

The Fortnightly Rant

The Big Flip-Out

Let's see...which of the current uncontrolled catastrophes is most Rant-worthy? So many to choose from....

Oh hell—why decide? Why not select “All of the above”?

No, that won't work, either. Our newsroom operating system, such as it is, can't begin to track all the known threats: instability in both the climate and the global economy; the extinction of a wide variety of species, newspapers included; the laughable inadequacy of our killer asteroid detection system; the complete absence of a killer asteroid response; the emergence of the Covid-19 virus.... Creating such a system would probably be of no use, anyway—the one that gets us will most likely be the one we don't see coming!

Ah, well.... No one gets out of this life alive, as we all know, and as Werner Twertzog reminds us. So, let's just exercise our will and proceed as if we'll live forever. After all—we have, so far!

Earlier this month, the journal *Conservation Biology* published a cheery little item headlined “Scientists' warning to humanity on insect extinctions.” Apparently half a million insect species may be doomed. Humans are said to be the primary cause, through encroachment on their habitat and degradation of it. Another threat mentioned: insecticides. There's a shocker.

In a chilling bit of symmetry, if we kill off the bees, we're next because one-third of our global food supply depends on bees for pollination. Not to anthropomorphize or anything, but a recent story suggests that a certain variety of *Apis mellifera* may be taking this matter into its own ovipositors.

On February 22nd, someone in Pasadena called 911 over a single bee

sting—which will sound silly only to those unfamiliar with anaphylactic shock. When paramedics arrived on the scene they were attacked by a swarm of 40,000 Africanized killer bees. Five people were hospitalized.

In other random bug news, it seems that two years ago a succession of storms in the Empty Quarter of the Arabian Peninsula turned that dry and desolate region into a locust incubator. Now they've hatched, they're hungry, and they're in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia, where people were already vulnerable to food shortages. Keith Cressman, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization's Senior Locust Forecasting Officer, told NPR that a swarm of locusts the size of Manhattan can eat, in a single day, as much food as everyone in New York and California combined.

Of course, killer bees and locusts present localized threats and are visible to the naked eye. Another, far smaller bug has most of us concerned at the moment.

Monday, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the gloriously-named and magnificently-titled Director-General of the World Health Organization, was quoted on NPR saying, “Does this virus have pandemic potential? Absolutely it has. Are we there yet from our assessment? Not yet.”

Tuesday, the CDC advised that “current global circumstances suggest it is likely that this virus will cause a pandemic.” Why not? It's already caused a panic.

As a journalistic enterprise, it is our sworn duty only to report what has actually happened, in an absolutely objective manner. That said, we'll predict this: nothing good will come from Covid-19, nothing except this: President Trump, around whom, in his own mind, the entire



[A note about the artwork: The cartoon above may seem familiar to readers with long memories. Mike Dater, our *Starving Artist*, drew it more than three years ago, as the date in the corner shows. At the time, the subject was merely the President-Elect, and we could only surmise with trep-

idation what horrors might await us. Earlier this month, when President Trump and William Barr—his personal Roy Cohn—hung out a new shingle over the entrance to the Justice Department, reading “Mar-a-Lago Social Club,” we decided that a re-run was in order.—The Ed.]

universe revolves, has made the Dow a central pillar of his re-election campaign. He acts like he's got a one-way dial on his desk that nudges the number up. A week ago the Dow looked pretty good—for people with fat stock portfolios. People working three jobs, without health insurance? They should get another job.

Words mean nothing to *El Presidente*, of course, but for the record, in November, 2012, he tweeted, “If the Dow drops 1,000 in two days the President should be impeached immediately.” Between last Friday and yesterday morning, the Dow had dropped more than 2,700 points.

Let us all now bow our heads and give thanks to Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and capitalism, through whose good graces the global econ-

omy was reconfigured around China, which is run by a nominally-communistic autocracy.

Trump has far less control over the stock market than he thinks, of course. Unfortunately, he has already had a considerable amount of control over our response to Covid-19—and not in a good way.

Independent journalist Judd Legum reported Tuesday that in 2018, Trump fired Rear Adm. [Ret.] Tim Ziemer, the National Security Council's Senior Director of Global Health Security. Regarded as “one of the most quietly effective leaders in public health,” he was not replaced. Then Trump eliminated the NSC's entire global health security unit. Tom Bossert, Ziemer's counterpart at the Department of Homeland Security, was also dismissed, along

with his team.

“In addition to firing experts,” Legum wrote, “Trump also slashed funding for the CDC's epidemic prevention activities, forcing the agency to end its work in 39 out of 49 countries.”

“One of the countries where the CDC had to end its work? China.”

Not to worry, though. Trump says we'll have a vaccine for “Caronavirus” soon. Health experts say a year would be more likely, but hey—they're not President.

Better start saving up, Bunky. HHS Secretary Alex Azar won't promise you'll be able to afford it. “[W]e can't control that price,” said the former head of Eli Lilly, “because we need the private sector to invest.... Price controls won't get us there.”

The Alleged News®

Red Scare 2020

With Iowa, New Hampshire, and Nevada out of the way, the Democratic Primary campaign is taking shape; Lord, we hope our heart can take it. We characterized this job, in the Clinton era, as “being strapped in the cheap seats, watching the glacier races.” Well, the glaciers are racing now, and politics are finally about something. It's thrilling—by which we mean terrifying.

Iowa's results were ambiguous, but important things were on full display: the impracticality of caucuses, the brazenness of a certain candidate, and the willingness of the corporate media to put its fat thumb on the scales when faced with a candidate who dares to call them out. Headline after headline called Buttigieg the winner, based on the ex-corporate consultant's bold, baseless assertion. Subheads fol-

lowed, breathlessly covering the race for third place. The actual winner, Sanders, was typically referenced in the third paragraph.

New Hampshire, true to form, brought clarity: Sanders won, with enough of a margin to pre-empt any quibbling. Again, though, much of the coverage was devoted to who won second place, and third. That was matter of some import, to be sure. An ex-Vice President finishing fourth was news, as was the third-place finish of a Senator from the state next door. But even people who one would think had passed math in high school made much of the fact that Sanders' share of the vote had dropped since 2016—when he had just one opponent, rather than ten.

Nevada voters had eleven days to digest the post-New Hampshire landscape, and one day to react to a

report in the *Washington Post*, quoting “people familiar with the matter,” saying “Russia is attempting to help” Sanders' campaign.

“It is not clear what form that Russian assistance has taken,” the *Post* “reported.” Veteran foreign affairs journalist Joe Lauria noted, “That would tell any traditional news editor that there was no story until it [the form of that assistance] is known.” The *Post* is owned by billionaire Jeff Bezos, owner of Amazon, which pays no income taxes and is therefore an occasional target for Sanders' rhetoric.*

The leadership of Nevada's Culinary Workers Union—which one could otherwise imagine backing Sanders—snubbed him and rejected his Medicare for All, swearing to

* Elements of the editorial team consider this paragraph to be bullshit.—The Ed.

defend its existing health care program. Union members ignored their leadership and went for Sanders—as did a lot of other Nevadans. Sanders ended up with double the vote count of his closest rival, Biden.

It was a shock for many, none more so than Chris Matthews. MSNBC's pre-eminent dispenser of conventional wisdom and homages to Tip O'Neill compared Sanders' victory to Hitler's blitzkrieg defeat of France in 1940.

Mike Casca, Sanders' director of communications, responded, with blithe disregard for capitalization and punctuation, “never thought part of my job would be pleading with a national news network to stop likening the campaign of a Jewish presidential candidate whose family was wiped out by the nazis to the third reich. but here we are.”

As readers may have heard by now, Mike Bloomberg, former Republican—as in G.O.P.—Governor of New York City, would also like to become the Democratic nominee for President. He appears to have calculated that the problem of his previous party affiliation is counter-balanced by his net worth, which is in the vicinity of \$60 billion. With wealth like that it's hardly a wonder that, rather than spending his time panhandling for chump change, he chose to fund his own campaign. His lack of individual donors, though, precluded his participation in Democratic debates.

Conveniently for Mike, the Democratic National Committee [DNC] dropped that rule in Jan-

The Alleged News®

from page one

uary, a couple of months after he wrote a series of checks to the DNC and state Democratic parties totaling well over a million bucks.

This pay-to-play arrangement was denied by the party, studiously ignored by most of the media, and obvious to people paying attention. Its sordid nature served only to buttress Sanders' argument. Listening to Tuesday night's debate, many believed Bloomberg had bought not just a podium, but a claque; whenever Bernie brought up Bloomberg's support from billionaires, he got a round of boos. This suspicion was bolstered by a report from CBS affiliate WCSC saying tickets had been sold at prices ranging from \$1,700 to \$3,500. *Vox* published a story trying to explain how tickets were allocated; it read like an instruction manual for the Iowa caucus app.

Sanders' detractors are freaking out because they fear he would be another George McGovern. The matchups are hardly comparable, though. In 1972, the economy was

well into recovery from a recession, and Nixon was enjoying a 25 point lead in the polls. With the current costs of housing, health care, child care, and college, hardly anyone feels secure. Sanders, who puts these issues front and center, polls better against Trump than any of the other Democrats.

After three contests, Sanders is clearly the man to beat. He must be—everyone is beating on him, from his Democratic rivals, to allegedly neutral news media, to out-of-office politicians, to political operatives from campaigns past.

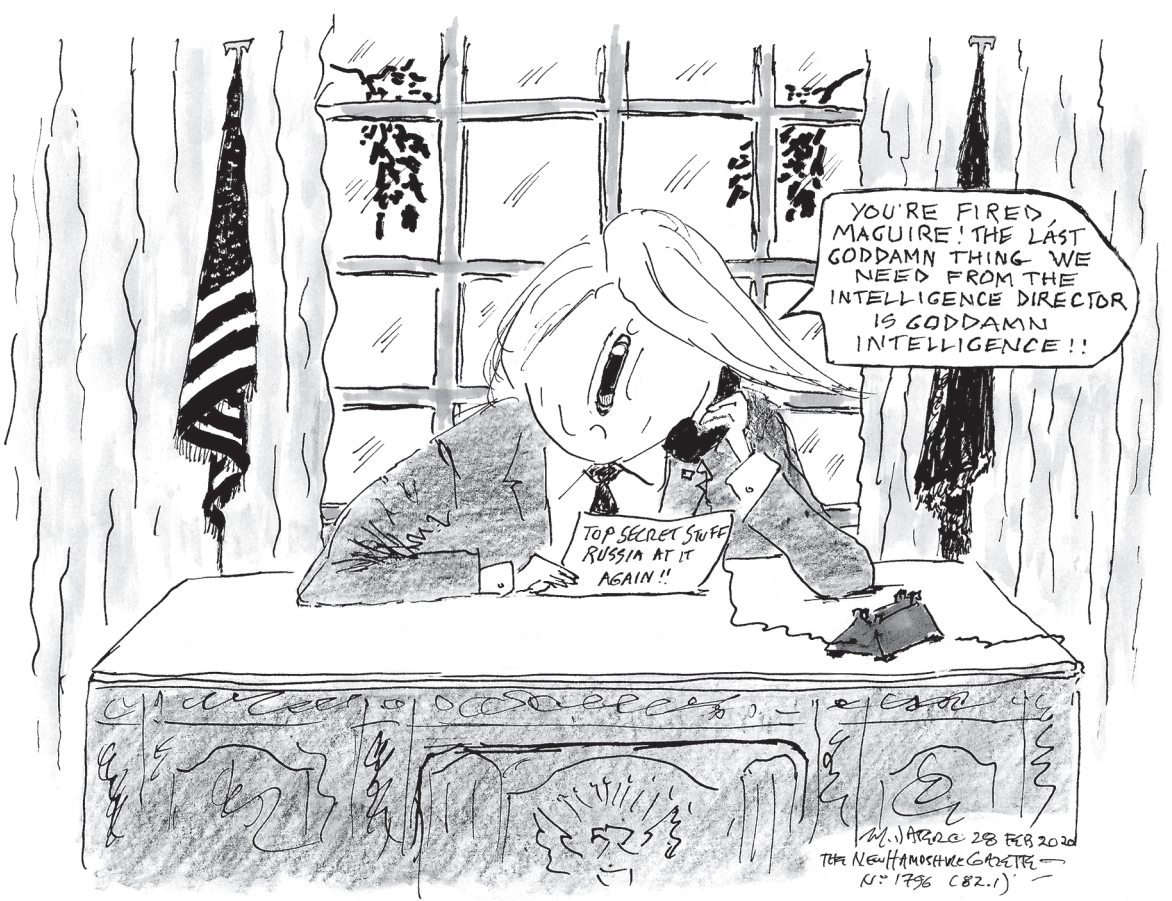
And yet he rises.

He has managed, as he promised, to create a movement. He was able to do so by using something the other candidates could not see, or dared not use: the simple truth of where we are today.

—==—

The First Assassination Coverup?

The *Boston Globe* of February 17th contained that rare item, a column by Jeff Jacoby worth reading. It lamented the July 9, 1850 death of Zachary Taylor, our 12th President, "from a sudden attack of gastroenteritis, brought on by consuming a



All winter, regardless of the weather, people have been gathering at 3:00 every Sunday afternoon to register their protest against the Administration. A sign from this Sunday: "Fake President, Real Authoritarian." It being much nicer than usual, a couple of counter-protestors showed up. One wonders what Tom Paine, author of *The American Crisis*, would think.

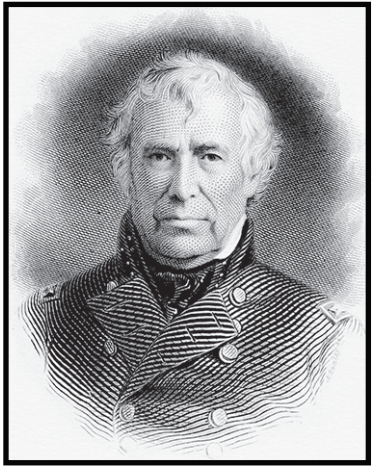
copious amount of cherries and iced milk on a blisteringly fetid Washington day."

Jacoby calls Taylor "a Southerner with Northern principles. On the burning issue of the day, he weighed in forthrightly. Taylor assured anti-slavery activists that there would be no expansion of slavery, and bluntly warned Southern lawmakers who threatened to secede: 'If it becomes necessary I'll take command of the army myself,' he said. 'I will hang you with less reluctance than I hanged deserters and spies in Mexico.'"

That's a pretty lively line, coming from a sitting President. Thinking it might belong on page eight, we plunged headfirst, as is our wont, into the digital rabbit hole. We have not yet found the exact date when a sitting President threatened to hang some sitting Congressmen, but we did find something equally intriguing.

Readers may recall that Taylor's remains were exhumed for forensic

examination in 1991. That unusual event was prompted by a 141 year-old question: was Taylor poisoned by pro-slavery Southerners?



President Zachary Taylor

The exhumation was controversial from the start. Clara Rising, a writer and former professor, persuaded Taylor's closest living relative to agree to the procedure. Many others, though, were appalled. Mi-

chael Parenti, in an obscure 1998 monograph titled, "The Strange Death of President Zachary Taylor: A case study in the manufacture of mainstream history," cites the *New York Times*, *The New Republic*, and Charles Krauthammer all denouncing Rising.

The Kentucky State medical examiner announced nine days later that, though some arsenic was found, the amount was insufficient to have caused Taylor's death.

"Having never known cherries and milk to be fatal," Parenti wrote, "I decided to investigate the matter more closely."

Closely, indeed. Parenti seems to have studied innumerable first-hand accounts of witnesses to Taylor's last days. He familiarized himself with the considerable differences between the symptoms of chronic and acute arsenic poisoning.

Most tellingly, he spoke with medical experts about the proper lab procedures for testing hair and

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Sometimes Old is Good

The Fechheimer Building, one of the finest examples of a cast-iron facade in Portland, Oregon, was built in 1885. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, it was restored in 1981 by Russell Fellows Properties, the principals of which enjoy a subscription to this newspaper.

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— Joe Keefe

nail samples. Acute arsenic poisoning, which kills in days, can only be found by sectional testing of the very base of the sample. In Taylor's case, entire hairs and nails were tested, thereby diluting the result.

In short, the testing was rubbish, and cannot be relied upon. The "cherries and milk" explanation of Taylor's death is rubbish, also—yet it is widely accepted as gospel. The Kentucky Medical Examiner said "case closed," though, so that is that.

Parenti wrote in 1998 that, with a "press that vigilantly reassures us that all is basically well with political life in America...an empirical investigation of the actual facts does not stand a chance."

One has to hope that, if nothing else, the past 22 years have taught us to be a little more skeptical.

—==—
R.I.P., Gagland

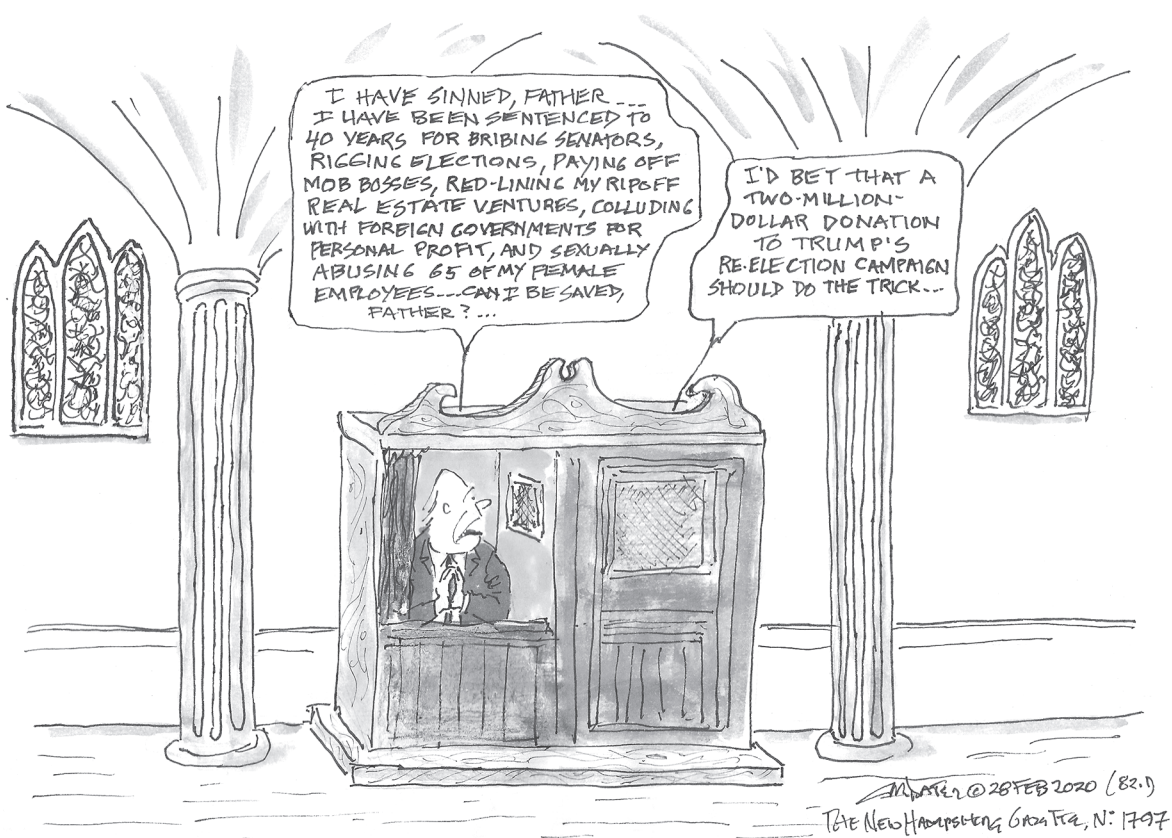
Larry Garland, much-loved piano player and vocalist at the Press Room for about forty years, died on February 12th.

The photo of Larry, below, was taken by Joe Stevens, legendary photographer of rock musicians and

freelance raconteur, who sent us this remembrance:

"I called him Gagland," Joe wrote, "cause he was an humorous geezer. [I] knew his mum Dorothea; she did the *New York Times* crossword every day, played an upright [piano], spoke French. He had a bike repair shop in the p.r. [Press Room] basement...would replace some honey's two-wheeler seat, inflate the tyres [sic], and pop upstairs for a jazz session for the punters [customers of a commercial establishment]."

Jay Smith, owner of the Press Room and at one time a City Councilor, owned a house on Sheafe Street where Joe once lived. "[Jay] had me do my first-ever photo to exhibit on the brick wall of his nightclub. He wanted a great mix from my collection, so I framed 35 11x14's of the Sex Pistols, Theltonious Monk's funeral, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Democrat of New York, and Mahalia Jackson. Jay invited Mayor Eileen Foley for the opening. The joint was packed. Smith bought the Moynihan, Foley got hammered, I paid my bar tab from the pix sales, and Gagland



played 'till the wee, small hours of the morning... R.I.P., Gagland."

—==—
The Black Heritage Trail Presents a Dialogue on Education and Diversity

This Sunday, the Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire (BHT-NH) will host a lecture and community dialogue on the topic of "Racism without Racists: Educating Generations Past & Future" exploring how education shapes and reinforces cultural expectations and norms, and the challenges this poses for students whose beliefs are still developing.

The panelists, Kabria Baumgartner, Mabelle Barnette, Liz Canada, and Elizabeth Dubrulle, will explore how the educational system can pose significant challenges for students outside the dominant culture. Panelists will discuss the historical challenges that educational institutions have faced in teaching diverse student groups and will also examine ways to create parity and positive learning experiences for all.

The 2020 Tea Talk Series, entitled

"What's Belief Got to Do with it?" is taking a deeper look at the role of belief as a powerful component of human nature and the ways in which beliefs shape our lives and societies. Through panel presentations and shared dialogue, these Sunday afternoon discussions investigate how beliefs form personal convictions and our moral framework, and explore how understanding our own belief systems can guide us to strive for justice, equality and inclusion.

The Winter Tea Talk Series, presented by the Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire in partnership with the Portsmouth Public Library and Temple Israel, is a series of participatory lectures related to New Hampshire's Black history and African American culture.

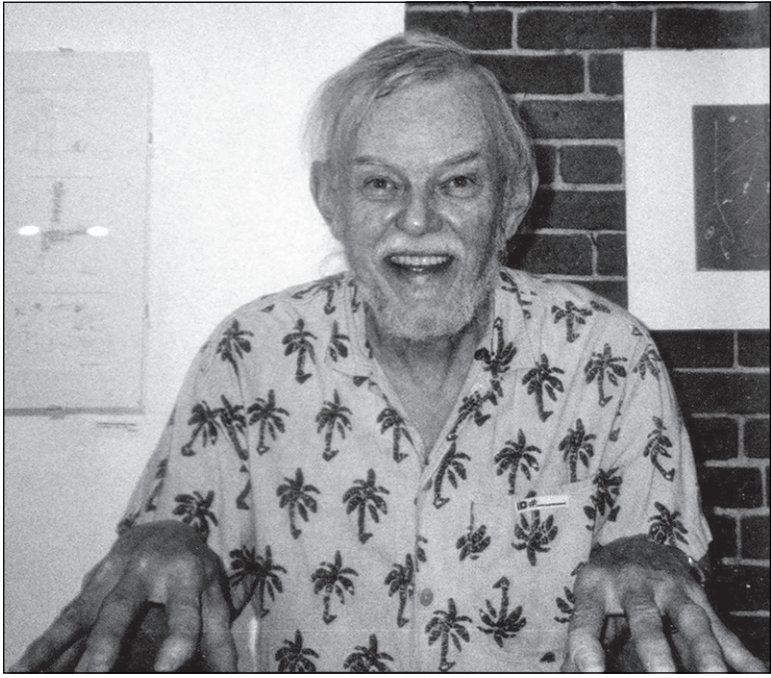
For more information and the full series schedule, please visit: blackheritagetrailnh.org/tea-talks.

The Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire works to open hearts and minds for a deeper understanding of who we are as a collective and to recognize that we share a unique-

ly American heritage. Building on the success of the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail that started more than two decades ago, the new statewide Black Heritage Trail connects the stories of New Hampshire's African heritage by documenting and making visible many of the historic sites that testify to this rich history.

Guided tours and public programs, along with educational materials and teacher workshops, will continue to be developed by the Black Heritage Trail to promote awareness of African-American culture and to honor all the people of African descent whose names may not have been included in previous town histories. The Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire provides a variety of learning experiences for adults and children. Offerings include school programs, guided tours, traveling programs, lectures, and workshops.

The Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire is an independent, non-profit organization. The organization is a registered 501c 3 nonprofit.



Larry Garland, piano player and vocalist every Tuesday night at the Press Room for nearly forty years, died on February 12th. Hot shot photographer Joe Stevens, aka Captain Snaps, gave us permission to use this photo of Larry, and sent us a remembrance, above.

Murph's Fortnightly Quote

"On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their heart's desire at last, and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron."

— H. L. Mencken (1880-1956) journalist, satirist

"Most people think of politics as its own unique public institution governed by impartial laws dating back to the founders. Not so. It is, in fact, an industry—most of whose key players are private, gain-seeking organizations."

— Katherine Gehl, member of the Board of Directors of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation under President Barack Obama, and Professor Michael Porter, Harvard Business School.

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We are pleased to announce that, thanks to volunteer distributors, this newspaper can now be found at the following locations:

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Hanover Public Library, 13 South St.

Keene:

Keene Public Library, 60 Winter St.

Lebanon:

Lebanon Public Library, 9 E. Park St.

Middle Class Tax Cuts
To the Editor:
Watch out, here comes President Trump promoting “middle class tax cuts” in the form of tax incentives for those who buy stocks. Then, right behind him comes Bill O'Reilly, hosting the “Great American Wealth Project.” Guess who'll wind up with the wealth.

America's smart money knows the economy is cyclic and that “corrections” (read recessions) are inevitable. They also know the student loan bubble and world-market volatility could blow up the market overnight in a crash dwarfing 2008. So, if you're rich and wish to stay rich, your best bet is to sell off holdings now, while the market is sky high.

But selling stock when the market is high isn't easy. We need suckers. So, here comes the Trump Administration seducing you to buy in “high” by dangling tax breaks. With luck, the influx of buyers will drive stock prices even higher and make the fat cats even richer. Meanwhile, Trump will be braying, “Hey, look at the economy, the market is soaring out of sight. I truly am a financial genius!”

Wrong.
Trump and his cronies are crooks promulgating a scheme to steal your money. When the bottom falls out, guess who'll be holding the bag.

Rick Littlefield
Barrington, N.H.
Rick:
Um... the usual victims?
For the record, we received this letter more than a week prior to Wall Street's latest episode of dyspepsia.
The Editor

~~~~~  
**Betraying the Republic**  
Dear Sir:  
A recent poll by Quinnipiac University found that voters in the key battleground states of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin, who saw the economy as the most important issue, favored Donald Trump by a significant margin versus those who see issues such as health care, the environment and education as top concerns. This is most depressing and concerning on two levels.

First, Donald Trump does not deserve all the credit people give him for the current economic conditions. According to *Forbes* (February 20th), during the last three years of the Obama administration, 8.1 million jobs were created, versus 6.5 million under Trump. During the Obama administration, the Dow Jones stock index increased 150 percent, or 50 percent over initial value, and the S&P 500 stock index rose 56 percent. Under Trump the Dow has risen 136 percent, or 36 percent over initial value, and the S&P by 34 percent. (*Fortune*, November 19th). Under Obama the GDP rose on average two percent, while under Trump, 2.5 percent, not the four percent he promised. Mr. Trump is operating under an economy he inherited that was steadily improving, while Obama inherited an economy on the brink of a depression.

The second reason to be depressed and concerned, in my opinion, is much more troubling than Trump getting undue credit for the economy. Even if we were to give full credit for the current economic conditions to Trump, should that override concerns regarding corruption, dignity, integrity, honesty, fairness, and humanity? What does it say about a society that would ignore, excuse, deny, or otherwise overlook an individual who has disgraced the office he holds, destroyed almost all constitutional and behavioral norms, and oversees a lawless administration, simply because our 401K is doing well? Are we any better than Judas Iscariot who betrayed for 30 pieces of silver? Are we saying that we are willing to betray our Democratic Republic, our constitution, our children's and grandchildren's future, our rule of law and our self respect for our own 30 pieces of silver we think Trump has given us?

America is one election away from the potential destruction of the Republic that our founders and past generations nurtured, died for, and passed on to us to do the same for our successors. Let us hope that selfishness, greed and undeserving credit do not replace the basic values of what America once stood for. There may be no “do overs”



after November 3, 2020 To paraphrase Ben Franklin, we gave you a Republic, if you can keep it.

Rich DiPentima, LTC, USAF, Ret.  
Portsmouth, N.H.  
Rick:  
*For some reason, your question about Judas Iscariot brought to mind the United States Senate.*  
The Editor

~~~~~  
“It is a matter of course and of absolute necessity to the conduct of business, that any discretionary businessman must be free to deal or not to deal in any given case; to limit or withhold the equipment under his control, without reservation. Business discretion and business strategy, in fact, has no other means by to work out its aims. So that, in effect, all business sagacity reduces itself in the last analysis to judicious use of sabotage.”

—Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929)
An Inquiry Into the Nature of Peace, and the Terms of Its Perpetuation (1917)

~~~~~  
**Should the Police Benevolent Association Be Endorsing Trump?**

To the Editor:  
Donald Trump is the most lawless president in U.S. history. He has attacked defenders of law and order at every turn. He has attacked any law enforcement official or agency that points out his illegal activity: the FBI, members of the Department of Justice, Judges. He is also the most untruthful president in history: the *Washington Post* has documented more than 16,000 lies. He is also a crook. For example, the millions he had to pay back for the fraudulent Trump University, his veterans scam and his fake Trump charity.

So, it was truly disturbing to see that the New England Police Benevolent Association was endorsing this man. As the first-line protectors of public peace, the arbiters of the laws, such an endorsement goes against everything

police are supposed to stand for!

It is not at all clear how many or what percentage of New England or New Hampshire police supported the endorsement. In his intemperate comments attacking Portsmouth Police Commission chair Joe Onosko, the executive director of the Benevolent Association, Jerry Flynn obfuscated this information. I still have high hopes that a large number of police, perhaps a majority, opposed this endorsement.

The Portsmouth Police Department has gone through some difficult times in the last few years and has emerged stronger for it. Mr. Onosko has been an important part of that process. Mr. Flynn's histrionic remarks, intemperate attacks on our elected Police Commissioner and threats to Portsmouth businesses, demean police officers everywhere.

Michael Frandzel  
Portsmouth, N.H.  
Michael  
*We'll second that.*  
The Editor

~~~~~  
Will a Return to Norms Save Us?

To the Editor:
Since our government was founded there has always been a tension between norms and statutes, that is, individual freedom, (how much we can depend on human decency, morality and good will to uphold and defend our ideals), vs government intervention, (what laws and regulations do we need to control behavior which threatens the common good and our democracy.)

The writers of the Constitution were successful in finding a balance which sustained our democracy for almost 250 years. Its success depended upon leaders with principles who followed the commonly accepted norms,

and/or were restrained by the conventions, traditions and expectations of the political process.

Like any other authoritarian personality, Donald Trump has no commitment to democratic rules. Exploiting legal loopholes for his own benefit has been the guiding principal of his life. Like a spoiled child he says, “I can do anything I want!” and in the case of the Department of Justice, he is absolutely right. There are no laws prohibiting him from using the Department to punish his enemies, protect his cronies and consolidate his power.

Having a con man with no scruples and an insatiable need for power and adulation occupying the presidency was the founding fathers worst nightmare. It is the reality we live in today.

Because Trump controls the Republican Party with promises of glory combined with threats and fear, there is only one way to end this madness. Returning to sanity and respect for norms to maintain our fragile democracy will be up to the voters in November.

Cynthia Muse
Rye, N.H.
Cynthia:
A return to certain norms of yesteryear would certainly be reassuring on some level. We can't help but recall, though, that some of those norms—silence in the presence of corrupt and fraudulent authority, rigid enforcement of racist property rights, &c., &c.—paved the way to the present day.
The Editor

~~~~~  
*“Veblen ... was a masterless, recalcitrant man, and if we must group him somewhere in the American scene, it is with those most recalcitrant Americans, the Wobblies. On the edges of the higher learning, Veblen tried to live like a Wob-*

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bly. It was a strange place for such an attempt. The Wobblies were not learned, but they were, like Veblen, masterless men, and the only non-middle class movement of revolt in twentieth-century America. With his acute discontent and shyness of program Veblen was a sort of intellectual Wobbly.”

— C. Wright Mills (1916–1962), Introduction to 1953 edition of *The Theory of the Leisure Class*

~~~~~  
A Cañon City Conundrum
[On a postcard, without salutation:]

If a socialist is elected to public office and is required to swear an oath, on what book would the socialist swear on [sic]? The *Communist Manifesto*? Mao’s *Little Red Book*? Certainly not the Bible, for that would compromise the socialist’s creed. How can a socialist take an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States when the very being of a socialist is to destroy the Constitution? The Bill of Rights?

Cordially,
David
Cañon City, Colo.
David:
Congratulations! That’s the most fatuous argument of the year, to date.

The Constitution—as we read it, anyway—puts the power of the government in the hands of the people; ergo, if the people say they want their government operating in a manner that could be characterized as democratic socialism, then that’s what they should have.

Yes, yes, we know—it’s all just words on parchment; in practice we have what former Congressman Ron Dellums [D-Calif.] accurately called “government of the people, by the corporations, for the rich.”

People have said what they want in poll after poll: programs which serve the people. Our Soup Nazi government,

though, consistently replies: No health care for you! No child care for you! No higher education for you!

How will you pay for it? What a question! This nation is awash in money—extracted from the working class, and boarded by our oligarchic overlords, who have been refusing to pay taxes. End their free ride, and there’s the money.

Not mentioning any names, but the biggest obstacle to achieving widespread prosperity is chumps who fall for a threadbare line of antiquated propaganda.
The Editor

~~~~~  
**You Socialist, You!**  
To the Editor:

If you’ve ever gone to the library, sent your child to school, or played on the city ballfields, you’re a socialist! It’s not going to matter which Democrat is nominated for President because Donald Trump and those who support him will call all Democrats socialists. It’s the difference between thinking, “What’s in it for me?” vs. “What’s in it for all of us?” I believe that when members of a society act together to make everyone’s lives better, we’re doing the right thing. We don’t help anyone when we label everything that helps us as individuals in a society as “socialism.”

According to *dictionary.com*, socialism is “a theory or system of social organization that advocates the ownership and control of the means of production and distribution, of capital, land, &c., in the community as a whole.” I think that those who are afraid of socialism are rightly afraid of being told what to do by an authoritarian ruler. However, programs that help all of us do not equal socialism!

Judy Ullman  
Portsmouth, N.H.  
Judy:  
*We had to laugh at your mention of*

*authoritarianism. You’re absolutely right. We have no doubt that is a major factor behind the public’s skittishness regarding the “S” word.*

*What’s funny is that we’re sliding—no, make that rushing headlong—into authoritarianism right now!*  
*Well, it’s not funny, per se, but...*  
*The Editor*

~~~~~  
On William Marvel & Colin Van Ostern
To William Marvel, regarding his “Northcountry Chronicle” piece, published February 14, 2020:

William, your description of the political machinations and apparent malfeasance of funds by Colin Van Ostern during and after his campaign to become Secretary of State of New Hampshire does readers a great service.

The toxic combination of ambition for power and political money is ubiquitous. We chiefly see it at its most ugly and evident in the national Republican Party, such as the funneling of tens of millions of U.S. Senate campaign dollars through Moscow Mitch McConnell’s hand, virtually prostituting moderate GOP Senators—few and such as they are—to dance to Mitch and his ally Donnie Trump’s fact-challenged party line.

Van Ostern’s maneuvering and money tactics remind us to be wary of the propensity of both major parties, at even the local or state level, to become more like money-lured lemmings than statesmen and stateswomen. This is a chief reason for which, while I have not voted for a Republican in a statewide election since 1980, I have no desire to be a card-carrying member of the Democratic Party, Inc., with its bought and paid-for super delegates, which erode the one person, one vote principle that underpins our nation’s ideals. We haven’t gotten there yet, and won’t until the Citizens United decision is reversed.

At the end of your piece, William,

you state “As an unaffiliated voter, I had a choice. This time I took a Republican ballot, for a change.” I can hope only that in light of your previous paragraph of nit-picking at all the major Democratic candidates, your vote kept in mind the much greater and more palpably dangerous defects and dysfunctions of our incumbent President.

It is a shame that the candidacy of William Weld did not generate more momentum before our primary. Your view on Mr. Weld and alternative paths for the allegedly “Republican” Party would be a topic this reader would welcome in a future column of yours.

Respectfully,
Mark Trafton
Exeter, N.H.
Mark:
We’re happy to serve as the means to communicate your message to Mr. Marvel. Far be it from us, though, to predict how he might respond.
The Editor

~~~~~  
*“The institution of a leisure class has emerged gradually during the transition from primitive savagery to barbarism; or more precisely, during the transition from a peaceable to a consistently warlike habit of life.”*

— Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929), *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, (1899)

~~~~~  
Warren’s the One
Dear Editor,

He betrayed our Kurdish fighters against ISIS. He defended Putin and disparaged our Intelligence Agencies which unanimously reported that Russia interferes in our elections. He replaced dedicated professionals with political puppets in our nation’s Intelligence, Justice, and Treasury departments. He’s lied to us over 17,000 times. He obstructs justice, coddles Russia, and extorts our allies.

These crimes, and so many more, should motivate fair-minded Republicans as well as Independents and Democrats to vote against such traitorous corruption. Any Bernie, Biden, Buttigieg, Bloomberg, or Klobuchar

could win and remove him from office. But only Warren can win *and* govern effectively to cleanse the putrefaction.

Elizabeth Warren has the competence and courage to restore integrity from trump’s corruption. Warren has the compassion and commitment to repair the social safety net. Warren has the smarts and moderate demeanor to win a political majority for the comprehensive changes that most Americans want and need.

Bruce Joffe
Piedmont, Calif.
~~~~~  
**Governor SuNoNo**  
To the Editor,

After reading summaries of Governor Sununu’s cheery State of the State report, I feel like the guy who’s driving a rattletrap that doesn’t match the jolly salesman’s enthusiastic description of it. Why does Sununu feel so pleased about the bumpy ride he’s giving me? Local wits have taken to calling the governor Gov. SuNoNo based on the record-setting 57 vetoes he exercised in the last session of the legislature.

Among the bills Sununu vetoed, many of which had bipartisan support: an increase in the minimum wage, formation of an independent commission to draw legislative district lines to prevent gerrymandering, three-gun safety bills, and net energy metering for towns and businesses to reduce energy costs. Sununu characterized the bills he vetoed as “radical, aggressive things.”

Apparently, the Governor sees an increase in the state’s \$7.25 per hour minimum wage as “radical” and “aggressive.” Someone working a full 40-hour work week for all 52 weeks of the year at \$7.25 per hour would earn \$15,080 per year. Try living on \$15,080 a year, Governor Sununu.

Governor Sununu is so into the habit of vetoing bills that he even vetoes new versions of the same bill which have been modified specifically to gain his approval. “Net metering is an electricity billing mechanism that allows consumers who generate some

*Mash Notes, Hate Mail, &c.*  
*to page six*

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## How wasteful is the Pentagon?

by Jim Hightower

Remember when candidate Trump promised not only to wall-out all migrants crossing our Mexican border, but also to make Mexico pay for his xenophobic wall?

Well, Mexico hasn't paid a peso... and won't. So, he keeps running to Congress, demanding that it pony up unlimited billions of our tax dollars for his pet political project.

Aside from one token appropriation, however, Congress has said: "Ummmm... no."

But that's no hill for a narcissistic climber. Unable to get tax money legitimately, Trump has simply stolen it, taking money from the US military budget. Ignoring the Constitutional mandate that only Congress is empowered to control the flow of government money, Trump filched \$6.1 billion from our military last

year, snatched another \$3.8 billion this month, and intends to swipe at least another \$3.4 billion before the year is out.

This executive "reprogramming," as the White House euphemistically calls its daylight robbery, is being pulled off by masking Trump's wall obsession as a "national emergency." The Pentagon brass has been yanking funds meant for the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, National

Guard... and ultimately from our fighting forces.

Presidential autocracy aside, Trump's massive larceny raises three other interesting issues of public morality: One, his trickery sets a precedent not only for future presidents, but also for our young people's behavior; Two, our congress critters, especially Trump Republicans, are setting a new standard of craven meekness in the face of this direct

executive assault on their authority and on our democracy; and, Three, by simply kissing off a budget loss of more than \$13 billion, saying it's in excess of the military's needs, the Pentagon is admitting that the war machine is routinely taking way too much of the public's money.

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from page six

Thank you for elucidating in this instance. The only thing better than raising questions in the minds of readers is having another reader anticipate and answer them.

The Editor

### Trump Betrays His Promise to Protect and Fight for American Workers

by Lawrence Wittner

Campaigning for the presidency in 2016, Donald Trump promised that, if he was elected, "American worker[s] will finally have a president who will protect them and fight for them."

Has he kept this promise?

When it comes to protecting workers' health and safety, his administration has been a disaster. Once in office, Trump packed the leadership of U.S. regulatory agencies with pro-corporate zealots, leading to predictable results. They repealed an Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) rule requiring employers to keep accurate records of injuries, repealed a rule requiring that federal contractors follow safety and labor laws, and withdrew an OSHA policy allowing workers to participate in OSHA inspections. In addition, as the AFL-CIO noted, the Trump administration targeted job safety rules for toxic chemicals, mine examinations, and child labor protections for destruction. It also sharply reduced the number of OSHA inspectors. As of 2019, only 875 were enforcing health and safety regulations nationwide—the lowest level in the agency's half-century of operation.

Meanwhile, although Trump bragged in June 2019 that the wages of American workers "are rising at the fastest rate in many decades," this claim is far from the truth. In fact, wages rose faster only a few years before, under his predecessor. Furthermore, an examination of what economists call "real wages"—wages offset by inflation—reveals that they have remained remarkably stagnant during the Trump era. As the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics later reported, "real" average weekly earnings of American workers rose during 2019 by just one-tenth of one percent.

The wage stagnation of the Trump era is particularly hard on America's vast number of low-paid workers. According to a study by the Brookings Institution appearing in late 2019, 44 percent of U.S. workers (53 million Americans) were employed in low-wage jobs that paid median wages of \$18,000 a year. The writers of the report concluded that "nearly half of all workers earn wages that are not enough, on their own, to promote economic security." Moreover, as data gathered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates, the percentage of low-wage workers has grown dramatically. Naturally, many of these workers have been forced, by economic necessity, to work two—and sometimes three—jobs to survive.

The Trump administration bears considerable responsibility for this impoverishment of American workers. It has consistently opposed

raising the starvation-level federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, set in 2009. Indeed, Trump opposes establishing any federal wage minimum, and his GOP minions have blocked a minimum wage increase passed in 2019 by the Democratic-controlled House from being introduced in the Senate. In addition, the Trump administration stymied a scheduled pay raise for federal workers and gutted Obama administration rules that made millions of Americans eligible to receive overtime pay for their overtime work.

Trump has also championed measures to deprive American workers of major healthcare and pension benefits that they have funded through their tax payments. Although, during his 2015-16 campaign, Trump promised never to cut Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, he has repeatedly sought to do so. On February 8, 2020, he again insisted that his new federal budget "will not be touching your Social Security or Medicare." But, only two days later, Trump unveiled a budget that called for cutting Medicare by half a trillion dollars, Medicaid by \$900 billion, and Social Security by \$24 billion.

The Trump administration has also been waging an assault upon labor unions, which provide the major organizational muscle defending the rights of America's workers. Thanks to Trump's anti-labor appointments to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), an agency estab-

lished in the 1930s to guarantee fair treatment for workers and their unions, it has become ever more difficult for unions to operate. The NLRB has issued rulings constraining how and where workers can organize and protest, gerrymandering bargaining units to the benefit of employers, permitting corporations to fire workers in retaliation for union activity, and narrowing the right to strike. Given the NLRB's pro-corporate bias, even existing labor organizations—such as unions comprised of graduate student workers—are now being threatened with loss of collective bargaining rights.

In recent decades, as an unrelenting corporate attack has crippled unions in the private sector, big business, the wealthy, and their rightwing allies in public office have turned to destroying the lingering strength of public sector unions. Working toward this goal, they have promoted "right-to-work" laws on the state and national level. These laws, by eliminating the obligation of workers to pay for the union representation they receive, encourage the emergence of millions of "free riders" and, thereby, provide an effective way to undermine unions. Shortly after Trump's inauguration, House Republicans introduced the National Right to Work Act and, within days, the White House announced the new president's support for "right-to-work" laws.

Although anti-union forces never managed to push the National Right

to Work Act through Congress, they did secure an important victory. After they brought the "right-to-work" case of Janus v. AFSCME before the Supreme Court, Trump's Justice Department joined the case with an anti-union brief. Then, thanks to Trump's appointment of Neil Gorsuch, a rightwing ideologue, to the Supreme Court, the court issued a 5-4 ruling, overturning precedent and declaring that workers could refuse to pay dues to public sector unions representing them.

In the aftermath of this decision, public sector unions worked vigorously—and, in most cases, successfully—to convince workers to pay dues voluntarily. But their membership did decline. Consequently, despite opinion polls showing that about half of America's non-unionized workers want to join a union, the Janus decision and the other anti-labor measures of the Trump administration have combined to reduce union membership in the United States to a record low of 10.3 percent.

As a New York Times editorial concluded, Trump, as president, has sent "a clear message to American workers: You're on your own."

Dr. Lawrence Wittner, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is Professor of History emeritus at SUNY/Albany and the author of *Confronting the Bomb* (Stanford University Press).

"The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace in a continual state of alarm (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing them with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary."

—H.L. Mencken (1880–1956)



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