged by this "groundbreaking" agreement at first, but not so fast. Setting aside the fact that we should never believe a word that comes out of these murderers' mouths, to close the deal, the United States capitulated on *everything*. We even agreed to stop using the word "terrorist" when describing al-Qaeda, which was just a jaw-dropping concession.

The U.S. also agreed to help convince the Afghan government to release 5,000 Taliban prisoners (while the Taliban was only required to release 1,000) and agreed to what the Taliban called a "reduction in violence" instead of the total cease-fire that we had demanded at the beginning of the negotiations. The United States also agreed to support the gradual removal of Taliban leaders from international sanctions blacklists, including the lists of the United States and United Nations.

Zalmay Khalilzad, the Afghan American diplomat supposedly leading the negotiations for the United States, consistently said that the United States was not looking for a withdrawal agreement but "a peace agreement that enables withdrawal."

Give me a #*% break. This entire episode is mortifying enough. Let's at least have the dignity to call this what it really was: total surrender.

The Taliban certainly had no problem calling it what it was. At the Doha Sheraton hotel where the Taliban and the Trump team signed the deal, the Taliban's press guy gleefully called the agreement "the defeat of the arrogance of the White House in the face of the white turban." Hmmm…catchy!

At one point, Sirajuddin Haqqani proudly said that "no mujahid ever thought that one day we would face such an improved state, or that we will crush the arrogance of the rebellious emperors and force them to admit their defeat at our hands." What a shining moment for us all.

These statements undoubtably sent chills up and down the spine of every Afghan. But of course, they didn't hear it firsthand because the Afghan government didn't even get to attend the February negotiations because the Taliban refused to negotiate with them. If ever there was a flaming red flag, this was it. How in the world could anyone believe

that peace and cooperation were possible between the Taliban and the Afghan government after we left if the Taliban wouldn't even sit at a table with them? I gotta tell ya, we had some on-the-ball negotiators.

The incendiary comments from the Taliban certainly came as no surprise to the Afghan people, who had already seen this play before. They had already lived through at least one brutal civil war, which is the reason they were living under the tyrannical rule of the Taliban when U.S. forces arrived in 2001 to stop the ruthless Islamic regime.

In September 2020 – after multiple delays over the terms of the prisoner swap the U.S. had negotiated with the Taliban without the input of the Afghan government – the Afghans and Taliban did finally sit down at the same table to engage in "peace" talks.

This was a historic moment to be sure, but it's important we remember what happened *between* the signing of the "peace" deal in February 2020 and the September joint "peace" talks.

Between these two meetings, the Taliban launched multiple attacks on Afghanistan's security forces, members of the government and judiciary, activists, journalists and religious leaders. They also attacked Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security – an intelligence complex located in the northern city of Aybak – killing 11 people and injuring over 60 more. On March 9, 2020, Afghanistan's presidential inauguration day, the Taliban unleashed a barrage of mortar shells.

ISIS-K continued its suicide bombing routine, including one at a funeral for a local police commander in the province of Nangarhar that killed 25 people and injured 68 more.

There were other mass casualty attacks – both before and after the meeting between the Taliban and Afghan government – like the one at a tutoring center that murdered 44 people, one at Kabul University that killed 21, a truck bomb that killed 27 people in Kabul, and an attack on a Kandahar airfield.

Then there was this: Sayed Ul-Shuhada, an Afghan high school in Kabul, was bombed, killing at least 90 civilians and injuring almost 150 more – during the holy month of Ramadan, no less. Most of the victims were teenage girls innocently leaving class.

There was also a mass casualty event so evil that even the Taliban or ISIS-K wouldn't take credit for it: An attack on a maternity ward

supported by *Doctors Without Borders* that killed brand new mothers, their newborn babies, medical staff, and a police officer.

On June 16, 2021, at least 24 members of an Afghan elite force and five police officers were killed by the Taliban in Faryab Province. Ferdous Samim, whose best friend – a major in the Afghan security forces – was killed in the attack, spoke for many Afghans when he said: "We mourn. The Taliban celebrate. And it hurts too much."

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported 1,783 civilian casualties between January 1, 2021 and March 31, 2021 alone. This was a 29 percent increase from the same period the year before. The number of female casualties increased by 37 percent and child casualties were up 23 percent. There was a 38 percent increase in civilian casualties in the six months after the beginning of the Afghanistan "peace" negotiations in September 2020 compared to the same period the year before.

Before and after his speech, President Biden tried to distance himself from the hell that was unleashed in Afghanistan after the U.S. announced its withdrawal because, after all, he "inherited a deal that President Trump negotiated with the Taliban."

While it's true the Trump administration signed a total joke of an agreement, the Biden administration didn't have to abide by its terms because the Taliban was clearly in breach of every single provision.

You know how important it is to me that the United States honor our commitments, even bad ones that are passed from one presidential administration to the next. But the Taliban's egregious actions – happening in real time and in plain sight – were in such violation of the February 2020 agreement that, in my mind, it was void practically from the moment it was signed. The Taliban's failure to reduce violence and refusal to sever ties with al-Qaeda alone justifies this view.

We have now come to the second question involved in this conversation: After the decision was made to leave Afghanistan, how and why did the withdrawal go so horribly wrong?

Now that time has passed – and more and more information has come to light – there is only one answer to this: <u>total</u> <u>incompetence</u>.

The defensive, accusatory and angry reaction of President Biden and his administration after the fact made it all look far worse, and their theme of "*no one could have seen this coming*" is downright absurd:

- President Biden on August 16, 2021: "The truth is: This did unfold more quickly than we had anticipated."
- President Biden on August 22, 2021: "Let me be clear: The evacuation of thousands of people from Kabul is going to be hard and painful no matter when it started or when we began. It would have been true if we started a month ago or a month from now. There is no way to evacuate this many people without pain and loss – of heartbreaking images you see on television."

What? No, seriously, *what*? Forget classified briefings and tactical strategy reports, does anyone in the White House even bother to read a newspaper? Watching and/or reading media coverage alone provided all the knowledge necessary to figure out that the Taliban had *zero* intention of playing it straight and never did.

They had been on a murderous warpath through Afghanistan for months – capturing government military bases and entire command centers – and it's not like they were even trying to keep it a secret.

In an outstanding example of journalism, The New York Times reported in August 2021 that: "In early May, a Taliban commander telephoned Muhammad Jallal, a tribal elder in Baghlan Province in northern Afghanistan, and asked him to deliver a message to Afghan government troops at several bases in his district. 'If they do not surrender, we will kill them,' Mr. Jallal said he was told."

In the article, Antonio Giustozzi, a research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in London who has written multiple books about Afghanistan, explained the Taliban's strategy: "They contacted everyone and offered the chance to surrender or switch sides, with incentives, including money and rewarding people with appointments afterward. A lot of money changed hands."

Naturally, Mr. Jallal and other tribal elders ultimately complied, and the Taliban moved on to capture district after district, all the while

gobbling up more weapons, ammunition, food and fuel. The Taliban was doing this with, by the way, with volunteer and financial support from Pakistan, Russia and Iran…which is just perfect, isn't it?

The result, The New York Times explains, was a "lopsided fight between an adaptable and highly mobile insurgent juggernaut, and a demoralized government force that had been abandoned by its leaders and cut off from help. Once the first provincial capital city surrendered this month, the big collapses came as fast as the Taliban could travel."

I am *not* being a Monday morning quarterback here. If sources for The New York Times knew this, you don't think our own CIA did?

Joe Biden had all the facts he needed back then. But following his playbook of passing the buck, he decided to blame his senior military advisors for the mess – which was just more insulting spin.

Months before the withdrawal, CIA Director William J. Burns told the Senate Intelligence Committee that there was "significant risk" associated with it. "The U.S. government's ability to collect and act on threats will diminish. That's simply a fact."

Despite President Biden telling ABC's George Stephanopoulos – in response to a question asking if any military advisers had suggested we leave troops in Afghanistan – that "no one said that to me that I can recall," we now know several did just that.

In September 2021, General Kenneth "Frank" McKenzie, then the commander of U.S. Central Command, told the Senate Armed Services committee under oath that his recommendation to President Biden was that the U.S. maintain a small force of 2,500 troops in Afghanistan.

While he refrained from sharing his private conversations with the president, he did say that his personal view was that withdrawing those forces "would lead inevitably to the collapse of the Afghan military forces and, eventually, the Afghan government."

At the same hearing, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley said he agreed with the recommendation to leave troops in Afghanistan, although he refused to discuss or characterize any private conversations with the president.

In 2024, now retired General Austin Scott Miller, the top American general in Afghanistan during the withdrawal, told the House Foreign Affairs Committee that he repeatedly warned the Biden administration

that things would get "very bad, very fast" after U.S. troops departed. He was so worried by the administration's "lack of understanding of the risk," he said, that he warned those planning the possible evacuation to prepare for "really adverse conditions."

This confirms what stellar journalists were reporting at the time. In April 2021, The New York Times reported that, after Biden announced to his advisors that he wanted all U.S. troops to be out of Afghanistan by September 11, 2021, this happened:

"Over two decades of war that spanned four presidents, the Pentagon had always managed to fend off the political instincts of elected leaders frustrated with the grind of Afghanistan, as commanders repeatedly requested more time and more troops. The current military leadership < Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III and General Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff > hoped it, too, could convince a new president to maintain at least a modest troop presence, trying to talk Mr. Biden into keeping a residual force and setting conditions on any withdrawal. But Mr. Biden refused to be persuaded."

"There would be no conditions put on the withdrawal, Mr. Biden told the men, cutting off the last thread – one that had worked with Mr. Trump – and that Mr. Austin and General Milley hoped could stave off a full drawdown."

Four months later, The Wall Street Journal recounted the same scene, saying that, according to several administration and defense officials, Joe Biden's decision to bring home U.S. troops was "made against the recommendations of his top military generals and many diplomats, who warned that a hasty withdrawal would undermine security in Afghanistan." The article continued:

"The president's top generals, including Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army General Mark Milley, urged Mr. Biden to keep a force of about 2,500 troops, the size he inherited, while seeking a peace agreement between warring Afghan factions, to help maintain stability. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who previously served as a military commander in the region, said a full withdrawal wouldn't provide any insurance against instability."

"In a series of meetings leading up to his decision, military and intelligence officials told Mr. Biden that security was deteriorating in Afghanistan, and they expressed concerns both about the capabilities of the Afghan military and the Taliban's likely ability to take over major Afghan cities."

"Other advisers, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan, raised the possibility of Taliban attacks on U.S. forces and diplomats as well as the Afghans who for two decades worked alongside them. Ultimately, neither disagreed with the president, knowing where he stood."

The Wall Street Journal also reported that a July 2021 internal State Department memo, sent to Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Director of Policy Planning Salman Ahmed "warned top agency officials of the potential collapse of Kabul soon after the United States' August 31 troop withdrawal deadline in Afghanistan."

The memo also "warned of rapid territorial gains by the Taliban and the subsequent collapse of Afghan security forces and offered recommendations on ways to mitigate the crisis and speed up an evacuation."

On August 18, 2021, The New York Times revealed there were "drumbeats of warnings" over the summer: "Classified assessments by American spy agencies over the summer painted an increasingly grim picture of the prospect of a Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and warned of the rapid collapse of the Afghan military, even as President Biden and his advisers said publicly that was unlikely to happen as quickly, according to current and former American government officials."

"By July, many intelligence reports grew more pessimistic, questioning whether any Afghan security forces would muster serious resistance and whether the government could hold on in Kabul."

Indeed, after the withdrawal, Marc Polymeropoulos, a veteran intelligence officer who served as a CIA base chief in Afghanistan told The Washington Post, "The counterterrorism posture went from problematic with the U.S. withdrawal to extraordinarily bad with the Taliban in full control. Suddenly one wonders if we will go entirely dark. It's like a bad dream."

The WP article also reported that another intelligence officer, who withheld his/her name over safety concerns, said the successful Taliban takeover was "encouraging many jihadists to think about traveling to Afghanistan now instead of Syria or Iraq." The paper quoted one al-Qaeda fighter named Abu Khaled as saying, "God willing, the success of the Taliban will be also a chance to unify mujahideen movements like al-Qaeda and Daesh." Well, that's just awesome, isn't it?

A senior counterterrorism official in the Trump administration Nathan Sales added this good news: "We are now back to 1998, where the Clinton administration was launching missiles at desert camps and hoping to hit something. That wasn't enough to prevent 9/11 and returning to that is not a recipe for success."

Even if President Biden didn't fully grasp the severity of the destruction that would happen after an American withdrawal from Afghanistan – which, after what we just covered is in and of itself disqualifying – there was certainly enough evidence to know that U.S. troops had to stay until we had a solid plan for the evacuation of American citizens and our Afghan allies; to keep Bagram air base open until everyone was out; until we were sure that humanitarian efforts were coordinated between the U.S. and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); and until we were certain that the CIA had planned for new ways to gather intelligence and initiate counterterrorism strikes.

But nope. Instead of being a reliable ally, here's Joe Biden, one last time: "And here's what I believe to my core: It is wrong to order American troops to step up when Afghanistan's own armed forces would not…the Afghan military collapsed, sometimes without trying to fight. If anything, the developments of the past week reinforced that ending U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan now was the right decision. American troops cannot and should not be fighting in a war and dying in a war that Afghan forces are not willing to fight for themselves."

This is a despicable thing to say. Really? Are you really going to stand in front of the entire world and essentially call Afghan soldiers cowards?

President Biden, it's obvious you deeply love your children and grandchildren. What would *you* do if *you* were stuck out in the middle of nowhere – vastly outnumbered – and *your* wife, *your* parents and *your* children were looking down the barrel of a terrorist's gun? Are you really blaming these people for handing over their weapons to stop the slaughter of their families – after *YOU* sealed their fates?

Since I am neither an Afghan nor a soldier, it's more appropriate that you hear from someone who is both. General Sami Sadat, a three-star commander in the Afghan National Army, explained it this way in an August 25, 2021 guest essay in The New York Times:

"For the past three and a half months, I fought day and night, nonstop, in southern Afghanistan's Helmand Province against an escalating and bloody Taliban offensive. Coming under frequent attack, we held the Taliban back and inflicted heavy casualties. Then I was called to Kabul to command Afghanistan's special forces. But the Taliban already were entering the city; it was too late. I am exhausted. I am frustrated. And I am angry."

"President Biden said last week that 'American troops cannot and should not be fighting in a war and dying in a war that Afghan forces are not willing to fight for themselves.' It's true that the Afghan Army lost its will to fight. But that's because of the growing sense of abandonment by our American partners and the disrespect and disloyalty reflected in Mr. Biden's tone and words over the past few months. The Afghan Army is not without blame. It had its problems – cronyism, bureaucracy – but we ultimately stopped fighting because our partners already had."

General Sadat went on to explain the reasons why the Afghan military – one that has lost over 66,000 troops in the war – collapsed, including political divisions in both Kabul and Washington and the February 2020 "peace" deal – which, as reminder, the Afghan government was completely left out of. In fact, the General says the deal "doomed" him and his men by pinpointing a date certain for withdrawal.

General Sadat also lamented the corruption in the Afghan government (then led by Ashraf Ghani, who blew town early on in this

mess), which he acknowledges is significant. He explains that most of the leaders in the Afghan government were there because of personal relationships, not experience:

"These appointments had a devastating impact on the national army because leaders lacked the military experience to be effective or inspire the confidence and trust of the men being asked to risk their lives. Disruptions to food rations and fuel supplies – a result of skimming and corrupt contract allocations – destroyed the morale of my troops."

The final nail in the coffin – and every American should pay close attention to this – was the sudden loss of logistical and maintenance support from America. Funny, in his condescending speech slapping the Afghan military in the face, Biden conveniently left this part out:

"Still, we kept fighting. But then Mr. Biden confirmed in April he would stick to Mr. Trump's plan and set the terms for the U.S. drawdown. That was when everything started to go downhill. The Afghan forces were trained by the Americans using the U.S. military model based on highly technical special reconnaissance units, helicopters and airstrikes. We lost our superiority to the Taliban when our air support dried up and our ammunition ran out."

"Contractors maintained our bombers and our attack and transport aircraft throughout the war. By July, most of the 17,000 support contractors had left. A technical issue now meant that aircraft – a Black Hawk helicopter, a C-130 transport, a surveillance drone – would be grounded. The contractors also took proprietary software and weapons systems with them. They physically removed our helicopter missile-defense system. Access to the software that we relied on to track our vehicles, weapons and personnel also disappeared. Real-time intelligence on targets went out the window, too."

"The Taliban fought with snipers and improvised explosive devices while we lost aerial and laser-guided weapon capacity. And since we could not resupply bases without helicopter support, soldiers often lacked the necessary tools to fight. The Taliban overran many bases; in other places, entire units surrendered. Mr. Biden's full and

accelerated withdrawal only exacerbated the situation. It ignored conditions on the ground. The Taliban had a firm end date from the Americans and feared no military reprisal for anything they did in the interim, sensing the lack of U.S. will. And so the Taliban kept ramping up. My soldiers and I endured up to seven Taliban car bombings daily throughout July and the first week of August in Helmand Province. Still, we stood our ground."

General Sadat ended his essay with this: "We were betrayed by politics and presidents. This was not an Afghan war only; it was an international war, with many militaries involved. It would have been impossible for one army alone, ours, to take up the job and fight. This was a military defeat, but it emanated from political failure."

This is a total disgrace. Every single American should be mortified.

So, after hundreds of thousands dead, including thousands of American service members and civilian contractors, and after $825 billion in total military expenditure and another $130 billion spent on reconstruction projects – actually, $8 trillion dollars if you count all the post-9/11 wars and include direct Congressional war appropriations; war-related increases to the Pentagon base budget; veterans care and disability; increases in the homeland security budget; interest payments on direct war borrowing; foreign assistance spending; and estimated future obligations for veterans' care – this is how it ended.

The United States of America snuck out of Bagram Airfield in the middle of the night, without telling General Mir Asadullah Kohistani, Bagram's new commander. This allowed the Taliban to steal millions – if not billions – worth of military equipment that the United States provided Afghan forces, including Black Hawk helicopters, armored vehicles and drones. There was also highly informed speculation that the Taliban was in possession of biometric devices that could identify our Afghan partners.

The United States of America left an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 prisoners at Bagram – including many hard-core Taliban fighters and senior al-Qaeda operatives – whom the Taliban promptly released after they captured Bagram from the Afghan government without a fight.

Meanwhile, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled the country with a reported $169 million in cash, and Americans lowered our flag at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, leaving it empty.

The few Afghans who were successfully evacuated before the U.S. withdrawal were taken to places like our military base in Doha, Qatar, where they sat sweltering, starving, and without proper sanitation. A leaked email sent from a member of the State Department's Diplomatic Security Service to officials at the Pentagon and States Department – obtained by *Axios* – detailed "a life-threatening humanitarian disaster" caused by "conditions that are of our own doing."

The email included assessments from members of the Doha U.S. Embassy staff, with one reporting this: "Where the Afghans are housed is a living hell. Trash, urine, fecal matter, spilled liquids, and vomit cover the floors."

In one of its last communications, the American embassy issued a Security Alert warning that "the United States government could not ensure safe passage to the Hamid Karzai International Airport," making Afghanistan a Level 4 security risk because of "civil unrest, armed conflict, crime, terrorism, kidnapping and Covid-19."

This warning turned into a fatal reality when 13 of our brave soldiers and scores of Afghan civilians were killed by dual explosions set by ISIS-K, making Thursday, August 26, 2021, the deadliest day in Afghanistan since 2011.

Soon thereafter, in northwestern Kabul, ten civilians from the same family – eight of them under the age of 18 – were killed in a U.S. drone strike meant for the Islamic State. The family's neighbor described the scene: "The bodies were covered in blood and shrapnel, and some of the dead children were still inside the car."

A relative of the victims, Ahmad Fayaz, put it this way: "The United States 'always says they are killing [the Islamic State], al-Qaeda or the Taliban, but they always attack civilian people and children. I don't think they are good people.'"

When asked about the incident, the chief Pentagon spokesman, John F. Kirby, said, "We're not in a position to dispute it."

The Taliban started building their government – or what they call an "Islamic Emirate" – which included only Taliban hardliners. The

prime minister is still Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund, who is on the United Nations blacklist, and their Interior Minister is still Sirajuddin Haqqani – the terrorist I mentioned earlier that has a $10 million U.S. bounty on his head and who is on our foreign terrorist list.

Even though Joe Biden said in his speech that "our true strategic competitors, China and Russia, would love nothing more than the United States to continue to funnel billions of dollars in resources and attention into stabilizing Afghanistan indefinitely," it was just the opposite. China and Russia were thrilled by our withdrawal.

A spokeswoman for China made clear that her country was ready to foster a "friendly and cooperative" relationship with Afghanistan. "The Taliban have repeatedly expressed their hope to develop good relations with China, and that they look forward to China's participation in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. We welcome this. China respects the right of the Afghan people to independently determine their own destiny and is willing to continue to develop... friendly and cooperative relations with Afghanistan."

For his part, Vladimir Putin took the opportunity to scold us, saying this was even more proof that the West needs to stop its "irresponsible policy of imposing someone's outside values from abroad."

Our allies around the world were, at best, shaken and, at worst, super ticked off.

The chairman of the German Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee said the U.S. withdrawal was "a serious and far-reaching miscalculation by the (Biden) administration" and that these actions had done "fundamental damage to the political and moral credibility of the West." The head of Germany's conservative party Armin Laschet called the withdrawal "the greatest debacle that NATO has experienced since its foundation."

Even Latvia's defense minister weighed in: "This kind of troop withdrawal causes chaos…unfortunately, the West, and Europe in particular, are showing they are weaker globally."

The United Kingdom, the loyal country that was the second-largest supplier of troops to Afghanistan and the one that had the second-most casualties from the war, was incensed after the Biden administration

kept them largely in the dark as to how and when the U.S. would leave Afghanistan.

Rory Stewart, a former British cabinet minister with experience in Afghanistan, put it this way, "(Biden) hasn't just humiliated America's Afghan allies. He's humiliated his Western allies by demonstrating their impotence." Ben Wallace, Britain's defense secretary who also served as a captain in the British Army, "I'm a soldier. It's sad that the West has done what it's done."

Conservative member of Parliament and head of the British Foreign Affairs Committee Tom Tugendhat said that the actions by the United States were the "biggest foreign policy disaster" since the 1956 Suez crisis.

He wasn't finished: "We need to think again about how we handle friends, who matters and how we defend our interests." The chairman of the Defense Committee in the British Parliament Tobias Ellwood perhaps put it the most succinctly:

"Whatever happened to 'America is back'?"

Five years after America's withdrawal, Afghanistan remains desperately poor, internationally isolated and governed by a Taliban regime that has imposed some of the world's most severe restrictions on women and girls.

More than 17 million Afghans face acute food insecurity, millions of returning refugees are straining an already fragile economy, and despite economic growth, per-capita GDP fell 5.6 percent as the population expanded faster than the economy. International aid – which once sustained much of the country – has also declined sharply.

Women have also been pushed out of much of public life through sweeping restrictions on employment, travel and personal freedom. But the most heartbreaking consequences are being borne by Afghanistan's little girls. Afghanistan is now the only country in the world that prohibits girls from attending school beyond the sixth grade, leaving approximately 2.5 million girls shut out of secondary school and university.

Every year, another generation reaches that invisible wall. After five years of Taliban rule, more than 2.6 million Afghan girls have been denied a secondary education. Afghanistan is now the only country in the world where girls and women are effectively prohibited from attending secondary school and university.

The consequences will follow these children for the rest of their lives. Girls deprived of education face greater risks of child marriage, early pregnancy, exploitation and poverty. And the damage perpetuates itself: without educated girls, Afghanistan will eventually have fewer female teachers, doctors, nurses and midwives. UNICEF estimates that the country could lose as many as 20,000 female teachers and 5,400 female healthcare workers by 2030.

Epilogue

Once upon a time, a young boy got a horse as a present for his 12th birthday. It was a coveted gift and his entire village cheered and said, "Isn't this wonderful!" "We'll see," replied the wise Zen master who lived in the village.

Two years later, the boy was violently thrown off his horse, shattering his leg and causing great dismay throughout the town. The villagers all cried, "How unfortunate this is for the boy!" "We'll see," replied the wise Zen master.

Shortly after the boy's fall, a brutal war broke out near the village, but the boy could not fight because of his broken leg. Relieved that the boy would remain safe, the whole village said, "This is so fortunate for the boy!" "We'll see," replied the Zen master.

…and so the story unfolds.

I recently attended the symphony and was struck by the intricacies involved in the performance. Collectively, the music is perfectly synchronized and flawlessly executed.

As they played, I watched the individual sections seamlessly enter and exit the songs as the score dictated. Possessing absolutely zero musical ability, I am always captivated by the immense talent of those who do. I am also amazed when I think of the years of perseverance and commitment that every single person on that stage endured to develop the skills necessary to contribute to the overall endeavor.

A violinist's path may have started in elementary school and eventually taken her to Juilliard, while a guy in the percussion section might have started his journey in high school or as a member of a garage rock band. Regardless of the road taken, everyone on that stage spent countless hours, at great personal sacrifice, to perfect their individual talent.

That's all of us, America. Every single one of us has an extremely important contribution to make to the betterment of our country, and we have all been preparing for our role for years. Regardless of what our individual pursuits may be, we must all resolve to contribute our unique voice and to commit to participate with a serving heart.

The time has come for us to honestly question our commitment to the future of this nation. I'll ask again:

Will our legacy be something we are proud of, or will we forever be known as the former superpower that recklessly relinquished our prominence because we lack the will to protect it?

I have the deepest confidence that we will come together and pull this off. But we'll see.

Emily

I'll meet you at www.1787forAmerica.org

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