
Concours d'entrée 2023

Annexe sujets

Anglais

Série Sciences Économiques et Sociales

**Épreuve d'admission : Explication en LVE d'un texte
contemporain**



Trump's arrest is a circus he didn't choose, with circumstances he doesn't welcome: ANALYSIS

5 Rick Klein, *ABC News*, April 5, 2023

The master showman might relish the scene: hours consumed by aerial shots of motorcades and an airplane, circus-like protests and counter-protests across multiple cities, a long wait outside a courtroom for a not-guilty plea and, finally, a prime-time rally back home.

10 But the lasting images of a historic day might be fleeting glimpses of a most unusual defendant at the courthouse in Manhattan. Former President Donald Trump was stone-faced and silent, eyes narrowed in the view of omnipresent cameras -- on screens everywhere but in no way in control of the moment. So it is for Trump and the Republican Party he has long since taken dominance over. Trump is, once again, at the center of wild action consuming virtually all of the national political oxygen.

15 What's less familiar is how little Trump is able to define the terms of this moment. And with this scene in the Trump show likely to last a while, the party he has shaped to his liking is no better situated to manage an unfamiliar landscape with wildly unpredictable consequences.

When he settled behind a lectern back home after a long day, Trump framed the allegations against him as part of his campaign cause, in a blanket denial -- of dozens of felony charges related to hush money paid to the adult film star Stormy Daniels before the 2016 election, which prosecutors labeled a politically minded "scheme" -- that stitched together familiar falsehoods about other investigations into a broader case for his return to the White House.

20 "I never thought anything like this could happen America," Trump said late Tuesday at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, in what amounted to a widely viewed version of his stump speech. "The only crime that I have committed is to fearlessly defend our nation from those who seek to destroy it."

25 Sitting alongside the expected taunts and bluster are now, for the first time, actual criminal charges, detailing an alleged plot to falsify business records and hide deeply embarrassing information from Daniels that extended through the end of the 2016 campaign and into Trump's first year in the White House. There are now 34 felony counts in a case that seems likely to extend into the primary season and could even go past next year's general election.

30 News of the indictment has essentially frozen the 2024 presidential race. Most of Trump's major rivals, including Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, have refrained from directly attacking the polling front-runner and are instead blasting the district attorney for bringing the case at all, though some have also obliquely raised the seedier aspects of the accusations.

35 DeSantis has said the district attorney is "stretching the law to target a political opponent" (but "paying hush money to a porn star ... I just can't speak to that"). Trump's Vice President Mike Pence, meanwhile, labeled the case "nothing more than a political prosecution," in language echoed in a range of statements from prominent GOP members of Congress. Yet like DeSantis, few if any Republicans have defended the underlying actions at the heart of the charges. Their unseemly nature -- as well as the possibility that this is just the first of several cases that could be brought against the former president, who is targeted in multiple probes he has labeled persecution -- carve some possible space for Trump rivals. (...)

40 As one might expect, 88% of Democrats said the hush-money investigation warranted charges, with independents split 40%-32% on the question. Intriguingly in an era of polarization, 16% of Republicans said Trump was right to be charged, with another 21% saying they were not sure -- a sizable chunk of the GOP electorate that's not automatically pro-Trump.

45 Some political observers saw in Trump's body language on Tuesday a realization that he is facing a harsher reality than he would admit publicly. "He may be the martyr for the MAGA movement, but this is not a procedure that helps him secure the presidency of the United States," former Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., an ABC contributor, said Tuesday. The fact of and circumstances around Trump's indictment could mark a disruption as memorable and significant as the escalator ride that started the Trump era of American politics nearly eight very long years ago and just a few miles away at Trump Tower in Manhattan.

50 Trump thrives off of spectacles where he is the focus. What remains to be seen is how he and his party react to one he didn't choose, carrying consequences he most certainly does not welcome.

Scottish independence: Is it still a priority for young Scots?

Calum Leslie, *BBC Newsbeat*, June 1st 2023

All eyes were on one of the biggest bands in the world when they headlined Radio 1's Big Weekend in Dundee. But it's something The 1975's frontman Matty Healy said - rather than sang - that's made some headlines. No, he didn't completely confirm his relationship with rumoured girlfriend Taylor Swift. Instead, during his set at the festival this weekend he said Scotland "should definitely just be doing its own thing" - something he also brought up at a gig in January. The country voted to stay in the UK back in 2014 but in truth the talk about Scottish independence has never really gone away.

Dundee is a good place to start - it's where more people supported Scottish independence than anywhere else in the 2014 referendum. And it's where tens of thousands of young people gathered this weekend to listen to music from the likes of The 1975 and Lewis Capaldi.

Polls suggest Scots aged under 24 are more likely to back independence than the average person. When Newsbeat asked people at Big Weekend to name a politician, most gave the same answer - Nicola Sturgeon. But now Ms Sturgeon has stood down, are young Scots still the independence generation or are they worried about other issues?

Someone who agrees with Matty Healy, and was also at Big Weekend, is SNP member Luke Smith. The 18-year-old says he was in "total shock" when Ms Sturgeon stood down as first minister earlier this year. One of the things she was best known for was her desire to make Scotland independent.

"You know the world hasn't ended," Luke says. "We're still the largest party, we're still ahead in the polls, so we've still got that support."

New SNP leader Humza Yousaf made history as the first Muslim to lead a country in western Europe when he took over from Ms Sturgeon as first minister. South Asian Scots recently told Newsbeat they hope the new leader gives them a voice. Mr Yousaf has focused on lots of issues since he came to power but has also promised they "will be the generation that delivers independence for Scotland". And Luke, who lives in North Berwick, isn't worried about him achieving the SNP's goal of independence.

"I think it's early days. But I think the more Scotland sees of him the better he'll be received. And I do think he's got what it takes to appeal broadly," he says. "It's not no worries. There's obviously going to be one or two things, but I think there's every reason to be confident."

Surprisingly, Scottish Labour Party member Amy Lee Fraoli agrees with Luke in some ways. But she thinks Ms Sturgeon leaving gives her party a big chance to get more voters. [...] 24-year-old Amy thinks young voters like her are now starting to think about issues other than independence now Ms Sturgeon has left.

"Just before she'd left the conversation was dominated by independence but I think young people are now asking 'how do things affect me?' What's my chance of getting into uni or what experience have I had at school, is independence the answer to that or is there another way we could go about that?"

Amy, who lives in West Lothian, thinks it's time for a change after 16 years of SNP government.

"People in the area I'm from aren't better off, the education system's not better off, in some places it's actually worse than it was when the SNP came to office in 2007."

Scottish Conservatives member Euan Blockley says the independence referendum was the first time he was able to vote.

"It's what sort of got me into politics. And then there was this wave of nationalism and Nicola Sturgeon," the 25-year-old says. Euan, who lives in Glasgow, says he's "delighted" Ms Sturgeon has left and believes voters are motivated to remove a "very bad SNP government".

"Some people did have a soft spot for Nicola Sturgeon," he says. "But now you look at the opinion poll ratings of Humza Yousaf, they certainly don't feel that way about him. I think that's going to motivate people to go out and vote for unionist parties and particularly the Scottish Conservatives."

But how does Euan think the Scottish Tories will appeal to young voters, a group they haven't always been associated with?

"I think we've got a big task, I'm not going to pretend lots and lots of young people are voting Scottish Conservative," he says. "But I think it's why we've got to direct policies to young people that will benefit them. We need to build more houses, all of my friends are struggling to get on the housing ladder. That's a problem across the political divide, you cannae get a house. But it's not just that, it's areas like mental health where young people want to see change."

David Olusoga: King Charles should pay reparations for Royal Family's slavery role

Adam Sherwin, *iNews*, May 12th 2023

King Charles should pay compensation for the Royal Family's involvement in the slave trade as an act of "restorative justice", the historian David Olusoga has said. Professor Olusoga said it would be a "good thing" for the newly crowned King to acknowledge the monarchy's role in the "crimes of Empire" by committing to pay reparations to descendants of the trade's victims. The sum could run to millions of pounds.

5 Buckingham Palace is currently co-operating with a landmark study into the British monarchy's role in the transatlantic slave trade. Its involvement stretches back to Elizabeth I, who gave a large ship to slave trader John Hawkins in 1564 in exchange for a share in the profits of the voyage. Historical records show that 12 British monarchs, including James I, Charles I and II, sponsored, supported or profited from Britain's involvement in slavery over 270 years.

10 At the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Rwanda last year, King Charles expressed "profound sorrow" at the atrocities of slavery and said ways must be found to "acknowledge our past". But he has not publicly acknowledged the Crown's central role in the trade.

Professor Olusoga, presenter of programmes, including *Britain's Forgotten Slave Owners*, told i: "I think it can only be a good thing if the Royal Family, like other institutions, recognises its role in Britain's transatlantic slave trade."

15 The historian, who provided historical analysis during the BBC's coronation ceremony coverage, added: "Once you have acknowledged the historical truth of your involvement in slavery and the crimes of Empire, what do you do with that knowledge? You can use some of the wealth you possess to engage in restorative justice."

Professor Olusoga, who will be presented with the special award at Sunday's TV Baftas on BBC One in a recognition of his work as a presenter and producer across three decades, pointed to the Church of England as a model the Palace could follow. The Church has pledged £100m to "address past wrongs" after its investment fund was found to have historic links to slavery. The money will be spent on grants for projects helping communities adversely impacted by historic slavery.

20 According to reports this week, Boris Johnson warned King Charles not to talk about slavery at the 2022 Commonwealth Summit in Rwanda or he would "end up being forced to sell the Duchy of Cornwall to pay reparations to those whose ancestors built it". [...]

Professor Olusoga, presented with an Order of the British Empire (OBE) by King Charles this year, said he understands why *Bridgerton* actress Adjoa Andoh described the Palace balcony scene at last weekend's coronation as "terribly white".

30 "It was difficult looking at that scene not to think of the tragedy of what happened to that family," said the historian, who appeared in Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's Netflix series. "It just made me feel sad that Harry and Meghan were not there. In some ways the Royal Family are as diverse as millions of families across Britain. It's just sad, for the reasons we all know, that that diversity was not seen at the coronation.

"It's impossible to modernise the monarchy. It's an antiquated and archaic system we happen to have. We try to fool ourselves that the monarchy is entirely symbolic. In fact, the monarch still has considerable influence and is exempt from all sorts of laws. The King has real political power in this country. There should be a debate about that."

35 Professor Olusoga admitted to "terrible soul-searching" before accepting an OBE in 2019 for his outstanding contribution to the television community, and to society and culture in general.

"Of course, a public honour linked to Empire is insensitive and fundamentally silly and I look forward to the day that changes," he told i.

40 "I spoke to many black household names, like Baroness Doreen Lawrence, and I made the calculation that to take an honour opens doors and gives you more influence and power than making a political statement by boycotting it. Do black people in this country need less influence? No. I will use that influence to carry on fighting against racism and for more diversity and equality in the TV industry."

45 Professor Olusoga said this weekend's award is on a "different level". "It's an affirmation of my work as a presenter and producer," he said.

Inside the gender housing gap

Charlotte Duck, *London Evening Standard*, March 8th 2023

5 "The shame I feel over not having a house is immense," says Kiranjot Kaur. The 48-year-old Kundalini yoga teacher currently rents a house in Peckham from her 16-year-old son's father. But her future in that home hangs in the balance. "It is unwritten between us that when my son turns 18 I will move out." Kaur, a born-and-bred Londoner, tried to buy a house when her parents downsized and gave her some money. "I had £15,000 but I went to the bank and they laughed at me and said I didn't earn enough to get a mortgage." This is despite her always earning the average London salary. "My business is doing okay, but I can't keep up with the price of houses. My sister made a £120,000 profit on a house she bought and sold after three years, that's £40,000 a year, which is more than I earn annually."

10 Julia Herman, 34, is a journalist who was on the cusp of buying an ex-local-authority, two-bedroom flat in Oval in the summer of 2021. "At that time, I could just about afford it. I had a good job and savings, but it fell through because it was leasehold and there was a big repair bill. It was cheap for a reason. I'd spent six months going back and forth with solicitors and I couldn't face another six months of that, so I took a pause."

15 During this time, she met and moved in with her boyfriend, who owns a house in Hackney. "He's said I'm welcome to go on his mortgage and the house is as much mine as it is his but it's not. I want my own space and I want to be able to say it's mine. It's a level of independence and self-sufficiency that feels quite important to me."

20 Unfortunately, despite swapping being freelance for full-time employment, Herman has found getting her own place now is much harder. "The market has moved and I've been priced out. I have a good deposit that I've spent 15 years saving for, but you need a minimum of £300,000 — even my deposit and five times my salary wouldn't add up to this." Herman feels the gender pay gap is to blame: "Women make up the vast majority of caring and teaching roles, which are low-paid sectors. They also pay penalties because they take time out to have children and it's often women who care for elderly parents. At all levels they are not encouraged to earn as much as men."

25 Herman and Kaur are not alone in struggling to buy. According to new research by property technology company iPlace Global, it takes a London woman 5.3 years longer than her male counterparts to buy a property in the capital. This is at least in part because, in the UK, even before they've had children, the average woman's income is 16 per cent less than that of a man and she saves 35 per cent less on average. "For the average UK property worth £362,452, women would need 12.2 times their annual salary to buy a home whilst men need just over 10 times," says Simon Bath, of iPlace Global. No wonder 45 per cent of women who have not bought a property feel more stressed that they'll be renting for the rest of their lives, compared with 39 per cent of men.

30 "Our research highlights that women have a strong appetite to achieve home ownership — but it is the disadvantages of traditional societal underpinnings holding them back," says Bath.

The gender pay gap is nothing new but the cost-of-living crisis has exacerbated the gender imbalance, with women spending an even higher proportion of their income on household expenses. A recent report by the London Assembly housing committee even suggested that some London homes should be made available to women at lower rents to reflect the gender pay gap.

35 While Kaur admits she's lucky to have a subsidised rent in Peckham, she says most of what she earns goes on bills and looking after her son. "I spend all the money I earn on living, and feeding a teenage boy is expensive! Being a single parent isn't just about the money or lack of it that we earn. Time is money. The time I take parenting and running a house solo isn't accounted for."

40 Kaur is planning to set up a second business and, if that is successful, she'll buy outside London or abroad. If it's not, she'll look into social housing. "That's my route out unless my business does well. I'm embarrassed that I've found myself in this situation."

Amazingly, it's only since the 1970s that women have been named on a mortgage but, while the mothers and grandmothers of the generation of women buying today might not have been in the driving seat when it came to their finances, this does not seem to be something that has been passed down through the generations.

45 "There are still gaps in financial confidence between women and men, but we should be careful drawing conclusions from that," says Dr Sara Reis, director of The Women's Budget Group. "The data on who controls finances and budgets within families shows a more complex picture than men always being the person responsible for money. And there are differences along lines of class — women are more likely to manage money and budget in low-income households." [...]

If the Tories fail to change, they face electoral apocalypse in the Blue Wall

David Gauke, *New Statesman*, May 10th 2023

Once upon a time, the realignment of British politics was working out very nicely for the Conservative Party. It is increasingly clear that this is no longer the case. For some time, politics has been changing. Rather than votes being determined by economic class, cultural values have become increasingly important. Socially conservative working class voters have been moving to the right, socially liberal middle class voters have been moving to the left.

5 This is not unique to the UK but the Brexit referendum strengthened cultural identities and accelerated the trend. The Leave half of the country became increasingly Conservative, the Remain half increasingly non-Conservative. In the 2019 general election, the Conservatives embraced the realignment and were rewarded with an 80-seat majority.

10 There were three reasons why this was so beneficial to the Conservatives. The anti-Tory vote was split among Labour, Liberal Democrats, Greens, Nationalists (in Scotland and Wales) and even the occasional independent. The vote was also inefficiently distributed, with younger Remain-voting graduates being clustered in cities. Finally, the Leave half of the country realigned more fully than the Remain half as many moderate middle class voters feared the prospect of a Jeremy Corbyn-led government and stuck with the Tories. None of those factors, however, are proving to be permanent.

15 At this year's local elections the anti-Conservative vote was not so much divided as willing to coalesce behind whoever was best placed to beat the Tories. This resulted in greater losses for the Conservatives than the parties' shares of the vote might have suggested.

Demographic changes are also seeing the anti-Tory vote more efficiently dispersed. Young families have long moved out of London to the Home Counties but, with greater working from home, that trend has accelerated. These London exiles are maintaining their London non-Tory voting habits.

20 And, if anything, the 2019 realignment asymmetry has been reversed. Labour is recovering in Leave voting areas, as cost-of-living issues become more prominent, while the people who continue to care most about cultural issues are graduates who dislike the cultural values represented within the government.

25 Let us take my home county of Hertfordshire, a traditionally true blue area in which the Conservatives controlled seven out of ten district councils in 2015. They are now down to one district council, losing two in 2019 and a further four this time. This should not be viewed purely as a response to the government's recent difficulties. In the county council elections in 2021, which were in general a pretty strong performance for a party in power, the Conservatives lost ground in commuter towns such as Berkhamsted, Harpenden, Hemel Hempstead, Hertford and Bishop's Stortford. The decline of the Conservatives in Hertfordshire looks structural, not cyclical. Hertfordshire is not unique. A similar story of disenchantment with the Tories can be told for Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. (Buckinghamshire and parts of Cambridgeshire had no elections this year but would otherwise have fitted the pattern.) It is no coincidence that this geographical area is coterminous with those areas that favoured Remain in 2016. [...]

35 The wider issue, however, is that the Conservatives have alienated a large element of the electorate that, in previous eras, would have been natural supporters. Aspirational and relatively economically secure, they voted Conservative in the expectation of stability and caution, of sound public finances and respect for institutions, of competence and moderation. Instead, they have had the chaos of Brexit, the buffoonery of Johnson and the recklessness of Truss.

40 In Rishi Sunak, the Conservative Party has a leader who has the potential to appeal to the Blue Wall voters. Yes, he voted for Brexit but he does not sound like a Brexiteer. This counted against him in the Conservative leadership race last summer but is an advantage now. The problem is the party. These voters have noticed that he felt obliged to make Suella Braverman his Home Secretary and know that he constantly has to keep his right-wing MPs and party activists onside. The activities of the Conservative Democratic Organisation and the occurrence of the National Conservatism Conference will not reassure them.

45 To win back these socially moderate voters, the Conservative Party badly needs a period of modernisation. As it is, Sunak is doing well to resist the pressure to move further to the right. A bad general election defeat will mean that he will no longer be in a position to do even that.

50 The local election results should be a warning. The Conservative Party will probably not have to pay the full cost of political realignment at the next election. The thinly-resourced Liberal Democrats usually underperform in general elections compared to low-turnout local elections. Unenthusiastic Conservatives will return to the polls in autumn 2024, preventing a Tory wipeout in the Blue Wall. But if the Conservative Party fails to recognise the danger and change, it is only a matter of time before that fate will befall it.

Judges' dueling decisions put access to a key abortion drug in jeopardy nationwide

NPR, April 8 2023,

5 Federal judges in two states issued contradictory decisions Friday evening that could drastically impact access to a drug used in nearly all medication abortions in the U.S.

10 In Texas, U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk ruled that the Food and Drug Administration improperly approved the abortion pill mifepristone more than 20 years ago. A coalition of anti-abortion rights groups called the Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine sued the FDA last year. The judge issued a nationwide injunction pausing the FDA's approval, which is set to take effect in seven days. Within hours of that decision, U.S. District Judge Thomas O. Rice issued a ruling in a separate case in Washington state. That lawsuit filed by a coalition of Democratic attorneys general in 17 states and the District of Columbia sought to block the FDA from pulling the drug from the market.

15 Rice's decision blocks the FDA from "altering the status quo and rights as it relates to the availability of Mifepristone." Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson told NPR on Friday that he believes the judge's ruling could make it possible for patients in those states to continue using mifepristone for abortion in the short term — even after the Texas decision takes effect. "If you live in Washington State or one of the 17 states that joined Washington in our lawsuit...then the judge's ruling in our case preserves the status quo on ensuring that access to mifepristone remains available," Ferguson said. For the rest, he said, "The Texas judge's ruling seriously has the potential to eliminate that access for mifepristone here in the coming days."

20 Most abortions already are illegal in about a dozen of those states, including Texas, following last summer's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision.

Hours after the Texas ruling, the Justice Department appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, which has a reputation for being a conservative jurisdiction. The Justice Department says it is also reviewing the decision in Washington state. President Biden said the ruling in Texas could have widespread consequences.

25 "If this ruling were to stand, then there will be virtually no prescription, approved by the FDA, that would be safe from these kinds of political, ideological attacks," the president said in a statement.

"It is the next big step toward the national ban on abortion that Republican elected officials have vowed to make law in America," Biden added. He said that the administration would fight the ruling, noting, "The Department of Justice has already filed an appeal and will seek an immediate stay of the decision."

30 Anti-abortion rights groups hailed the Texas decision. "By illegally approving dangerous chemical abortion drugs, the FDA put women and girls in harm's way, and it's high time the agency is held accountable for its reckless actions," Erik Baptist, senior counsel with Alliance Defending Freedom, said in a statement.

35 Mifepristone was approved by the FDA in 2000 for use in combination with a second drug, misoprostol. More than half of all abortions in the United States are done using medication, as opposed to a surgical procedure, and the two-drug combination was used for 98% of them in 2020, according to the Guttmacher Institute. Major medical groups say mifepristone, which is also used in miscarriage management, has a well-established safety record and have been calling for relaxing restrictions on its use for years.

40 In its lawsuit, the coalition of abortion rights opponents said the protocol was improperly approved by the FDA. The group had asked Kacsmaryk, who was appointed by President Trump and has longstanding ties to conservative religious groups, to overturn the approval.

45 Abortion providers nationwide say they've been preparing to rely on another medication abortion regimen using misoprostol alone. Misoprostol is prescribed primarily for ulcers, and is already widely used off-label for other gynecological purposes in the United States. Research suggests the single-drug regimen is somewhat less effective and often causes additional side effects. But the World Health Organization says the method, which has been used internationally for decades, can be safe and effective at the appropriate dosage.

The decision likely will mean uncertainty and confusion for doctors and patients, says Farah Diaz-Tello, senior counsel with the reproductive rights legal advocacy group If/When/How.

50 "People who are seeking an abortion with pills ... are going to find it much more difficult to do so, especially in the time period as providers figure out what they're going to be able to do," she says. "So I think we're going to see an immediate exacerbation of the crisis of access that already started in June of 2022" with the U.S. Supreme Court decision last year in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which overturned decades of abortion-rights precedent.

55 Diaz-Tello predicts more people will look to induce their own abortions without medical supervision, using medications obtained online or in other countries. She also worries about the risk of increased scrutiny of patients seeking medical care for emergency complications from either self-managed abortions or miscarriages.

Where are all those Brexit benefits?

Rachel Sylvester, *Prospect*, May 20th 2023

In the wake of the EU referendum, when the Vote Leave brigade was still trying to work out what Brexit actually meant, I visited the warehouse complex of Unipart, once one of the country's biggest car part suppliers and now a leading logistics partner to automotive companies such as Jaguar Land Rover and Volkswagen. The firm employed more than 6,000 people in the UK and had a turnover of £900m, selling components to companies such as Volkswagen. Its warehouse site covered an area totalling a million square feet.

The site in Cowley, just outside Oxford, had previously housed the factory for British Leyland, the firm that came to symbolise the failure of British manufacturing in the 1970s and from which Unipart emerged. John Neill, the Unipart executive chairman, said that he feared that Britain was risking economic catastrophe. "It's desperate," he warned. "The Brexiteers are playing roulette with my customers and my suppliers and my employees and our communities."

The car industry—which is highly international and more dependent than most sectors on so-called "just in time" supply chains—was always worried about the implications of leaving the EU. Now three of the big global motor manufacturers are insisting that the government must renegotiate the Brexit deal, which they say threatens the future of the British automotive industry.

To make matters worse, it is the fate of the most important part of the future market—electric vehicles—that is at stake. [...]

It turns out that Project Fear is Project Reality. I can't help thinking of Sarah Vine's remark to her then husband Michael Gove on the morning after the Brexit referendum: "you were only supposed to blow the bloody doors off". This reference to the *The Italian Job* now seems ironic given that the film's Mini car chase is a reminder of the British motor industry.

The government is clearly worried. The car industry is totemic, a symbol of economic success as well as the creator of real employment and wealth. The growth of electric vehicles (as well as the associated battery technology) is a core component of any eco-friendly economic recovery that will create green jobs.

Jeremy Hunt, the chancellor, has offered Jaguar Land Rover half a billion pounds in subsidies not to build a new electric battery "gigafactory" abroad. The package includes a cash grant, reduced energy costs and paying to upgrade the power network around the potential site in Somerset.

But the prime minister's response to the motor manufacturers' concerns was staggeringly tin-eared: "I voted for Brexit, I believe in Brexit," he told journalists while travelling to the G7 summit in Japan. He cited the supposed "Brexit benefits" of policies that he had introduced as chancellor.

There aren't many of those in evidence for the motor manufacturers or those working in car factories. In fact, the phrase "Brexit benefits" has become the punchline of a bad joke rather than the start of a glorious new dawn. At the same time, the Vote Leave promise to "take back control" rings ever hollower as the country is gripped by a cost-of-living crisis that leaves households feeling increasingly powerless.

Brexit was never a rational economic decision; it was an emotional vote against the status quo. But now the financial consequences are ricocheting around the country.

The anti-establishment outsiders are in power, and they have not delivered. The Brexiteers blame "the Blob" in the civil service, leftie lawyers, or a "woke" elite because they cannot accept responsibility for their own failures. It's always someone else's fault. The Eurosceptics accuse yet another Conservative leader of betrayal, but the truth is that their ideological certainties have simply run up against economic reality.

Public opinion has been shifting slowly but surely against the Leave vote for some time. If the referendum were held again tomorrow it would almost certainly deliver a Remain result. Regret is growing even if there is little appetite for another referendum.

There are wider political consequences of the shifting mood. The recent local elections showed that the realignment brought about by Brexit is going into reverse. Labour's vote was up the most in areas with the fewest graduates, while the Conservatives continue to do worst in the areas with most.

The Brexit result was a vote for change. But nothing has changed for the better—particularly in the disadvantaged areas and "red wall" constituencies that switched from Labour to the Conservatives at the last election. In fact, life has got tougher for most voters, who see their bills rising, NHS waiting lists soaring, rivers overflowing with sewage and trains at a standstill. The warnings from the car industry will only reinforce the sense that the country is going in the wrong direction—and that it may be time for a change.

Oregon tells a cautionary tale about drugs, but we're not listening

Seattle Times, April 29 2023

5 Last month, one of Washington's fellow travelers in the West Coast liberal project got fed up. "I'm not going to lie to you, I'm pissed about that," said Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, at a community meeting.

Warning to us: he was talking about how his state, Oregon, had two years ago launched an ambitious, first-in-the-nation experiment to decriminalize the possession of hard drugs. Oregon's Measure 110 was aimed at a longtime progressive goal: to get the legal system out of the drug addiction realm, to be replaced with a health approach.

10 "What was sold to the voting public was, 'Yes, we will decriminalize some personal amounts of drugs,'" the angry mayor said. "But the main event was supposed to be the establishment of substance-use disorder treatment statewide, including a lot of it right here in the metro area. And here we are two years later, and we've seen the decriminalization of hard drugs, but we're not seeing the treatment. "It needs to happen, and it needs to happen urgently. And if it doesn't happen, then we need to rethink the basic tenets of that ballot measure. If it's not working, then let's just admit it, and let's move on to something that does."

15 Strong words. I bring them up because our state now appears to be stumbling into a plan, if you can call it that, to follow Oregon. Except we're doing it far more haphazardly, after our state lawmakers adjourned this past week without passing any sort of treatment network. Unless there's a special lawmaking session to revisit the issue, possessing small amounts of hard drugs like meth or fentanyl will become legal here on July 1. But lawmakers left for the year after voting down a bill that included paying for crisis clinics and other treatment efforts around the state.

20 Two years ago, Oregon made it so having drugs was no longer a crime, but a civil violation, subject to a ticket with a \$100 fine. You could get out of the fine by calling a hotline and getting evaluated for addiction. So Oregon tried to maintain some semblance of a "nudge" toward treatment.

25 That plan was coupled with about \$300 million worth of treatment facilities, in every Oregon county, paid for mostly by taxes on legalized marijuana sales. Measure 110's goal was not just to end the war on drugs, but to replace it with a sort of truce of healing.

It hasn't worked out. Arrests dropped to zero, so the war part ended. But the healing part has been lacking.

30 So far, drug users have received 4,266 of the civil tickets. But fewer than 200 have called the hotline about treatment. Incredibly only 36 people in two years have followed through to get the health assessment — less than 1%.

Even advocates now say it was a mistake not to get the support infrastructure up and working first.

35 "If I had to do it all over again, I think I would reverse the way that we've done it," an Oregon state legislator told *The Economist* magazine. The pro-drug liberalization publication ruefully acknowledged that Oregon's trailblazing effort is struggling: "Oregon dismantled a system to deal with addiction, albeit a flawed one, without planning what would replace it."

40 Remind you of anyone? This is exactly the mistake Washington lawmakers are making, only here it's worse. By punting on the issue, they're leaving an incoherent Wild West situation where drugs may be effectively legal in some cities and towns but not others, while, most crucially, they're leaving any statewide treatment network unfunded.

45 This reminds me of Seattle's heedless flirtation with defund the police. The concept of defunding the police is the same as decriminalizing the drugs; they both spring from the same well. It's to shift away from the use of enforcers — to correct racial imbalances in the legal system, but also, ideally, to try to get better results for everyone. Don't deploy a cop with a gun when what you need is a social worker. This makes perfect sense on paper. Whether it works in the real world is an open question. But one thing we know through bitter experience is that it's a disaster when done backward. Seattle crippled itself by starting down the road of defunding the police in 2020 without first doing the hard work of standing up any alternatives. Nearly three years later, the city is down more than 300 officers while city residents are still waiting for a promised civilian public safety team to take their place.

50 It's too soon to dub the Oregon experiment a failure. But it is already a cautionary tale. It's not in some distant state, it's right next to us. Based on what's been going on down at our state Capitol, it might as well be on the moon.

Memphis police numbers dropped by nearly a quarter in recent years – were staffing shortages a factor in the killing of Tyre Nichols?

The Conversation, 7 Feb 2023

- 5 In the years running up to the fatal beating of Tyre Nichols, the Memphis Police Department faced an increasingly dire staffing crisis. Indeed, shortages on the force have led to questions over whether, given their relative lack of experience, the five officers now charged with Nichols' murder would have been assigned to the now-disbanded SCORPION unit – or even hired in the first place.
- 10 Memphis isn't alone in confronting the issue of dwindling officer numbers. In January 2023, the federal judge monitoring the Baltimore Police Department said a severe staffing shortage there is causing slow reform progress as the agency attempts to comply with a federal consent decree.
- 15 We are criminologists, two with experience as police officers, who study police turnover and its effects on agencies and communities. In jurisdictions across the U.S., we've seen how police departments are experiencing significant changes to the three main variables in police staffing: recruitment, resignations and retirements.
- 20 We've also seen that these changes are likely to deteriorate the quality of policing and may give rise to more incidents of officer misconduct, increased violent crime, decreased policing services and a failure to meet community and professional standards.
- In response to staffing shortfalls and rising crime, the Memphis Police Department relaxed its hiring standards in 2018, such as by no longer requiring a college degree to begin working as a police officer. However, this approach only temporarily improved staffing levels. After mass racial justice protests in the wake of the 2020 killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer, the trend reversed as the agency began losing officers again. (...)
- 25 Concern about staffing shortages is not confined to Memphis and Baltimore. Over the past three years, police recruitment and retention have been key concerns for jurisdictions across the country. We monitor police staffing levels in several agencies across the U.S. In one large, Western police department, we found that in the seven months following the Floyd protests, voluntary resignations of sworn officers were nearly three times (279%) higher than baseline expectations. In some places, extreme staffing pressure has led to rapid increases in police response times to emergencies. For example, in Salt Lake City, the police staffing crisis led to response times nearly doubling for priority calls in 2020 and 2021.
- 30 In conversations with police chiefs and other leaders at smaller and suburban agencies, we hear that they have faced a lower-intensity staffing challenge for more than a decade. However, those at larger, metropolitan agencies nationwide say the crisis has boiled over, and they fear they are losing the ability to provide baseline levels of service. Both groups of police executives directly link the staffing crisis to fallout from the 2020 George Floyd protests.
- 35 Although our studies do not follow individual officers, recent reporting by The Marshall Project uses yearly federal economic data to show that nationally the police profession experienced a small decline in total employees – including both sworn officers and civilian staff – between March 2020 and August 2022. This may reflect agencies offering highly lucrative bonuses for officers willing to transfer agencies, rather than swarms of officers leaving the profession altogether.
- 40 When speaking with police chiefs in large agencies, a consistent story emerges: They say officers are not leaving the profession, but instead are leaving for other nearby agencies that offer better pay and a more positive work environment. This phenomenon, known as “lateral transfers,” is rapidly shifting officers away from large, urban departments and toward smaller police agencies and sheriff's departments. (...)
- 45 The police staffing crisis has been exacerbated by the ongoing retirement wave of officers hired through funding from the 1994 crime bill. The bill, led by then-Senator Joe Biden, directed over \$8 billion to hiring an additional 100,000 police officers nationwide in order to combat crime. However, officers hired with that federal money are now retiring, adding additional staffing pressure as the most experienced officers leave the profession in the same wave that brought them in.
- 50 President Biden has proposed \$10.9 billion to help hire an additional 100,000 police officers over the next five years. Adding more officers will help, but so too will keeping officers in the profession, especially in the communities most impacted by historic increases in violent crime.
- Addressing this issue will require the collaboration of police leaders and their communities to determine what level of police services they require, as well as financial support from state and federal levels to ensure police agencies can improve, rather than degrade, their workforces.

Sinn Féin at the coronation: how to understand Michelle O'Neill's decision to attend King Charles's big day

Peter John McLoughlin, *The Conversation*, April 28th 2023

Sinn Féin vice president Michelle O'Neill's acceptance of the offer to attend the coronation of King Charles III may come as a surprise to some. It is standard protocol for such an invitation to be made to all significant political parties in the UK, including those in the devolved regions, and Sinn Féin is now the largest party in the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, history is a complicating factor in this case, and even today Sinn Féin still refuses to take its seats in the Westminster parliament. This is an expression of its refusal to recognise British sovereignty over Northern Ireland.

Sinn Féin will argue that attending Charles's coronation is merely a mark of respectful neighbourly relations rather than any act of fidelity. It is, of course, also a gesture to Ulster unionists. Indeed, on announcing her intention to attend the event, O'Neill said as much, declaring that it was "time to respect our differing and equally legitimate aspirations" in Northern Ireland. While still emphasising her own republicanism, she also recognised that "there are many people on our island for whom the coronation is a hugely important occasion".

By invoking an all-Ireland context, O'Neill was implicitly restating her refusal to accept the country's partition. But her words also suggest there is a wider audience for Sinn Féin's gesture. It is not only a signal to unionists and neighbours across the water but to voters in the Republic of Ireland. Indeed, it was arguably the latter who prompted Sinn Féin's shift in position regarding the British crown in recent years. This is a change that started in 2011 with Queen Elizabeth's visit to the Republic of Ireland.

On that occasion, Sinn Féin quickly realised that it was out of step with southern Irish opinion. Still holding to a traditional republican stance, the party was boycotting the Queen's visit but then seemed surprised at how she was received by ordinary people, who cheered and applauded her at various engagements. Seemingly in response to this, Michael Browne, Sinn Féin mayor of Cashel, decided to defy the party's instructions by meeting the Queen and shaking her hand.

Rather than being reprimanded, Browne's actions pointed the way forward for his party colleagues. When the Queen visited Northern Ireland the following year, Martin McGuinness was equally eager to meet her and shake her hand. The Queen's reciprocation provided an enduring image of the Northern Ireland peace process, and a move that was rich in symbolism. McGuinness was a former commander in the IRA, the organisation responsible for killing the Queen's cousin, Lord Mountbatten, in 1979. The Queen was head of the British armed forces, whose soldiers had killed 14 civil rights protesters in McGuinness's hometown in 1972. Their meeting demonstrated to all that this violence was in the past. Both figures showed tremendous leadership in this moment. [...]

Sinn Féin's acceptance of the invitation is part of the same effort, but also has a more political intent. Since the Queen's visit in 2011, the party's support has gradually grown, surging in the last Irish election in 2020, and with all polls suggesting it will win the next. Sinn Féin is thus eager to show voters in the Republic that it is now ready to lead the country, and to reassure those who might feel it lacks the necessary political tact and diplomacy to represent Ireland on the world stage. Good relations with its nearest neighbour, whatever the difficult past, or the more recent tensions over Brexit, are essential to this. By attending King Charles' coronation, Sinn Féin is demonstrating that it is up to the task.

Dissident republicans will claim that O'Neill is "selling out" in attending King Charles' coronation, but Sinn Féin will argue that it is still advancing its core mission. Majority mandates in both parts of Ireland will bolster its demands to hold referendums on Irish reunification in the two jurisdictions – as is permitted under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, the deal that ended the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Indeed, this intent is encoded in O'Neill's statement on the issue. Saying that it was "time to respect our differing and equally legitimate aspirations" meant recognising unionists' desire to remain part of the UK, but also nationalists' to unite Ireland. O'Neill continued by saying it was also "a time to firmly focus on the future and the opportunities that the next decade will bring". Sinn Féin regularly insists that referendums on Irish reunification should be held within the next decade, so its supporters know what is being inferred.

Meanwhile, the party will continue to use its growing power in both parts of Ireland to press for greater co-operation and alignment between the two jurisdictions, suggesting that this will smooth the path towards their eventual unification. The IRA once claimed that it was engaged in a "long war" to force the British state from Northern Ireland and unite with the Republic. Sinn Féin, by contrast, is playing a long political game, but one geared towards the same end goal.

American society is so focused on race that it is blind to class

The Economist, Nov 2nd 2022

5 Affirmative action in American college admissions may be about to end. On October 31st the Supreme Court heard two cases in which lawyers argued that the current practice violates civil-rights laws and the constitution. Judging by the sceptical questioning of the conservative justices, who thanks to Donald Trump now command a majority, the question is not whether such preferences will be restricted, but whether they will survive at all. For more than 40 years the court has allowed some positive discrimination. But it has done so with discomfort. Too-obvious tactics like racial quotas, or awarding points for skin colour, were ruled excessive. The compromise was to consider race as one part of “holistic admissions” in a way that made its weight hard to discern. In 2003 Justice Sandra Day O’Connor declared the practice ought to be time-limited, expecting it to be unnecessary 25 years from then. If the court rules as expected in June 2023, five years ahead of Ms O’Connor’s schedule, there will be some sorrow, but hardly the same backlash as met the overturning of the right to abortion set in *Roe v Wade*. Surveys show that majorities of African-Americans, Californians, Democrats and Hispanics all oppose the use of race in college admissions (and in other areas). The demise of this unpopular scheme will offer a chance to build something better.

10 A diversity of backgrounds in elite institutions is a desirable goal. In pursuing it, though, how much violence should be done to other liberal principles—fairness, meritocracy, the treatment of people as individuals and not avatars for their group identities? At present, the size of racial preferences is large and hard to defend. The child of two college-educated Nigerian immigrants probably has more advantages in life than the child of an Asian taxi driver or a white child born into Appalachian poverty. Such backgrounds all add to diversity. But, under the current regime, the first is heavily more favoured than the others.

15 Racial preferences are not, however, the most galling thing about the ultra-selective universities that anoint America’s elite. The legal case against Harvard, one of the universities defending itself before the Supreme Court, has prised open its admissions records to show the scale of unjustified advantage showered upon the already privileged—disproportionately those who are white and wealthy. A startling 43% of white students admitted to Harvard enjoy some kind of non-academic admissions preference: being an athlete, the child of an alumnus, or a member of the dean’s list of special applicants (such as the offspring of powerful people or big donors).

20 A cynic could argue that racial balancing works as a virtue-signalling veneer atop a grotesquely unfair system. A study published in 2017 found that most of Harvard’s undergraduates hailed from families in the top 10% of the income distribution. When this is the case, it seems unfair that it is often minority students—not the trust-funders—who have their credentials questioned. University presidents and administrators who preen about all their diverse classes might look at how Britain—a country of kings, queens, and lords—has fostered a university system that is less riven with ancestral privilege.

25 Unfairness in American education will not be fixed by one court ruling. But it will shock a system in need of reform. Legacy admissions should be ended. Colleges claiming that alumni donations would wither without them should look to Caltech, MIT and Johns Hopkins—top-notch institutions that ditched the practice and, still seemed reputable and solvent. Blunt racial preferences will probably need to be replaced in response to the Supreme Court. But a less socially divisive system based on income could take their place. That would do a better job of taking actual disadvantage into account. It would still favour non-white and non-Asian Americans, because they are more likely to be poorer, but would do so using a racially neutral method.

30 In some ways, the question of who gets into a handful of elite universities is a distraction from the deeper causes of social immobility in America. Schooling in poorer neighbourhoods was dismal even before covid-19. The long school closures demanded by teachers’ unions wiped out two decades of progress in test scores for nine-year-olds, with hard-up, black and Hispanic children worst affected. Efforts to help the needy should start before birth and be sustained throughout childhood. Nothing the Supreme Court says about the consideration of race in college admissions will affect the more basic problem, that too few Americans from poorer families are sufficiently well-nurtured or well-taught to be ready to apply to college. However the court rules, that is a debate

35 America needs to have.

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Elon Musk's \$44bn education on free speech

Dec 19th 2022, *The Economist*

5 Elon Musk's two months running Twitter has been an unhappy experiment. The social network's 250m users have endured a wearying saga in which Mr Musk is the central character. Advertisers have fled. Twitter, which lost \$221m in 2021, is now on track to lose \$4bn a year, by one estimate. The damage has spread to Tesla, Mr Musk's carmaker, part of the reason it has lost half a trillion dollars in market value since early September, costing Mr Musk the title of the world's richest man.

10 On December 19th it looked as if Mr Musk might throw in the towel, after Twitter users voted for him to step down as chief executive. It has been a costly adventure. But in one sense his turbulent stewardship of the social network has done the rest of the world a favour. In two short months Mr Musk has been through a public crash course in the principles of free speech, neatly demonstrating the trade-offs involved in protecting expression online.

15 From the outside, Twitter seemed simple to someone whose day job was building self-driving cars and space rockets. (...)

20 In practice he has found that the right to speech conflicts with other rights. One is safety. Last month Mr Musk said that his commitment to free speech meant he would not ban a Twitter account that tweeted the whereabouts of his private jet, even though he considered this a security risk. But on December 14th he changed his mind after a "stalker" bothered his son. After suspending the jet account, Twitter introduced rules outlawing the reporting of others' real-time locations.

25 As well as limiting speech in the name of safety, Mr Musk has curtailed it to avoid the lesser sin of causing offence. In October the number of views of tweets that Twitter deems "hate speech" doubled, as users tested the limits of Mr Musk's new regime. Rather than allow this legal-but-nasty content, Twitter cracked down. In November hateful tweets recorded one-third fewer views than before the takeover. Earlier this month Twitter suspended the account of Ye, a rapper formerly known as Kanye West, after he posted a picture of a swastika within a Star of David—an image that, however grotesque, is nonetheless permitted by America's laws.

30 Mr Musk even limited speech when it was bad for profits. After pranksters sent tweets aping brands like Pepsi ("Coke is better") and Nestlé ("We steal your water and sell it back to you lol"), Twitter outlawed such behaviour to stop advertisers fleeing. Then, to stem an exodus of users, on December 18th Twitter said it would ban people from linking to rival social networks or posting their usernames. When questions were raised as to whether regulators would consider such a move anticompetitive, Mr Musk apologised and free speech was restored.

35 All this holds two lessons for whoever follows Mr Musk as Twitter's boss, should he leave. One is to keep content moderation at arm's length. The person deciding whether a post is acceptable is compromised if they are also responsible for boosting engagement among users and spending by advertisers. Mark Zuckerberg (...) realised this and outsourced Facebook's biggest moderation headaches to an independent "oversight board" in 2020.

40 The second lesson is that moderation has no clean solutions, even for "technokings" with strong views on free speech. Free expression is not a problem with a solution bounded by the laws of physics that can be hacked together if only enough coders pull an all-nighter. It is a dilemma requiring messy trade-offs that leave no one happy. In such a business, humility and transparency count for a lot.

45 These are novel concepts to some in Silicon Valley, who are impatient to tear up the established ways of doing things. But just as cryptocurrency enthusiasts have recently received a bracing lesson in the value of boring old financial prudence, so Mr Musk and his fellow free-speech enthusiasts are learning why free expression has caused many to scratch their heads over the centuries. Tech valuations have suffered a sharp correction in 2022. It has also been a chastening year for tech egos.

How to promote academic freedom in America

5 *The Economist*, Feb 9th 2023

10 When seeking a job to teach in the University of California system, academic excellence is not enough. Applicants must also submit a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) statement, explaining how they will advance those goals. That sounds fair enough, except that a promise to treat everyone equally would constitute a fail. Meanwhile in Florida, Governor Ron DeSantis and the state legislature are trying to ban the teaching of critical race theory, an approach to studying racism with which they disagree. While this has been going on, a row has broken out (also in Florida) over a new pre-college course in African-American studies. These three developments have one thing in common: they are attempts to win arguments by controlling the institutions where those arguments take place.

15 Threats to academic freedom in America can come from many directions. Students sometimes object to being exposed to ideas they deem troubling. Some even try to get faculty members fired for allowing such ideas to be voiced. Donors occasionally threaten to withdraw funding, which has a chilling effect on what can be taught. Speakers can be banned. Academics may self-censor, or succumb to groupthink. Occasionally American society demands restrictions on academic freedom, as when professors in the 1950s were asked to take loyalty tests to prove they were not communist sympathisers.

20 All these threats still exist. Plenty of people have rightly worried about academic freedom in America in the past. And yet one of the things that is distinctive about this moment is that the warring parties have determined that the best way to win the argument, and the most thorough way to stifle debate, is to remake institutions according to their preferences.

25 dei statements may seem innocuous enough, and their intentions may seem laudable. Yet if they are used as a filter for hiring, they will filter out anyone who fails to toe the campus-progressive line, and anyone who objects on principle to ideological litmus tests.

30 In Florida, Mr DeSantis seems to be hoping that left-wing professors in state colleges will go to work somewhere else, creating openings for more conservative professors. The Stop woke Act, now law in Florida, bars teaching about systemic racism unless this is done “in an objective manner”—a qualifier which is rather subjective. Academics who cross the line will be threatened with dismissal.

As for that course on African-American history, a draft version was denounced from the right as dangerous woke nonsense and then, when it was revised, denounced from the left as a whitewashed version of black history. The notion that students might look at contradictory ideas and judge their merits was too terrifying to contemplate.

35 Partisans on both sides seem indecently eager to create separate institutions for liberals and conservatives, where the liberals would never have to hear wrongthink (a category that would include some of Martin Luther King’s ideas, were they proposed by a less revered speaker), and the conservatives would never have to encounter the works of Derrick Bell (who has as good a claim as anyone to have developed critical race theory).

40 No doubt this would make both ideological tribes happier. But it would be a disaster for the country. Democracy depends on citizens who can find compromises. Liberalism depends on taking an opponent’s argument seriously and learning from it. America needs institutions that can have these debates, rather than monocultural incubators of mutually exclusive ideologies. dei statements could even be repurposed to this end: rather than asking applicants what they have done to further racial diversity and equity, institutions of higher learning might start asking how they plan to further real diversity of thought.

Bagehot: Wot's up wiv Ingerlund?

The Economist, April 22nd 2023

If English nationalism is on the rise, no one has told the English

LITTLE HAPPENS on St George's Day. There is no bank holiday on April 23rd to celebrate England's dragon-slaying patron saint. Traditions are few. Morris dancing, an English folk dance with bells and flailing handkerchiefs, is mercifully rare. A politician may post a message against a backdrop of an England flag. Tedious liberals point out that St George was Turkish and dragons do not exist. Beyond that, England's national day passes with no fanfare. England is absent.

Open a book, read a broadsheet newspaper or head to an academic conference, however, and England is everywhere. Britain is experiencing "a reawakening of English national consciousness", argued Jason Cowley in "Who Are We Now: Stories of Modern England". Englishness is "the motor force behind" ructions in recent British politics, say Alisa Henderson and Richard Wyn Jones, a pair of academics. Another author warns Britain "cannot survive English nationalism". This is a genre fond of quoting G.K. Chesterton's poetry: "Smile at us, pay us, pass us; but do not quite forget/ For we are the people of England, that never have spoken yet." According to the intelligentsia, the people of England are screaming.

If English nationalism is on the march, no one has told the English. Like the life of St George, the rise of English identity is largely myth, argues Sir John Curtice, a political scientist. Even after devolution of power to Scotland and Wales, Britain's departure from the eu, the rise and fall of the uk Independence Party and four straight Conservative general-election victories, the proportion of British people who identify as predominantly or only English has barely budged. If anything, it has fallen. In 1999, 31% of people fell into this bracket, according to the British Social Attitudes survey, the most comprehensive snapshot of opinion. In 2020, 22% did.

Chroniclers of English nationalism leapt on the 2011 census, which showed that a whopping 58% of residents in England identified as English only. Skip forward a decade and this number plunged to 15%. What caused this shift? A botched survey. In 2011 "English" was the first option and "British" was the fifth; in 2021 "Britain" came top of the list. If the patriotism of Englishmen does not extend to the lower box of a census form, it may not run deep.

The new nationalism is just as hard to spot in Britain's politics. It is often taken as a given that English nationalism was the driver of Britain leaving the eu. England makes up 85% of the country's population and, lo, it contributed 87% of the Leave vote. But English votes were not enough to win the referendum in 2016. Leave supporting Scots (38% of Scottish voters) were needed, too. A majority of voters in Wales voted to depart. The votes of the 44% of Northern Irish residents who plumped for "Leave" were as valid as those cast in Kent. Brexit was British.

England whispers during national elections. The general election of 2015, when the Conservative Party wrapped itself in an England flag, is portrayed as a breakthrough for English nationalism. Adverts showing Ed Miliband, the then Labour leader, in hock to Scottish nationalists were everywhere. But Labour increased both its vote share and the number of seats in England that election. It was collapse in Scotland that broke the party.

By contrast, under Boris Johnson, the Conservatives offered a vision in which England was barely mentioned. In 2019 the Tories duly won their largest majority in four decades. Oddly, one of the few people to notice the switch from English to British patriotism was Donald Trump, an idiot savant who remarked: "I asked Boris, 'Where's England? You don't use it too much any more.'" [...] These days, if you say you're English, you're thrown on telly

In truth, Englishness has a weak hold on Britain. This is no surprise when the concept is so poorly defined. In "England Your England", George Orwell summed up the nation by reeling off sights common in any industrial country ("queues outside the labour exchanges") and values shared by many ("reverence for law"). The result leaves England's finest essayist sounding like Alan Partridge, a boorish fictional tv presenter who wrote a ridiculous poem about working-class life: "Giros, glue-sniffing, dogs on ropes/But I see people with dreams and hopes."

If Orwell stumbled, it is little surprise that today's writers fail. Two visions of English nationalism are offered. One defines it as a bitter ideology that detests its European neighbours and resents its Celtic partners. The other offers a more benign version of civic nationalism, with Gareth Southgate, the eloquent and intelligent manager of the England football team, as its patron saint. Englishness becomes little more than a conspiracy of male writers, desperate to combine their love of football with a degree in English literature. Neither picture fits the facts.

English nationalism is absent because there is no need for it. Nationalism flourishes when people feel thwarted. But what England wants, England gets. England, usually, prefers a Conservative government and so Britain, usually, has one. England wanted out of the eu, and Britain did leave. Having your own way is not a recipe for resentment. So on St George's Day, do the most English thing of all: forget about England. It still has not spoken yet.

English devolution back on political agenda in push to tackle inequality

Jennifer Williams, *The Financial Times*, January 17th 2023

After a tumultuous 2022, a rare consensus has broken out between the two main political parties. Both Conservatives and Labour are actively talking up the potential of English devolution. The parties agree that the country's economic weaknesses are driven by exceptional regional inequalities in wealth and health. Experts, meanwhile, have long pointed to the UK's disproportionately centralised model, which over the course of the 20th century became a driver of regional inequality. The solution, ministers and analysts argue, is to hand power over to the English regions.

As areas across the country wait for devolution deals to be finalised, decentralisation is now a hot topic for both Labour and the Tories. Last year, the government vowed to "usher in a devolution revolution" in its levelling up white paper — a blueprint to raise economic prosperity across the country. Labour leader Keir Starmer used his recent New Year speech to promise a "take back control" bill, borrowing the famous Brexiter slogan, and "a huge power shift out of Westminster".

Akash Paun, senior fellow at the Institute for Government who leads the think-tank's devolution research, said it was "striking" how "the Conservatives and Labour appear to have converged on a shared diagnosis of the English condition". According to Paun, the diagnosis is "that the country suffers from both dysfunctional political centralisation and growing regional inequality, and that these two facts are causally related. That does suggest that devolution is an idea whose moment has come".

According to government data, as of 2021, median gross weekly pay in the North East region was 8 per cent lower than the UK average, while London was 22 per cent higher. When it came to the proportion of the population with Level 3 educational skills or above, the North East was 6 per cent below the national average, with the capital 10 per cent higher.

The white paper, unveiled in February by levelling-up secretary Michael Gove, called the UK "a highly-centralised country" in which "local actors have too rarely been empowered to design and deliver policies necessary to drive growth".

The report proposed a menu of potential powers for subregions and counties, including new directly elected leaders, most probably mayors, mirroring previous deals that began with Greater Manchester in 2014.

Agreements to devolve funding and decision-making over areas including transport and skills policy have since been announced for Cornwall, the East Midlands, Norfolk, Suffolk, North Yorkshire and the North East. [...]

Labour has also put devolution high on its agenda. In December, a long-delayed constitutional review carried out for the party by former prime minister Gordon Brown produced a similar analysis to the white paper.

"There is a strong correlation between Britain's overcentralised political power and its geographically concentrated prosperity," it said, recommending devolution of transport, childcare, buses and jobcentres. It was not "prescriptive" about which institutions would take those powers.

The review was followed by Starmer's New Year's speech, in which he attacked Westminster short-termism and promised devolution to "transform our economy, our politics and our democracy".

Jonathan Webb, senior research fellow at the think-tank IPPR North, said Labour was moving "in the direction of embracing" the English devolution agenda, adding: "The Brown review clearly shows it thinks devolution is important and thinks decentralising power is important."

Fiscal devolution remained one of the missing pieces of the jigsaw, Webb said. In 2019, IPPR North found 95p in every £1 paid in tax "is taken by Whitehall", compared with 69 cents in the euro by central government in Germany, where regional leaders have far more control over tax and spending. Research by the think-tank Centre for Cities, carried out for the Resolution Foundation, noted "an unusual level of fiscal centralisation" within Britain, arguing that despite devolution to date, the country had become even more fiscally centralised since 2015, as local government resources have been cut. The research recommended that government "devolve fiscal responsibilities to local authorities, giving local policymakers powers to control local tax bases and rates", in order to avoid "economic stagnation by 2030".

Greater Manchester and the West Midlands are hopeful their deals will be signed off by the end of this month. More details of Labour's plans are due to be announced at the Convention of the North in Manchester this month.

In the meantime, decentralisation proponents warn that warm words are easier than action. "Going from rhetoric to reality is the hard part," said Paun. "And history tells us that governments of all colours are good at finding reasons not to hand power away when it comes to the crunch."

Reynolds signs transgender ‘bathroom bill’, Iowa ban on gender-affirming care for minors into law

T. Barton, *The Gazette*, March 22

5 DES MOINES — Iowa Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds on Wednesday signed into law a ban on gender-affirming care for minors, as well as transgender bathroom restrictions for schools, that are almost certain to be challenged in court.

Reynolds signed Senate File 538, making Iowa one of a growing number of states to prohibit gender-affirming care for transgender minors. The newly-signed law prohibits Iowa doctors from prescribing puberty blockers or hormone therapy to transgender children under the age of 18. It also prohibits any surgeries on minors intended to affirm a gender that does not match up with their sex at birth.

10 Doctors who violate the bill would be subject to discipline from a state licensing board, and individuals could bring lawsuits against doctors who perform gender-affirming care. Minors who are receiving medical treatment now would have 180 days to discontinue that care. The legislation requires public schools to maintain separate bathrooms, locker rooms, showers, dressing areas and overnight accommodations for biological boys and biological girls. The bill allows a student who "desires greater privacy" to request special accommodations from their school, with written parental consent. Schools would be allowed to offer those students access to a single-occupancy restroom or "controlled use" of a faculty restroom.

15 Republicans described the proposal as a common sense way to ensure the privacy and safety of all Iowa students. Data, though, overwhelmingly shows that incidents of sexual assault in school bathrooms are rare, and that transgender individuals are at a higher risk of harassment, discrimination and assault if they are forced to use the restroom that does not align with their gender identity.

20 Opponents of the bill have repeatedly said that there have been no incidents of transgender students in Iowa harassing their peers or misbehaving in bathrooms over the last 15 years. They have noted that Iowa schools have been able to provide accommodations without issue.

25 Reynolds on Tuesday told reporters banning gender-affirming care for Iowans under the age of 18 is “in the best interest of the kids,” to whom her heart goes out. Reynolds also fired back at the proposed law’s critics, whom she said remind her of the critics of her move to reopen Iowa’s schools and businesses earlier than some other states during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

30 Emboldened by six years of conservative reforms under their belts and multiple elections that expanded their majorities in the House and Senate, Iowa Republicans have pushed a more conservative agenda this session, one focused on gender policies and curricula and books in schools with LGBTQ themes, and other measures targeting LGBTQ people, mirroring efforts in other GOP-led states. A record 29 unique pieces of anti-LGBTQ legislation were introduced already this legislative session, said Keenan Crow, a lobbyist with LGBTQ activist group One Iowa. That, they said, compares to 28 LGBTQ-related bills introduced during the two-year General Assembly from 2021-2022.

35 “The Iowa Legislature and Governor Reynolds have repeatedly targeted the most vulnerable students with rhetoric and legislation designed to suppress, out, target, ban and censor Iowa’s LGBTQ+ student communities,” Mike Beranek, president of the Iowa State Education Association, Iowa’s main public teachers union, said in a statement. (...)

40 Republican legislators who proposed and advanced the ban on gender-affirming care say it is necessary to protect children from medical care and treatments when the science is not settled, even though all major medical groups in the U.S. say the treatments are safe and the vast majority of studies show that the care leads to better mental health outcomes.

45 Doctors, LGBTQ and civil rights advocates say medical care is being politicized and creating a climate of fear. Reynolds and other Republicans have pointed to studies and actions in some European countries. For example, the United Kingdom’s only center dedicated to gender identity treatment for children will close, and Sweden last year began restricting hormone therapy for minors. Most medical studies show gender-affirming care is beneficial for young people experiencing gender dysphoria. Some have noted possible long-term effects and suggest more research is needed.

50 Five House Republicans voting against the bill said it runs counter to the “parental choice” mantra Republicans frequently champion, preventing parents from getting their child the medical care they need. “By signing these bills, the Governor has shown that she doesn’t actually care about parental rights,” said Becky Tayler, executive director for Iowa Safe Schools, said in a statement.

The lesson from the Diane Abbott row: if we fight racism in silos, we just can't win

Aditya Chakraborty, *The Guardian*, April 27th 2023

Long before Hackney North first elected Diane Abbott as its MP, my mother was a teacher in one of its primary schools. As a small boy I sometimes went with her, on long journeys by bus and train and across the wooden bridge over Clapton Pond, chanting about the billy goats gruff. *Trip trap, trip trap.*

5 Visiting her staffroom was almost a whistle-stop tour of the British empire, with teachers from Jamaica, Trinidad, Nigeria, Pakistan, Cyprus and Ireland. All, I think, first-generation immigrants to the UK and all women – and all aware that those two things meant they wouldn't get the money or the promotions they deserved. So they organised. My mother was in her trade union's black caucus, which spoke for "all teachers who face racism". This was London in the early 1980s, where the streets still echoed to the Anti-Nazi League's chant of "We are Black, We are White, together we are Dynamite".

10 This was Abbott's world, too. She came up through the Labour movement's Black Sections, activist-organised groups open to all historically oppressed by colonialism, be they African-Caribbean or Bengali or Cypriot. To fight racism then was to recognise that its victims looked different, spoke many tongues and had a tapestry of histories – but that they faced obstacles in common and could only beat them together.

15 That was a vital political schooling for Abbott and so many others. At its best, it was leftwing, alive to the complex play of class and sex alongside ethnicity, and universalist. While often more confident, today's racial discourse is narrower and less radical. Apart from the direct shock of stupid and crass remarks made by Abbott this week, one of the most troubling aspects of both the arguments made and the reaction to them is that they indicate some of the worst aspects of this discourse.

20 To counter her argument that the "prejudice" experienced by Irish, Jewish and Traveller people is not a patch on the "racism" suffered by black people, I cannot improve on the letter from someone whose family left a city in Poland where more than 99% of Jews were exterminated for their race and whose experiences of British antisemitism includes having Nazi insignia brandished in their face. As the anonymous writer says: "To compare those experiences to the struggles of redheads is incomprehensible." Quite.

25 The other theme of her argument is about the white privilege enjoyed by, say, Irish people, which flies in the face of a long history in which ethnic groups are sometimes deemed to be white and other times not. As Kenan Malik notes in *Not So Black and White*, Irish immigrants to 19th-century America were described as "niggers turned inside out", while in England the social reformer Charles Kingsley labelled them "white chimpanzees".

30 There is much to criticise here, and yet some of Abbott's most ferocious critics are very low on shame. Not so long ago, the Sun ran a column by Katie Hopkins comparing migrants to "cockroaches"; naturally enough, this week it ran an editorial decrying racism. It was joined by former MP John Mann, who once published a pamphlet giving advice on how to "remove any gypsies and travellers [sic]". Also spotted this week, fretting no doubt sincerely about antisemitism, was Boris Johnson, who is possibly modern journalism's best-remunerated user of racist language. Piccaninny, anyone?

35 Compare the blond Etonian to Britain's first black woman MP, and you see how racist and sexist 21st-century Britain remains. No matter how great the sin, how brazen the deceit, how lethally complacent the politician, he gets to come back again and again, and fills his pockets while doing so. Abbott can't even enjoy an M&S mojito on the tube without it becoming a major scandal. She has faced racial bullying – including from within her own party – that would have broken others. Little of that is remembered, and none of it helps. Given the right class, ethnicity and comportment, some people can get away with a million "mistakes"; others aren't allowed to make one.

40 That is the context for so much race politics: a "gotcha" culture where an unpopular person's misbehaviour or genuine error counts for more than actual policy, and an approach to race that prizes diversity over equality, and representation over transformation. This is aided and abetted by some within the ethnic minorities themselves who pursue what David Feldman, the director of Birkbeck Institute for the Study of Antisemitism, calls "competitive racisms". A couple of years ago, the Muslim Council of Britain published a report looking at how it could emulate the take-up of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism by coming up with its own hard and fast definition of Islamophobia. A couple of weeks ago, neocon thinktank the Henry Jackson Society published the "first national study into the discrimination facing Hindu youth in the UK", what it naturally calls Hinduphobia.

50 Not only does this make legalistic what should be political battles but it also, as Feldman says, "turns racialised minorities against each other, with each group thinking it can make gains on its own". [...]

Football fans, the national anthem and a battle for who controls the public space

Jonathan Liew, *The Guardian*, May 9th 2023

“We’ve fought wars,” pleads Peter Shilton, his voice breaking with emotion. “People have died to protect our national anthem. Every country has its national anthem, and they’re very proud of it. And, you know, we’re one of the top ones. It’s sad that a small minority feel they have to do this.” [...]

I did watch Liverpool v Brentford, an undistinguished encounter enlivened immeasurably by the scenes that preceded it. As God Save the King piped over the Anfield sound system, met with a predictable concerto of scouse disdain, the Liverpool players arrayed around the centre circle found themselves trapped between two equal and opposing forms of awkwardness. Different players reacted differently. Mo Salah, game face on, staring flintily into the middle distance, utterly unmoved. Fabinho: just baffled. Andy Robertson: gaze fixed firmly downwards, as if trying to laser-burn a hole in the turf through which he could mercifully plummet. Trent Alexander-Arnold trying, John Redwood-style, to mouth the anthem without singing it.

Why do Liverpool fans boo the anthem? Well, to borrow the words of Louis Armstrong when asked to provide a definition of jazz: “Man, if you gotta ask, you’ll never know.” All football fans have their nemeses. For Liverpool, it’s the British establishment and its associated pageantry. For Manchester City, it’s Uefa and the Champions League theme tune. For England, it’s anything that isn’t England. You might spot a certain double standard in the fans who sanctify their own national anthem while reserving the right to boo the other 208. But – as Shilton so eloquently puts it – we’re one of the top ones.

Shilton was speaking to Jacob Rees-Mogg on GB News, and lest anyone accuse the former England goalkeeper of simply being an unthinking servant to ceremony, be assured that his views on public gestures at football matches are in fact heavily nuanced. Only nine months ago, for example, Shilton was on the same channel explaining to Nigel Farage why he wasn’t in favour of taking the knee to protest against racial inequality, on the grounds that “I don’t think there’s a massive problem with race” and “the game’s full of black players”.

Of course, to anyone with even a passing familiarity with fan culture, the fact that Liverpool fans booed the anthem is neither surprising nor – really – all that interesting. But there is a wider issue at stake here, at a time when the sporting arena is increasingly being used as a theatre for protest, in an age when the very right to express oneself in public is being questioned, often suppressed. Who owns these spaces, and who gets to speak in them? And – more importantly – who gets to police what is spoken?

For all the contemporary distaste, there has in fact long been a rich tradition of anti-establishment protest in British sport, from the suffragettes to the anti-apartheid movement. In many ways the efforts of Animal Rising at the Grand National and Just Stop Oil at the world snooker championship are simply the inheritors of a sacred principle: that these places belong to us all. That in any pluralistic society there must be space for prevailing ideas to be challenged as well as upheld.

In which context it is worth asking which is the more principled act: fans booing a national anthem, or a governing body attempting to enforce one? Before the weekend the Premier League contacted its clubs to “strongly suggest” they commemorated the royal moment in some way. Like, why? It is barely relevant to point out here that the republican segment of the British public stands at 25% and rising. That number could be 100% or 1% and the principle would remain unchanged: celebrating a monarch is an overtly ideological act. There are of course people who will argue with an entirely straight face that the state itself is actually entirely apolitical, and can we all just eat some cake and stand respectfully in agreement?

But none of this is really about tradition or respect or even national unity, a concept that for some reason is never applied to striking nurses. It is a struggle for power, and has always been such: an eternal tug-of-war between those who control the public space and those who occupy it, those who own its deeds and those who own its soul. Protest banners against absentee owners are proscribed or hauled down. Ordinary people with inoffensive placards are hurled into the back of police vans for having the temerity to make a point.

As for the Premier League, an organisation that never met a billionaire royal it didn’t love, there is a sinister branding at work here: a form of influence masquerading as supplication. Bring your colour and noise. Bring your passion and fervour. Bring all the things that make excellent television product. Apart from the bit when you will be asked to stand and sing a hymn to a man you’ve never met.

And of course, the Premier League is entitled to pursue its interests in whatever way it deems fit. We must support the right of privileged executives to hoard the majority of the sport’s wealth while locking the rest of us out. It’s just regrettable – to coin a phrase – that a small minority feel they have to spoil things for everyone.

Yes, the Met police threw royal protesters into cells for no good reason – but at least they regret it

Marina Hyde, *The Guardian*, May 9th 2023

In a deeply unpredictable turn of events – anticipated by only the most casual students of the Metropolitan police – the force has made another howler. Howlers are the specific category of Met misuse of powers where nobody died, or got sexually assaulted, or both. Nevertheless, they can have serious significance. The anti-monarchy group Republic participated in months of briefings and meetings with the Met concerning their protest at last Saturday's coronation, in which they were informed that their peaceful plans were lawful. As it turned out on the day, however, six members of the group, including its chief executive Graham Smith, were arrested before the protest even began. According to the Met's account: "They were held on suspicion of conspiracy to cause public nuisance. We seized lock-on devices."

And yet ... did they? The police seem instead to have seized the luggage straps the protesters used to secure their placards. The force has now expressed "regret" that these arrests took place at all. This lengthy statement adds: "It was not clear at the time that at least one of the group stopped had been engaging with police protest liaison team officers ahead of the event."

Hmmm. If only there had been some way of establishing this situation in the moment, perhaps on some kind of communication device? Mobile police have carried personal radios since the late 1960s, so maybe the technology still feels new and unwieldy to them, whereas the new Public Order Act – passed at speed into law a whole three calendar days previously – is something with which they are far keener to display an aggressive familiarity.

At time of writing, the allegation about the arrest of the Republic members remained up on the Met's Twitter feed, despite it having also retracted it. In some ways this seems apt, allowing any users now catching up with the story to experience another play-by-play of Met incompetence and overreach as it happened. And of course, the Met indulges in so many displays of strength that later turn out to be cock-ups or accidental displays of weakness that they can't possibly be expected to go back and delete every stupid, high-handed and arguably libellous tweet. The paperwork of correcting their paperwork would be a constant burden. As a made-up police officer might put it: "I think the public would prefer us to be out catching criminals!"

Or, indeed, staying in catching criminals, given that the Met is currently investigating more than 1,000 sexual assault and domestic abuse claims involving around 800 of its officers. Serving Met officers have been taken off serious and organised crime investigations and counter-terrorism in order to investigate wrongdoing within their own force. The Met remains in special measures, a mere two months having elapsed since the publication of Louise Casey's devastating report that found it institutionally racist, sexist and homophobic, while the Met chief has publicly grappled with his ability to do something about the above. "In all cases, I don't have the final say on who's in the Metropolitan police," he WTF-ed last month. "I know that sounds mad, I'm the commissioner." [...]

Prime minister Rishi Sunak is at pains to insist that "the police are operationally independent of government", which might be a little too convenient. I'm not sure you get to pass draconian new legislation into law a mere three days before the coronation, then claim its prompt misuse has nothing to do with you. After all, you can hardly say the previous stab at draconian overhaul – the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 – didn't give a clear warning as to how this might play out. (This was the act that allowed for greater sentences for attacking statues than women, encouragingly.) In that case, the police began quickly and frequently misusing their new powers, either because they didn't understand them, or because they didn't care to. The Sarah Everard vigil during the special circumstances of the pandemic was an earlier warning bell – we saw how the Met policed protest when given almost unlimited powers.

Yet they keep on getting more. Suella Braverman's Home Office in particular should struggle with Macavity-ing its way out of this latest foul-up, given that it only very recently sent an official warning letter to Republic stressing that new laws had been brought forward to deal with "disruption at major sporting and cultural events". According to the Home Office last week, this letter was meant to inform, not intimidate. A claim that possibly doesn't hold up in light of events.

Then again, a whole lot of things don't hold up, from the new act, rushed with such ill-advised haste on to the statute book, to the troubling fact that a mere 6% of those arrested for protesting against the coronation were charged with anything at all. If we looked at any other country and saw people being put in cells, without grounds, for peacefully protesting against the investiture of any type of leader, we would surely have an unfavourable view of it. Lawmakers who lack the courage to take these unfavourable views may think they are doing the popular thing. In fact, they are a danger to us all.

Extinction Rebellion's change of tack will aid their cause

John Rentoul, *The Independent*, January 4th 2023

It took more than a year for the message to percolate, but Extinction Rebellion, or XR, has acted on the advice of an Editorial in *The Independent*. In August 2021, we suggested that the environmental protest group should compromise: "It should eschew demos that succeed only in persuading fair-minded people that environmentalists are a nuisance intent on making life worse for them."

5 We pointed out that public opinion of XR was unfavourable, by a margin of two to one. Its protests had raised the group's profile – three-quarters of British people have heard of it – which may have attracted recruits and donations, but it had failed to persuade people of the urgent need for dramatic lifestyle changes to avert climate disaster.

10 On New Year's Day, XR announced that it agreed with us. Headlined, "We Quit", the statement admitted that "very little has changed" since XR "burst on to the scene four years ago". It said the organisation had decided "to temporarily shift away from public disruption as a primary tactic".

While XR felt it had successfully used the power of disruption to "raise the alarm", it needed "constantly evolving tactics" for the next stage, which is to "bring about a transition to a fair society that works together to end the fossil fuel era". Rather than disrupting the public, XR said it now wants to "disrupt the abuse of power".

15 This different approach seems to involve peaceful demonstrations and working with other groups to put pressure on politicians. Its statement said: "This year, we prioritise attendance over arrest and relationships over roadblocks, as we stand together and become impossible to ignore." According to its website, this means "gathering at the Houses of Parliament day after day in large numbers" from 21 April.

20 In other words, politics rather than direct action. This is a welcome development. There is a place for direct action, especially to draw attention to wrongs that people know little about. But the climate crisis is not in that category. The problem is extremely well known. There are differences of opinion about what to do about it, and XR's stunts failed to increase support for its preferred solutions. They advertised the sense of urgency felt by the activist core, but instead of persuading most people that "time has almost entirely run out to address the ecological crisis which is upon us", they distracted people who were stuck in traffic or who couldn't get on the Docklands Light Railway.

25 This is the latest iteration of the eternal question for radical movements: how far should they go in making life difficult for people in pursuit of a better society? XR has gone one way, recognising that it can achieve the change it wants in the UK only through democratic pressure, which means taking people with it; Just Stop Oil and Insulate Britain continue with their campaigns of making nuisances of themselves.

30 I think that the new XR approach is more likely to produce results, although it is confused by the unrealistic nature of its demands. It wants the UK to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions over the next 24 months – by the end of 2025. But it doesn't seem to have a theory of how a daily demo in Parliament Square is going to achieve net zero in the rest of the world.

35 What is more, its main mechanism for achieving change in the UK is to set up a citizens' assembly, and to require government to answer to it rather than to the existing citizens' assembly, namely the House of Commons. Its citizens' assembly would be chosen randomly from "ordinary people"; it is not clear why this would be more democratic than elections, or whether it would produce an assembly that was more committed to XR's goals than the Commons is.

But as long as XR is debating such questions, rather than pouring fake blood over the Treasury's steps, it would seem to be moving in the right direction.

40 There is a similar debate taking place in America. *Gradual: The Case for Incremental Change in a Radical Age*, by Greg Berman and Aubrey Fox, is due to be published in June. It argues that the calls for bold change on the US left – "Green Deal Now! Abolish ICE! Defund the police!" – are counterproductive. (ICE is Immigration and Customs Enforcement, rather than internal combustion engine, although I suppose it could be that too.)

The authors agree that the US government has failed to address climate change, among other things, but argue that the way to remedy this is through persuasion and democratic pressure. It is encouraging that XR now agrees with them.

Column: George Santos isn't comic relief anymore

Nicholas Goldberg, *The L.A. Times*, May 10, 2023

5 In Shakespeare's plays or, say, the Victorian novels of Dickens, Trollope and Austen, there are often at least two plots moving forward at any moment: a serious dramatic story involving the work's main heroes and villains and a comic subplot peopled by absurd characters.

In the real world, we have comic subplots as well. Take Rep. George Santos (R-N.Y.), who — while American democracy has spun out of control, the U.S. Capitol was overrun and Donald Trump became a serious contender for reelection — wanders on and off the national stage like a ditzzy clown keeping the audience amused.

10 Santos has been a recurring joke in the midst of our otherwise terrifying and riveting political drama — a somewhat doughy, somewhat hapless Mr. Magoo-turned-con man in a blazer, sweater and chinos. He is a fraudster who told lie after ridiculous lie, ad absurdum, about his family background, education and job experience and, though caught in the act, steadfastly refused to be held accountable.

15 His free ride, though, could be coming to an end. Federal prosecutors in New York announced Wednesday that the 34-year-old freshman congressman has been charged with a wide range of not-so-funny crimes, including wire fraud, money laundering, theft of public funds and making false statements to Congress. In short, they allege, he deceived and defrauded campaign donors and the U.S. government. Santos turned himself in to federal authorities on Long Island on Wednesday morning and pleaded not guilty to the charges. He said he would not resign and that he's been subjected to a — you guessed it! — “witch hunt.”

20 The absurdity of the Santos situation first became clear to me when I watched a video of him trying to find his way through the House office buildings, lost but perpetually moving because he was being trailed and hounded at every step by a scrum of bloodthirsty reporters. He tried to pretend they weren't there; they had a great time at his expense. He was barraged with questions like, “Hey George, what's your name today?” He tried to look dignified, talking oh-so-seriously into his phone as he walked, though I highly doubt anyone was on the other end. (...)

25 At the heart of the joke was the fact that his lies were so brazen and so egregious — and yet so mundane at the same time. So checkable and disprovable — yet so insignificant. Like when he said he had been a “star” on the volleyball team at Baruch College. I mean, who would lie about that? It turns out he wasn't on the volleyball team. And didn't graduate from Baruch College at all. Nor did he attend the Horace Mann School, as he claimed. 30 Nor did he work at Goldman Sachs or Citigroup. He is not Jewish, as he repeatedly claimed to be. Or of Jewish descent. Or “Jew-ish,” as he later said he'd said. His grandparents did not flee Hitler. His mother was not in the World Trade Center during the 9/11 attacks. She wasn't in the country at all.

Santos' behavior was laughable, for sure, but also it was wrong, not to mention creepy. It was Jon Stewart, in the end, who pointed out the obvious: “We cannot mistake absurdity for lack of danger,” he said. “Absurdity 35 always makes you think something is more benign than it is.”

And it's true: The endless fabrications are obviously not funny to Santos' constituents on Long Island, who now, six months after the 2022 election, are still represented in Congress by a serial liar. Or to those who donated money for his election (some portion of which was spent, prosecutors say, on personal expenses including “luxury designer clothing”).

40 But Stewart meant more than just that. He was referring to how so many people — himself included — had failed to take Donald Trump seriously at first, seeing him as a harmless clown like Santos.

Trump did seem like a joke in those early days. He said outrageous things, told endless lies, pushed kooky conspiracy theories and seemed to have little argument for why Americans should vote for him other than that he was a flashy, rich, irreverent TV star.

45 Anyone who doesn't remember how improbable it all seemed should watch the clip (which I saw recently courtesy of journalist Peter Beinart's newsletter) of then-Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.) on ABC News with George Stephanopoulos and a panel of so-called political experts in July 2015.

In it, Ellison says that people who oppose Trump ought to get active, get involved and vote.

50 “This man has got some momentum and we'd better be ready for the fact that he might be leading the Republican ticket,” says Ellison.

At that point everyone on the show bursts into laughter. Peals of laughter, really. Stephanopoulos, grinning, says — and I don't really blame him for this error of enormous historical magnitude, because I probably would have felt the same way — “I know you don't believe that.”

Ellison doesn't join in the laughter. He says: “Stranger things have happened.”

55 President Santos anyone?

Column: There's a reason for the anti-LGBTQ+ backlash. And it isn't all bad news

A Pride Month display at a Target in Daly City near San Francisco. Customers complaints elsewhere prompted Target to move some merchandise to the back of stores.

Robin Abcarian, *The Los Angeles Times*, 31 May 2023

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Confederate flags offend me.

They represent the violence of slavery and nostalgia for a white supremacist past.

Assault weapons offend me.

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They represent death and destruction and the moral bankruptcy of politicians willing to sacrifice American children on the altar of the 2nd Amendment.

But rainbow colored T-shirts, dresses and baby rompers? Greeting cards that say "I'm happy that you're queer"? Who could possibly be offended by items that celebrate and affirm the rights of gay and trans people to simply live in peace? Yeah, I know: a bunch of people.

15

As we have seen recently, in boycotts against slightly enlightened corporations such as Anheuser-Busch InBev and Target, there is a concerted effort, led mainly by conservative Christians, to punish businesses that embrace the LGBTQ+ community. Anheuser-Busch found itself in the crosshairs when transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney promoted Bud Light on their social media feeds during March Madness. Target ticked off the forces of intolerance with its annual Pride Month display of merchandise, although it's been putting up rainbows at the end of May for more than a decade.

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Bud Light sales have plummeted; the company didn't apologize but backtracked, saying it never "intended to be part of a discussion that divides people." Target said the backlash has endangered its employees and removed some items from shelves. In some stores, the retailer said, Pride displays were relocated from the front to the back. Its stock has taken a hit.

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A rapper whose grotesque facial tattoos would scare the living daylights out of any child I know has dropped a music video claiming that "Target is targeting our kids." "You know they cutting these kids," raps Forgiato Blow, "they leaving trannies with scars." It's remarkable how he was able to pack so much ignorance and disdain into one sentence.

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Even in our own generally liberal community, some parents at Saticoy Elementary School in North Hollywood made waves last week when they urged families to "keep your children home and innocent" rather than subject them to a Gay Pride and Rainbow Day Assembly on Friday.

Why are we stuck in the middle of a moral panic about sexuality and gender identity? Why now?

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According to the Associated Press, nearly 500 anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been introduced in state legislatures this year. At least 17 states have passed laws that restrict or ban gender-affirming care for transgender minors. It's happening because ginning up fear about the "corruption" of children is a tried and true technique for rallying the far right. Because same-sex marriage is legal and transgender people have made extraordinary strides. Because the Christian right needed a new bogeyman after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe vs. Wade*, neutralizing an issue that has animated the Republican base and turned out votes for decades. Because Americans have grown relaxed about the LGBTQ+ community. A 2020 survey conducted by GLAAD, an LGBTQ+ advocacy group, and Procter & Gamble found that 75% of people who do not identify as gay or trans or queer — that is, a supermajority — were comfortable with seeing non-straight folks in marketing campaigns. And, last but hardly least, it's happening because the number of Americans who do identify as LGBTQ+ has exploded. A February Gallup poll based on the aggregated data of 10,000 people found that nearly 20% of Generation Z, those born between 1997 and 2004, identified as LGBTQ+. By comparison, only 2.7% of Baby Boomers identified that way.

45

This change is astonishing and proof that the stigma so long attached to gay, nonbinary and transgender people may finally be starting to fade away. Cue the backlash. (...)

In any case, it's a mystery to marketing experts why the backlash against Bud Light and Target has become so intense. After all, in some ways, Pride Month — June — has long been co-opted by corporations looking for marketing opportunities. Walmart has a Pride line of merchandise. As do Bloomingdale's, Kohl's, Hot Topic, Old Navy and even Michaels, the craft store. Campaigns for Levi's have featured gay and trans people. J. Crew has displayed pride flags in its windows. On June 25, Coors Light is sponsoring a Pride Parade in Denver, something it has done for two decades. It wasn't very long ago that companies were being pilloried by groups like GLAAD for showing their pro-LGBTQ+ colors only one month a year — "pink washing" — or for donating money to fervently anti-LGBTQ+ politicians.

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At this moment, when the bigots are on the march, those are starting to feel like the good old days.

What He's Made Of

Michael Brendan Dougherty, *The National Review*, May 24 2023

The launch of Ron DeSantis's campaign will show that he's not afraid of a confrontation with Donald Trump.

5

For political junkies, today is a big day. One is tempted to shout, like boxing-ring announcer Michael Buffer: "Let's get ready to rumble!" Donald Trump's most credible challenger on the Republican side is entering the race.

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It's a moment when the narrative is going to shift, but expect some resistance. For months, Trump supporters, professional Never Trumpers who depend on Trump's persistence for their paychecks, and mainstream-media outlets who view Trump as ratings gold and an electoral curse on Republicans have faked up a narrative that Ron DeSantis is stumbling, that he's the next Scott Walker, an overhyped governor who doesn't have the stuff to translate onto the national stage.

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First it was that he gave Tucker Carlson an explanation of his views on Ukraine, namely that it wasn't a chief American priority. Next it was a rumor of a fund-raiser getting spooked. Then Donald Trump was wooing Florida legislators to endorse him. Soon we were told that the governor's fight with Disney was "dragging on" and making him look bad. Fake, fake, fake, fake. These stories, mostly sourced to DeSantis rivals and then repeated endlessly, have created a psychic whirlpool on social media meant to sink the DeSantis candidacy before it begins. Today this effort is shown to have failed, and the dynamic tide will shift quickly once DeSantis announces and begins energetically campaigning.

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DeSantis is expected to launch with eye-popping fund-raising numbers. And he has the backing of 99 out of 113 Republican lawmakers in the Florida state legislature. As for Disney, while the New York Times headline made it look like the Mouse had canceled the movement of 2,000 jobs from California to Florida for political reasons, reporters on the Disney beat quickly corrected the record. Former CEO Bob Chapek's plan to move those jobs to Florida was widely opposed within the company because it would take creatives away from the Hollywood studio. If anything, Disney's and Pixar's lackluster performance at the box office, slashed revenue projections for Disney+, along with lower foot traffic at the parks indicate that perhaps it is conservatives alienated by Disney who are, in part, driving the company to make unwelcome decisions.

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It took a lot of willfulness on the part of the media to forget that in a year when many Republicans underperformed, DeSantis beat expectations in Florida by roughly ten points and won the state by 20 altogether. The only part of the "DeSantis slipping" narrative that has any weight is his slip in the national polls since Trump announced his campaign and then spent five months trying to abort the DeSantis campaign. But scratch a little deeper, and the fundamentals haven't changed.

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Among Republicans, DeSantis has similar favorability ratings to Donald Trump, despite being less well known. In fact, that is also an advantage for DeSantis because almost 30 percent of adults in February 2023 didn't have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the Florida governor. These are people he can win over. Trump's numbers are already locked in. Early polling has shown that Trump has a weakness with Evangelical voters, who were so crucial in supporting his first nomination. Trump also has a weakness with Republicans who have college degrees and with upwardly mobile suburban voters, the ones with the highest propensity to vote in primaries.

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These are voters who had trouble supporting Ted Cruz in 2016 as a Trump alternative, but they seem to show no hesitation about DeSantis.

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Many Republicans nationwide started to see DeSantis as their leader even while Trump was still in office. The launch of his campaign will show that, indeed, he's not afraid of a confrontation with Donald Trump, and it will be an occasion for reminding so many Republican voters of the conversations they had about moving to Florida during the pandemic. DeSantis will be able to make a generational argument: America desperately needs a fresher-faced leadership class. He'll be able to make an argument about competence. Don't be surprised if the candidate who spent months blowing hot air starts to look winded when the race finally begins.

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Biden's Student Loan Plan Squarely Targets the Middle Class

5 **Jim Tankersley**, *the New York Times*, Aug. 25, 2022

WASHINGTON — The big winners from President Biden's plan to forgive hundreds of billions of dollars in student loans are not rich graduates of Harvard and Yale, as many critics claim.

10 In fact, the benefits of Mr. Biden's proposals will largely go to the middle class. According to independent analyses, the people eligible for debt relief are disproportionately young and Black. And they are concentrated in the middle band of Americans by income.

The Education Department estimates that nearly 90 percent of affected borrowers earn \$75,000 a year or less. Ivy League graduates make up less than 1 percent of federal student borrowers nationwide.

15 Economists say the full scope of Mr. Biden's plan, including significant changes meant to reduce the payments that millions of borrowers will make for years to come, will help middle-income earners from a wide range of schools and backgrounds.

Yet despite the appeal of such debt relief, the program still has set off a contentious debate as economists and political figures assess the full consequences of the plan. It may cost as much as a half-trillion dollars over the course of a decade, imposing a future burden on American taxpayers.

20 The plan also could encourage colleges to raise tuition even faster than they already are. Schools could try to persuade borrowers to take on as much debt as possible to cover higher tuition, with the belief that the federal government would help pay it back.

Some conservative and Democratic economists also say the program could add significantly to what is already the highest inflation rate in four decades. Evidence suggests those claims are overstated, however, and American shoppers are not likely to see prices spike because of the program.

25 The real burden of the plan is likely to be carried by future taxpayers, who will shoulder what could be a half-trillion dollars in additional federal debt from the proposals. Economists generally agree that the distribution of that burden will depend on future tax and spending policies — who pays any increased taxes lawmakers might impose to reduce the federal budget deficit, or who suffers from spending cuts meant to do the same.

30 Experts say at least some future college students could also end up paying higher costs as universities respond to some of Mr. Biden's moves by raising tuition.

But in choosing to extend more generous debt relief than even many of his allies had expected, Mr. Biden is offering what independent analysts suggest would be his most targeted assistance yet to middle-class workers, and one that could help more young people make it to the middle class.

35 Mr. Biden said on Wednesday that the Education Department would forgive \$10,000 in loan debt for borrowers with individual incomes of up to \$125,000 or household incomes below \$250,000. Students who received Pell grants in school, which are available to lower-income families, would be eligible for an additional \$10,000 in debt relief.

40 He also announced plans that would limit many borrowers' loan payments to 5 percent of their discretionary income and ensure they were not buried in accumulated interest costs if they keep up with payments.

Mr. Biden has cast his plan as a victory for future members of the middle class as well, saying high student debt has effectively broken an economic promise America offered to young people in recent decades: Do what you can to pay for a college education, and you will be rewarded with a job that can afford the comforts of a home, health care and more.

45 Even supporters of the move acknowledge that debt cancellation will not reach anywhere close to a majority of American voters, a fact that Republicans have played up in making a case to voters that Mr. Biden has sought to help elites at the expense of everyone else. They say shaking free of a student debt burden has the potential to transform lives in a way few other policies could.

50 Critics from the left say that Mr. Biden should go further — and that he will not be providing full relief to the truly needy until he does so.

“While the student debt forgiveness plan is a positive step forward that will bring some measure of relief to millions of Black borrowers, the reality is that it's simply not enough,” said Rashad Robinson, president of Color of Change, a racial justice group. “The Biden administration must fully eliminate student loan debt to create a meaningful, lasting impact on people's lives and close the racial wealth gap.”

This Is What Happens When Race Is Everything

5 *The New York Times, Oct. 13, 2022*

Besides being offended by the racist comments made by members of the Los Angeles City Council I was also struck by the underlying worldview revealed during their leaked conversation.

10 Council President Nury Martinez along with two colleagues talked about a range of subjects, including redistricting, but two assumptions undergirded much of what they said. Their first assumption was that America is divided into monolithic racial blocs. The world they take for granted is not a world of persons; it's a world of rigid racial categories.

The second assumption was that these monolithic racial blocs are locked in a never-ending ethnic war for power. The core topic of their conversation was to redraw Council districts to benefit Latino leaders.

15 Those two assumptions didn't come out of nowhere. We have had a long-running debate in this country over how to think about racial categories. On the one side there are those who see American society as a conflict between oppressor and oppressed groups. They center race and race consciousness when talking about a person's identity. Justice will come when minority group power is used to push back on white supremacy.

20 On the other side, there are others who argue that racial categorisation itself can be the problem. The concept of systemic racism is built upon crude racial categorisation. According to them, America should fight racism while getting rid of "the categories that come out of the collision of Africa and Europe in the slave trade and the New World."

25 You do that by emphasizing how much all humans have in common and by emphasizing how complex each person's identity is — that it includes race but so many other things, too. The last thing you want to do is traffic in the sort of racial essentialist categories that were so rampantly on display during that conversation among the City Council members.

30 That conversation is what happens when the assumptions of the former school of thought are embraced as a matter of course. You don't get a righteous struggle against oppression. You get a bunch of people who assume that public life is a brutal struggle of group against group, and who are probably going to develop derogatory views of people in rival groups.

35 Los Angeles is a version of the American future. America is diversifying rapidly, and before long there will be no single majority group. On the ground, groups are mixing and blending. About three in 10 Asian newlyweds were married to someone from a different race or ethnicity in 2015, as were around one in four Hispanics and roughly one in five Black Americans. Six years earlier, 35 percent of Americans said that one of their close kin was married to someone of a different race.

As this blending continues, racial and ethnic categories get a lot more fluid. By 2060 40 percent of the Americans who will say they are white will also claim another identity. Fifty-two percent of the individuals categorized as nonwhite will also identify as white.

40 But while all this complex pluralism is happening on the ground, many politicians and conflict entrepreneurs revert to crude racial binaries in order to justify their status and gain power. Sadly, history shows us how ridiculously easy it is for people to whip up in-group versus out-group hostilities, especially if they can spread a worldview that asserts that life is essentially about a zero-sum war of group against group.

45 "The essential challenge that diversifying states face is the evolution of their identity," Justin Gest writes in his recent book, "Majority Minority." That means the crucial struggle is in the realm of ideas and the imagination. What stories do we tell or what rhetoric do we use to define who we are?

If we use rhetoric and tell stories that expand the definition of "we," if we continue to emphasize how complicated personal and national identities are, if we emphasize overlapping and inclusive identities, then we have a shot at making something special out of all this diversity.

50 If we use rhetoric that assumes that we're all locked into rigid racial blocs and that group conflict is the essential element of public life, then group conflict is what we will get — Balkanization on a continental scale. That's not just about L.A. City Council members. That's about a set of ideas and a way of talking too readily accepted in this society.

Biden Signs Bill to Protect Same-Sex Marriage Rights

Michael D. Shear, *The New York Times*, Dec. 13, 2022

WASHINGTON — President Biden signed the Respect for Marriage Act into law on Tuesday, mandating federal recognition for same-sex marriages and capping his own personal evolution toward embracing gay rights over the course of a four-decade political career.

In an elaborate signing ceremony on the South Lawn, Mr. Biden told thousands of supporters and lawmakers that the new law represents a rare moment of bipartisanship when Democrats and Republicans came together. “My fellow Americans, the road to this moment has been long, but those who believe in equality and justice, you never gave up,” Mr. Biden told the crowd, which White House officials later said had 5,300 people, before signing the bill to loud cheers. He added: “We got it done. We’re going to continue the work ahead. I promise you.”

The landmark legislation, passed by a bipartisan coalition in Congress, officially erases the Defense of Marriage Act, which a quarter of a century ago formally defined marriage as between a man and a woman. The new law prohibits states from denying the validity of out-of-state marriages based on sex, race or ethnicity. For Mr. Biden, who voted for the Defense of Marriage Act as a senator in 1996 and wavered on letting gay men and lesbians serve in the military, the signing ceremony was an indication of how much the president has changed when it comes to championing L.G.B.T.Q. His views on issues like abortion, gay marriage and sentencing reform — which once put him on the more conservative side of his party’s ideological spectrum — now more firmly match positions that have galvanized Democrats and even many Republicans over the past several years. The country continues to have deep ideological fissures. But in some areas, there are now new and different majorities expressing support for societal and political norms that were far different a generation ago, shifting over time much as the president has. In many ways, his arc is the country’s arc.

Mr. Biden, 80, was raised in a time when much of the country was less tolerant of people’s sexual orientations. His policy choices in the Senate reflected those times, often siding with those who proposed restrictions, or limits, on gay men and lesbians. He supported a measure that restricted how homosexuality was taught in schools, one of many defeats for the equality movement. During his 2008 vice-presidential debate with Sarah Palin, Mr. Biden said he opposed “redefining from a civil side what constitutes marriage.” But people close to Mr. Biden said he kept an open mind about the issue and was a keen observer of the ways that society was changing around him — and slowly changed his positions. (...)

Mr. Biden also now firmly supports the rights of women to choose to have an abortion, despite having had reservations earlier in his career. A practicing Catholic, the president was once an outright critic of abortion rights but later became a quiet — if uncomfortable — defender of them in the Senate. Since the Supreme Court’s ruling in June to end the constitutional right to an abortion, Mr. Biden has been fervent in his condemnation of the decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* and has repeatedly called for legislation that would replace the 50-year-old court precedent with legal protections for the right of women to have an abortion. (...)

But no issue represents Mr. Biden’s tendency to adapt to societal and political change as well as gay marriage. Polls show a sea change in public opinion across the political spectrum in the past decade, with nearly 70 percent of Americans now saying they support the right of same-sex couples to be married, with all the rights that heterosexual couples have under the law. But it is also a mark of ongoing fear that newfound gay rights may be fragile. The push for passage of the law was driven in part by the Supreme Court opinion overturning abortion rights, in which Justice Clarence Thomas raised the possibility of using the same logic to reconsider decisions protecting marriage equality and contraception rights. Opponents of the legislation still argue that it would undermine family values in the United States and restrict the religious freedoms of people who do not believe that same-sex marriage is moral.

Alarmed by A.I. Chatbots, Universities Start Revamping How They Teach The New York Times, Jan. 16, 2023

5 While grading essays for his world religions course last month, Antony Aumann, a professor of philosophy at Northern Michigan University, read what he said was easily “the best paper in the class.” It explored the morality of burqa bans with clean paragraphs, fitting examples and rigorous arguments. A red flag instantly went up.

Mr. Aumann confronted his student over whether he had written the essay himself. The student confessed to using ChatGPT, a chatbot that delivers information, explains concepts and generates ideas in simple sentences — and, in this case, had written the paper. Alarmed by his discovery, Mr. Aumann decided to transform essay writing for his courses this semester. He plans to require students to write first drafts in the classroom, using browsers that monitor and restrict computer activity. In later drafts, students have to explain each revision. Mr. Aumann, who may forgo essays in subsequent semesters, also plans to weave ChatGPT into lessons by asking students to evaluate the chatbot’s responses.

10 Across the country, university professors like Mr. Aumann, department chairs and administrators are starting to overhaul classrooms in response to ChatGPT, prompting a potentially huge shift in teaching and learning. Some professors are redesigning their courses entirely, making changes that include more oral exams, group work and handwritten assessments in lieu of typed ones.

The moves are part of a real-time grappling with a new technological wave known as generative artificial intelligence. ChatGPT, which was released in November by the artificial intelligence lab OpenAI, is at the forefront of the shift. The chatbot generates eerily articulate and nuanced text in response to short prompts, with people using it to write love letters, poetry, fan fiction — and their schoolwork.

15 In higher education, colleges and universities have been reluctant to ban the A.I. tool because administrators doubt the move would be effective and they don’t want to infringe on academic freedom. That means the way people teach is changing instead. “We try to institute general policies that certainly back up the faculty member’s authority to run a class,” instead of targeting specific methods of cheating, said Joe Glover, provost of the University of Florida. “This isn’t going to be the last innovation we have to deal with.”

20 At many universities, ChatGPT has now vaulted to the top of the agenda. Administrators are establishing task forces and hosting universitywide discussions to respond to the tool, with much of the guidance being to adapt to the technology. At schools including George Washington University in Washington, D.C., Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., and Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C., professors are phasing out take-home, open-book assignments — which became a dominant method of assessment in the pandemic but now seem vulnerable to chatbots. They are instead opting for in-class assignments, handwritten papers, group work and oral exams.

25 Gone are prompts like “write five pages about this or that.” Some professors are instead crafting questions that they hope will be too clever for chatbots and asking students to write about their own lives and current events. Frederick Luis Aldama, the humanities chair at the University of Texas at Austin, said he planned to teach newer or more niche texts that ChatGPT might have less information about, such as William Shakespeare’s early sonnets instead of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” The chatbot may motivate “people who lean into canonical, primary texts to actually reach beyond their comfort zones for things that are not online,” he said. (...)

30 Universities are also aiming to educate students about the new A.I. tools. The University at Buffalo in New York and Furman University in Greenville, S.C., said they planned to embed a discussion of A.I. tools into required courses that teach entering or freshman students about concepts such as academic integrity.

“We have to add a scenario about this, so students can see a concrete example,” said Kelly Ahuna, who directs the academic integrity office at the University at Buffalo. “We want to prevent things from happening instead of catch them when they happen.”

35 Other universities are trying to draw boundaries for A.I. Washington University in St. Louis and the University of Vermont in Burlington are drafting revisions to their academic integrity policies so their plagiarism definitions include generative A.I. John Dyer, vice president for enrollment services and educational technologies at Dallas Theological Seminary, said the language in his seminary’s honor code felt “a little archaic anyway.” He plans to update its plagiarism definition to include: “using text written by a generation system as one’s own (e.g., entering a prompt into an artificial intelligence tool and using the output in a paper).”

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You Don't Have to Be a Doctor to Know How Much Trouble the N.H.S. is in
Allyson Pollock and Peter Roderick, *The New York Times*, March 17th 2023

On Dec. 15, nurses walked out and began the largest nurses' strike in the history of Britain's National Health Service. They were protesting working conditions that have left them burned out and stretched thin -- and compromised patient safety -- and wages that fell in the last decade in real terms. Ambulance workers joined them. This week, thousands of junior doctors went on strike for three consecutive days.

5 "I come to work and can see that there's a patient waiting eight hours to see a doctor. There are some days where I finish my shift, come back the next day and then I see the same patient still sat waiting in A&E" -- the emergency room -- "the next day," Dr. Kiara Vincent, one of the doctors striking, told the BBC on Monday.

10 But you don't have to work in a hospital to know that Britain's N.H.S. is in the most serious crisis of its history; you just have to be injured, or ill. Thousands of people are estimated to have died in the last year because of overwhelmed ambulance and emergency services. There are 7.2 million people in England, more than 10 percent of the population, on waiting lists for treatments like hip or knee replacements, back surgery or cataract operations. And hundreds of thousands of people have had a doctor's referral for outpatient care at a hospital rejected because there are no available appointments -- they are simply bounced back to the doctor to begin the process again.

15 That the flagship health care service of one of the wealthiest countries in the world is in such a state is shocking, but not without explanation. Decades of marketization, 10 years of Conservative austerity and a pandemic have hollowed out the N.H.S. so much that people who can afford to, and increasingly those who can't, are having to pay for health care.

A two-tier system with more and more in common with American health care is taking shape. It's not working, and we'll soon be at the point where it's too late to do anything about it.

20 The damage to the N.H.S. was inflicted in three main waves.

In the late 1980s and early '90s, a Conservative government introduced the internal market and closed long-stay hospitals -- where care was free -- under the euphemistic banner of "care in the community." Private nursing homes backed by equity investors took over provision for older people, and care became chargeable and means-tested, mirroring Medicaid "spend down" rules.

25 In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Labour, under Tony Blair, built dozens of new hospitals with money from partnerships with private investors. The new hospitals were saddled with enormous loan and interest repayments -- around \$60 billion is still owed.

30 In 2010, the Conservatives, back in power -- alongside the Liberal Democrats until 2015 -- embarked on a decade of austerity. A government-commissioned report released last year called the years between 2010 and 2020 the N.H.S.'s "decade of neglect."

The cumulative effect was devastating: In the three decades that preceded the pandemic the number of N.H.S. beds in England was more than halved. Shortages -- of beds, ventilators or intensive care specialists -- in early 2020 were not unique to Britain, but Britain had fewer per capita beds than comparable countries. There was a palpable sense of panic about how Britain and its health service were going to manage.

35 Britain did manage. And it was because of the dedication of the people who work for the N.H.S., and the retired staff who came out of retirement to help. Britons know this: Research from the spring of 2022 suggests that the British public still overwhelmingly support the founding principles of the N.H.S., even as their satisfaction with it sinks to the lowest level in decades. (Nurses and ambulance workers have the most public support of all of the workers who have been staging strikes in Britain this winter.)

40 But people are also tired of waiting -- or not able to wait -- and more and more are paying for private treatment.

There was a 35 percent increase in people choosing to self-fund care between 2019 and 2021, with "market-beating growth" reported in the self-pay market since the Covid pandemic. The number of people self-funding operations like hip and knee replacements more than doubled.

45 And there are indications that some of the people paying for private treatment are doing so not because they can afford to, but because they can't afford to wait: Between 2019 and 2021, as self-funding increased, the number of people paying with private insurance decreased; people are reportedly taking out loans to pay for operations and, in a development that will be familiar to Americans but is something quite new in Britain, more and more people are turning to GoFundMe to raise money for medical treatment. [...]

Tucker Carlson and The Tragedy of Fox News

Bret Stephens, *The New York Times*, April 24, 2023

5 In the summer of 2011, Rupert Murdoch (...) was just back from London, where he had given testimony to a parliamentary committee investigating the phone-hacking scandal by his British tabloids (...). The scandal ultimately resulted in the closure of News of the World, at one point one of the world's biggest-selling English-language newspapers.

10 I don't remember many specifics about [our] conversation, but I do remember the gist of what he said about the fiasco: *Never put anything in an email*. His private takeaway, it seemed, wasn't to require his companies to adhere to high ethical standards. It was to leave no trace that investigators might use for evidence against him, his family or his favorite lieutenants.

15 Fast-forward a dozen years. Not much has changed. What is being euphemistically described as a parting of ways on Monday between Fox News and its chief disinformation officer, Tucker Carlson, is happening after the now-former prime-time host put things in emails and text messages that proved he knew he was peddling lies — and then went ahead and amplified them.

20 "Sidney Powell is lying by the way," Carlson told fellow host Laura Ingraham on Nov. 18, 2020, referring to the infamous election conspiracy theorist. "I caught her. It's insane." What's true of Carlson holds for many others at the network, up to and including Murdoch, according to evidence collected by Dominion Voting Systems in a brief it filed as part of its lawsuit against Fox News, which last week resulted in a \$787.5 million settlement. "Terrible stuff damaging everybody, I fear," Murdoch told the network's chief executive, Suzanne Scott. But the network fired or chastised journalists who reported the truth.

25 It isn't out of the question that Fox could now meet the same fate as News of the World. The company faces a similar lawsuit from Smartmatic, another voting-technology company, this time for \$2.7 billion. Carlson will almost surely set up shop elsewhere, taking his vast audience with him. The same will go for some of the other legally problematic prime-time hosts if given the boot. For Fox, riding the wave will no longer come easy: Angry populism is a force that can only be stoked, never assuaged.

So am I gleeful? Not at all.

30 Part of it is the thought that, whatever Carlson does next, it will probably be even more unhinged and toxic than his previous incarnation. Nobody should rule out the possibility of his going into politics, either as Donald Trump's running mate or as the Republican Party's compromise candidate between Trump and Ron DeSantis. But there's also the sense of what Fox might have become. Murdoch had an opportunity to build something the country genuinely needed in the mid-1990s, when the G.O.P. was moving away from the optimistic and responsible party of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush toward the feverishness of Newt Gingrich and Tom DeLay: an effective center-right counterbalance to the overwhelmingly liberal tilt (as conservatives usually see it) of most major news media.

35 It might not have had the ratings that Fox would get — though Fox was always about influence, as much as money, for Murdoch. But, executed well, it could have elevated conservatism in the direction of Burke, Hamilton and Lincoln, rather than debase it in the direction of Andrew Jackson, Joe McCarthy and Pat Buchanan.

40 Such a channel would still have been plenty conservative, in a way that most liberals would find infuriating. But it would also have defended the classically liberal core of intelligent conservatism: the idea that immigrants are an asset, not a liability; that the freedoms of speech and conscience must extend to those whose ideas we loathe; that American power ought to be harnessed to protect the world's democracies from aggressive dictators; that we are richer at home by freely trading goods abroad; that nothing is more sacred than democracy and the rule of law; that patriotism is about preserving the capacity to criticize a country we love while loving the country we criticize.

45 This kind of channel will be more desperately needed in the future, as the forces unleashed by Murdoch sweep everything in their path, from "establishment" Republicans to, quite possibly, Fox itself. The shame of Rupert Murdoch is that he wasn't the man to do it. It doesn't mean it can't be done.

The Abortion Fight Has Voters Turning to Ballot Initiatives And Republicans are increasingly attempting to limit that direct-democracy option.

Peter Slevin, The New Yorker, June 2, 2023

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In 1910, Ohio voters went to the polls and called a convention to update the state’s constitution, which had been in place since 1851. (...) The delegates drafted forty-two amendments, and, later that year, Ohio voters approved thirty-four of them. Significantly, Amendment 6 established a procedure for citizens to gather signatures to place a constitutional amendment directly on the ballot, avoiding the need for another constitutional convention. The number required was, and remains, ten per cent of the total who voted for governor in the prior election, spread across a certain number of counties. If a simple majority vote in favor, the amendment takes effect: “direct popular action,” as Roosevelt called it, containing reasonable barriers “to prevent its being wantonly or too frequently used.”

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For more than a century, that’s how things stood. The procedure has certainly not been wantonly used. Since 1950, according to the state chapter of Common Cause, forty-three citizen initiatives to amend the constitution have appeared on a ballot. Voters passed just ten of them. Nevertheless, in recent months, the Republican majority in Ohio’s gerrymandered state legislature has decided that a simple majority is too low a threshold. Despite objections from a bipartisan array of former governors, attorneys general, and election workers, Republican legislators scheduled a rare special election for August 8th, during which they will ask voters to approve raising it to sixty per cent. The stated reason is to “safeguard Ohio’s constitution from special interests.” A more immediate reason, according to the effort’s main sponsor, State Representative Brian Stewart: “The Left intends to write abortion on demand into Ohio’s Constitution.”

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The maneuvering in Ohio is a clear example—nearly a year after the Supreme Court, in *Dobbs*, overturned *Roe v. Wade*—of the recent, escalating effort by G.O.P.-controlled state legislatures to limit abortion access. In April, nineteen Republican attorneys general filed a brief in support of a Texas lawsuit seeking to take the abortion drug mifepristone off the market. In Idaho, where abortion is banned, with few exceptions, helping a minor travel out of state to obtain one without parental consent is now punishable with prison time. In Tennessee, performing an abortion is a felony in most circumstances, including in cases of rape or incest. Last month, after bitter legislative debate, Republican supermajorities established new restrictions in Nebraska, South Carolina, and North Carolina.

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In Ohio, where a six-week abortion ban is on hold, pending a court ruling, supporters of abortion rights are turning to Roosevelt’s “direct popular action,” seeking to gather enough signatures to place a proposed constitutional amendment on the November ballot to guarantee, in almost all cases, that “every individual has a right to make and carry out one’s own reproductive decisions.” They are confident of raising the necessary four-hundred-thousand-plus signatures to do so, bolstered by a Baldwin Wallace University poll last year that suggested that fifty-nine per cent of Ohioans support making abortion a constitutional right. (In neighboring Michigan, in November, nearly fifty-seven per cent of voters approved similar language for their constitution.) Hence the August election scheduled by Ohio’s anti-abortion legislators. “They say they’re trying to protect the Ohio constitution from outside interests,” David Pepper, a former chair of the Ohio Democratic Party, told me. “They’re trying to protect themselves from Ohio voters.”

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Referendums and initiatives often accomplish in the voting booth what can’t get through the legislative process, especially in gerrymandered statehouses. “If you ask voters, ‘Whom do you trust to make decisions, the people or the politicians?’ it’s always a landslide, three to one, for the people,” John Matsusaka, a University of Southern California professor of business and law and the author of “Let the People Rule,” told me. “That’s true in every state.” And raising barriers to referendums and initiatives—which can change laws or the state’s constitution—is a tactic that has been historically used by Democrats and Republicans alike. “There’s always a state trying to make it harder,” Matsusaka said. The reason, he believes, is that politicians in power want to preserve that power. “If you go back far enough, you will see that these things come in waves. What typically happens is when voters start to use direct democracy a lot, the politicians start to propose these restrictions.

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When Amazon and Tesco join a “coalition of compassion”, you know the welfare state is failing

Gordon Brown, *The Observer*, May 7th 2023

Just over a decade ago, I was in Downing Street planning our country’s pathway through the global financial crisis, completing our long-planned exit from Iraq, anguishing over soldiers’ deaths in Afghanistan and implementing the second stage of the Good Friday agreement on policing in Northern Ireland. I never once imagined that, just over a dozen years on, I would be having to negotiate a supply of 1.5m toilet rolls for my local family centre’s anti-poverty work.

And because 2023 finds mothers reusing nappies, sharing toothbrushes, going without period products, washing their clothes without washing powder and washing themselves and their children without soap, next week fellow helpers and I have set ourselves the task of securing all these essential toiletry products for families in need.

These are the latest supplies being added to the 600,000 surplus goods (worth around £10m) that 30,000 families have so far received from the new multibank that volunteers have created in Fife, where I live. Helping the hungry is the life-saving work of food banks, now more than 3,000 in number, alongside the growing number of community kitchens, pantries and larders. But now communities need not only a local food bank but a multibank – a bedding, furnishings, toiletry, clothes and baby bank all rolled into one. The biggest demand over the winter has been for duvets, blankets and sheets to keep people warm and given to our multibank by Amazon, Fishers laundry, Scotmid and the Textile Services Association. As spring moves to summer, these founding corporate donors are being joined by Tesco and the Online Home Shop, which are donating clothes and homemaking goods, tins of food from Morrisons, PepsiCo, Scotmid and Heinz, toiletries from Accrol and Unilever, paint from local suppliers, and we are now about to receive mattresses thanks to Whitbread. This is the kind of distribution revolution we need for the urgent relief of the poverty in our midst.

After last month’s punishing rise in food price inflation, telecoms, council tax and other prices, hardship – and the requirement to relieve it – is not diminishing but increasing. For sadly, under this government, coronation Britain is also a divided Britain, a country in which, with every month that passes, the poor are becoming even poorer.

The fanfare for a king cannot obscure what is unfair for others – rising deprivation among those without money or power. Regrettably, too, the national mood seems different from the last coronation. After years of wartime and postwar austerity, the British public of 1953 was optimistic about the future. This time, as charities take over from the welfare state as our national safety net and the food bank, not the social security system, is fast becoming the last line of defence against destitution, it is difficult not to fear for the future.

“The record is clear,” declared an in-denial Rishi Sunak in a prime minister’s questions answer to Keir Starmer a few days ago. “The number of people in poverty is lower.” The most generous way to explain his interpretation of the data is that he is looking at charts upside down, for the official government statistics actually show that last year there were 14.4 million people living in poverty, 1.4 million more than in 2010-11.

To call his claims fake news elevates what he is saying to what Churchill once called “a terminological inexactitude” – a more worrying kind of misinformation designed to mislead the public about the kind of society we are becoming. And when this erroneous claim of declining poverty is born of complacency, ignorance becomes a form of arrogance. Child poverty is now rising inexorably to 4.2 million children and soon it could entrap a record 5 million children, so we should be debating solutions to the problems we face, not denying there is a problem, and these grim statistics explain why 2.1 million people are using food banks and why most poor children are in families on low pay, with this decade 1.5 million more working households unable to make ends meet even after working all hours God has given them.

I’m talking to mothers who can’t sleep at night because they are worried sick about not having breakfast for their children before they go to school and who are ashamed they have to queue to use food banks. There are some images that never leave you. Images that are so haunting they encapsulate the trials and tribulations of the times we are in: the story of a 10-year-old sleeping on bare floorboards with only a threadbare sheet covering him; of a mother feeding her children at the expense of herself and relying only on leftovers, trying to sleep through her hunger; of a single father who says he can’t cope any more, dumping his 16-year-old son in floods of tears at a charity warehouse – leaving the desolate young boy to the compassion of staff and later the mercy of a care home.

These are real-life tragedies that capture a poverty that seems even worse and much more entrenched than what I saw growing up in a mining and textiles town [...].

• *Gordon Brown was prime minister from 2007 to 2010*

Traditional monarchy died with the Queen – but are we ready for a republic?

Neil Ascherson, *The Observer*, May 7th 2023

The future of the royals rests with the personality of one man – and he may be remembered as the king who paved the way for a republic.

Do we live in a monarchy? Of course we do, say some. See the man clenching his shoulders as a huge metal bonnet of gold and jewels is lowered over his ears: he's our king. Well, not really, say others. The word "monarch" means one man who rules alone, and today our kings and queens are decorations obedient to an elected parliament. But then a third voice says: not only do we live in a monarchy, but Britain is a far more monarchical place than most people realise.

The UK is the only sizeable country left in Europe whose institutions are still basically monarchist. Power flows top-down in Britain, not upwards from the people. A ghostly old deference pervades Cabinets, councils, administrations and ceremonies. In the middle ages, kingship was often "contractual": you protect us and we'll obey and fight for you. But later came the age of the "divine right" of kings: the absolute, anointed and unlimited authority of a monarch. In Europe, that was overthrown by the French Revolution and by the century of revolutions and constitutions that followed. Divine right gave way to ideas of "popular sovereignty" – sometimes real, sometimes a dictatorial fake. But England, as it swelled into Great Britain, missed out on this.

The "Glorious Revolution" of 1688-9 had merely taken absolute power away from the Crown and transferred it to the parliament. And there it still sits, disguised today as the absurd doctrine of "parliamentary sovereignty". Over the last half-century, efforts have been made to limit that absolutism, mostly through the law – judicial review, the new supreme court. But the structure still feels monarchist when you tap it. Take official information, for instance. In pedantic theory it's all secret. It's the Crown's exclusive property, and a mere citizen has no general right to it, although he or she can now use the recent Freedom of Information Act to beg access in specific cases. A minister may choose to share a government paper with him or her, but has no duty to do so. Any old-school monarch, from Charles I to George V, would understand this perfectly.

Reluctance to delegate authority "downwards" is deeply monarchical. With no constitution to limit it, central authority rules in the last resort. As Enoch Powell famously said: "Power devolved is power retained."

Mrs Thatcher abolished the elected government of London and went round the land closing university departments. Nothing happened to her. But, in most modern countries, where the rights of local government and universities are entrenched in a constitution, she would have been arrested as an enemy of the state. You can't arrest our queens and kings. Their most important privileges are immunities. Mel Brooks, playing Louis XVI in *History of the World Part 1*, enjoys royal immunity as he uses peasants for target practice and pinches the bottoms of the ladies-in-waiting: "It's good to be a king!" One school of thought guesses that the Windsors might be a bit more popular if they stopped looking so mournful and showed that they enjoyed being rich, adored and able to summon everything and anybody at a nod.

This king, like his predecessors, is immune to all sorts of things, from official inspections to various taxes and laws (especially laws concerning royal properties and estates) which he doesn't like. He may and does pay money to the Treasury, but not because he has to. And the tradition of royal immunity long ago overflowed into the world of top people, diluted down to "one law for us and another for them". In other places, immunity is bought by corruption. Here it is simply assumed – often, as in the case of Boris Johnson, all too correctly.

The very title "United Kingdom" describes a monarchical contraption. Elsewhere, many nation-states have decentralised authorities – German Länder, Canadian provinces. But those are federations, where the rights of British Columbia or Mecklenburg-Vorpommern are constitutionally guaranteed. Devolved Wales and Scotland have no such rights. Royal Westminster could abolish the Welsh assembly or the Scottish parliament tomorrow, by a majority vote of one. Realistically, it would be terrified to do so, although the Conservative party fought desperately to prevent devolution and has never quite accepted such a dent in the kingdom's shining armour. [...]

The late Queen, by 70 years of charm and hard work, kept that truth in the background. Without wallowing in Mel Brooksish luxury, she looked most of the time as if she genuinely enjoyed her job. Ironically, it's partly because she was so good at that job that now, in 2023, the props holding the monarchy up are reduced to one: the personality of a single man. Melancholy self-sacrifice ("It hurts to be a king!") is no programme for Charles III; these days, it would merely irritate his subjects. Instead, they would like to see him laugh as he slashed the royal sword into the thickets of privilege and deference which imprison him, and which protect the anachronisms of the British state. In short, he could be remembered as the happy warrior who made his kingdom fit to be a republic.

Recreational marijuana to become legal in Delaware despite opposition from Gov. John Carney

Under House Bill 1 and House Bill 2 adults 21 and over can possess up to an ounce of weed and the state will establish a regulated industry to sell cannabis

5 Brian A. Saunders, The *Philly Voice*, April 22, 2023

Recreational marijuana will become legal in Delaware after Gov. John Carney said he would no longer stand in the way of legislation. The state will create a regulated industry to sell marijuana to consumers 21 and older, recreationally. Delaware will become the 22nd state to legalize recreational marijuana, Gov. John Carney announced on Friday.

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Despite Carney's opposition to making weed legal, he said he would no longer stand in the way of the legislation passing. He said he would not sign the two-bill legislation, however.

"In the coming days, I will allow House Bill 1 and House Bill 2 to be enacted into Delaware law without my signature," Carney said.

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"These two pieces of legislation remove all state-level civil and criminal penalties from simple marijuana possession and create a highly regulated industry to conduct recreational marijuana sales in Delaware. As I've consistently said, I believe the legalization of recreational marijuana is not a step forward."

The two-bill legislation was spearheaded by State Rep. Ed Osienski.

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"After five years of countless meetings, debates, negotiations, and conversations, I'm grateful we have reached the point where Delaware has joined a growing number of states that have legalized and regulated adult recreational marijuana for personal use," Osienski said in a statement. "We know that more than 60% of Delawareans support the legalization of marijuana for adult recreational use, and more than two-thirds of the General Assembly agreed."

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House Bill 1 will remove all penalties for the use or possession of marijuana and marijuana accessories. It also established that any adults 21 years old or over can have up to an ounce in their possession. Personal weed must be in a closed container while in a vehicle. Smoking in public is still illegal, as well as growing plants.

House Bill 2 will set the parameters for legal cannabis sales in Delaware. Under that legislation 30 retail licenses will be awarded to dispensaries, 30 manufacturing licenses, and 60 cultivation licenses to process and package marijuana.

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Retail licenses are not expected to be issued until at least August of 2024, WHYY reported. A 15% tax will be added to Delaware's recreational weed retail sales.

Osienski said that Carney has to appoint a commissioner and select an oversight committee. Regulations on plant propagation, which is the process of creating new plants, also will have to be established.

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Carney's decision to move on from the battle over marijuana legislation less than a year after he decided to veto legislation in May 2022.

"I do not believe that promoting or expanding the use of recreational marijuana is in the best interests of the state of Delaware, especially our young people. Questions about the long-term health and economic impacts of recreational marijuana use, as well as serious law enforcement concerns, remain unresolved," Carney said at the time.

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Carney had been silent on the latest legislation to legalize weed after it passed in the Delaware state Senate on March 28. Despite his position, it's a new day in Delaware.

"I remain concerned about the consequences of a recreational marijuana industry in our state," he said. "I'm concerned, especially about the potential effects on Delaware's children, on the safety of our roadways, and on our poorest neighborhoods, where I believe a legal marijuana industry will have a disproportionately negative impact."

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The decision to legalize recreational cannabis in Delaware comes a year after New Jersey began the sale of weed. New Jersey adopted legislation that decriminalized weed and made adult use legal in Nov. 2020.

Pennsylvania has not moved forward on legislation to legalize marijuana despite Gov. Josh Shapiro being in favor of the decision. There are multiple pieces of legislation on the table including a proposal that would regulate the sale of marijuana through Fine Wine & Good Spirits and another that would allow the government to create a plan to regulate the sale of weed in the state.

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How Scottish universities' "free tuition" is preventing legions of young Scots from getting a better education

Brian Wilson, *The Scotsman*, May 12th 2023

5 One of the late Jimmy Reid's favourite maxims was that poor children were never so well fed as under war-time rationing. Everyone was guaranteed a minimum and maximum, rich and poor. The same principle applies to means-testing. The term acquired a bad name when identified with denying poor people means-tested National Assistance payments. It would have benefited from re-branding when applied to more recent debates around reduction of disadvantage.

In that context, means-testing should become the friend of the poor, rather than a trap to deny their needs. The alternative is "universalism" which means scarce resources are shared with those who need them least. So nothing much changes.

10 "Universalism" fits pseudo-progressive Scottish politics like a glove. It sounds like a high-minded principle which, in practice, does zero to close the gaps which characterise our society – attainment, aspiration, life expectancy or anything else. It is an illusion with which Scotland seems comfortable.

One conspicuous example is university education. The principal of Edinburgh University, Sir Peter Mathieson, has put his toe in dangerous waters by suggesting Scottish students from wealthy backgrounds who happily pay tuition fees to English universities might be allowed to do so in Scotland.

15 This was immediately ruled out by Humza Yousaf on the grounds that access to universities should "be based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay". Worryingly, it is possible Mr Yousaf actually believes that this piety reflects the reality in Scotland's universities.

20 There are regiments of young Scots with the "ability to learn" being denied access to courses because the number of Scottish (non-fee paying) students is rigidly capped. Scottish universities accept 55 per cent of Scottish applicants, compared to an equivalent proportion of 74 per cent in (fee-paying) England.

These are distortions driven by the starting point of "free tuition". Yet it is a myth that this protects even the most disadvantaged Scottish students from debt. There is a lot of data about which mix of loans, grants, fees and means-testing produces the most egalitarian outcomes. If that was what motivated us, rather than slogans, we would want to learn from them all.

25 In practice, "free tuition" means the Scottish Government pays universities a fraction of the actual costs. This deficit is balanced by taking fee-paying students from wherever they can get them, including England but, most lucratively, by the plane-load from China. How this accords with "the ability to learn, not the ability to pay" is unclear.

30 Holyrood's education committee has warned that higher education is "structurally reliant on international fees, with this source of revenue forecast to overtake Scottish Government funding as a percentage of total income in 2023-24". It can't go on like this without limiting opportunities for more young Scots.

I would argue the only true key to equalising opportunity lies in a sustained commitment to early intervention which would gradually expand the building blocks of literacy and numeracy. Without addressing that societal challenge for deep-rooted change, adjustments thereafter are mainly cosmetic – but that is a wider debate.

35 The most urgent point is made by Universities Scotland which says: "The Scottish Government needs a plan for universities, staff and students. It cannot keep expecting to have world-class universities on the cheap." But it does.

There is no perfect, principled answer to how higher education is funded, though the façade of "universalism" is certainly not delivering sustainable outcomes. The mantra of "no tuition fees plus loans" should be weighed against other models, based on experience and comparison. Alas, that debate won't happen in Scotland.

40 The last politician who tried was Johann Lamont, when Scottish Labour leader. For her trouble, she was brutally misrepresented by one Nicola Sturgeon, who managed to persuade the poor, whose children will never see the inside of a university, that "means-testing" was a threat rather than a redistributive device to benefit their own families.

No Scottish politician has gone near the subject since, nor is likely to. Capping potential for increasing numbers of young Scots, gross over-dependence on foreign wealth and serious underfunding will continue as our "progressive" model. Until one day, the bubble bursts or the planes stop delivering.

Ireland's violent men of peace
Douglas Murray, *The Spectator*, April 22nd 2023

It was from the Northern Ireland conflict that I first learned how language - like everything else - can be warped utterly. Take the late Martin McGuinness, not to mention his still-living, libel-hungry comrades.

For almost three decades they put bombs in public places, shot random people in the head and tortured others to death. After 30 years of this they received a wonderful career-end bonus. They became 'men of peace'. Suddenly McGuinness and co were not to be criticised. Instead they were applauded for laying down their weapons. Before long they were travelling the world talking about 'conflict resolution'. They won elections by pushing aside all those who had been against shooting people in the head from the start. Now if you condemned these killers you were 'anti-peace process'.

Since we are going through the celebrations for the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, it seems worth remarking this unpopular point. Last week we saw Joe Biden in Ireland chumming up with Gerry Adams. Soon afterwards, the Clintons were in town to celebrate the peace process. So a dissenting note is overdue.

Earlier this month somebody wrote to the Spectator letters page to stand up for John Major. I didn't know he had fans. But this well-meaning reader claimed that I should not be so down on Sir John because, after all, he 'was instrumental in establishing the foundations of peace in Northern Ireland'. What Major should in fact be credited with is rescuing Sinn Fein-IRA at the exact moment it had lost. He proved a master at resuscitating terrorists.

As any historian of the conflict must know, by the time the IRA came to the negotiating table they had become operationally incapable. They had been penetrated by the British army and British and Irish intelligence agencies at almost every level. Their Army Council had been infiltrated, not least by my much-missed friend Sean O'Callaghan. IRA recruiters such as Denis Donaldson were working for the UK security services. Even the head of the IRA's internal 'nutting squad' (who interrogated and murdered suspected informers) was a British agent. Freddie Scappaticci, who was named as the secret agent 'Stakeknife' 20 years ago, died of natural causes at his home on the mainland last week.

So as I say, a tougher man than Major might have snuffed out the IRA all but completely. Instead, at the very moment it was at its weakest, the British government helped to elevate that gang of murderers to positions they could never have dreamed of. Suddenly the Nationalist moderates like John Hume lost all the clout they had, as surely as David Trimble and moderate Unionists ended up losing to the awful Ian Paisley.

The peace that Major and Tony Blair helped to bring about had undoubted benefits. For 25 years Northern Ireland has been relatively peaceful. Sectarian violence is still commonplace and the province remains a tinderbox. But at least the daily killings and bombings have slowed down. That we haven't had another 3,000 dead deserves notice, and credit.

Nonetheless, this needs to be seen alongside some ugly truths - such as the fact that the men of violence were rewarded, given portfolios in government and made international statesmen, while people who never took up guns were left by the political roadside. Worse, the actual sources of the conflict were not put to rest. They were put on hold.

It has always been my view that the IRA would be back, as they were at intervals throughout the 20th century. And not just because of 'British occupation'. In my opinion, Northern Ireland should be governed by whoever it wants to be governed by. At present its people want to remain within the United Kingdom. The problem is that the ghastly story Sinn Fein-IRA preached throughout the Troubles is preached still. [...]

The poisonous folklore of Irish Republicanism remains.

Of course it has some poisonous opposites on the Unionist side. But the acts of violence stretching from well before 1916, though the Nazi collaboration, to the civilian bombings and the disappearance of innocent mothers of the 1970s to 1990s (here's looking at you, Gerry) all happened because the poison tree has never been uprooted.

These days it can be seen in the youths who don't remember the Troubles but nevertheless go out in the Creggan with petrol bombs. It can be seen in the sputterings and smiles of American Democrats like Joe Biden, the Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer and the disgusting former congressman Peter King.

The poison tree is not currently in full flower. But it will be again, seeing as the conditions are all there. Everybody thinks it's gone, but its bloody bloom will break out again some season - because youths brought up with the worst stories and heroes will have forgotten what their grandparents learned the hard way. That heady Irish cocktail of romance, lies and boredom is still intoxicating. And those of us who oppose it will continue to be called 'anti-peace'.

Prince Harry is having a bruising time in the High Court

Alexander Larman, *The Spectator*, June 6th 2023

Prince Harry is on a mission. ‘How much more blood will stain their typing fingers before someone can put a stop to this madness?’ Harry asks of journalists in his witness statement in his case against Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN). After the prince became the first member of the royal family to give evidence in court in 132 years this morning, he was asked what he meant and whether he was there to ‘put a stop to this madness’.

5 ‘That is my hope,’ he replied.

The royal claims MGN used unlawful methods, including phone hacking, to get stories dating back to the 1990s about him. ‘I would constantly be leaving and receiving voicemails, as text messaging was much less common back then,’ he told the court. Harry says in his statement he remembers ‘hearing a voicemail for the first time that wasn’t new’.

10 ‘I now understand their significance in terms of phone hacking. I believe that both mine and my associates’ voicemail messages were hacked by the defendant,’ he says, accusing tabloids of accessing his voicemails when he was at Eton.

Prince Harry’s statement, which runs to 26,789 words, is about twice as long as *The Great Gatsby*, another tale of a miserable rich man trying to find his place in the world. But, for all its length, the statement packs a punch. Harry denounces what he sees as the cosily-intertwined relationship between the press and our politicians:

15 *“Our country is judged globally by the state of our press and our government – both of which I believe are at rock bottom. Democracy fails when your press fails to scrutinise and hold the government accountable, and instead choose to get into bed with them so they can ensure the status quo.”*

20 This was strong meat indeed, and little wonder that MGN – represented by Andrew Green KC – fought back robustly in court. (The ‘rock bottom’ government has yet to issue a statement.) Green offered what appeared to be the expected noblesse oblige due to a member of the royal family – even a semi-detached one – referring to him, at Harry’s barrister David Sherborne’s behest, as ‘Your Royal Highness’, then ‘Prince Harry’. Yet his line of questioning represents quite the most combative interrogation that the Duke of Sussex has faced in several years, possibly ever.

25 Green questioned emotive remarks in Harry’s witness statement, such as how he is holding people accountable for their actions. The barrister, described as a ‘beast in court’ by Legal 500, has been skilfully unpicking the idea that every single one of these articles will have caused the hurt and outrage that Harry seems to suggest that they have – or that they were obtained using unlawful methods.

One exchange this morning led Harry to say huffily: ‘This is 20 years ago, I can’t speculate whether I saw these articles at the time.’ Green raised the obvious rejoinder as to how Harry could be said to be paranoid in his personal relationships if he didn’t remember the content of the articles that led him to become so. The Duke, clearly irked by this impertinence, resorted to snapping: ‘That’s a question for my legal team.’

30 ‘If you say so,’ Prince Harry replied ironically in another exchange with Green. Asked whether a story about him having Sunday lunch in a pub in London’s Fulham Road might not have come about as a result of unlawful information gathering, he replied: ‘I do not believe that as a witness it’s my job to deconstruct the article or be able to answer which parts are unlawfully obtained and which aren’t. I think the journalist themselves should be doing that’.

35 We can only speculate as to what is likely to be revealed over the coming hours, but what is certain is that the Prince Harry soap opera will continue to rumble on. The last time a royal appeared in court was the future Edward VII, testifying in the so-called Royal Baccarat Scandal of 1890. On that occasion, the-then Prince of Wales was doing nothing more than providing detail about the allegedly illegal activities of his friend Sir William Gordon-Cumming. But now, his descendant has considerably greater intentions in mind: to take on the media, whom he blames for having ruined his life.

40 ‘The thought of Piers Morgan and his band of journalists earwigging into my mother’s private and sensitive messages...makes me feel physically sick,’ he says in his statement. It’s safe to say that, whatever happens in this case, Harry isn’t interested in centuries of protocol expressed by the term ‘never complain, never explain.’

The Oxford Union will never surrender to cancel culture

James Price, *The Telegraph*, May 11th 2023

University is not supposed to be an ideological safe space, but somewhere that you can and should have every sacred idea challenged

5 Almost exactly 200 years ago today, a small new Oxford society held its inaugural debate. In the 1820s, the University's authorities prevented true freedom of speech and expression, so the young students who chafed under these restrictions created what would become the Oxford Union, the world's most famous debating society.

10 Since then, it has played host not only to presidents and prime ministers, but the likes of Einstein, Desmond Tutu and Mother Theresa. The Union's infamous vote against fighting for King and country was said to have given Hitler the confidence that Britain could be beaten, and members of the society elicited the first ever public apology for Watergate from Richard Nixon. The Union has hosted everyone from genocide deniers and terrorist sympathisers to Nobel prize recipients, Oscar winners and even, last week, a former porn star. All faced the same interrogation of their ideas and beliefs by members who appreciated the opportunity to scrutinise, challenge and hold to account everybody, no matter their rank or status.

15 That tradition is still alive and strong in the Oxford Union today, but so too is the pernicious threat to free speech and an open exchange of ideas. The cause of the controversy today? A murderer? A fascist? A communist? No. Try a professor of aesthetics whose crime is to believe that "many trans women are still males with male genitalia, many are sexually attracted to females, and they should not be in places where females undress or sleep in a completely unrestricted way".

20 These words were spoken by Professor Kathleen Stock, who has been invited to speak at the Oxford Union this term to talk about, inter alia, her being hounded out of her job at the University of Sussex after a prolonged campaign of abuse from students for expressing such heretical beliefs.

It is no secret that issues of gender and trans rights have become a heated topic in recent years, both in universities and increasingly in wider society. What better way, you might think, to learn more about this obviously complicated and sensitive issue, than inviting someone with extensive academic experience of these issues and challenging her in front of hundreds of students somewhere designed to allow free speech?

25 You would, apparently, be wrong to think such a bigoted and backward idea. That is the view of some in the Oxford Student Union (the boring, worthy cousin of the more fun debating society, that concerns itself with student "welfare"). In response to the crime of allowing a woman to discuss her ideas (which should be protected under the Equality Act 2010) and be challenged, the Union is threatened with losing its place at the annual "freshers fair".

30 In a wonderful coincidence, this is also the week where the Government's Freedom of Speech Bill has been accepted in the Lords and will become law. The tiny (but awfully loud) minority of students have provided a perfect first opportunity for the new post of "Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom" to uphold the principle that the answer to speech you don't like, is more speech. University is not supposed to be an ideological "safe space" where you come merely to be laden with debt and cancel culture, but somewhere that you can and should have every sacred idea challenged.

35 The Oxford Union is the perfect place to do that. When I was a student, I remember the magic feeling in the air on a Thursday night, when a member of the Cabinet would stand up and be faced with better and more incisive scrutiny than they would in the House of Commons, where there were no sacred cows and no offence was either given or taken.

40 In our 200th year, the Union has redoubled its commitment to that principle, and an urgent appeal to protect our independent premises is already underway to help prevent cancellations or boycotts from crippling that sacred mission. I've no idea what Professor Stock is planning to say, or how I will feel about it when she says it. It may be that I will disagree with her to my core, but as Voltaire didn't quite say: I will defend to the death her right to her right to say it.

Green zealots want to downgrade Britain in pursuit of ideology

Andrew Orłowski, *The Telegraph*, June 5th 2023

The Sixties was a decade of engineering miracles, but one of the most astonishing feats is forgotten today: the humble Lunar Orbiter spacecraft took the first picture of an Earthrise, and mapped 95pc of the Moon, including its dark side. Consider what was involved: no camera of the day could take photographs in conditions that were both so bright and so dark. Entirely new lenses and film processing had to be devised, in extreme conditions, on a craft that powered itself. The pictures had to be seen on earth, so the first space data network - a new internet if you like - had to be invented to beam it back. [...]

All this was created by small teams of engineers at two private companies: Eastman Kodak and Boeing. Apollo itself was overwhelmingly a private sector initiative, with contractors outnumbering federal employees by over 11 to 1. So it takes some chutzpah to argue the exact opposite: that this was a triumph of the Big State. Yet that's what the BBC's favourite economist, Professor Mariana Mazzucato, argues. Mazzucato explicitly evokes Apollo in her most recent book, *Mission Economy: A Moonshot Guide To Changing Capitalism*.

The professor argues that we'll get more innovation by making the state even bigger. Her book is the latest in a series of polemics that advocate a vastly expanded state, where private enterprise is subordinated to political goals. Or as she puts it, in the cold banalities of academic NGO-speak: "A purpose-driven partnership with the private sector." Mazzucato has powerful allies: Labour has vowed to put her ideas into practice. In his Green New Deal proposal of 2021, Ed Miliband promised state funding for a huge range of measures all designed to lessen our reliance on hydrocarbons, or make them more inconvenient and expensive. The list includes the usual suspects - like billions on insulation and more investment in today's primitive and expensive renewables - as well as support for "innovations" like hydrogen fuel and carbon capture. Spraying subsidies around this like is in effect forcing the private sector to bend to the state's will.

Now we know how Labour will pay for it all. Wary of the reaction that capsized Liz Truss' catastrophic administration, it will forgo the capital markets and plunder private pensions instead. Shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves has said she would not rule out forcing retirement funds to allocate some of their money towards fast-growing businesses - in other words, start-ups.

We should not be surprised by this, for seizure is very much in vogue with the corporate class too. In March, JP Morgan's chairman and chief executive Jamie Dimon argued that grabbing private assets was morally justified.

"We may even need to evoke eminent domain," he wrote to shareholders. "We simply are not getting the adequate investments fast enough for grid, solar, wind and pipeline initiatives."

And there you were, innocently thinking that the green energy transition was going gangbusters. Apparently not.

Spending money on new technology is seductive until we begin to audit where the spending is actually going. Alas, in the Mazzucato-Miliband era, we will not be upgrading anything. In each instance, a superior technology will be replaced with an inferior one. For example, Allam Cycle Carbon Capture, the current favourite, simply makes a clean and efficient gas plant more inefficient. As for hydrogen, the pesky physical nature of the atom ensures that everything from its generation, to its storage, to its transmission is suddenly much more difficult than conventional fuels. For example, converting a two engine turboprop from kerosene to hydrogen increases the engine weight from two to thirteen tonnes. Keeping the fuel safe at -257C adds further weight. Using hydrogen as a battery means only a third of the energy is returned after the conversion process. That means £100 Kwh of energy costs £300. Hydrogen is an anti-Midas "solution" that turns anything it touches from gold to manure. The list goes on: onshore wind is getting more expensive, not cheaper. Batteries are a mature technology, and given the high input costs, we can kiss making those goodbye too, along with the rest of our manufacturing sector.

"Seizing private property to facilitate the installation of energy systems that lack the reliability required by a modern economy ought to fail any basic moral or common sense test," writes Andrew Stuttaford in the *National Review*.

Mazzucato loves to paint herself as the sensible one, the only grown up in her room, and her critics as extreme ideologues. But this is pure projection. As Stuttaford points out, what she advocates is corporatism, a model pioneered by Mussolini in Italy between the wars. There, the state directed what activity took place and who got to do it. Why not go the whole hog and only permit 22 'Councils of Corporations' - instituted in 1926 - that can be brought under political control?

Then, as now, capitalism was in disrepute, in what Il Duce called the third and final "phase of decadence". It's hard not to look at the behaviour of venture capitalists during the decade of low interest rates and not sense some decadence, too. But at least they were spending other people's money. Tomorrow, it will be yours.

Yousaf is not the leader to repair rotten SNP

Alex Massie, *The Times*, May 9th 2023

[...] Devolution was not intended to be exciting. "Scottish solutions to Scottish problems" was an oblique acknowledgment that many of the arguments heard in the Scottish parliament would be humdrum to the point of banality. This is how it should be. Much political activity should be dull. If politics is exciting something is probably going wrong.

5 This is one lesson to be drawn from the past 15 years of Scottish and British politics. This has been a time of tumult and discord in which too many people have been compelled to devote too much attention to politics. Bookended by the crises of high finance in 2008 and the Covid years, these were years of identity-driven constitutional politics. The referendums on independence and Brexit were each once-in-a generation arguments that happened within two years of one another. Too much; much too much.

10 All eras end and this one has petered out in a state of communal exhaustion. Today's arguments may be worthy but they are not existential. This is a smaller, quieter period of recovery and recalibration. Rishi Sunak and Sir Keir Starmer are gratifyingly unexciting. Something similar may be said of the duel between Humza Yousaf and Anas Sarwar here in Scotland. With independence off the agenda for the foreseeable future, a period of comparative tranquillity beckons. But without the prospect of a fresh constitutional adventure, what can Yousaf plausibly offer?
15 Just as it is time for a change at Westminster – a notion confirmed by last week's local election results in England – so it is time for change at Holyrood. A Labour victory at the general election adds weight to the argument that the SNP's race is run in Edinburgh too.

For the first time in more than 20 years the nationalists are seriously divided. The Salmond and Sturgeon years were an age of impressive, if often unthinking, unity. That era is also no more. Backbenchers who rebel once may be
20 counted upon to rebel more frequently in the future. It is a taste that, once acquired, proves intoxicating. Yousaf must contend with a rebel caucus, mostly though not exclusively comprising MSPs from rural areas, many of whom backed Kate Forbes for leader.

Many of these MSPs are concerned by what they consider the undue influence of the Greens on the Scottish government. From gender recognition reforms to the deposit return scheme and highly protected marine areas,
25 these nationalists worry that the government has been captured by an unpopular Green agenda.

At the same time, however, Yousaf has signalled that it is time to reconsider the usefulness of universal benefits and state-sponsored handouts. When Johann Lamont, then leader of the Scottish Labour Party, asked similar questions a decade ago the nationalists acted as though she was Margaret Thatcher's stepdaughter, hellbent on persecuting
innocent Scots. Times change, I guess.

30 Even asking if it is OK to ask about such matters risks compromising Yousaf's credentials. The spectre of higher income tax rates coupled with less generous state-funded entitlements risks upsetting both the left and right wings of the SNP. And for what great purpose? These questions will not disappear but they should be understood as symptoms of a much greater, deeper inquiry: what is Yousaf for and what does the new first minister really believe in? The SNP has succeeded, in part, by being all things to all people. A party for Highland farmers and central belt social workers.
35 This was always a neat trick but one that requires a certain deftness to pull off.

There is no compelling reason to suppose the SNP will achieve material success in its third decade in power that it could not achieve in either of its first two. Yousaf's decision to hold an "anti-poverty summit" might have been well-intentioned but it was also laughable. After 16 years in office, the SNP thinks it is time to hold a meeting. Is that really
it?

40 At first minister's questions, Yousaf has wasted no time in deploring the opposition's fondness for, well, opposing the government. There is some pathos in the spectacle of a first minister pleading that opposition parties should really share their better ideas with him. Anyone who doubts that the SNP has run out of proposals should look at the evidence presented by the SNP itself.

Welcome, then, to an age of smaller politics. This should not be confused with easier politics, for most of the
45 problems evident in the economy, education and the NHS are of the intractable kind. What may be said with some conviction is that a party that has not addressed these in 16 years is not likely to offer the leadership required to address them now. That is Yousaf's real problem and the electorate knows it.

Just as it's time for change at Westminster, so it's time at Holyrood.

Ron DeSantis, Disney Are Headed Into Untested Legal Waters

Arian Campo-Flores and Jacob Gershman, The Wall Street Journal, May 30, 2023

5 In dueling lawsuits, Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Walt Disney Co. are locked in a legal battle over corporate power, governmental control and freedom of speech, without a clear-cut advantage for either side. The showdown is the culmination of a fight sparked by Disney's criticism of a DeSantis-backed law limiting the teaching of gender identity and sexual orientation in schools.

10 Disney is trying to convince a federal judge that it is the victim of a campaign of retribution waged by a governor intent on silencing dissent. In a competing lawsuit filed in state court, DeSantis's allies are arguing that Disney illegally sought to usurp government authority in its effort to have more control over its Florida operations.

The conflict raises complex questions about the scope of the First Amendment and constitutional protections of contracts, making it difficult to predict who will prevail, legal experts said.

15 "It's very easy to know that DeSantis is retaliating against Disney for its political views and political activity, but that doesn't mean it's easy to show it legally in a case," said Alexander Volokh, an Emory University law professor. DeSantis's office didn't respond to a request for comment.

20 The Republican presidential candidate signed laws in the past year meant to undermine Disney's control of the special tax district encompassing the Magic Kingdom and the rest of its theme parks near Orlando, after the company spoke out against a state measure that prohibits classroom instruction about gender identity and sexual orientation for children through third grade. He handpicked a new board to oversee the 39-square-mile tract of land, but before members were seated, Disney struck a last-minute deal with the existing board—which it had effectively controlled—that preserved some of its authority over the district. DeSantis's new board voted to declare void those last-minute agreements. Disney then sued DeSantis, members of his new board and other officials in federal court. The board then sued in state court in Orlando to enforce its declaration that the agreements were invalid.

25 Disney's chief charge against DeSantis is that the state trampled on its contractual rights when it voided Disney's agreement. The company cites a part of the Constitution that bars states from passing laws impairing the obligation of contracts. The Contract Clause, as it is known, was borne out of economic turmoil of the post-Revolutionary period when a wave of state debt-relief laws threatened the rights of creditors. In the 1800s it was among the Constitution's most litigated provisions. Its relevance receded starting in the 1930s when the Supreme Court gave states more leeway to override contracts.

30 "Since the New Deal, it's been very difficult to win a Contract Clause claim," said University of Florida law professor Michael Allan Wolf, a specialist in land-use planning and property law. The Supreme Court itself hasn't struck down a state law under the Contract Clause since 1978. At least one conservative justice, Neil Gorsuch, has favored a stricter interpretation of its protections.

35 Disney says the voiding of the agreement lacked any legitimate purpose, destroying "the foundation for billions of Disney's investment dollars and thousands of jobs."

The DeSantis-allied oversight board offered a preview of Florida's rebuttal in a report it approved. It disputed that Disney's agreement was actually a contract but characterized it as a product of "self-dealing" and an unenforceable surrendering of governmental authority.

40 Disney's First Amendment claim alleges the state retaliated against Disney for expressing a disfavored political viewpoint. The lawsuit brims with quotes from Republican legislators—and DeSantis's recently released book—suggesting the land-use legislation was political payback.

45 The idea of ousting the state's most iconic revenue engine was unthinkable just a few months earlier, the governor wrote, until Disney "crossed a line in its support of indoctrinating very young schoolchildren in woke gender identity politics."

Should the litigation ever reach the Supreme Court, DeSantis and his allies would confront a conservative Supreme Court that has disfavored government constraints on speech.

50 Legal scholars say that while the evidence around the governor's motives may be strong, DeSantis could point to judicial rulings discouraging courts from surmising the mind-set of legislators when they cast votes on otherwise valid laws. Disney also claims the state violated its constitutional rights by failing to compensate Disney for its loss of property rights. It is a particularly messy area of constitutional law; unless a plaintiff can show a severe destruction of property value, such claims generally fail.

Beware, DeSantis is as much a threat to America as Trump

By [Jennifer Rubin](#), November 21, 2022, *The Washington Post*

If you believe Florida's Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis would be a less dangerous presidential candidate than former president Donald Trump, take a moment to consider the recent ruling striking down DeSantis's "Stop WOKE Act." That opinion — as well as other rulings against his attempts to inhibit dissent — makes clear that DeSantis is just as willing as Trump to embrace the GOP's authoritarian element and use state power to punish his enemies.

To recap, the Stop WOKE Act — also perversely known as the Individual Freedom Act — is the Orwellian scheme that DeSantis signed into law earlier this year to muzzle the candid discussion of race and racism in classrooms and the workplace. As U.S. District Judge Mark E. Walker explains in his opinion, "The law officially bans professors from expressing disfavored viewpoints in university classrooms while permitting unfettered expression of the opposite viewpoints." He dryly continued, "Defendants argue that, under this Act, professors enjoy 'academic freedom' so long as they express only those viewpoints of which the State approves."

DeSantis, in attempting to curtail the discussion of political positions of which he disapproves, followed in a long line of authoritarians who have attempted to paint dissent as dangerous and, therefore, unprotected.

The law, for example, bars discussion of the concept that a person "by virtue of his or her race, color, national origin, or sex should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment to achieve diversity, equity, or inclusion." During oral arguments, when asked if this would bar professors from supporting affirmative action in classroom settings, attorneys for the state government answered, "Your Honor, yes."

Thus, Defendants assert the idea of affirmative action is so "repugnant" that instructors can no longer express approval of affirmative action as an idea worthy of merit during class instruction. ... What does this mean in practical terms? Assuming the University of Florida Levin College of Law decided to invite Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor to speak to a class of law students, she would be unable to offer this poignant reflection about her own lived experience, because it endorses affirmative action.

The law so blatantly violates the concept of free speech that one wonders if remedial constitutional education should be a requirement for Florida officeholders. Walker tore into DeSantis and the GOP legislature, holding that the law "is antithetical to academic freedom and has cast a leaden pall of orthodoxy over Florida's state universities." He declined to mince words: "In this case, the State of Florida lays the cornerstone of its own Ministry of Truth under the guise of the Individual Freedom Act, declaring which viewpoints shall be orthodox and which shall be verboten in its university classrooms," he wrote. "The First Amendment does not permit the State of Florida to muzzle its university professors, impose its own orthodoxy of viewpoints, and cast us all into the dark."

That is the essence of authoritarianism. DeSantis's willingness to back such a monstrous violation of free expression should send up warning flags about his commitment to uphold the Constitution. Walker is the same judge who struck down another DeSantis assault on the First Amendment — his vague anti-riot law to quell demonstrations. In that opinion, Walker recalled, "In 1956 and 1961, Florida's anti-riot laws were used to suppress activities threatening the state's Jim Crow status quo." DeSantis apparently considered such efforts commendable.

"What's past is prologue," Walker wrote. "Now this Court is faced with a new definition of 'riot' — one that the Florida Legislature created following a summer of nationwide protest for racial justice, against police violence and the murder of George Floyd and many other people of color, and in support of the powerful statement that Black lives matter." He added, "The question before this Court is whether the new definition is constitutional." Spoiler alert: It's not, just as Jim Crow-era laws to prevent civil rights demonstrations were not constitutional.

DeSantis seems to have no fondness for the basic rights our Constitution confers on Americans. Instead, he delights in using state power to demonstrate his contempt for the expression of views he dislikes. This forms the core of his political brand, underscored by his "don't say gay" law, his statute banning "critical race theory" in schools and his firing of a county prosecutor who criticized his abortion policies. DeSantis has also regularly flexed his power as governor: excluding media from events, taking public proceedings behind closed doors and exacting revenge on supposedly woke corporations such as Disney. DeSantis's contempt for dissent and his crackdown on critics should not be discounted. This is the profile of a constitutional ignoramus, a bully and a strongman. Voters should be forewarned.

The right exploits Nashville shooting to escalate anti-trans rhetoric

Fenit Nirappil, 30 March 2023, *The Washington Post*

5 Conservative commentators and Republican politicians unleashed a new wave of anti-trans rhetoric following Monday's shooting at a Nashville Christian school that killed six people, escalating a broader backlash to the rising visibility of transgender people in public life. The attempts on the right to connect violence to transgender people come even though transgender people are rarely the perpetrators of mass shootings, which are overwhelmingly carried out by cisgender men, according to criminal justice experts. And trans people are more likely to be victims of violence than cisgender people, multiple studies have shown.

10 In Nashville, the shooter's gender identity and motive remain unclear: police initially said the shooter Audrey Hale was a 28-year-old woman, and then later said Hale was transgender, citing a social media profile in which Hale used masculine pronouns. The Post has not yet confirmed how Hale identified.

15 Nevertheless, Fox News host Tucker Carlson featured a photo of the shooter superimposed with the words "Trans Killer" on his Tuesday show. The chyron read: "We are witnessing the rise of trans violence." Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) speculated on Twitter, as well as during a congressional hearing Wednesday, that hormone treatment may have played a role in the shooting, even though there is no evidence the shooter was on hormone therapy.

20 "This has fit into their existing narrative presenting trans people as dangerous criminals, presenting gender affirming care as inherently dangerous, and it's very alarming to see them turn this up to 11," said Ari Drennen, a trans woman who monitors anti-trans rhetoric in conservative media as LGBTQ program director for Media Matters of America, a liberal watchdog group. "I didn't really think it was possible to escalate from implying we are pedophiles, but we are seeing this escalate into people calling trans people violent terrorists."

25 At least 38 transgender people were killed last year and 50 were slain in 2021, according to tracking by the Human Rights Campaign. As #TransTerrorism trends on Twitter this week, LGBTQ advocates expressed concerns that anti-trans rhetoric in the wake of the Nashville shooting, which killed three children, will buoy a blitz of anti-trans bills in state legislatures to restrict access to gender-affirming medical care for both minors and adults. (...)

30 While appearing Tuesday on Laura Ingraham's prime time show on Fox News to discuss the Nashville shooting and "hate crimes" against Christians, Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) criticized gender affirming care as mutilating children, adding: "All of this goes back to the fact, Laura, that we've got to get the facts here in this shooting, we've got to prevent this from happening again, we've got to tell the truth about what happened in Nashville."

35 Others argued that the public focus should be on trans people, rather than guns. Donald Trump Jr. on Monday night tweeted: "maybe, rather than talking about guns we should be talking about lunatics pushing their gender affirming bulls--- on our kids?" He followed up with a Tuesday tweet that said "there's a clear epidemic of trans/non-binary mass shooters." The Washington Post's Fact Checker found no epidemic of transgender mass shooters and gave Trump's claim four Pinnochios.

40 Conservative commentator Matt Walsh, one of the most fervent anti-trans activists on the right, called the "gender ideology movement" the "most hateful and violent movement in America" on a Wednesday podcast episode entitled "Christian children murdered by trans mass shooter." On Monday night he tweeted that "left wing trans extremists are violent, dangerous people."

45 Since 2006, 96 percent of 340 mass killings involving a single shooter were committed by men, according to a Washington Post analysis of a database maintained by Northeastern University, the Associated Press and USA Today. "This is a cisgender male phenomenon, by and large," said Eric Madfis, an associate professor of criminal justice at the University of Washington at Tacoma, who has studied the gender dynamics of school shootings. (...) Studies show transgender people are disproportionately likely to be victims of violence.

Transgender people are four times more likely than cisgender people to be the victims of crimes including rape, sexual assault, and aggravated or simple assault, according to the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law.

“Biden’s plan to 'do something' on guns is unserious”

Katie Pointer Baney, *Washington Examiner*, June 05, 2023,

5 In a recent op-ed published in *USA Today*, President Joe Biden sought to assure the public that he’s taking real steps to prevent more deaths at the hands of violent criminals with guns. The piece accompanied what Biden calls “meaningful executive action,” which included an executive order released earlier this month that will do nothing but set the federal bureaucracy’s sights on law-abiding Americans and responsible gun owners.

10 The president’s words, and the gun control policies pushed by his allies in Congress, do not represent a serious plan to protect innocent lives or make American communities safer. When you put their proposals under the slightest bit of scrutiny, they don’t hold water. What you’re left with are chants and expressions that may move people’s emotions, but won’t actually protect innocent people at the mall or children in their classrooms. Perhaps that’s why a recent poll found that approval of the president’s gun policy hit an all-time low of 31%.

15 Biden’s marquee proposal to ban so-called “assault weapons” is perhaps the best example of his ineffective gun control policies. Not only are most of its supporters unable to define the term “assault weapon,” including Biden’s own Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) director, but there’s no evidence that such a ban would actually reduce violent crime. Even generous assessments of the 1994 crime bill, which banned certain types of semi-automatic rifles for a decade, show it had little impact on reducing crime or gun deaths.

20 The deadliest school shooting in our nation’s history, for example, at Virginia Tech in 2007, was committed by a deranged man with two handguns. Furthermore, according to a Pew Research Center analysis from 2020, “rifles — the category that includes guns sometimes referred to as ‘assault weapons’ — were involved in 3% of firearm murders” that year. In other words, so-called assault weapons are rarely used in the acts of mass violence that Biden hopes to address. And yet, a ban on them is the centerpiece of the Biden administration’s plan. Biden’s policies are ineffective, more unpopular than ever, and will never pass through Congress. It’s time to focus on real, achievable solutions.

25 Let’s look specifically at securing schools. The most common-sense, attainable solutions to protect schoolchildren have nothing at all to do with firearms policy, nor do they require restricting the rights of law-abiding gun owners. First and foremost, we need to expand the pool of eligible school resource officers (SROs). While requirements vary from state to state, there are tight restrictions on who can and can’t serve as an armed SRO. In Wisconsin, for example, the scope is limited to current and former law enforcement officers who meet strict requirements. That’s a very small pool of people. At minimum, we should extend eligibility to include veterans and private security contractors. Armed and trained SROs provide the strongest deterrent against criminals dead set on violence.

30 Allowing qualified teachers to carry concealed firearms in the classroom is another proposal that should be taken seriously but with careful consideration for teachers’ first priority: their students. In the event of a crisis, teachers should be focused on getting their students to safety and should only be a last line of defense. That’s why staffing more SROs in our schools is the top priority.

35 On top of that, states and localities should be providing every school with resources to install safety glass so intruders can’t gain entry; equip classroom doors so they can be closed and locked from the inside; and add panic buttons or similar security systems for alerting law enforcement. These are undetectable but potentially lifesaving measures to protect schools that don’t require chipping away at Americans’ constitutional rights.

40 Ultimately, the preferred gun control policies of the Biden administration and its allies have no limiting principle. Biden himself has repeatedly said that the Second Amendment is “not absolute.” So, despite what they may say, they would not stop at an “assault weapons” ban, but would keep going until no American can lawfully defend themselves or their loved ones with a firearm. This approach will not protect schoolchildren, make communities safer, or save lives. It will only punish the millions of responsible gun owners across the country and empower criminals, who by definition don’t follow the law.

45 Biden wants lawmakers to “do something” to prevent more tragic killings by armed criminals. But when your “something” favors ineffective, unpopular, and unconstitutional bans and ignores sensible security enhancements to schools or other public places, then your plea is unserious. Americans see through it, and they deserve better.