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five years later.



THINKING MINNESOTA

ISSUE 33
FALL 2023
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A Republic If You Can Keep It

The Center's Martha Njolomole
on why Americans should
never take 'The Dream'
for granted.

Martha Njolomole,
American Experiment
economist

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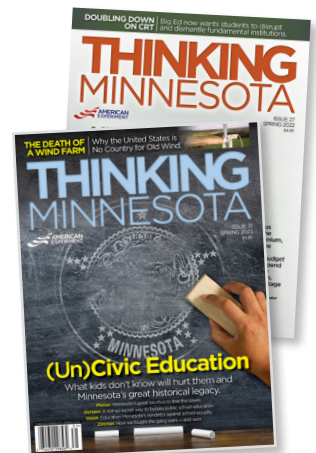


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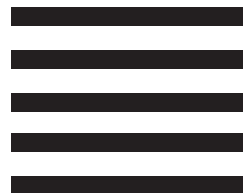
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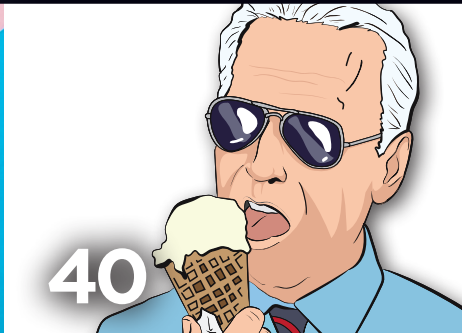
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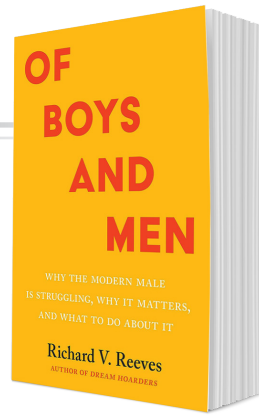
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THE NEW REVOLUTION

School choice is making waves across the country thanks to union boss Randi Weingarten.

The year 2023 was a great one for parents and students in many states nationwide. I never imagined the school choice movement would make such dramatic progress in such a short time. With Republican-led legislatures ushering in universal school choice programs, Arkansas, Ohio, Florida, and our neighbor Iowa to name a few, allow all students and families to use state funds toward non-public schools and escape the failing government-run public education system.

Corey DeAngelis, a senior fellow at

I envision a near future when over half of the states will adopt some form of universal school choice legislation.

the American Federation for Children who spoke at an American Experiment co-sponsored event in May, calls 2023 “the year of school choice.” So, who do we have to thank for this groundbreaking trend? None other than Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) — the second-largest teachers’ labor union in America. Weingarten’s radical agenda and the extreme tactics of the teachers’ unions have resurrected the school choice movement. In addition to the states already mentioned, Utah, South Carolina, Oklahoma, and



Ron Eibensteiner

Indiana have all passed some form of school choice through Education Savings Accounts (ESAs). Additional ESA proposals are currently pending in Texas, North Carolina, West Virginia, Georgia, and Montana.

“The dam is breaking on the government school monopoly,” says DeAngelis. And, if I may add, it is about time that parents are given a chance to rescue the next generation of children from the toxic clutches of Big Education.

The public education-government complex has proven itself to prioritizing extreme leftist ideology above students’ academic performance and place union interests above parental concerns and rights. It has single-handedly energized a backlash that threatens to break through

the education monopoly wall that has seen growing cracks since the COVID-19 pandemic school shutdowns of the last couple of years.

American Experiment has seen the light shining through the cracks in a number of ways, exposing weaknesses in a former iron grip. The summer 2022 *Thinking Minnesota* Poll found that the percentage of respondents who gave Minnesota’s public schools an “A” grade was *half* of what it was only two-and-a-half years ago in March 2020, while those who gave schools a “D” or “F” had *doubled*. This is disappointing to say the least considering Minnesota’s reputation as a state with excellent public schools, but unsurprising considering the learning loss around the politically charged school closures at the behest of Gov. Tim Walz and his teachers’ union overseers.

I envision a near future when over half of the states will adopt some form of universal school choice legislation. This will allow parents to have some control over how our education dollars are spent rather than bureaucrats who take their marching orders from union bosses like Weingarten. ESAs give parents the freedom to choose which schools and curriculum will best fit the needs of their children. Public schools and their administrators will be forced to respond to the needs and wishes of parents or watch as students transfer to schools that perform better academically. Schools with low standards — or none at all — will flounder and eventually close. Isn’t this the way it’s supposed to work in a free and open society? I think Minnesota parents and students would wholeheart-

edly agree.

In fact, the same 2022 *Thinking Minnesota* Poll found that most Minnesotans do agree that academic achievement should be the top priority in our schools: 41 percent — an overwhelming number compared to 17 percent who think supporting teachers should be the top priority. Minnesota students deserve an education centered on the tried-and-true “Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic” over non-academic, culturally trendy vacuousness such as Critical Race Theory and trans-activism — issues that only serve to divide groups and leave children ill-prepared to succeed in the future. Senior policy fellow Kathy Kersten has a feature in this issue about the troubling push to indoctrinate kids in this ideology, alarmingly against parents’ values and even without their knowledge.

Indoctrination is bad enough, but public schools have proven their utter incompetence in ever-falling test scores and an increasing number of kids who fail to meet basic math and reading standards. According to the 2023 statewide assessment results by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), *more than half* of Minnesota students don’t meet basic proficiency in reading or math. Education policy fellow Catrin Wigfall has documented these falling scores going back to her 2020 American Experiment report “Allergic to Accountability: Minnesota’s public schools have little to show for decades of increased spending.” Yet despite unacceptable poor performance, teachers’ unions and public schools demand more and more funding even with solid data showing our willingness to increase funding

year after year has resulted in lower and lower test scores and learning proficiency. It’s time to demand accountability. A good path toward that is through school choice with parents putting their own money where it will be used to maximum effectiveness, which might not be at a public school.

In order to get us back on track for academic excellence and rising stan-



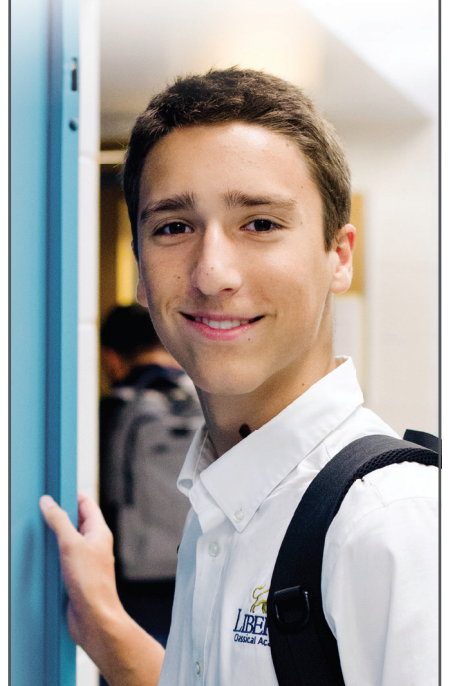
Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers

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dards, a concerted effort must be made to eliminate the influence that these union bosses have in our schools. Their unending demand for more money while they fail our kids is essentially anti-child, anti-knowledge, and quite frankly, anti-American. We must move away from academic standards that emphasize division along race, sex, and political lines. It’s time to recognize that union bosses like Randi Weingarten have little regard for parents and children but exist solely as an organization to maintain power and political influence. It’s time we consider school choice as the means to reform our education system, return power to parents, and focus on who should be the benefactors of our education system: parents and students. ★



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Preemptive measures

> I have been reading the 50th anniversary edition of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, a history of Nazi Germany. It is scary reading when the comparison is made to the U.S. of the present time. All aspects of society in Germany were under the control of the dictatorship. The U.S. is not under a dictatorship, but precursor socialist paths do exist and need to be understood and vehemently opposed.

Thanks to *Thinking Minnesota* for your conservative journalism in opposition to these socialist paths.

*Ron Wood
Waseca, MN*

Light rail fail

> The government that turned the Twin Cities light rail, which should be the envy of the nation, into a manure pile that cannot pay for itself with ridiculously low fees and fares paid on the honor system should never be trusted to manage any important transportation questions again.

*Brian Raja
Grand Rapids, MN*

All aboard?

> The Democrats in this state (as well

as other states) are completely detached from reality. Biking, walking and “rolling” obviously won’t work during the winter months and the trains which were touted so highly sit idle. I can’t even go to a Twins game because they don’t run.

I won’t even start with the craziness of the “Duluth Express” for a mere \$200 million. Most people could probably drive to Duluth faster and cheaper than the train. So, what do you do in Duluth — I guess rent a car to drive along the shoreline. Other than a few cities such as New York City and Chicago, mass transit is a bust. We never learn!

*Howard Abel
Elk River, MN*

The long goodbye

> What’s really remarkable about everything described is that it was done with a razor-thin DFL majority of one vote in the Minnesota State Senate. Say what you will about them, but the DFL is incredibly disciplined and maintains monolithic, ruthless control.

I came to Minnesota from New York in 1972 to pursue an M.A. at what is now the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. I stayed on for another six years after I finished the degree and had two jobs, one of which was with a state government agency. After all, would you want to go back to the Bronx?

I remember the *TIME* cover story to which you referred, and in fact still have my copy, with then Gov. Wendell Anderson holding up a walleye (yuk, yuk). What you didn’t mention is that the article’s author, Lance Morrow, is still with us and in his update last year, noted that he couldn’t possibly write the same thing now.

I was back in Minnesota in September 2022 for the first time since 2010. The “Good Life in Minnesota” is now a dump rivaling Detroit, St. Louis, or New Orleans. I can’t imagine why anyone would want to live there now, and I can see the state lurching even further leftward as

normies and taxpayers leave the state.

Meanwhile, for all the claims that those leaving Minnesota for Texas and Florida are “blue locusts” bringing their voting habits with them, I offer that here in Florida, Republican voter registration surpassed that of the Dems for the first time ever in November 2021, and now the gap has widened to over 541,000.

Every day, I thank God that even if I have to live in Brandon’s America, I can still get to live in Ron DeSantis’ Florida.

*Howard Hirsch
Vero Beach, FL*



Stately article

> I think every government official in Minnesota should be forced to read the “State of Our State” article by John Phelan on page 32 of the 2023 summer issue of *Thinking Minnesota*. Every citizen of Minnesota should be appalled by the changes in our state during the past 50 years! I certainly am.

*Lois Meissner
Eden Prairie, MN*

Big Government problems

> As an electrician who has done work in a number of Section 8 apartment buildings over a period of 25 plus years, I have seen a lot of damage done to families by this free handout program and the rules it enforces on these one-parent households.

First is the rule that requires young males to leave the family when they reach the age of around 18 as they are not allowed to live in these Section 8

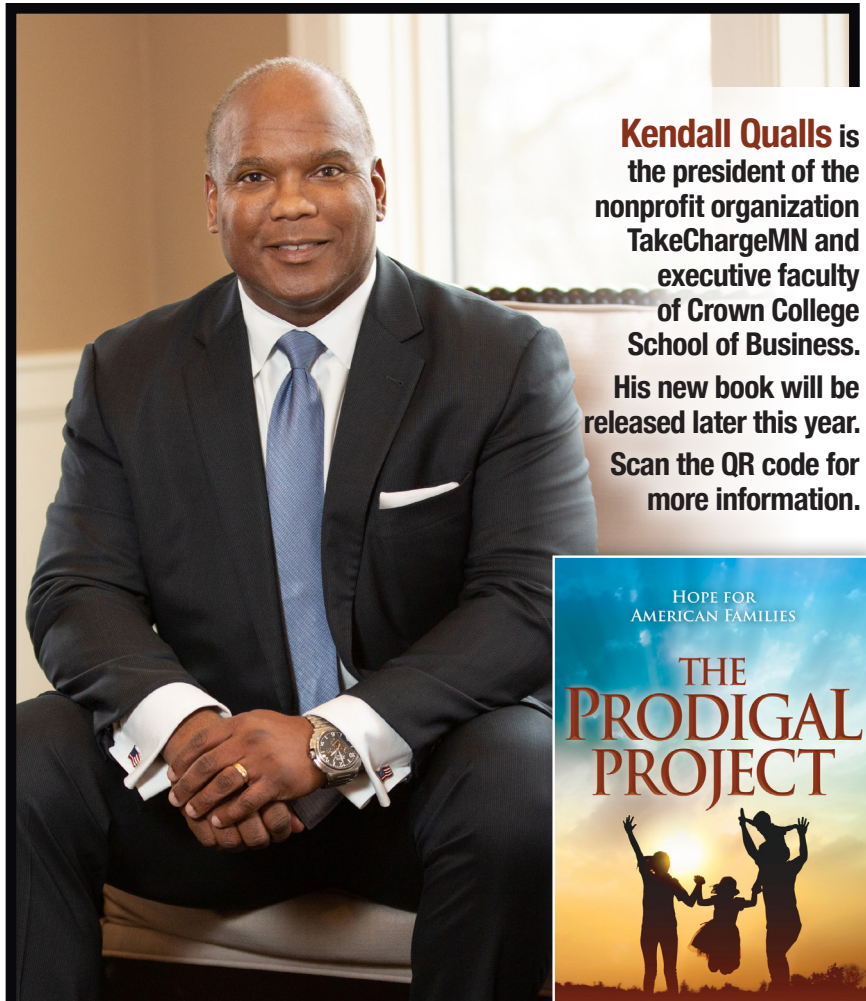
What you didn't mention is that the article's author, **Lance Morrow, is still with us and in his update last year, noted that he couldn't possibly write the same thing now.**

households. What do the lawmakers think is going to happen when all these young men are released onto the streets with no income, place to live, or any resemblance of a job? And most have done horribly in school without a father figure to help them find their way. Many join gangs as a result.

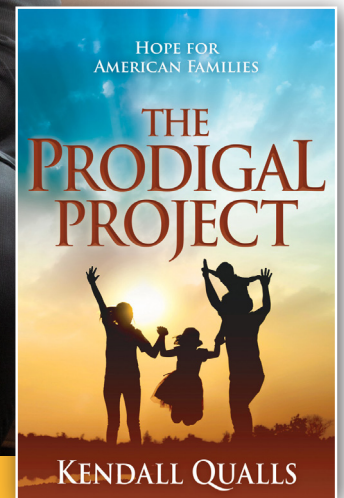
The girls have seen their role models in action, and most get pregnant early so that they can start their own new family knowing that having more kids equals more money for mothers.

This is a cycle that is extremely difficult to escape for any of the offspring from such a situation. "Free" money is hard to ignore with no real-life family experience for the kids born into it. This is a sad waste of human potential. ★

*Kevin Mackey
Grand Marais, MN*



Kendall Qualls is the president of the nonprofit organization TakeChargeMN and executive faculty of Crown College School of Business. His new book will be released later this year. Scan the QR code for more information.



Through personal stories in *The Prodigal Project*, Kendall Qualls explains that the promise of America is available to anyone regardless of race or social status. In this book, Qualls addresses uncomfortable topics such as the crisis of fatherless homes and the silence of the church in addressing this problem as the main source of disparities, not systemic racism.

In *The Prodigal Project*, Qualls also tackles the threat of the progressive movement against the traditional nuclear family, religious faith, and the values that made the U.S. an exceptional nation.

KendallQualls.com



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UP FRONT

Internships



THE NEXT GENERATION

Two American Experiment interns reflect on their summer.

American Experiment offers internship opportunities to bright young people who want to make Minnesota a better place to work and live. Our quarterly internship program includes three focus areas: policy, development, and communications. Our policy interns work closely with our policy fellows and economists, assisting with research in the fields of economics, education, energy and environment, health care, and public safety. Development interns support American Experiment’s event planning, fundraising, grassroots engagement, and donor relations efforts.

Our communications interns work one-on-one with the communications team, including social media engagement, institutional promotion, and campaign design. While interns can specify interest in working in one of these areas, there is often overlap in projects to provide a

well-rounded experience.

But you won’t be making coffee, as the testimonials from two recent interns, Ginger Gilbert and Adriana Azarian, can attest.

Ginger Gilbert

I am from Plymouth, Minn., and a junior at Cedarville University in Ohio studying political science with a minor in neuropsychology and Bible. I am interested in pursuing a career as an intelligence analyst or going to law school.

My experience interning this summer was enjoyable and engaging as it allowed me to research a variety of policy topics, collaborate on different projects, learn how a nonprofit organization operates, and contribute to the Center’s mission of making Minnesota a freer, more prosperous and better-governed state.

I mainly worked on numerous projects

related to the state’s K-12 education system. This research contributed to articles for American Experiment’s website and graphics for its social media, and supported the organization’s partners in their efforts to empower and educate parents. I also contributed to helping public employees exercise their right to opt-out of union membership and contributed to efforts to ensure new teachers know their options regarding union membership.

Adriana Azarian

Interning at American Experiment has been both educational and rewarding. From researching, writing, attending meetings, and creating PowerPoints, I’ve learned so much along the way. I’m so thankful for all the wonderful opportunities and amazing people I’ve met here.

As a politics major at Hillsdale College, I learn and discuss the philosophical and historical side of politics at school. My internship has expanded my knowledge and understanding of how politics gets implemented. American Experiment has kept my mind sharp and complemented my education.

While I worked on various projects, I’ve most enjoyed writing articles. I’m pursuing political journalism, so writing about important issues in Minnesota and being published in *Thinking Minnesota* has been incredibly formative. It’s truly been a privilege.

I’m very thankful to everyone at the Center especially Catrin Wigfall for her guidance and mentorship. Working with some genuinely brilliant people making a difference in Minnesota has been an honor. ★

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Incredibly, this “speech code” criminalizes even intending to say something that a political opponent could claim is false.

Criminally Speaking?

A new law could allow Minnesotans to be prosecuted or sued for speaking out on matters of voter eligibility.

Under a new law, Minnesota residents could be prosecuted or sued for speaking out on matters of voter eligibility — or even *intending* to speak out. One new law criminalizes “materially false statements” that intend to “impede or prevent” someone from voting. Who decides which statements fall into this category? Shockingly, Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, elected county attorneys, and any Minnesotan who claims to have been harmed by such speech.

This new law alarmed three Minnesota residents who are speaking out against the state’s Felon Voting law, which gave non-incarcerated felons the right to vote starting in June.

Mary Amlaw, Ken Wendling, Tim Kirk, and the Minnesota Voters Alliance (MVA) believe the law is unconstitution-

al and are suing the state of Minnesota to stop its enforcement. The Minnesota Constitution, they argue, makes it clear that felons cannot vote until they have served their full sentences — which, they say, includes time on probation, supervised release, and work release.

If any of them say so publicly — that the Minnesota Constitution bars felons on probation, supervised release, or work release from voting — they could be sued by the state attorney general, the county attorney, or any regular citizen who claims to be injured by their speech within 60 days of an election. Amlaw, Wendling, Kirk, and the MVA call this new speech code the “Don’t Say Felon” law.

According to James Dickey, senior counsel at the Upper Midwest Law Center (UMLC), this threat directly violates

his clients’ First Amendment rights.

“The law itself actually perpetuates fraud because it allows any person who claims to be injured to bring a lawsuit against the person who spoke,” says Dickey. “Given the text of the law, any person of ordinary firmness would think twice before speaking out about [the Felon Voting law].”

Incredibly, this “speech code” criminalizes even *intending* to say something that a political opponent could claim is false.

“One of the really crazy things about this law is that you can be sued because someone makes the claim that you *intend* to violate the law — you haven’t even done it yet, but that you’re about to do it,” Dickey says. “That’s called a ‘prior restraint’ and is the worst kind of First Amendment violation.”

Given the threat of legal action, UMLC argues, the “Don’t Say Felon” law could discourage everyday citizens from talking about voter eligibility.

“You have a First Amendment right to file a lawsuit. It’s called a right to petition a court for the redress of grievances. So if our clients file a lawsuit arguing that

felons can't vote until they finish their sentences and then they talk about the lawsuit outside of court, does that mean they're violating the statute and they're subject to prosecution? All because you argued that felons can't vote until they finish their sentence?" says Dickey.

Minnesotans found guilty of violating the law face criminal penalties of up to \$3,000 and a year in jail, plus civil penalties of up to \$1,000 per violation, *plus* the other side's attorney fees. And even if they win their case, they'll still have to pay their own lawyer's legal fees.

"Theoretically speaking, let's say you win your defense and the attorney general loses. What have you won? Even if you win the case, you don't get your attorney's fees paid. So all you win is higher legal bills from your own lawyer," says Dickey.

Altogether, UMLC argues, the "Don't Say Felon" law unfairly "chills political speech." Since it deals with elections, simply bringing the charge against a political opponent (or activist) would be enough to cause irreparable harm. By the time the case is settled, even if you've successfully defended your speech, your election is likely over.

Given the risk of irreparable harm, UMLC plans to ask the court for a preliminary injunction, which prevents the law from being enforced until the case is decided.

"Our plaintiffs are really just regular folks who happen to care about the future of their state and their country, and they are therefore involved politically," says Dickey. "And any person, regardless of their political stripes, should be able to say whatever they want about political issues and be able to talk freely. And the First Amendment guarantees that. It's really disturbing that the government of Minnesota believes that people should be told what they can and cannot say in the moments leading up to an election.

"So this lawsuit aims to put an end to that kind of paternalism, which has no place in our democracy." ★

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Is School Choice ‘Racist’?

Answering false accusations with truth and facts about what school choice actually means.

Recently, someone responded to an article I wrote on educational freedom, informing me that “school choice is racist.” I initially brushed aside the comment but found myself returning to the sentiments and wanting to address them.

Here’s the full comment: “School choice is racist in itself since it creates a two-tier system that those who have

the means can elect/choose, and choice has gutted the public school system by dividing resources from public schools and draining resources, weakening the public schools.”

What is school choice?

The American Federation for Children defines school choice as any policy that allows families to take their children’s

education dollars to an approved education provider of their choosing — whether that is a traditional public school, a public charter school, a private school, a religious school, a virtual school, homeschool, or any other learning environment families choose.

It is all about providing families — regardless of financial ability or home address — the opportunity to access the educational environment that best serves their children. It is because of school choice that families with less means aren’t limited to one type of learning environment. So, the argument that school choice only helps the wealthy is a non-starter.

In fact, educational freedom benefits low-income families the most, because it means that access to a quality education

It is all about providing families — regardless of financial ability or home address — the opportunity to access the educational environment that best serves their children.

isn’t just available to the rich. School choice is also widely supported by and exercised in communities of color.

Remember federal efforts in the 20th century of redlining and assigning students to schools based on geography? School choice programs have reduced district segregation.

Alternative schooling has also been shown, statistically, to move kids from less diverse to more diverse situations, on average, writes Rachel Ferguson, a professor at Concordia University Chicago. “But even if some diversity is lost

in the long run, it's hard to argue that well-off kids getting more diversity should outweigh impoverished minority kids getting a decent education," Ferguson continues.

"Given the public education system's unwillingness or inability to educate black students adequately, we need a new system, one that is built by our community and empowered by parents. That is anything but racist," writes Denisha Allen, founder of Black Minds Matter, a project of the American Federation for Children.

"Gutted" public education?

One oft-parroted argument against educational freedom is that school choice programs "drain" money from traditional public schools and "funnel" resources away from them.

This is a common myth that needs dispelling.

First, the reality is that most families continue choosing their neighborhood public school district even when a school choice program is available. Such programs have been around for decades, and participation hovers under three percent of all publicly funded students in the states that operate these programs. This is hardly a "mass exodus" from the public school system.

Second, an overwhelming number of empirical studies confirm that educational choice programs do not have a negative fiscal impact on public schools and taxpayers. In fact, a majority of studies even show that school choice programs have a positive academic impact on students who remain in the public schools.

Third, public schools receive state funding only for the students actually enrolled in those schools. If a child does not attend the public school, the school is relieved of the costs of educating that student and doesn't receive the state dollars to provide that service. That's not "draining" money from public schools — a public school

has no right to state taxpayer money for students it doesn't teach.

Fourth, those who argue school choice drains money from public schools are blind to other enrollment shifts. "The truth is, student enrollments go up and down all the time, even without school choice. And everyone in education knows it," says Bob Bowdon with Choice Media. "When

An overwhelming number of empirical studies confirm that educational choice programs do not have a negative fiscal impact on public schools and taxpayers.

local economies grow or shrink, it can force massive changes on school districts. Immigration patterns can be significant here. Homeschooling trends matter. Even a rising percentage of empty nesters can dramatically change public school enrollments without any new policies about charters or private school choice."

Fifth, participation in a choice program is voluntary. If families are voting with their feet, shouldn't this be an incentive for school leaders to make their product better?

Supporting school choice is not an "either/or" relationship — either support school choice or support public schools — but a "both/and."

Empowering families is good for the students whose parents choose to have them participate in the school choice program, and it helps students whose parents choose to keep them in their neighborhood public school. There's nothing "racist" about that. ★

—Catrin Wigfall



American
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News of Note in Minnesota

Center events, initiatives, and policy work.



Policy fellow David Zimmer and Center president John Hinderaker talk with visitors at American Experiment's Farmfest booth this year.

Protecting women's sports

Championship swimmer and Independent Women's Voice advisor Riley Gaines spoke to a sold-out crowd at the Metropolitan Ballroom on July 6. She spoke about standing up to the extremist trans-mob and becoming the country's leading spokeswoman and defender for women's and girls' athletics.

Summer tour

American Experiment policy fellows traveled across the state for the Center's "Off the Cliff" tour, explaining the consequences of Minnesota's 2023 legislative session. Policy fellows and speakers answered questions about how the legislature passed policies impacting the economy, public safety, energy, education, and more.

Farmfest and the State Fair

American Experiment was a presence across the state this summer with booths at both Farmfest and the State Fair. Held on August 1 – 3 in Redwood County,

Minn. Farmfest afforded the Center an opportunity to connect with rural Minnesota and discuss issues having an impact outside the Twin Cities. American Experiment's Greater Minnesota outreach director Micah Olson states, "There is a palpable frustration in Greater Minnesota over the last legislative session. People are fed up with being overlooked by politicians in St. Paul, and as a result, American Experiment has seen exponential growth in our efforts from this frustration."

American Experiment returned to the Minnesota State Fair with a booth at the KS95 tent outside the Grandstand. On Saturday, August 26, the Center's policy fellows and staff were present to talk with Minnesotans from across the state about the latest initiatives, research reports, and upcoming events.

In addition to handing out copies of the latest *Thinking Minnesota* and policy briefs, the steady stream of booth visitors were able to spin a prize wheel for Center merchandise and register for a \$250

gift card to offset the state's increased car licensing fees.

Greater Minnesota-Duluth

American Experiment held an evening reception featuring Center president John Hinderaker at the home of Duluth chapter chair Becky Hall. Over 70 conservatives showed up dedicated to amplifying our message in the Greater Duluth area. Also in Duluth was an event at Clyde Iron Works in July as part of the "Off the Cliff" summer tour, with over 100 people in attendance. Hall states, "Our chapter efforts here in the Duluth area have been a smashing success. People are excited about the conservative movement and are looking for ways to pitch in and put Minnesota on the path to prosperity."

Upcoming events

Following its August 10 Summer Party at Punch Bowl Social in St. Louis Park, the Young Leaders Council is holding a "Cocktails & Connections" evening event on October 24 at Interlachen Country Club in Edina with the Minnesota Private Business Council. Young professionals will have the opportunity to network with some of Minnesota's top executives and business leaders.

Economist John Phelan will be speaking at the Clyde Iron Works in Duluth on November 9. Phelan will be discussing the economic consequences of the DFL's trifecta agenda in the state's government and how to return the state to a more prosperous track.

Policy fellow Catrin Wigfall will be in Fergus Falls on November 14 unpacking the troublesome trends plaguing Minnesota's K-12 education system and outlining a way forward. Wigfall will touch on academic performance, new

education mandates, and how educators, parents, and community members can get involved to restore excellence. More information on Center events, speaking opportunities, reports, and podcasts can be found on our website at AmericanExperiment.org

New hires

Jill Sandager has joined American Experiment as the new event coordinator. Sandager graduated with a degree in biology/pre-medicine from Trinity International University but spent much of her early career performing musical theater and



Jill Sandager

opera in various theaters throughout the Twin Cities. She also has a diverse employment background ranging from sales, marketing, and entrepreneurialism to clothing design and cake decorating. On

beginning her new position, Sandager says, “I’ve grown tired of sitting back and watching the progressive left take over and ruin our state, so I’m finding fulfillment in contributing to American Experiment’s mission.”

Also new is Nick Majerus, who is the Center’s first digital media specialist. Majerus is a political communications professional who specializes in digital media and strategic



Nick Majerus

communication. He holds a degree in economics from the University of Minnesota and has previously worked at the Minnesota Senate, the Minnesota House of Representatives, and the Republican Party of Minnesota. Says Majerus, “I’m excited to begin working at American Experiment, where I’ll have the opportunity to help make Minnesota a freer, more prosperous, and better-governed state.”

Correction:

An error in the *Thinking Minnesota* Summer 2022 and 2023 issues (“UMLC Update”) cited the wrong number of absentee ballots cast in Minnesota’s 2010 statewide election. The Secretary of State’s canvassing report shows it was 126,732, not 23,237 as previously reported. ★

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Education Innovation

A new learning program based in Minnesota is helping families break free of government schools.

If you haven't noticed yet, we are at the beginning of a massive transformation in how American K-12 education is delivered. Many families are realizing the top-down system isn't the right fit for their children and are moving on to bottom-up alternative models that better align with their personal values and worldviews.

It's educational innovation working its magic, and I'm here for it.

From microschoools to homeschool centers, families are accessing a variety

of educational models all with diverse philosophies and are being empowered to be the driving force of where and how their children learn.

Joining this new education ecosystem is Portals, a nonprofit, literature-to-project based learning program aimed at supporting anyone who wants to foster a Christian education in a homeschool, cohort, or private school setting.

"Parents wanting a change in their child's learning environment can become

completely overwhelmed by the thought of taking on homeschooling on their own," says Dr. Seann Dikkers, vice president of development at Portals. "But that's where we come in — as a resource for any adult to provide a full school year of structured experiences (lessons



and projects) with digital supplements alongside them. If mom can't facilitate learning one day, grandma can easily jump in and keep the learning going. We also have entire Christian schools signed up to provide teachers with boilerplate lesson plans to save them prep time — it's support without strings."

As an educator for 29 years, including as a former public school teacher, principal, and professor, Dikkers sees Portals as a key resource in the explosion of education innovation. Want to homeschool but don't think you have the background, exposure or training to do so effectively? Portals offers professional development and on-call support. Are you part of a microschool and interested in family-style learning or already homeschooling and just want to save time with planning? Portals' lesson plans can be used across age levels. How about supplementing your lesson plans at a private school? Portals adds exploratory engagement to each day of learning. Dikkers explains, "We target *any* of the barriers for parents

Portals has started this school year as K-12, with over five times the number of students (184) primarily by word of mouth.

to provide their own education and seek to remove them systemically."

Following a successful pilot year that included 17 teachers/parents at 13 locations with 34 K-7th grade students including one microschool, Portals has started this school year as K-12, with over five times the number of students (184) primarily by word of mouth. At \$240 per school year, Portals participants receive complete lesson plans and project ideas built around existing homeschool curriculum, on-call support, and on-call mentorship for any adult in a child's life to provide learning experiences.

"There are a number of reasons families want an alternative to a government school, but not every family has the tools or resources to make it happen," says Dikkers. "Portals offers comprehensive day-to-day support for that —

at a price that is a viable competitor to public options."

Based out of Alexandria, Minn., Portals recently became a support partner for the Minnesota Association of Christian Home Educators (MACHE). The model program is also generating interest in other states. Coign Conservative Credit Card selected Portals out of hundreds of charities and nonprofits to be their 2023 3rd Quarter Charity Partner for support dollars to fuel the education revolution. Dikkers adds, "Every dollar we take in goes straight to curriculum development and building a digital dashboard for parents to organize their children's education."

"Homeschooling and other innovative learning models have surged across the country in the last few years, and we don't see that changing any time soon," says Dikkers. Support for homeschooling and other non-government schools goes beyond the anecdotal — national homeschooling numbers are still well above their pre-2020 rate, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's May 2023 Household Pulse Survey.

As more families discover an educational world outside of their neighborhood school, support, advice, and camaraderie with parents who have made similar educational choices for their children are important, continues Dikkers. "We at Portals want to give parents what they are looking for and then get out of the way. You may not be a certified teacher, but you know your child best. You can do this."

While not the only option outside of the mass schooling system, Portals adds to the value of a competitive education marketplace. "Providing what we consider the highest quality support for the most affordable price possible helps create a more dynamic marketplace, a greater variety of options, and improved accessibility of those options," says Dikkers. ★

—Catrin Wigfall

For more information on Portals, visit PortalsAcademy.com.



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TOM STEWARD

CUTTING THEIR LOSSES

Minnesota loses a big opportunity for investment due to an anti-business environment.

Thanks to the state's botched management of the biggest single investment in North Carolina-based timber products mill Huber Engineered Woods' (HEW) history, the 140-year-old company pulled the plug on plans to build a state-of-the-art plant in the north central community of Cohasset.

"It never seems to surprise me how Minnesota can snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. The \$440 million Huber plant was served to them on a platter," American Loggers Council executive director Scott Dane told the *Mesabi Tribune* after regulatory delays, tribal opposition and environmental extremists' legal challenges led Huber to pull out.

The economic impact of the plant's shutdown will be devastating not only for employees and their families, but the entire region.

Minnesota's loss quickly turned out to be Mississippi's gain.

"This massive investment by Huber Engineered Woods is a significant win for Mississippi and is another example of our state's strong economy," said Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves. "We are proud to welcome another top manufacturer to Mississippi and are excited about the economic benefits this investment will bring."



Tom Steward

It wasn't supposed to turn out this way when Huber and Gov. Tim Walz coordinated the announcement of the pivotal project in June 2021.

"We are pleased and excited to bring this new investment and set of employment opportunities to Itasca County and the surrounding areas," said HEW president Brian Carlson. "It is our desire for our new Minnesota operations to be a shining example of our company's commitment to building a diverse and inclusive workforce."

The 800,000 square-foot facility meant a big lift for the regional economy, creating 150 permanent new jobs averaging \$31 an hour, 300 to 400 construction jobs, and an estimated 1,500 ancillary jobs. It also guaranteed an enormous

opportunity for loggers and truckers with a daily need for 150 logging trucks plus a projected 20,000 trucks and 330 rail cars to transport the finished products.

"Northeastern Minnesota's infrastructure and transportation systems are geared to expand and support the success of Huber's new facility in Cohasset," said Mark Phillips, commissioner of the Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation Board, which contributed to \$60 million in state aid for the project. "Our region's workforce is highly skilled, hardworking, and ready to help Huber Engineered Woods produce its products in Minnesota."

The opportunity couldn't have come at a better time or place than in Cohasset. The community of 2,700 residents faces the loss of some 170 jobs from the closure of the Boswell power plant. The economic impact of the plant's shutdown will be devastating not only for employees and their families, but the entire region. After all, Boswell accounts for a huge portion of the area's tax base — 13 percent in Itasca County, 69 percent in Cohasset and 19 percent for the school district.

"We are excited that Huber has chosen this site to expand their business. This will be a tremendous boost, not only to the local economy of Cohasset, but to all of Itasca County," said Itasca County commissioner Davin Tinquist.

What's more, Huber gets good marks for its environmental and sustainability record, as well as plowing back one percent of its operating net income into "the communities where employees live and work."

Yet the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe opposed the mill located a mile outside the reservation border from the start.

“The ‘Frontier Project’ [Huber plant] would repeat a tragic history of outsiders profiting at the expense of local resources,” Leech Lake Band chairman Faron Jackson, Sr. wrote in the *Star Tribune*. “In this case, a New Jersey family’s company wants to export Minnesota’s wealth.”

Walz administration and its allies.

“Gov. Walz showed no real interest in trying to find a way to keep Huber here. The Leech Lake band showed no interest in coming to the table to find a solution; instead they chose a course of legal action to try to kill the project,” said Sen. Justin Eichorn, (R-Grand Rapids.)

The usually low-key Blandin Foundation based in Grand Rapids also put



The last straw came when the Minnesota Court of Appeals sent the project back to the drawing board in February 2023 to undertake a more comprehensive environmental review. The news of Huber’s abrupt decision to abandon Minnesota spread quickly in industry publications like the *Southern Loggin’ Times*.

“Huber had planned to build its sixth OSB [oriented strand board] plant in Cohasset, Minn., but after experiencing constant entanglements in the process from governing authorities, including a Minnesota Court of Appeals decision that would have caused further delay in the construction of the \$440 million plant, Huber opted to pull out of the project and begin looking elsewhere.”

Local elected leaders blamed the “devastating” outcome squarely on the

Walz on the spot in a letter shared with the media.

“I respectfully request your administration commission an independent after-action review of the Huber project in Cohasset, Minnesota,” wrote Blandin Foundation president and CEO Tuleah Palmer. “...Those participating in the review must represent a broad cross-section of the impacted interests to ensure a fair and comprehensive analysis.”

It will take much more than a commission to restore confidence in Minnesota as a place where companies can invest.

“Minnesota should be embarrassed and ashamed. Their actions will reverberate for decades,” says Dane. “When new forest products interests explore development, it won’t be in Minnesota.” ★



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The point is that this is sincere scholarship, and Reeves is not afraid to risk “cancellation” by the post-modern mob.

Boy Problems

A new book analyzes how the economic and social world of men and boys has been turned upside down.

“It has become increasingly clear to me,” Richard V. Reeves of the Brookings Institution writes in *Of Boys and Men*, “that there are growing numbers of boys and men who are struggling in school, at work, and in the family.”

Reeves notes that on a range of measures, men — especially those lower on the social ladder and among them, black men in particular — are falling behind. In education, the “gender gap in college degrees awarded is wider today than it was in the early 1970s, but in the opposite direction.” Indeed, “for every 100 bachelor’s degrees awarded to women, 74 are awarded to men.” Economically, “the wages of most men are lower today than they were in 1979, while women’s wages have risen across the board.” Socially, “one in five fathers are not living with their children” and “men account for almost three out of four ‘deaths of despair,’

either from a suicide or overdose.”

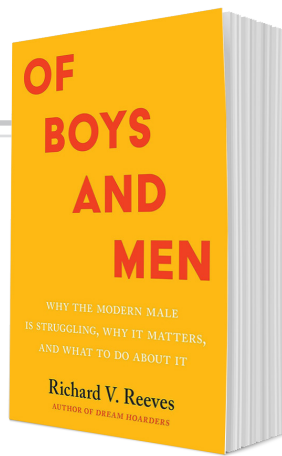
What is causing this? Regarding education, Reeves notes that male brains develop more slowly than female ones so that, unintentionally, “from a neuro-scientific perspective, the education system is tilted in favor of girls.” Male economic underperformance is, Reeves argues, because “male workers are challenged on one side by robots, and on the other side by workers in other countries,” automation and China, in other words. Concerning fatherhood:

...I argue the following: (1) the male role has long been culturally defined as that of provider, and based on the economic dependence of mothers on men; (2) this traditional role has been dismantled by the securing of economic independence by women; (3) culture and policy are stuck on an

obsolete model of fatherhood, lagging way behind economic reality; and (4) this is resulting in a “dad deficit,” with men increasingly unable to fulfill the traditional breadwinner role but yet to step into a new one.

Consequently, “many men are left feeling dislocated,” and this is the root cause of what Anne Case and Angus Deaton call “deaths of despair” in their excellent 2020 book, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*.

To fix the situation regarding education, Reeves advocates for “giving boys an extra year of pre-K before starting them in school; a recruitment drive of male teachers into classrooms; and significant investments in vocational education, including more technical high schools.” In employment, Reeves notes a “decline in traditional male occupations,” but, instead of reversing this trend, he argues for getting more men into health, education, administration, and literacy — what he calls HEAL — jobs, which are expected to grow in coming decades. To accomplish this, he proposes “build[ing] a pipeline in the education system, provid[ing] financial incentives, and



reduc[ing] the social stigma faced by men working in these fields.”

To “reconstruct the role of men in the family,” he outlines “a new family model, one where the relationship between fathers and children

is independent of the one between fathers and mothers.” To accomplish this, he recommends “equal and independent parental leave; a modernized child support system; and father-friendly employment opportunities.”

There is much in the book for conservatives to disagree with, namely his discussion of race as it relates to violence in black men. And he dismisses legitimate concerns around “trans rights” as simply an attempt by conservatives to “whip up the partisan base.”

But while he castigates conservatives for “fuel[ing] male grievances for political gain,” “overweight[ing] the importance of biological sex differences for gender roles,” and “see[ing] the

solution to men’s problems as lying in the past rather than the future, in the form of a restoration of traditional economic relations between male providers and female carers,” he also lambasts liberals for, among other things, “a tendency to pathologize naturally occurring aspects of masculine identity, usually under the banner of toxic masculinity,” “an unwillingness to acknowledge any biological basis for sex differences,” and “a fixed conviction that gender inequality can only run one way, that is, to the disad-

vantage of women.” The point is that this is sincere scholarship, and Reeves is not afraid to risk “cancellation” by the post-modern mob that insists on erasing any inherent biological or psychological differences between the sexes.

Many conservatives would agree that the problems Reeves identifies are real, more so than many on the left. They might also agree with several of his suggested causes; worries about China and automation destroying manufacturing jobs are, after all, a staple of “National Conservatism.” They might also disagree with many of his proposed solutions, as do I. But, again, Reeves has produced a work of sincere and deep scholarship and it deserves a hearing. These problems are too big to be either ignored or solved by one side of the aisle. ★

—John Phelan



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Sensitive Nonsense

Changing art without regard to historical context or an artist's intent isn't sensitive, it's culturally corrosive.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the publication of *Casino Royale*, the novel in which Ian Fleming introduced the world to his most famous creation: 007, James Bond. New editions of the books are being published to mark the event, and readers will find the following note: “A number of updates have been made in this edition, while keeping as close as possible to the original text and the period in which it is set.”

Sensitivity readers — people hired by publishers to check for supposedly offensive content, misrepresentation, stereotypes, and bias on issues such as race, religion, and sexual orientation — have removed various racial descriptors and epithets and, in America, sex scenes have

been toned down. There is something in these rewrites to satisfy the woke and social conservatives alike.

The Bond novels contain much to jar a modern reader. Take one example: There was an old wives' tale in Britain that homosexual men couldn't whistle. In *The Man with the Golden Gun*, Bond is told that his target, the assassin Francisco Scaramanga, is believed to have “homosexual tendencies” and one way he identifies his quarry is by his inability to whistle. Fleming's books are, arguably, more transgressive of contemporary mores now than they were in 1953 when the *New Statesman* dismissed *Casino Royale* as a confection of “sex, snobbery and sadism.”

Indeed, “Bond is not a hero, nor is he depicted as being very likable or admirable,” as Fleming himself wrote. “He is a Secret Service Agent. He's not a bad man, but he is ruthless and self-indulgent. He enjoys the fight — he also enjoys the prizes.”

Fleming knew such men from personal experience. He had been a spy during World War II, working for Britain's Naval Intelligence Division. He was involved in planning Operation Goldeneye, sabotage operations in Spain if Franco had allied with Hitler, and helped run two intelligence units: 30 Assault Unit and T-Force. The former, Fleming wrote in a 1942 memo, would “accompany forward troops when a port or naval installation

is being attacked and, if the attack is successful, their duty is to capture documents, cyphers.” The latter was the operational arm of a joint Anglo-American mission to secure German scientific and industrial technology in the final stages of the war.

Bond, Fleming explained, “was a compound of all the secret agents and commando types I met during the war.” These were men like Wilfred “Biffy” Dunderdale, a *bon viveur* who headed MI6’s station in Paris, drove an armor-plated Rolls-Royce, dressed in handmade suits and Cartier cufflinks, and played a key role in cracking the Enigma code; Forest Yeo-Thomas, who

Such are the kinds of men who parachute into occupied Europe to wage war single-handedly, and it is those men and their world that Fleming sought to depict. **Such men and such a world is not likely to make for “sensitive” reading.**

parachuted multiple times into occupied France where he was captured and tortured by the Gestapo before escaping and killing an enemy agent; or Duane Hudson, who spent much of the war behind enemy lines in Yugoslavia where he survived assassination attempts and recruited a network of agents to blow up Axis shipping — he blew up an Italian ship single-handed.

These men were often ill-suited to civilian life, and Fleming painted Bond similarly. At the end of *Moonraker*, with the country saved and the villain dispatched, Bond meets his female

accomplice, Gala Brand, for what he assumes will be a “dirty weekend.” Instead, she thanks him politely for all the excitement, points out her fiancé, and says goodbye.

And now what? wondered Bond. He shrugged his shoulders to shift the pain of failure — the pain of failure that is so much greater than the pleasure of success. The exit line. He must get out of these two young lives and take his cold heart elsewhere. There must be no regrets. No false sentiment. He must play the role which she expected of him. The tough man of the world. The secret agent. The man who was only a silhouette[...]

Such are the kinds of men who parachute into occupied Europe to wage war single-handedly, and it is those men and their world that Fleming sought to depict. Such men and such a world is not likely to make for “sensitive” reading. Whatever bowdlerized things are being released, they are no longer Ian Fleming’s James Bond novels.

Fleming assumed his audience was mature enough to accept a protagonist who was not a hero. A man who, for all his flaws, was necessary in certain situations and better, at least, than the man on the other side. The sanitization of the Bond novels raises questions about the sinister tampering with the art of the past, but it also raises questions about our own maturity as publishers and readers. Can we only accept as heroes the lifeless ciphers of pseudo-socialist pseudo-realism, shorn of flaws and bereft of depth? It is no longer enough that “Popeye” Doyle foils the drug dealers in *The French Connection*, he must refrain from using offensive language while doing so, as Disney decided with another recent bowdlerizing. “In fiction people used to have blood in their veins,” Fleming once wrote. “Nowadays they have pond water. My books are just out of step. But then so are all the people who read them.” ★

—John Phelan

A with Sheila Qualls
ALPHANEWS

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Pushback
The Biden administration is wrong regarding the proposed ban on affordable health coverage options.

On September 11, American Experiment submitted comments urging the Biden administration to withdraw a proposed rule that would effectively ban certain types of insurance coverage. Not only are the proposals bad policy, but every major proposal in the rule would color outside the lines of federal law to achieve policy goals that the Biden administration cannot get passed through Congress.

Background

The main proposals aim to undermine access to two types of health insurance coverage: short-term, limited-duration insurance (STLDI) and fixed indemnity excepted benefit insurance. STLDI provides major medical coverage to people who need temporary insurance coverage, such as people between jobs or recent graduates. Fixed indemnity excepted benefit insurance provides supplemental fixed cash benefits to people who experi-

ence a medical event to help offset the financial burden, including medical costs that their major medical coverage might not cover.

STLDI and fixed indemnity coverage have been available on the market for decades. STLDI has long been available for contract terms up to 12 months. Fixed indemnity coverage generally provides a fixed cash payment triggered by a medical event. These event-based payments could be based on a period of time (for example, \$100 per day in the hospital) or per service (for example, \$100 per doctor visit).

People highly value STLDI and fixed indemnity coverage

Both types of insurance are highly valued by people in transition or looking to supplement their current health coverage. For people losing a job, coverage from their former employer under COBRA can be very expensive. Affordable Care Act

(ACA)-compliant individual market coverage can also be prohibitively expensive to anyone looking for coverage who does not qualify for government subsidies or have access to employer-sponsored coverage. Fixed indemnity can help fill cost sharing for people with high deductibles and help cover non-medical expenses like childcare, lodging, or home upkeep during an illness.

Biden rules effectively ban coverage options

The Biden administration has proposed several rules that will effectively ban key coverage options for both STLDI and fixed indemnity coverage. The rules would reduce the contract term for STLDI to three months up to a maximum of four months with renewal. Currently, STLDI can be offered for an initial term of less than 12 months and renewed for up to 36 months, which reflects the maximum amount of time people can

renew transitional COBRA coverage. As we explain in comments to the rule, “regulations can become so onerous that they effectively ban the activity they regulate.” In this case, the Biden administration must know limiting contract terms to a maximum of four months will effectively shut down the market for STLDI in many states. The fact is, STLDI stopped being available in over 60 percent of states with similar requirements as the rule proposes.

For fixed indemnity coverage, the Biden administration proposes to ban benefits paid on a per-service basis. Thus, a person could not receive a cash payment per surgery to supplement the high-cost sharing under their major medical insurance coverage or to help fund lodging for family members to be by their side in their time of need. Instead, benefits could only be paid on a per-period basis. Moreover, the rule proposes to remove the tax exclusion for benefits paid from fixed indemnity plans under certain circumstances. These changes only serve to make the coverage less attractive.

The push toward government-controlled health care

The passage of the ACA in 2010 ushered in a new era of federal control over health insurance coverage, but it still left states as the primary regulators of insurance. A federal statute, the McCarran-Ferguson Act dating back to 1945, still puts states in the lead regulator role. In this role, the federal government has long deferred to states to regulate STLDI and fixed indemnity coverage. This policy recognizes that states are in a far better position to understand and adapt to changing local market conditions to protect consumers.

But with the expansion of federal control over health insurance under the ACA, there’s been a push to centralize more and more control over people’s

health care choices into the hands of the federal government. Much of this push goes against federal statutes and policies that continue to preserve states as the primary regulators of insurance.

The proposed rules on STLDI and fixed indemnity coverage would clearly march America closer to a government-controlled health care system by eliminating private options. Indeed, the Biden administration openly justifies the proposed rule as a way to “encourage” people to enroll in the federal government’s preferred health coverage.

Unfortunately, this means people will lose access to affordable coverage and many will choose to go uninsured. The proposed rule, to its credit, openly

The fact is, ACA-compliant coverage is entirely unaffordable for people who don’t qualify for subsidies in certain areas of the country.

admits this outcome. The fact is, ACA-compliant coverage is entirely unaffordable for people who don’t qualify for subsidies in certain areas of the country. In Hannibal, Mo., the lowest-cost silver plan — the middle tier plan — on HealthCare.gov costs \$17,668 annually (\$1,472 per month) for a 60-year-old. Clearly, people in Hannibal and elsewhere need more affordable options.

American Experiment’s comments focus largely on how the proposed rules impermissibly upend decades-old applications of federal law. If the Biden administration approves the rule as proposed, litigation will almost certainly follow. ★

—Peter Nelson



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Less Cops, Less Crime

Claims that police quit and crime dropped in Golden Valley don't hold up.

In July, a *New York Times* opinion piece about Golden Valley, Minn. received much attention. In “Half the Police Force Quit. Crime Dropped,” author Radley Balko quotes Golden Valley Police Chief Virgil Green as saying, “crime was down” despite mass defections from his police force. Upon examination, the claims are dubious.

First, “half the police force quit” doesn't accurately describe what has happened to the once proud and capable police force that is budgeted to have as many as 31 police officers and supervisors.

In 2022, some members of Golden Valley's city council and its mayor decided that the police department needed reform through various diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. The ensuing transformation led to an unprecedented

number of police officer resignations over the past year and a half.

Throughout the summer of 2023, according to City of Golden Valley Human Resources records, the city's police department had approximately four police officers able to conduct patrols. The records also indicate several “community service officers” (civilian uniformed officers who have no enforcement authority), several sergeants, an assistant chief, and Chief Green filling out the ranks.

This level of staffing required the city to contract with the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office to cover police calls 50 percent of each day. Given the history of what has occurred in Golden Valley, the city should prepare for a long and arduous process as it attempts to attract potential police officer applicants, as has

been the case in Minneapolis.

The second claim, “Crime is down,” is true only if you rely solely on data collected and reported by the Golden Valley Police Department (GVPD). But the disclaimer on the police department's crime statistics site clearly notes: “The below reports do not include data from the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office.”

When the statistics from the sheriff's office (obtained through a data practices request) are added, claims of a reduction in crime don't hold water.

The combined data comparison from January through June 2022 and 2023 indicates:

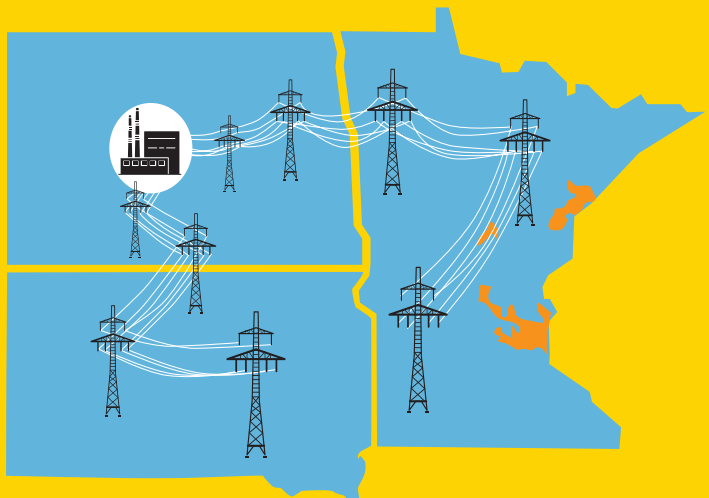
- Calls for Service are up 16 percent.
- Arrests are up 21 percent.
- Citations (misdemeanor offenses) are up 40 percent.
- Crimes Against Persons are up 49 percent.
- Crimes Against Property are down slightly at 4.8 percent.
- Crimes Against Society (drug offenses, liquor law violations, weapon offenses) are statistically down approximately 48 percent, but these crimes are most often detected and responded to through proactive law enforcement, which has been dramatically and negatively impacted by the staffing situation. This “reduction” should not be viewed as a drop in this criminal activity, but rather as a lack of proactive law enforcement efforts.

No matter how the data is analyzed, the claim that Golden Valley lost half its police force and saw a reduction in crime is misleading. When reform advocates manipulate crime data to suggest fewer officers result in less crime, their hidden agendas become exposed.

Golden Valley is facing a prolonged public safety crisis of its own making, and citizens should look no further than the elected officials who created it. ★

—David Zimmer

Did You Know...



■ = North Dakota Transmission Area

■ = Other Energy Source Area

North Dakota coal economically impacts the Upper Midwest?

Generates **\$5.7 billion**
in economic activity



Provides over **14,000**
direct and indirect jobs



Provides power to over
2 million
homes and small businesses



24/7/365
fuel supply

reliable
dispatchable

More facts on the LOWEST COST energy source at:



www.SecureEnergyFuture.org





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Woke *Shane*

The Guthrie Theater tries hard to ruin a great story.

I was looking forward to the Guthrie Theater's last performance of the season, a theatrical adaptation of the novel *Shane*. I read and studied Jack Schaefer's classic 1949 Western as a seventh grader at St. Joseph's Elementary School in West St. Paul and wondered how they would make it come alive on the stage. Unfortunately, the Guthrie's high-quality acting and excellent stage production could not

overcome the awkward, overwrought insertion of an "erasure" narrative by playwright Karen Zacarias.

The Guthrie's banal land acknowledgement before the play foreshadowed Zacarias' adaptation stating, "we gather on the traditional land of the Dakota People." Land acknowledgements always raise two questions. First, how (and from whom) did the Dakota People obtain this land, and second, if

the Guthrie claims it's their land, aren't they worried the Dakota will eventually demand its just return?

The play started technically strong with the curtain revealing a 20-by-40-foot painted map of Wyoming circa 1889. When actor Juan Arturo (who plays young Bobby Starrett and narrates the play) walks on stage behind the translucent map, the lighting gives him a ghost-like appearance. True to the novel, the titular character Shane makes his entrance by approaching the Starrett family homestead from a distance. When he dropped his saddle bags on the stage, I was disappointed dust didn't fly — surely a western journey would demand such

effect. But my disappointment turned to satisfaction as clouds of dust burst into the air as actor William DeMeritt alternately slapped his thighs before drawing a drink of water. He nailed the scene.

After that promising beginning, the play quickly veered from Schaefer's original text. First, we learn through awkward dialogue that the Starrett family is Hispanic. Marian is originally from Mexico and Joe's mother is Hispanic. Young Bobby becomes Roberto. The couple met in Arizona when Joe was working in the mines and Marian's family fled there after their land in Mexico "became America." A new character, Winona, is introduced, a Native American guide working for cattleman Luke Fletcher.

The final change from the original book portrays Shane as an African American cowboy, which, taken alone, would have gone unnoticed, especially given DeMeritt's excellent performance.

The play then proceeds through the story of Shane, a gunfighter struggling to leave his past behind and be a better man. He becomes a hired hand for Joe Starrett, earning his trust as the two work side-by-side clearing the land. The scene holds the striking symbolism of accomplishment and overcoming challenges

After that promising beginning, the play quickly veered from Schaefer's original text.

as the men finally remove the last stump in the middle of the yard. But Shane is reluctantly called back to his old life to protect the Starrett homestead from the greedy cattleman trying to take the land. Actor DeMeritt nails one of the biggest moments of the book — and play — when he dramatically emerges from the barn wearing the gunfighter "uniform"

we haven't seen since he stored it away at the beginning of the play.

Ignoring the politics, the performance met the high standards of a Guthrie production. For example, slow-motion choreography in the bar fight and the way Shane and Starrett chopped away at the stump were particularly impressive.

Unfortunately, it was hard to ignore the politics, making a simple and enduring tale distractingly awkward. While the story is told, it is interrupted several times to push the land-grab narrative — an addition completely absent from the novel that takes away from its transcendent message. At one point, Shane and Joe Starrett leave the stage to Marian, Winona, and young Bobby (Roberto) as the women discuss the shared experience of Mexicans and Native Americans who were forcibly displaced from their land by greedy and conquering Americans. Toward the end of the play, Joe Starrett loudly laments that all land is stolen and we stand on the blood of our forefathers.

Zacarias wrote the play to "test the tropes of the genre" and "deepen and diversify the story." Director Blake Robinson praised Zacarias for bringing a "culturally authentic perspective to this version of Shane." Guthrie artistic director Joseph Haj said the play "invites us to interrogate the well-worn Western genre and work to distinguish fact from myth." Interrogate in this case is a euphemism for rewriting history, applying a contemporary lens to events of the past.

Shane is a novel set at the time of great development and expansion of the United States of America. Settlers like the Starretts took considerable risks to venture west, stake their claims, and build this country. Zacarias' portrayal of these settlers as conquerors and thieves with all land "stolen" is unfair and certainly not authentic.

When I read Robinson's director notes in the program, I sensed even he thought Zacarias went a little too far in pushing this land-grab narrative writing, "Will

we get it all right? Probably not — how is that even possible? But I stand in awe of Karen's big heart." In other words, ignore the liberties we took with the story to push our political agenda — her heart was in the right place.

The play ends with our newly imagined character Winona killing evil cattleman Luke Fletcher with a skillful throw of her knife and then declaring she was reclaiming 1,000 head of cattle that rightfully belonged to her people back to the Standing Rock Reservation in South Dakota. Our heroine!

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Ultimately, the good acting and quality production of the Guthrie Theater's staging of *Shane* was almost ruined by their awkward and self-righteous insertion of a land-grab narrative that distracted from a great American story. It was a missed opportunity to illustrate the enduring strength undergirding the frontier spirit, the triumph of overcoming immense hardship, and a nation coming of age — faults and all. The Guthrie and its audience would be better served by letting these stories speak for themselves, not using them to settle political or historical scores. ★

—Bill Walsh



≡ PERSPECTIVE

A Republic If You Can Keep It

The Center's Martha Njolomole
on why Americans should
never take 'The Dream'
for granted.

Martha Njolomole,
American Experiment
economist

was born 27 years ago in Malawi, a small, landlocked country in southeast Africa. My family was poor, but that wasn't unusual: most people in Malawi are poor. In our home we did not have electricity or running water. We cooked over an open fire, using either firewood or burnt charcoal. Every day, my sister and I walked, sometimes for miles, with buckets to get water, carrying the water back home on our heads. That was drinking and cooking water; we washed our clothes in a nearby river.

Often, we did not have enough to eat and it was not uncommon for us to go to bed hungry. The farm we relied on for food was small. It did not produce enough maize for the whole year, and my family could not consistently afford to buy food.

Health care was not readily available. The closest public health center was a 40-minute walk from our house. (Of course, we didn't own a vehicle.) On the few occasions when I had to go there, I was never given a medical test or saw an actual doctor. This is because the clinic had no equipment and was understaffed. The nearest hospital was more than an hour away on foot and was plagued by the same issues. The times when I walked there to see a relative who was admitted for an overnight stay, the hospital rooms were overflowing, with people sleeping on the floor and even in the hallways.

The closest primary school I attended was more than two miles from my house, a 45-minute walk. When I started school in January 2002, there were around 150 students in every first-grade classroom. For five of the seven years I attended school, we sat on the classroom floor because the school only had enough desks and chairs for the two upper grades (I skipped fourth grade, otherwise it would have been six years

of sitting on the floor). My entire fifth grade was spent learning outside under a tree because there weren't enough classrooms for the thousands of students in the school. And even though over 1,000 students started first grade with me in 2002, fewer than 400 were able to reach eighth grade, the final year of primary school in Malawi. The rest had dropped out along the way or were repeating earlier grades, still the plight of most Malawian students today.

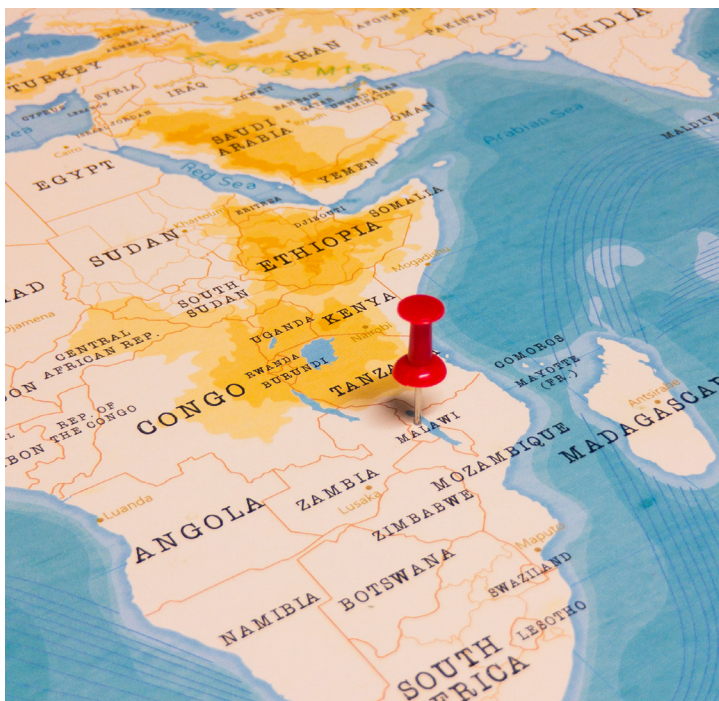
I loved to read, but my family

that usually over 100,000 high school students take in their final year to graduate — I was one of six girls, out of the entire country, who won scholarships to study abroad.

I was lucky. Three of the six were awarded scholarships to study in China. I and two others got scholarships to study in the United States. Ironically, we were the runners-up.

So, the following year, at age 17, I boarded an airplane in Lilongwe, Malawi, and after several flights arrived at Troy University in Alabama. I had never been on an airplane and had not been outside of Malawi. It would be nine years before I would see my family again.

Malawi is what could be called a quasi-socialist country, with the government providing most services. When I left home, my plan was to study economics in America so that I could return to Malawi and help the government deliver services more efficiently. But I was astonished by what I found in the United States. While only less than a quarter of Malawians had easy access to water and



At age 17, I boarded an airplane in Lilongwe, Malawi, and after several flights arrived at Troy University... It would be nine years before I would see my family again.

didn't have any books. So I looked for discarded scraps of newspaper that I would find lying around my town, both to improve my reading and to learn about what was happening in the world. At home, we got our news through a small battery-powered radio most evenings as we sat on the floor eating our dinner. After finishing primary school, I attended a Catholic high school. In 2012, when I was 16 years old, based on the results of the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) exams — an annual standardized national test

electricity, in the U.S., nearly everyone did. That was only the beginning of the unimaginable prosperity I saw all around me. I wondered, how do they do it?

What is it about America that created this remarkable standard of living and the freedom and opportunity that go with it?

In my economics classes, I studied thinkers like Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises. I began to understand how the free enterprise system generates America's wealth. I stayed on at Troy to obtain my master's degree in economics. And by the time I earned that degree, my career goals had changed. I wanted to work for a policy organization that advocates for free markets and limited government.

That is what brought me to Center of the American Experiment in Minnesota, a long way from where I started out in Malawi.

An immigrant's perspective

When Gallup surveyed American adults in 2001 on how proud they were to be American, 55 percent said they were extremely proud, and altogether, nearly 9 in 10 adults said they were extremely or very proud to be American. That was 22 years ago, and things have changed.

In their June 2023 survey, Gallup reported that only 39 percent of adults were extremely proud, and 67 percent were extremely or very proud to be American. That decline in patriotism is especially stark for young adults. While 10 years ago, 85 percent of young adults aged 18 to

As an immigrant born and raised in a developing country, I find it hard to sympathize with my generation's misgivings about capitalism generally and the United States specifically, a country that has tremendously improved my life.

29 were extremely or very proud to be American, this year for those aged 18 to 34, the figure was down to 59 percent. This year, half of all adults over 55 are extremely proud to be American, but only 18 percent of adults aged 18 to 34 feel the same way.

Surveys from YouGov, Morning Consult, and Pew Research Center, among others, have found a similar trend of growing skepticism about the United States among young adults. In addition



Martha (bottom row, second from left) with her family in Malawi on Christmas Day in 2004.

to their waning patriotism, young American adults are becoming even less likely to support free enterprise — the U.S.'s long-defining economic system.

As an immigrant born and raised in a developing country, I find it hard to sympathize with my generation's misgivings about capitalism generally and the United States specifically, a country that has tremendously improved my life. No country is flawless. But given the chance, I would wholeheartedly choose to be in America.

To come to the United States, a country where electricity and running water are unremarkable occurrences, not luxuries as they are in Malawi, has opened me up to a world of endless possibilities. Even as a college student with nothing to my name, my life became exponentially better than I could have

imagined in my formative years of living in Malawi. Here, I have come to enjoy some of the highest standards of living in the world. There is such a level of abundance and convenience in this country, that I sometimes tend to forget where I came from.

In my 10 years of living in America, I have not worried about issues like electricity blackouts or wondered where I would get drinking water, let alone if I would have enough to eat. Yet years ago, something as seemingly trivial as accessing water took up hours of my day. Now, like most Americans, I reserve my frustration instead for slow internet, delayed Amazon packages, bad drivers, and bad hair days — a testament to the massive progress that this country has made

in moving beyond subsistence.

Malawi and the United States

Between 1891 and 1964, Malawi was a British protectorate originally named the British Central Africa Protectorate. The British changed the name to Nyasaland in 1907 after the country's biggest lake, Nyasa, which is a tribal word for lake. (In English, Lake Nyasa essentially translates to Lake Lake.) After independence in 1964, it ceased to be called Nyasaland and became Malawi — meaning flames.

Regardless of the exact origins, with independence the new name symbolized a return of the country from the British settlers and the beginning of a new dawn. Independence carried with it the idea of freedom, self-governance, and, more importantly, economic development. History, however, proved otherwise.

The next 30 years after independence were followed by brutal dictatorship,



Martha Njolomole is an economist at Center of the American Experiment. She earned a Master of Arts in economics at Troy University in Alabama. Martha's upbringing in Malawi, a developing country, helped her develop a passion for contributing to research on the social and economic advancement of economically disadvantaged people.

which necessitated a second fight for independence, this time from an autocratic domestic government. Initially serving as prime minister starting in 1963, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda later ruled as president starting in 1966 when Malawi became a republic. In the same year, through an Act of Parliament, Malawi also became a one-party state. Banda was proclaimed president for life in 1971 by the legislature.

During his reign, which ended in 1994,



Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, portrait from Malawi 5000 Kwacha 2021 Banknote.

there was never a presidential election. Every Malawian had to pay homage to Banda. He was to be thanked for all good things, even the sun's rising. Dare disrespect the president, and you might find yourself thrown into a crocodile-infested dam. During Banda's 30-year rule, thousands of his opponents were jailed without trial, killed, tortured, or forced into exile if they dared to speak out against the atrocities perpetrated by his government.

As for economic development, according to data from Penn World Table, Malawi's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita grew rapidly after independence, peaking in 1985 at \$1,544 (in constant 2017 dollars). After that, it started declining and reached \$1,215 in 1994.

Unfortunately, democracy did not equate to major changes in the country economically. As of 2019, Malawi's GDP per capita was approximately \$1,161. In the period through which I lived in the country — between 1996 and 2013 — GDP per capita ranged

from a low of \$856 (in 2002) to a high of \$1,623 in 2008. After 2008, GDP per capita declined to \$1,206 in 2013.

Data from the World Bank includes more recent years and is also the most frequently used for international comparisons. According to that organization, after controlling for purchasing power differences, when I lived in Malawi, GDP per capita ranged from a low of \$1,077 in 1996 to a high of \$1,368 in 2013 (in constant 2017 dollars). In the United States, however, GDP per capita in the same period ranged from \$44,000 to about \$56,000. For 2022, GDP per capita in the U.S. was \$64,407 — about 43 times higher than Malawi's.

Certainly, money is not the sole measure of prosperity. But things like education, infrastructure, and health care require massive investments, which poor countries like Malawi lack. The result is that by almost every indicator of well-being, Malawi trails the United States by a huge margin. Compared to U.S. residents, Malawians are more likely to live in extreme poverty, more likely to be food insecure, and less likely to have access to clean electricity and cooking fuels, which in turn makes them more likely to die from indoor pollution. Malawians are also less likely to have access to health care and more likely to die young, are more likely to receive a poor-quality education and less likely to finish secondary education. They are also less likely to have access to safe water and basic sanitation services and, therefore, are more likely to die from causes attributed to unsafe water or sanitation. As recently as 2021, Malawians are less likely to own mobile phones and have access to the internet.

The idea of America is worthy of pride

Every year, thousands of people risk their lives to come to this country because there is a level of opportunity and freedom offered here that is rarely found elsewhere. Unlike most immigrants, I wasn't actively looking to come to the United States, but that's only because I had no realistic means of getting myself to this country. Certainly, coming from one of the poorest

countries in the world gives me a bleak point of reference. But that is also what makes it particularly easy for me to appreciate this country, the institutions on which it was founded, and its unique standing even among the world's most developed countries.

It should be cause for concern that some groups, such as the non-college-educated, feel denied the opportunities and benefits that come with living in such a prosperous country. However, I object to those who claim that the solution to this situation is turning America into a socialist "paradise" — as many young people nowadays seem to prefer. Even with its problems, America

The United States is more than a place, it is a symbol of what human ingenuity can achieve in the absence of government interference.

remains one of the best countries in the world in which to be born and to live, mainly thanks to this country's (somewhat diminishing) commitment to upholding the founding principles of liberty, limited government, and free enterprise. These principles are what have elevated this country above all others.

Everyone fortunate enough to be an American should not only be proud of this country but actively defend those principles. The United States is a symbol of what human ingenuity can achieve in the absence of government interference. It is a nation conceived in liberty, and it is only by upholding that liberty that we can fulfill our potential as a place where everyone is guaranteed the opportunity to pursue happiness as they see fit. Coming to the United States has changed my life for the better, and for that, I count myself lucky and feel extremely proud to live here. Considering the alternatives, everyone should. ★



STATE OF DISTORTION



In 2023, Minnesota's political leaders enacted some of the world's most extreme laws regarding medicalized treatment for gender-distressed young people.

BY
KATHERINE
KERSTEN

The idea that it's possible to change one's biological sex was virtually unheard of until little more than a decade ago. Yet today, in many public schools, Minnesota students are being instructed in "gender-fluidity" and urged to "state their pronouns." A skyrocketing number of our state's young people are irreversibly altering their bodies through puberty blockers, hormones and surgeries in hopes of living as the opposite sex.

Elsewhere in the world, however, gender ideology's harms are rapidly becoming apparent. Europe's most "progressive" countries — Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway — are decisively rejecting so-called "gender-affirming care" as dangerous and non-evidence-based. At least 20 other American states are banning or restricting it.

Nevertheless, in 2023, Minnesota's Democratic "trifecta" moved to hardwire extremist gender ideology into our state's public policy landscape. They

Our state is becoming an outlier just as mounting evidence is revealing that the gender affirming model of care is one of history's greatest medical scandals.

enacted a "trans refuge" law that will make medicalized treatment available to all young people who ask for it, and simultaneously banned psychological counseling to help gender-confused children become comfortable with their natal sex.

And in a chilling, unprecedented assault on parental rights, lawmakers authorized courts to take "emergency jurisdiction" over children whose

parents resist invasive gender-affirming care. In so doing, they legally equated these youngsters with those who need "protection or services" because of parental abuse or mistreatment.

In signing the new "trans refuge" law, Gov. Tim Walz accused states that are restricting medicalized gender interventions of "bigotry and hate." In Minnesota, he declared, "compassion is on the march."

The opposite is true. Our state is becoming an outlier just as mounting evidence is revealing that the gender-affirming model of care is one of history's greatest medical scandals.

The "trans" phenomenon

Until recent years, the number of young Americans who expressed severe distress about their biological sex was vanishingly small — about .01 percent. But in the last decade or so, gender dysphoria has surged by over 1,000 percent in the United States. In 2007, there were no pediatric gender clinics in the U.S. Today, there are more than 100.

Roughly two percent of high school students now identify as transgender, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). That number roughly doubled between 2017 and 2021, says the CDC. The shifting sex ratio is of special interest. Until recently, the ratio of transgender identification in the United States was 7:1, boys versus girls. In fact, before 2012, there was no scientific literature on girls ages 11 to 21 ever developing it at all.

But today, in the U.S., the great majority of self-identified transgender youth are girls. In Britain, it's 70 percent. Remarkably, from 2009 to 2019, the U.K. saw an extraordinary, unexplained increase of 4,400 percent in the number of gender-distressed young women.

Young people who experience "gender dysphoria" suffer from real, sometimes debilitating, depression and mental

anguish, and deserve our empathy and concern. But transgender activists make a reality claim. They insist people who feel this way don't just have a psychological desire to be the opposite sex. They *really are* the opposite sex. This claim "is starkly, nakedly false," in the words of Dr. Paul McHugh, former psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore.

Until 2008 or so, the standard treatment for youthful gender dysphoria was "watchful waiting." When supported by psychological counseling through



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In signing the new "trans refuge" law, Gov. Tim Walz accused states that are restricting medicalized gender interventions of "bigotry and hate." In Minnesota, he declared, "compassion is on the march."

natural puberty, between 70 to 90 percent of these patients became comfortable with their sex, according to research.

But after 2008, the medicalized "gender-affirming care" model, imported from Holland, began to replace non-invasive talk therapy. The new model seeks to relieve distress by "affirming" a young person's self-expressed gender "identity" — both through "social transition" (adopting a name, pronouns and dress associated with the opposite sex), and medical transition, using drugs and sometimes "sex transition" surgery. This model was widely adopted in Europe and

America without rigorous clinical trials to establish its safety or effectiveness, and relies on “off-label” drugs the FDA never approved for this purpose.

The “gender-affirming” model

Today, in the U.S., medicalization of gender dysphoria often begins with puberty blockers, starting between ages 9 to 12, followed by synthetic cross-sex hormones (testosterone and estrogen) by age

Puberty blockers can stunt growth and decrease bone density. Their use, followed by cross-sex hormones, almost always causes lifelong infertility.

16. Puberty blockers can stunt growth and decrease bone density. Their use, followed by cross-sex hormones, almost always causes lifelong infertility.

Cross-sex hormones launch what is generally a lifelong dependence on the medical system for those who wish to retain the cosmetic resemblance to the opposite sex that they cause. Hormones also increase risk factors for developing cancers, liver damage, diabetes, blood clots, stroke and heart attack. As with blockers, their long-term effects on brain development are unknown.

“Sex reassignment” surgery sometimes follows, including, in the U.S., double mastectomy for females as young as age 13 and sometimes removal of, or attempts to “create,” genitalia.

All these interventions, which permanently alter tissues and organs, are

performed on healthy bodies in the name of alleviating subjective psychological distress thought to spring from a sense of gender identity. Young people are being asked to make irreversible, life-changing decisions on these matters at an age when many states bar them from using a tanning bed or getting a tattoo.

Here’s how Dr. Marcus Evans, formerly a psychiatrist and trustee at the Tavistock Centre gender clinic in London, explains gender ideology’s fundamental premise: “This trend is rooted in the faddish idea that everyone — including children — has an innate gender identity, akin to a religious soul, that one discovers and nurtures.” This is a fantasy, he writes, at war with biological fact.

Dr. McHugh compares treating the psychological confusion of gender dysphoria with hormones or sex-change surgery to treating anorexia with liposuction. It leaves a patient’s underlying psychological problems undiagnosed and unaddressed.

In other words, what’s underway here amounts to a massive uncontrolled experiment.

Why is this happening now?

So why are so many young people drawn to the fantasy of transgender identity today, despite its perils?

A primary answer, often overlooked, is that American youth are in the midst of a mental health crisis — struggling with anxiety, depression, alcohol abuse, behavioral challenges, and thoughts of suicide at unprecedented levels. And they report greater loneliness than any generation on record.

Between 2005 and 2014, the number of teens diagnosed with clinical depression grew 37 percent. The worst hit — suffering from depression at three times the rate of boys — were teenage girls.

Between 2010 and 2019, self-harm rose

189 percent among girls ages 10 to 14.

In 2020, *Wall Street Journal* writer Abigail Shrier wrote a book entitled *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*, which sheds invaluable light on the explosion of what’s now called “rapid onset gender dysphoria” in adolescent girls. Shrier traced the extraordinary spike and sex-ratio shift in transgender identification to about 2017, when the first generation of teens who had used smart phones throughout adolescence graduated from high school.

She points out that nearly 70 percent of girls who identify as trans belong to a peer group in which at least one friend has “come out” — in some cases a majority of friends. This suggests that rapid onset gender dysphoria is a so-called “social contagion.”

Between 2005 and 2014, the number of teens diagnosed with clinical depression grew 37 percent.

These girls share a number of characteristics. For example, they feel they don’t belong, and struggle with female socialization. A large majority, something like two-thirds, already have one or more psychiatric diagnoses — anxiety, depression, eating disorders, autism — and almost half have engaged in self-harm before diagnosis.

Sixty-five percent of these girls claim to be trans after a social media binge. There they find trans influencers who, in Shrier’s words, detail every moment of their “transition” and boast of how their lives have improved, often portraying the pain they have endured in the process as a badge of honor.

The girls find a new online “community,” where new “friends” (frequently anonymous) applaud them and encourage them. These individuals generally depict gender dysphoria as a heroic social identity. They often urge the



Katherine Kersten, a writer and attorney, is a senior policy fellow at Center of the American Experiment. She served as a Metro columnist for the *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis) from 2005 to 2008 and as an opinion columnist for the paper between 1996 and 2013. She was a founding director of the Center and served as its chair from 1996 to 1998.

girls to isolate themselves from anyone who raises questions, including parents.

Dr. Marcus Evans has observed that parents of gender-dysphoric girls frequently “express concern” that their child is “being groomed by a thicket of online video resources.” As in actual cults, he says, these girls are encouraged to believe that all their personal problems can be solved by embracing one overarching dogma.

In the words of one European clinician, hearing girls’ formulaic requests for hormones can be like “listening to them read from a Facebook manual.”

Today, however, diagnosis of gender dysphoria and referral for body-altering interventions rarely includes careful, nuanced psychological evaluation to investigate the underlying sources of young people’s distress. Evans, for example, resigned from England’s Tavistock gender clinic because he feared that children were routinely “being fast-tracked into medical solutions for psychological problems.”

In the U.S., a 2022 Reuters investigation found that none of the U.S. pediatric gender clinics studied were performing comprehensive mental health assessments or reaching differential diagnoses prior to referring patients for medical “transition.” The director of Boston Children’s Hospital Gender Multispecialty Service, for example, has acknowledged that puberty-blockers are being handed out “like candy.”

Pushback is beginning

But as medical harms have become more apparent, pushback is gaining steam. Minnesota’s neighboring states — including South Dakota, North Dakota and Iowa — have banned or restricted gender-affirming care. Whistleblowers are coming forward, and detransitioners who regret their decision are raising public awareness of medical negligence and filing lawsuits against their medical providers.

One such whistleblower is Jamie Reed, a former case manager at Washington University’s Transgender Center in St. Louis. Reed — a self-described “queer” woman married to a “trans man” — is hardly a conservative. But in January 2023, she went public with alarming

revelations. What is happening to children at her clinic, she declared, is “medically and morally appalling.”

Reed detailed the gender clinic’s lack of formal treatment protocols, its “false assertions” to families about safety, and how vulnerable and deeply troubled

The director of Boston Children’s Hospital Gender Multispecialty Service, for example, has acknowledged that puberty-blockers are being handed out “like candy.”

young people are pushed to begin medicalized interventions. She came to recognize, she said, that adolescents are incapable of “grasping” the “profound impacts” these interventions will have “on their bodies and minds,” and “what it means to make the decision to become infertile while still a minor.”

Reed’s descriptions of the painful, sometimes debilitating, side effects of the surgeries adolescents undergo are particularly disturbing. In rare cases, she said, infants are “born with atypical genitalia,” which calls for “sophisticated care and compassion.”

But clinics like the one where I worked are creating a whole cohort of kids with atypical genitals — and most of these teens haven’t even had sex.... Yet all it took for them to permanently transform themselves was one or two short conversations with a therapist (emphasis in original).

In June 2023, following Reed’s revelations, Missouri lawmakers severely restricted minors’ access to puberty blockers, hormones and surgeries.

How has Minnesota’s Democratic “trifecta” responded to the attempts of states like Missouri to erect guardrails to protect vulnerable children? Our state leaders adopted a “trans refuge” law that will prevent courts or officials

here from complying, in a child custody action, with removal requests, extradition orders or subpoenas regarding children who come from other states for “gender-affirming care.”

Minnesota education policymakers have engaged in a similar wholesale embrace of gender ideology. For a decade, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has fueled the “school to clinic pipeline,” as the Manhattan Institute’s Leor Sapir has called it, by portraying gender confusion as a normal part of growing up and celebrating young people who adopt a “trans” identity as the “new Rosa Parks.”

For example, MDE’s 2017 “transgender toolkit” instructed schools to allow students to use the bathrooms and locker rooms, and join the athletic teams, that aligned with their gender identity. In 2019, the agency’s “Minnesota Student Survey” — administered to ninth- and 11th-graders every three years — began asking 15-year-olds to specify if they are “transgender,” “genderqueer,” “genderfluid,” “nonbinary,” “pansexual,” “trans male” or “trans female,” or “questioning.”

This year, Minnesota lawmakers ventured into even more bizarre territory. They required public schools to stock menstrual products in bathrooms for boys in grades 4 to 12, since “not all menstruators are female.” And new teacher licensing rules will require teachers to “affirm” students’ self-proclaimed gender identities.

Yet such “affirmation” is not a “neutral” act, according to pediatric gender experts like Britain’s Dr. Hilary Cass. On the contrary, it amounts to “active intervention” in a child’s psychosocial development, which can cement an identity (and lead to additional interventions) that typically result in sterility and loss of sexual function, as well as heightened risk of cancer and heart disease.

Europe is doing an about-face on medicalized interventions

Minnesota Democrats insist their new policy regime will significantly reduce the risk of suicide, anxiety, and depression, and claim it is vital to

the well-being of young people with gender distress. Rep. Leigh Finke, who sponsored the “trans refuge” legislation, describes blockers, hormones and surgery as “life-saving.”

In taking this position, however, Minnesota leaders have turned a blind eye to developments in Europe, where Scandinavian countries — long liberals’ lodestar of progressive thinking — are now decisively rejecting the medicalized model in favor of a holistic focus on psychotherapy and counseling.

Sweden, Finland, and the United Kingdom began to rethink gender-affirming care around 2019. They did so using the standards of “evidence-based medicine,” which holds that interventions should be based on the best available research. Health authorities in each of these nations carried out a “systematic review” of all available studies on the medicalized model’s effectiveness. Rigorous analyses of this kind are the gold standard of evidence-based medicine because they don’t just summarize individual studies’ conclusions, but assess their methodological strengths and weaknesses to determine the reliability of their findings.

The European research reviews flatly contradict Minnesota policymakers’ claim that blockers, hormones, and surgery are medically necessary and life-saving for gender-distressed young people. In July 2023, 21 clinicians and researchers from nine countries summarized these findings in a letter to the *Wall Street Journal*. The “claim that gender transition reduces suicides is contradicted by every systematic review,” they wrote, while evidence that hormones yield mental health benefits is of “low or very low certainty.”

Medicalized treatment for gender dysphoria also creates “significant” risks, including “sterility, lifelong dependence on medication and the anguish of regret,” the clinicians observed.

This evidence-based confirmation that blockers and hormones do not reduce suicidal thoughts or attempts is of pivotal importance. Advocates of gender-affirming care routinely pressure wavering parents to acquiesce to medicalized interventions by asking, “Would you rather have a dead daughter or a live son?” But the claim

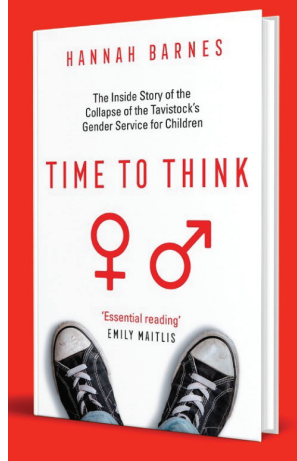
that withholding gender affirmation will provoke suicides is “purposeful disinformation,” according to Dr. Riittakerttu Kaltiala, Finland’s top expert on pediatric gender medicine, and spreading it is “irresponsible.”

Today, Scandinavian countries and the U.K. are labeling blockers and hormones as “experimental” and limiting their use to rigorously regulated clinical trials. (Gender surgery for minors is generally prohibited in Europe.) Increasingly, other countries, such as France, are following their lead.

If adopted in the U.S., this approach would deny puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones to the vast majority of American teens currently receiving them.

For a decade, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has fueled the “school to clinic pipeline,” as the Manhattan Institute’s Leor Sapir has called it, by portraying gender confusion as a normal part of growing up and celebrating young people who adopt a “trans” identity as the “new Rosa Parks.”

Britain’s abrupt about-face on gender-affirming care reveals what can happen when courageous medical providers and journalists break the code of silence that characterizes many gender clinics. In 2019, five clinicians at London’s Tavistock Centre — then the nation’s only National Health Service (NHS) pediatric gender-identity clinic — resigned as a “matter of conscience,”



Barnes’ book chronicles Tavistock’s Gender Identity Development Service clinic scandal in which ideology was prioritized over medical care and clinical practice.

X / @hannahsbee

bringing the number to 35 in three years.

Their revelations echoed those of Jamie Reed at Washington University in St. Louis. “I felt for the last two years what kept me in the job was a sense there was a huge number of children in danger and I was there to protect them from the service, from the inside,” one clinician told the *Times of London*. “The Tavistock clinicians fear they have played a part in a huge medical scandal,” says journalist Hannah Barnes, author of the 2023 bombshell book, *Time to Think: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Tavistock’s Gender Service for Children*.

In 2021, the NHS commissioned pediatrician Hilary Cass to carry out an independent review of the Tavistock service. Her devastating report concluded that the type of treatment provided there “was not safe or viable as a long-term option for the care of young people with gender-related distress.” In 2022, NHS ordered Tavistock to be closed.

The U.K., like other European countries, is now reorienting care for gender dysphoria around psychotherapy and counseling. Its new “holistic model” is mindful of the risks of even non-medicalized “social transition.” According to the NHS, for most young patients, gender dysphoria will be a “transient phase” best treated with psychological support.

Minnesota Democrats ignore developments in Europe

How do Minnesota policymakers justify their continued support for medicalized treatment of pediatric gender distress in the face of decisive European rejection? They rely, not on evidence-based

medicine, but on the policy statements and guidelines of professional medical societies such as the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), which prefer the medicalized model to non-invasive “watchful waiting.”

Minnesota advocates of gender-affirming care persist in “seeing no evil.” In this, they echo Dr. Rachel Levine, the Biden administration’s assistant secretary for health, who recently asserted that in America, no children are receiving drugs or hormones for gender care who shouldn’t.

But Dr. Gordon Guyatt of Canada’s McMaster University, a founder of evidence-based medicine, dismisses U.S. medical societies’ guidelines for managing youth gender dysphoria as “untrustworthy.” For example, an unrebutted, peer-reviewed “fact check” in 2019 found that the AAP’s 2018 statement seriously “misrepresented” the studies cited, which “repeatedly said the very opposite of what AAP attributed to them.”

It seems clear that treatment protocols for, say, cancer patients would never be based on such low-quality evidence. Why is this tolerated in the U.S. for children experiencing gender distress?

There are three primary reasons. First, pediatric gender care in America has become politicized, say the European authors of the *Wall Street Journal* letter. As a result, they explain, prestigious U.S. medical societies are “exaggerating the benefits and minimizing the risks.”

Ideological capture of this kind has occurred at the U.S. Endocrine Society, according to endocrinologist Roy Eappen of “Do No Harm,” a group that opposes extreme identity politics in medicine. Most endocrinologists “rue” the “elevation of transgender activism over medical expertise and patient needs,” he wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* in June 2023. But they are “cowed into silence” by activists who equate questioning the gender-affirming model with attacking the troubled young people who express distress.

The second reason for the medicalized model’s proliferation is that, in 2016, the Obama administration prohibited insurers from limiting health care coverage on the basis of gender identity. Subsequently,

public and private insurance coverage for such care expanded exponentially. Today, more than half of states pay for gender transition treatment through Medicaid for low-income families. The Biden administration has proposed an expansion of Obama-era policies.

One detransitioner summarized the paradoxical situation this way: “These

If adopted in the U.S., this approach would deny puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones to the vast majority of American teens currently receiving them.

interventions are mind-bendingly expensive, entirely cosmetic and medically unnecessary, yet are covered by insurance.”

The third reason that “gender care” is expanding so rapidly is that the medicalization of gender distress has become a big business. Puberty blockers can cost tens of thousands of dollars a year. Synthetic cross-sex hormones generally run between \$100 and \$500 a month. For most patients, this will be a lifelong cost.

Surgeries too, are exploding. Between 2016 and 2019, nearly 4,000 young people between the ages of 12 and 18 underwent gender-related procedures, according to a 2023 Columbia University study. About 87 percent were breast or chest surgeries, which can cost between \$5,000 and \$10,000. Since 2019, the pressure to medically transition children has dramatically increased. Genital surgeries cost between \$25,000 and \$75,000 and often result in complications. (These can include internal pressure sores, urinary obstructions, severe and recurrent bladder stones — and worse.) Young people are hurrying to complete as many cosmetic modifications as possible before they are dropped from their parents’ policy at age 26.

Tragically, detransitioners who regret their earlier actions — like California 19-year-old Chloe Cole, whose breasts were removed at age 15 — generally don’t qualify for insurance coverage, and often have difficulty even finding a physician who will see them. Ironically, they can’t get coverage because they no longer have a diagnosed medical condition — gender dysphoria.

Americans don’t know what is really happening

What’s underway in Minnesota, and across America, is a medical scandal of huge proportions. Democrats who rely on politicized medical societies’ recommendations should be mindful of a monstrous precedent — the eugenics movement of the 1920s and ’30s — when many in the medical establishment were complicit in the state-approved sterilization of vulnerable populations, primarily black, disabled, or mentally ill.

Minnesota policymakers claim the effort to restrict “gender-affirming care” is motivated by hatred. In fact, opposition is not about impugning an “identity,” but supporting and protecting fragile, troubled children. Significantly, in Denmark, opposition to medicalized interventions is led by a mainstream LGBT organization, the Danish Rainbow Council.

“As adults, we must dare to step up and say stop this madness,” which involves “castrat[ing] and steriliz[ing] children and physically destroy[ing] their otherwise healthy bodies,” the council declared in 2022.

Minnesota’s new trans refuge law poses real danger to at-risk children and their families. At the same time that European nations are embracing holistic care centered on counseling, a new state law banning “conversion therapy” for gender identity will essentially bar Minnesota youngsters from receiving such care.

And parents who resist condemning their children to invasive puberty blockers and lifelong hormones will live in fear that the state, through its courts, will order this to be done.

Gov. Walz may regard this as “compassion.” Real compassion and care for these vulnerable young people would be following the science. ★

Enjoy the Blackouts, JACK

The Biden administration's reckless EPA regulations endanger us all.

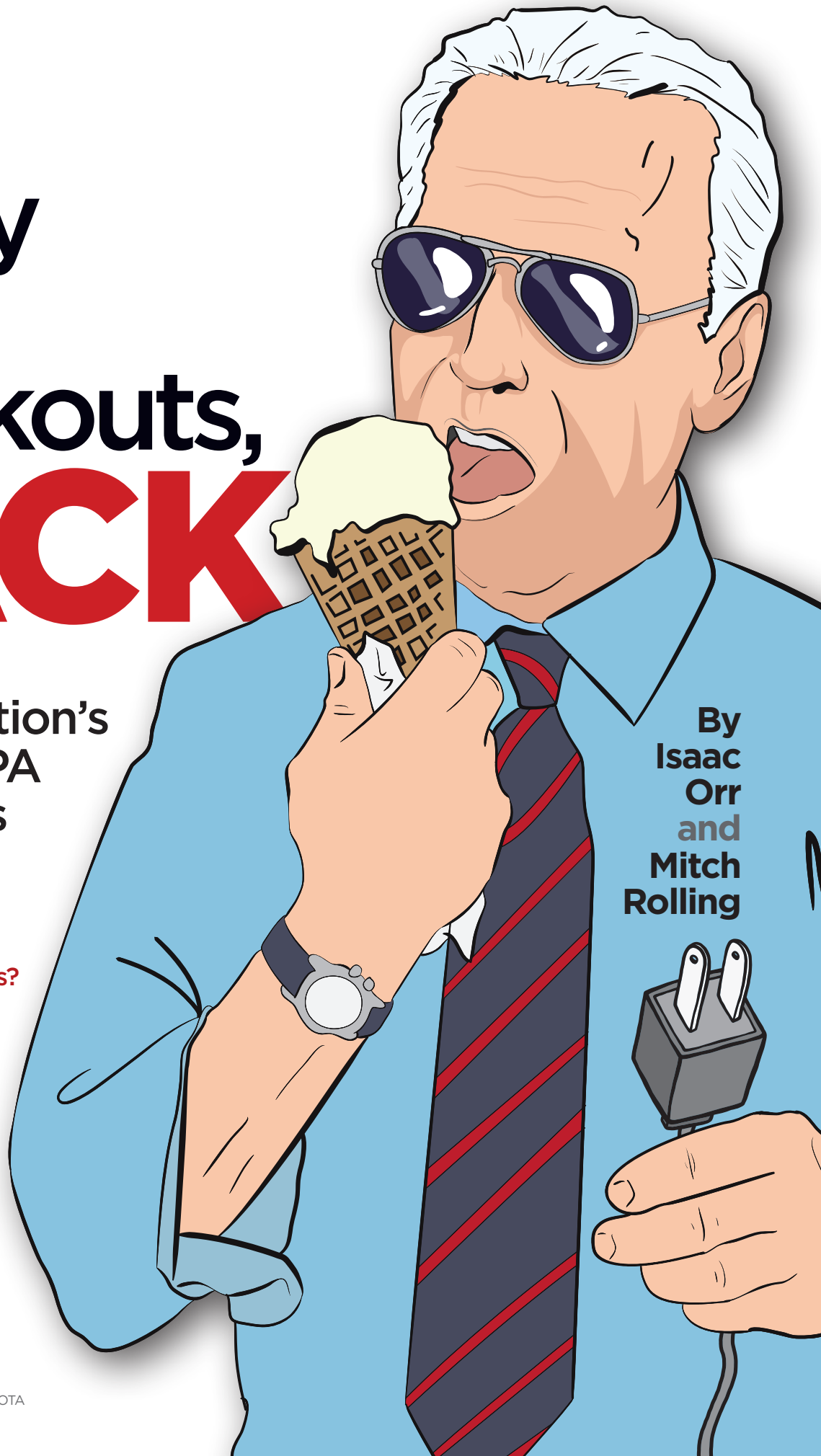
Build back blackouts?

"I'm here to shut down reliable power plants and eat ice cream, and I'm all out of ice cream. Enjoy the blackouts, Jack."
—President Joe Biden, probably.

Get ready for rolling blackouts and melted ice cream due to an onslaught of new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations that will kneecap the reliability of the American electric grid.

According to Biden EPA

By
Isaac
Orr
and
Mitch
Rolling



administrator Michael Regan, the agency’s goal is to force coal and some natural gas plants to endure deaths by a thousand cuts, piling so many onerous new rules and regulations onto the utility industry that plant owners decide to shut down or limit power generation from these reliable assets, rather than retrofit them with pollution control equipment, in favor of building unreliable wind and solar generators.

Posing the biggest threat to grid reliability among the EPA’s onslaught of reckless regulations are the agency’s proposed rules limiting carbon dioxide emissions from new and existing coal and natural gas-fired power plants. The EPA believes these regulations and the so-called Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) will fundamentally transform the electric grid by causing the retirement of nearly all of the coal plants on the regional electric grid to which Minnesota belongs — the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) — within the next 10 to 15 years. The EPA assumes these power plants will be replaced with unreliable wind turbines and solar panels.

The breakneck speed and broad scope of the EPA’s rules prompted four of the largest power grid operators in America, which serve all or part of 30 states and 155 million people, to take the unprecedented step of warning the agency that its proposed regulations could undermine the reliability of the U.S. electric system.

These warnings are important and appreciated, but the grid operators didn’t conduct the modeling necessary to show just how devastating the regulations would be to the reliability of the electric grid. American Experiment jumped at the opportunity to conduct this analysis of MISO on behalf of the North Dakota

Transmission Authority (NDTA), making us the only organization in the country, that we are aware of, to conduct this deep dive on the impact of the rules.

On the brink of blackouts

First, it’s helpful to recall the current state of the electric grid in the United States, generally, and MISO, specifically: It isn’t good.

Since the summer of 2020, rolling blackouts have affected California, Texas, the Southwest Power Pool (SPP) — a regional grid that includes all or part of 13 states spanning North Dakota to New Mexico — and the Southeast, including portions of Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

Furthermore, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), the organization responsible for developing and enforcing electric reliability standards for the United States and Canada, warned last summer that two-thirds of the country, including MISO, was at an elevated risk of power outages if electricity demand had been higher than normal.

Blackouts are a growing risk because too many conventional power plants — those powered by reliable coal, natural gas, or nuclear fuels — are being retired due to state and federal energy policies, eroding the margin of safety the country once had. At the same time, electricity demand is growing as lawmakers attempt to “electrify everything” by mandating electric vehicles (EVs) on the roads and banning the use of natural gas for home heating and cooking.

In short, policymakers are burning the reliability candle at both ends, and the Biden administration’s EPA regulations will only throw fuel on this fire.

MISO ICAP: Current Grid vs. EPA’s Modeled Generation Mix Under Proposed Section 111 Rules

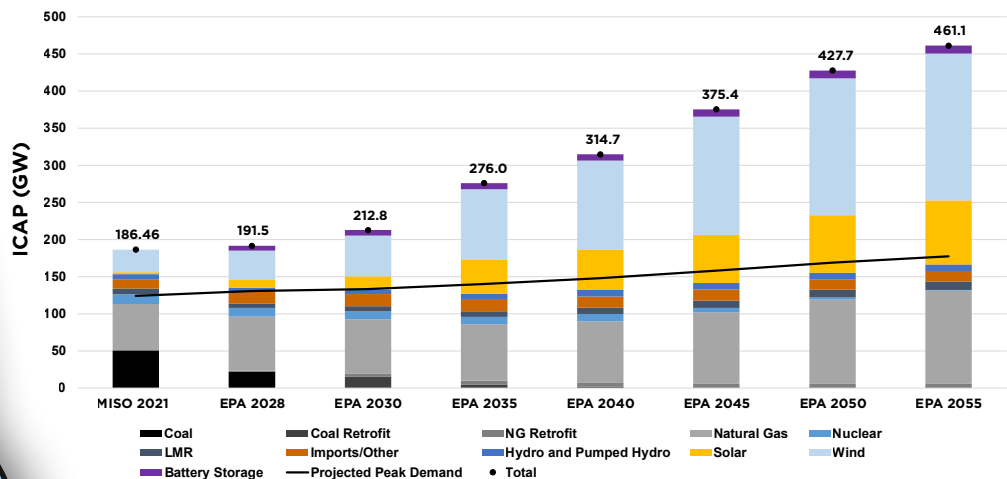


Figure 1. The EPA assumes the amount of power plant capacity will increase by a factor of 2.5, or 250 percent, but electricity demand will only grow by 43 percent.

Data Source: Integrated Proposal with LNG Update

About the regulations

The EPA proposed the new carbon dioxide regulations on new and existing coal and natural gas power plants in May of 2023. The EPA claims the proposed rules will not force coal or natural gas-fired power plants to shut down. Rather, these facilities can remain operational past 2040 if they reduce their carbon dioxide emissions using carbon capture and sequestration equipment or, in the case of natural gas plants operating in a baseload capacity, co-firing with so-called “green hydrogen.”

The problem is neither carbon capture and sequestration technology nor so-

Not only would these regulations impose an extreme financial burden on families that are already struggling to make ends meet, but the costs of complying with these regulations would far exceed the benefits.

called “green hydrogen” have been demonstrated to work at the scale that the EPA is mandating, leaving coal and natural gas plant owners with few options besides shutting down or reducing the hours the plants operate.

Even the EPA doesn’t seem to believe that its regulations are attainable. Looking into the agency’s own modeling assumptions reveals that it expects these regulations and the IRA subsidies for wind and solar to force the closure of nearly all the coal plants in MISO by 2035, and the agency assumes virtually zero hydrogen-burning plants will be in operation in the future, as shown in Figure 1.

Instead, the EPA assumes a massive increase in the number of wind turbines, solar panels, and battery storage facilities will be built to meet rising electricity demand in the future and to replace the coal and nuclear fleets that the agency believes will shut down by 2055. This

leaves the MISO region dangerously dependent on the whims of the weather to maintain grid reliability.

Rule by regulator

The EPA is mandating large changes to the electric grid in a short period of time. Any reasonable person would think that a regulation with such broad implications for the American electric grid should be subject to a thorough and transparent reliability analysis to ensure these changes won’t cause rolling blackouts.

However, the EPA never analyzed how IRA subsidies for wind and solar or its carbon dioxide regulations would affect the reliability of the electric grid; *it simply assumed the grid would be reliable*. This baseless assumption is so unbelievable that our jaws dropped when we read it in EPA documents discussing the rules.

It doesn’t seem possible that a small group of unelected bureaucrats at the EPA could be allowed to mandate such massive changes to our electric grid — and our way of life — without having to do a basic reliability study and transparently show their work to the American people, but this is how our system currently operates. This “rule by regulator” is disheartening at best and depressing at worst.

The only way to fight back against these EPA regulations is to do the government’s job for them by modeling the impact of these rules and explaining why they are unworkable in a public comment period. This is why Mitch Rolling and I jumped at the opportunity to work with NDTA analyzing the impact of these regulations on the reliability and cost of electricity in MISO and submitting our findings as part of the formal rulemaking process.

Running the numbers on reliability

We understood the EPA would try to ignore or discredit our work, so we crafted our reliability analysis to be as bulletproof as possible. To this effect, we used the EPA’s own assumptions for what the MISO grid and electricity demand would look like in the future (Figure 1) and compared this installed power plant capacity to historical

hourly fluctuations in electricity demand and wind and solar output from 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Our thought process was simple: If the EPA’s MISO grid of the future can’t handle historical conditions, we should have zero confidence that the EPA’s modeled grid would be able to keep the lights on in the future. The numbers show that the EPA’s grid was not able to keep the lights on using *any* of these historical comparison years and that some of the capacity shortfalls that would occur would be absolutely devastating.

For example, MISO would experience multiple 12-hour blackouts in January 2040 if wind and solar are as unproductive as they were in 2021, illustrated in red in Figure 2. One of the blackouts would be so large that it would account for nearly 20 percent of the electricity demand on the grid, an amount so massive that it would entirely black out Wisconsin and Minnesota at the same time.

Power outages of this size and scope would almost certainly be deadly. More than 246 people died in Texas during Winter Storm Uri in February 2021, when blackouts cut power to 4.5 million people. The winter blackouts stemming from the IRA subsidies and Biden’s EPA carbon dioxide regulations would affect nine to 10 million people in a part of the country that experiences harsher winters than Texas, increasing the odds of fatalities, frozen pipes, property damage, and billions of dollars in economic losses.

The massive blackouts happen for a



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Mitch Rolling is a policy fellow at Center of the American Experiment on energy and environmental issues.

Capacity Shortfall Events in EPA Model Year 2040 Using 2021 Historical Demand and Wind and Solar

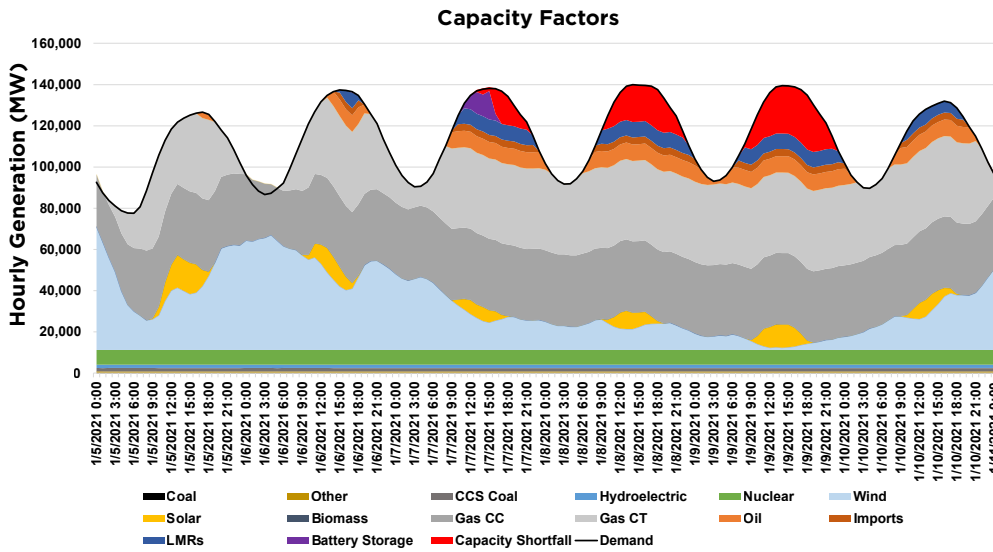


Figure 2. Massive blackouts would occur in 2040 if MISO wind and solar conditions are the same as they were in 2021.

few reasons. The biggest reason is that the wind turbines and solar panels that the EPA assumes will exist in MISO in 2040 aren't producing enough electricity to meet demand. Historical data show wind generation falls throughout the week, solar generation is low in winter due to short days and snow cover, and the battery storage facilities on the grid, shown in purple in Figure 2, aren't large enough to make up for their loss.

Falling wind and solar output wouldn't be a problem if there were enough natural gas plants on to ensure the lights stay on even if there is zero electricity being generated from these sources. The EPA's modeling didn't build nearly enough natural gas plants to replace retiring coal plants *and* meet future growing electricity demand.

As a result, these regulations would endanger everyone by leaving us vulnerable to massive winter blackouts when the weather isn't cooperating.

The true cost of the EPA's regulations

It's one thing to demonstrate that these regulations, as currently drafted, would cause dangerous blackouts, but we also wanted to calculate the true cost of these proposed rules.

To do this, we modeled how much

additional wind, solar, natural gas, and battery storage capacity would be needed to prevent blackouts from occurring based on the historical performance of these resources in 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022, and meet the reductions in carbon dioxide emissions that the EPA assumes will occur because of IRA subsidies and its proposed regulations.

We found that achieving these two criteria would require a much bigger electric grid than the EPA anticipated. In total, the MISO grid would need to add an additional 146 gigawatts (GW) of capacity — enough to meet Minnesota's current peak power demand eleven times — relative to the EPA's assumptions to meet these two criteria. This means the grid shown in Figure 1 would need to be 32 percent bigger.

Building this extra capacity would cost an additional \$246 billion compared to the EPA's assumed grid. This would cause electricity prices for families and businesses to increase by about 32 percent, which equates to approximately \$170 every year for each of the 45 million people living in the MISO region. For a family of four, this is an extra \$680 per year.

Not only would these regulations impose an extreme financial burden on families that are already struggling

to make ends meet, but the costs of complying with these regulations would far exceed the benefits. In fact, our analysis found that these regulations would result in annual compliance costs of \$7.7 billion in MISO, which far exceeds the EPA's estimates of \$5.9 billion per year in net benefits *for the entire nation*.

It is important to remember the EPA's annual net benefit calculations include the agency's calculation of the benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to prevent future temperature increases. This means that the cost of reducing emissions in MISO alone would far exceed the administration's estimated climate benefits for the entire country.

What happens next?

American Experiment submitted our comments to the Federal Register on August 8, 2023. For the next several months, the EPA will read and respond to the comments that have been submitted as part of issuing a final regulation sometime in 2024, which will become the law of the land unless it is stopped as the result of a lawsuit. These legal battles will almost certainly end up at the U.S. Supreme Court in what will be a landmark decision with wide-ranging implications for the future of energy policy in America.

Conclusion

The Biden EPA has set the United States on a crash course with energy reality by regulating dependable power plants out of existence and stacking the deck in favor of unreliable wind and solar generators that are not up to the task of powering our modern lives. Our modeling suggests winter blackouts and skyrocketing electricity prices will be the inevitable end result.

It is an outrage that the EPA can impose such sweeping and dangerous regulations with so little input or oversight from the American people or their elected representatives. Most Americans probably don't even know that the EPA is crafting these regulations, but they'll find out when the lights go dark.

It's truly the EPA versus the grid right now. Enjoy the blackouts, Jack. ★

PAY TO PLAY

Minnesota For Sale

The DFL sold the state's politics to out-of-state interests — and it was a fire sale.



Democrats swept Minnesota's four statewide contests — Governor, Attorney General, State Auditor, and Secretary of State — for the fourth time since 2006. For the first time in a decade, Democrats took complete control of the state legislature. But it was all by the narrowest of margins. For example, the Democratic state auditor, Julie Blaha, was re-elected by fewer than 10,000 votes out of 2.5 million ballots counted. The incumbent attorney general, Keith Ellison, won re-election by only 20,000 votes. Democrats took the majority in the state Senate by a single seat, 34-33, with that 34th seat winning by a margin of only 321 votes in the district representing the Hastings/Red Wing area. Meanwhile, the Democrats' House majority remained unchanged at 70-64.

By all accounts, Democrats barely squeaked by in 2022 despite a fundraising advantage of between two-to-one and three-to-one over their Republican rivals. Minnesota Democrats and their allies raised and spent approximately \$97 million to gain complete political control last year, and now command an annual state budget of more than \$36 billion a year. That return on investment, something like \$370 for every dollar invested, is greater than anything you could find on Wall Street or Silicon Valley. Depending on how you measure it, about one-third to one-half of the Democrats' money came from out of state.

Minnesota was sold, but who were the buyers?

You won't be surprised to learn that public employee unions had the most to gain and represent some of the Democrats' largest contributors. National and state government employee and teachers' unions gave more than \$12 million to the cause this past cycle. Still, there is quite a bit of money in Minnesota politics that defies efforts to trace its source, and not just the so-called "dark money" groups (money raised by political fundraisers who do not disclose

original donors or source of funds). Several political action committees registered in Minnesota last year spent more than \$10 million on state elections, then disappeared into the night. Most listed a Washington, D.C. address, and a few were based in New York City. Thanks to their financial filings, we know which candidates they supported

Illinois and an heir to the Hyatt hotel fortune, gave more than \$2.6 million, according to official campaign finance records. Even Hollywood royalty made the list. Oscar-winning movie director Steven Spielberg and his actress wife Kate Capshaw gave over \$400,000. Pritzker and Spielberg weren't the only members of the prestigious Forbes 400 roster of billionaires from out of state to pour money into our elections. Some of the fortunes behind the biggest corporate names in America are "investors." In fact, 23 households from 12 different states on the Forbes 400 list gave to Minnesota Democrats this past cycle.

George Soros connections

One billionaire in particular stands out. If you look at George Soros' direct donations to Minnesota Democrats as an individual, he doesn't even crack the top 10 list of donors. However, the donations from his organizations and extended family add up to a significant and influential amount in a state as small as Minnesota.

Ninety-three-year-old George Soros was born in 1930 in Budapest. He was granted U.S. citizenship in 1961 and lists his home address as New York City. He made his money in money, most famously betting against the British Pound in 1992.

He still ranks among the richest top 400 world billionaires and would rank even higher, except that he transferred most of his fortune to his nonprofit Open Society Foundations in 2017. Earlier this year, the elder Soros named his youngest son Alexander (age 37) as the new head of the family political operation, passing over Alex's older siblings, but the Soros family's involvement in Minnesota state politics appears to date back to 2006 when George Soros gave \$10,000 to the state DFL party. He gave \$250,000 to the DFL in 2018 and that exact same amount again in 2022. He gave Atty. Gen Keith Ellison \$2,500 (the maximum donation



Donations from [George Soros'] organizations and extended family add up to a significant and influential amount in a state as small as Minnesota.

in Minnesota, but have little idea where they originally got their money.

If you follow Minnesota politics, you won't be surprised to learn the largest individual contributor to the state's Democrats was Alida Messinger, who personally gave more than \$3 million to state Democrats over the past two years. Messinger is an heiress to the Rockefeller oil fortune and the former wife of former Gov. Mark Dayton. But the names of other major individual contributors may surprise you.

J.B. Pritzker, the current governor of

amount) in 2021.

Alex, individually, gave \$100,000 to a Political Action Committee (PAC) supporting Ellison's first bid for state attorney general back in 2018 and gave \$5,000 to the DFL party in 2020. Along with his dad, he also gave the maximum \$2,500 directly to Ellison in 2021. In 2015, Alex contributed the maximum amount to Ellison's last congressional campaign.

The photo on page 45 is from Alex's personal Twitter account and shows the younger Soros with his dear friend Ellison.

In 2022, Alex gave the max \$1,000 each to 13 different Democratic candidates for the state legislature — money that was strategically placed in key swing races. Alex's older brother Jonathan and Jonathan's wife Jennifer gave an additional \$12,000 to Minnesota Democrats in 2022. Recipients included Gov. Tim Walz and Secretary of State Steve Simon. Another brother, Robert, gave \$1,000 to Simon last year.

According to the Open Society Foundations grants database, the Soros group gave \$650,000 to the dark money outfit Faith in Minnesota in 2019, a subsidiary of the political nonprofit ISAIAH. Over the years, Open Society has given \$475,000 directly to ISAIAH. In 2020, Faith in Minnesota completed a massive get-out-the-vote effort on behalf of Minnesota Democrats.

In 2020, the Open Society gave \$500,000 as seed money to the Minneapolis group Vote4MPLS, which organized the so-called defund the police referendum in that city in 2021. Open Society later kicked in an additional \$150,000 to that cause and in 2022, the George Soros-funded PAC Democracy II contributed an additional \$300,000 to the state DFL.

All told, Soros family members and directly controlled organizations have contributed more than \$2.7 million to Minnesota Democrats. Few donors in-state or out-of-state have given more, but it's a significant amount for a state this size. However, money doesn't always equate to electoral success. Despite the generous amount of money

put into the 2021 defund the police referendum in Minneapolis, the ballot measure was defeated by a comfortable 13-point margin. Soros doesn't always back the winning team.

Dark money

Some of the sources for dark money used in Minnesota can be traced, starting with the unassumingly named North Carolina organization State Victory Action, which spent \$1.8 million in the state last year. Five hundred thousand dollars of State Victory's money came from the National Education Association (NEA), a nationwide teachers' union. Another \$200,000 came from a group of carpenters' unions.

Even bigger dollars came from a cluster of dark money outlets aimed at electing Democrats to specific offices. The biggest chunk of change came from the Democratic Governors Association (DGA), of which \$200,000 was traced back to another carpenters' union. The Democratic Attorneys General Association (DAGA) spent millions more through various entities in Minnesota. The Communications Workers of America union tossed in \$100,000.

The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, a casino-owning tribe in Minnesota, gave \$75,000 to DAGA. The Band donated an additional \$131,000 to their political fund, Mah Mah Wi No Min. All but an inconsequential amount of that money went to Democratic candidates and causes. The Democratic Association of Secretaries of State (DASS) also spent millions reelecting Steve Simon last year.

At the legislative level, the Democrats utilize the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee (DLCC). Donors to this group include some household names. For example, the American Federation of Teachers — a national teachers' union — gave \$68,000 to the DLCC. Delta Airlines contributed \$5,000. NextEra

Energy, a renewable energy company, contributed \$10,000. The steel company Nucor contributed just under \$10,000.

The shopping center heiress Deborah Simon of Carmel, Ind., gave \$43,800 to the DLCC. The company her father built owns properties across the United States, including Edina's Southdale Center mall. In 2021, she also gave \$150,000 to the DGA.

The Soros-backed Faith in Minnesota is part of a sprawling group of intertwined nonprofits. Their 501(c)(4) unit received \$200,000 from something called the democracy FIRST PAC, whose principal donor is billionaire philanthropist Lynn Schusterman of Tulsa, Okla. Her late husband, Charlie, made a fortune in the oil and gas industry.

Her name pops up again as a donor to the PAC for America's Future, along with another child of Berkshire Hathaway's, Charlie Munger Schusterman, who also gave contributions under her own name to the reelection campaigns of Democrats Simon and Walz in 2022. The Schusterman's daughter, heiress Stacy Schusterman of Tulsa, gave \$234,000 to the DGA victory fund and also gave individual contributions to both Simon and Walz last year.

The Bridge to Democracy super PAC was launched with much fanfare last year, targeting Trump supporters in 12 states, including Minnesota. In the end, their money was used (through the organization Forward Majority) to oppose some Republicans who were, in fact, *not* Trump supporters but merely running in competitive legislative districts. So much for principle.

Alliance for a Better Minnesota

Those new to Minnesota politics might believe that the most powerful address in the state is the beautiful

1905 State Capitol building, designed by the famous architect Cass Gilbert, but they would be mistaken. The most important address in Minnesota politics is farther up University Avenue in St. Paul, at the intersection



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with Snelling Avenue: Spruce Tree Center, located at 1600 University Avenue. It is home to the organization coordinating the Democrats' fundraising and messaging, the nonprofit network Alliance for a Better Minnesota (ABM).

ABM was founded in 2007, immediately after the last election in which Republicans won statewide races. The group controls an array of 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) corporations and PACs all with the same mission: electing Minnesota Democrats. There are 11 separate corporate entities under the ABM umbrella. Minnesota Democrats spent approximately \$97 million in total in winning the last election, which means about one in five dollars on the Democratic side passed through the ABM machine at some point in its journey.

In the election year of 2022, the ABM network took in and spent some \$19 million — an amount of money that rivals the state Democratic Party. That's more than what ABM spent during the last two election cycles, *combined*. Of that \$19 million, a majority — more than \$12 million — came from out-of-state sources, and more than \$7 million came from the Democratic Governors Association based in D.C. — not a Minnesota-based organization with direct ties to and a vested interest in the lives of Minnesotans. Further, the DGA was the largest single donor to ABM and the largest donor in all of Minnesota politics this past cycle. What does ABM do with all this money? During election times, they do the dirty work of the Democratic Party.

For example, last year ABM's largest single spending item was the more than \$5 million they spent in opposition to the Republican candidate for governor. ABM does the negative campaigning against Republicans so that the actual Democratic candidates can stay above the fray. These are called "independent expenditures."

Groups like ABM understand that elections are a year-round effort, year in and year out. There is no such thing as an "off year" or "non-election" year and ABM has built a professional organization to support this constant effort.

ABM's main fundraising arms are entities called the 2022 Fund and WIN Minnesota. To showcase the co-dependency of these groups, current DFL party chair Ken Martin's previous job was running WIN Minnesota and the 2022 Fund. All of this is done within the letter of state election laws.

Three entities are classified as 501(c)(3) nonprofits.



Democrats' policy agenda is deeply unpopular with state voters; they will need every dollar they can get from Wall Street and Hollywood to prevail again in 2024.

Donors to these outfits can remain anonymous and receive a tax deduction for their contribution. The donors to the three ABM-related 501(c)(4) (dark money) nonprofits can also remain anonymous, of course, but do not receive a tax deduction. But they can rest assured that their money goes more directly to political efforts. Donors to the various state and federal PACs run by ABM must be disclosed, but money from these donors can be used directly in election campaigns.

Most of what the other ABM-related groups do can be classified under the category of "community organizing." Two ABM spinoff groups have graduated

to their own separate office spaces farther west on University Avenue, Minnesota Voice and Minnesota Youth Collective.

Minnesota Voice runs a partnership that includes 40 other nonprofits, organizing the Democratic vote along racial, religious, and class lines. It includes groups representing every hue of the Democratic rainbow coalition and every special interest.

Minnesota Youth Collective

organizes youth votes and trains new generations in the art of community organizing. ABM controls all 11 organizations through a series of interlocking boards of directors. As an organization, it is the power (and money) behind the throne of Minnesota Democratic politics.

In election years, ABM does the shift work for the Democratic Party and its candidates. Year-round, they provide the community organizing muscle to stitch together their diverse coalition into a bare majority at the ballot box. Of course, a fundraising operation is nothing without donors, and as previously illustrated, some of the richest billionaires in America give to state Democrats.

Victory lap

Shortly after the legislative session ended, Gov. Walz went on a nationwide victory tour with a stop at the White House. He made national media appearances and received glowing tributes printed in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.

In August, he represented national Democrats at the Iowa State Fair, promoting a so-called progressive Minnesota as an alternative to the policies being promoted by Republican presidential candidates at the event. But with an election next year, Minnesota Democrats have to do it all over again and defend their small majority in the state House of Representatives.

Our exclusive *Thinking Minnesota* polling at the end of the legislative session taken in May shows that the Democrats' policy agenda is deeply unpopular with state voters; they will need every dollar they can get from Wall Street and Hollywood to prevail again in 2024.

When you follow the money, it's amazing the places you'll go. ★

≡ UNIONS

SECOND CLASS CITIZENS

NO MORE

Five years after a landmark SCOTUS decision, public employees continue exercising their restored freedom of association.

BY
CATRIN
WIGFALL



Five years ago this past summer, the voices of millions of Americans who believe government employees should decide for themselves whether to financially support a union were heard. In a case with far-reaching implications for the teaching profession and education reform, the United States Supreme Court overturned *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*, a 1977 decision that forced government employees to pay “fair share” fees to a union to cover the cost of collective bargaining.

Mark Janus, a social worker employed by the State of Illinois, convinced the Court that the *Abood* decision violates the First Amendment (*Janus v. AFSCME*).

The High Court’s decision was a fully anticipated restoration of the First Amendment rights of public employees who chose not to join a union but were nevertheless forced to finance union activity as a condition of employment. But the opinion went further than expected, underlining the fundamental nature of speech rights by requiring unions and employers to get the *affirmative consent* of employees *before* deducting any fees from paychecks.

The High Court said, “States and public-sector unions may no longer extract agency fees from nonconsenting employees. The First Amendment is violated when money is taken from nonconsenting employees for a public-sector union; employees must choose to support the union before anything is taken from them. Accordingly, neither an agency fee nor any other form of payment to a public-sector union may be deducted from an employee, nor may any other attempt be made to collect such a payment, unless the employee affirmatively consents to pay.”

Mr. Louis Abood, a teacher from Detroit, would certainly be pleased, had he lived to see the *Janus* victory. He and a group of Detroit school teachers made the same argument following the

unionization of teachers in Michigan in the late 1960s. They said forcing teachers to pay agency fees to cover the cost of collective bargaining violated their speech rights because collective bargaining with a public body is inherently political.

The Court in 1977 agreed that the state could not force public employees to become dues-paying union members, but ruled that forcing employees to pay the costs of collective bargaining was an acceptable “impingement” of the First Amendment. This solved the “free rider” problem and appeased those threatening labor unrest.

Real freedom is having a voice and choice on the job — not being silenced for pushing back against policies that are not working.

The problem? Collective bargaining affects all things political: taxes, spending, and the size and policies of government, such as teacher licensure, salaries and pensions, K-12 curriculum, and student discipline.

In June 2018, the Court admitted its error.

Mark Janus’s victory came with the help of previous legal cases, most notably veteran California teacher Rebecca Friedrichs’ case against the California teachers’ union. She came before the Court to make the same argument two years prior to *Janus*, in 2016. All observers, including government unions, said she won her case, but Justice Antonin Scalia died before the opinion was published. So, Mark Janus picked up the baton to continue the race.

Five years later, the *Janus* decision still matters.



This article is an adaptation of and an update to a feature Catrin Wigfall co-authored in the summer 2018 issue of *Thinking Minnesota*.

“The *Janus* decision is great for education — for children, for families, for the teaching profession. For over 40 years educators have been forced to financially subsidize the social, sexual, and political agenda of the teachers’ unions — against our wills, behind our backs, and as a condition of employment. And children are the victims,” says Friedrichs, founder of For Kids & Country.

It is hard to overstate the importance of teachers and the impact of the educational system on our country. The *Janus* decision will help restore professionalism to teaching and empower educators to communicate more freely what they need to educate tomorrow’s leaders.

“We’re finally free; free to stand together, empower our profession and

***Janus* put the importance of worker freedom center stage, but it only resolved part of the problem.**

Antiquated labor laws must be reformed to better protect workers’ rights in the 21st century and ensure true workplace democracy.

uplift our schools. Educators have been given a gift — the freedom to reject state and national unions. I hope teachers will opt out in large numbers and stand together to reject state and national union bullies and reorganize into local-only associations. That would lead to real education reform,” Friedrichs continues.

Powerful state unions like Education Minnesota and its national affiliates, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), now must earn the support of teachers — as long as teachers know they are no longer forced to subsidize government unions in order to keep their job.

Unions have had guaranteed revenue



Policy fellow Catrin Wigfall (center) stands on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court alongside Rebecca Friedrichs (left) during oral arguments of the *Janus* case on February 26, 2018.

for decades, no matter what quality of service they deliver. As a result, unions have become highly political, arrogant, and disinterested in teachers. This has not been good for the women and men they represent or for the students and parents who must live with the results.

With this taken-for-granted approach, teachers’ professional needs have drowned in a political maelstrom. Nonetheless, teachers have tried valiantly to solve educational challenges like the achievement gap, or propose innovative ideas for K-12 curriculum, only to be met with opposition from teachers’ unions and their administrative and political allies. Real freedom is having a voice and choice on the job — not being silenced for pushing back against policies that are not working.

American Experiment has interviewed dozens of teachers who love teaching, but admit the job is getting harder, and less safe, every year. The Minnesota Legislature missed an opportunity during the 2023 legislative session to enact meaningful changes to better protect teachers and students, and there is concern the state’s new discipline policy that bans K-3 suspensions and vague new rules regarding use of force by school personnel, including school

resource officers, could have significant unintended consequences.

With increasing burdens being placed on teachers while their professional needs take a backseat to Education Minnesota’s political priorities, more Minnesota educators continue to say “no thanks” to union membership.

Since American Experiment’s efforts began in 2018 to inform teachers about their rights, Education Minnesota has lost thousands of members. From 2020-21 (the most recent data available), the union lost more than 2,700 members. That is almost two percent of its membership in just one year. This also marks the second consecutive year the state teachers’ union has lost active teacher members and the third consecutive year the union has lost Education Support Professional members (paraprofessionals, teacher aides, etc.). Education Minnesota’s total revenue has also declined just over eight percent from 2018 to 2022, even with the union increasing dues to make up for lost memberships. At the national level, the NEA has lost nearly 8 percent of its active members since *Janus* (excluding student members, retired members, etc.) and the AFT has lost roughly 10 percent.

And it’s not just teachers who don’t feel represented by their union. Other



Catrin Wigfall is a policy fellow at Center of the American Experiment. She is the director of Educated Teachers MN and Employee Freedom MN. Catrin spent two years teaching fifth grade general education and sixth grade Latin in Arizona as a Teach for America corps member before using her classroom experience to transition back into education policy work.

state employees have also decided their decades-long union relationship isn't in their best interest. Through American Experiment's Employee Freedom project, workers across the state are separating themselves from polarizing and political views endorsed by the union that they do not share.

Among total public workers in Minnesota employed by government entities with union contracts, nearly a third (31.9 percent) have declined union membership as of 2022 public records requests made by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. "Since the *Janus* decision in 2018, an increasing number of public employees are exercising their First Amendment right to opt out of union membership, and that trend is likely to continue," concludes Mackinac.

But the monumental win at the Supreme Court five years ago does not mean the fight for individual rights within government unions is done. There are still teachers and other civil servants unaware of the *Janus* decision, the rights now restored to them, the choices now available to them, and what exercising those choices involves. No, you won't lose your seniority, tenure, pension, health insurance or other benefits as a nonmember. Yes, you are still covered under the negotiated contract. No, you cannot be discriminated against based on union membership status. No, you are not a "freeloader" or "free rider" — labor unions fought for the right to represent all employees within their bargaining unit, regardless of union membership status. Unions could lobby to change their exclusive representation rights that are in the law, but if they wish to maintain the monopolistic privilege of exclusive agency, they create the "free rider" claims so often complained about.

And there are still teachers and civil servants whose rights are being violated — from signatures being forged on membership forms to resignations during the union-enforced opt-out "windows" being denied.

That is why efforts like American Experiment's Educated Teachers and Employee Freedom projects are needed and valued.

Janus put the importance of worker freedom center stage, but it only resolved

part of the problem. Antiquated labor laws must be reformed to better protect workers' rights in the 21st century and ensure true workplace democracy. And state policymakers must be vigilant against efforts by union political allies to unravel what the landmark decision promulgated. Federal, state, and local governments have a constitutional duty to protect their workers' freedom of association, particularly given that declining ranks have unions engaging in backdoor methods to safeguard their monopolistic power.

Union executives have no experience

Pushing back against unions' priorities and their highly charged political agenda is not an attack on our civil servants — teachers included. Rather, it's an attempt to get the unions' attention and let them know they are missing the mark on what public employees want them to prioritize.

being customer focused; they have not made the institutional shift to thinking of teachers and other public employees as customers and professionals, instead of as captives and taken for granted. They have deviated from their primary mission — negotiating compensation and working conditions — to making demands aimed at advancing their far-ranging political activism and social agendas. This focus is a detriment to both their members and, in the case of teachers, our children. Unions can't take on everything without ending up doing many things poorly.

While those beholden to the union "scream from the rooftops about how wrong and unfair the *Janus* ruling is, let's pause for a moment and at least acknowledge that, in the context of the teachers' unions, almost no one is even

talking about what's best for kids.... And if the well-being of children — who are mandated by law to attend school — isn't front and center, I don't want to hear the wailing," writes former educator and union member Erika Sanzi for the Fordham Institute.

It's telling when the national teachers' union fails to pass a resolution that says the union will "re-dedicate itself to the pursuit of increased student learning in every public school in America by putting a renewed emphasis on quality education," yet discusses hundreds of motions intent on turning public education into a training ground for political activism — from broad-brushing police as biased and corrupt, increasing abortion rights and mocking the Second Amendment as a societal harm to fighting for preferential treatment based on immutable characteristics, to name a few.

"These union bosses now view themselves as leaders of a radical progressive political movement, not as promoters of the welfare of workers in a specific workplace," writes Mailee Smith with Illinois Policy in *National Review*. "Government unions' desperate search for influence demonstrates that they're dedicated to using their political power to push their agendas, even at the expense of their remaining members' interests."

Pushing back against unions' priorities and their highly charged political agenda is *not* an attack on our civil servants — teachers included. Rather, it's an attempt to get the unions' attention and let them know they are missing the mark on what public employees want them to prioritize.

"...[W]hile great teachers work feverishly to educate children in reading, math, and other core subjects," unions' control of the conversation around education has Americans believing that all teachers agree with the union agenda, states Friedrichs. "We do not. Unions — more aptly named the education mafia — have picked our pockets, exploited our profession, ravaged our students, and dismantled our once-great educational system, all while claiming to represent us."

Teachers and other government employees must continue to exercise their restored rights and let the union know that until it at least learns to respect them, it certainly does not speak for them. ★



Q&A

FREE SPEECH?

Journalist **Matt Taibbi** tells **John Hinderaker** why the First Amendment is under threat from Big Government and Big Tech.



Matt Taibbi is an award-winning journalist, author, and staunch defender of free speech. He recently testified in front of Congress regarding the sweeping effort of government agencies and Big Tech to control and censor information. He is the publisher and editor of the online magazine *Racket News*, and host of the popular podcast *America This Week*.

John Hinderaker: Tell us about your background. You're a journalist by profession?

Matt Taibbi: I am, yes. And I'm from a family of journalists. My father was a news reporter for a long time on NBC, and my stepmother was also a business anchor at CNN. *Rolling Stone* is the main publication that I wrote for. I worked for them for a little over 15 years covering presidential campaigns. That was the beat made famous by Hunter S. Thompson. But I've also written for various publications here and abroad. I lived in the former Soviet Union for about 10 years at the start of my career and wrote in both English and Russian for a number of publications, including the *Moscow Times*, which is an expat paper. And then I had my own paper called *The Exile*.

At some point toward the end of 2022, you got involved in what has become known as the Twitter Files in your capacity as a journalist. How did that happen? How did it work logistically?

The company [Twitter, now known as X] and Elon invited me to come and participate. The logistics are very hard to explain because the situation kept changing over time. So for instance, in the first Twitter Files report, I was just handed a batch of documents that pertain to a subject that I had asked about, which was the decision by Twitter to block access to the *New York Post* exposé on

Hunter Biden's laptop. After that, there was a moment where we had basically laptop access to Slack conversations for about an eight-month period of time in Twitter's history before and after the 2020 election that produced, I would say, the lion's share of the raw documentation that we got throughout the entire project. After that, it was a different system where each of the journalists had to submit individualized searches that would be cross-referenced against various databases and terms. In the end, we ended up with big piles of documents once every couple of weeks.



Matt Taibbi has earned a reputation for exposing government and media lies and excesses. He has earned numerous awards for his writing and is the author of 10 books including four *New York Times* bestsellers.

How would you characterize the most important revelations from the Twitter files?

If you want to look into it from a traditional breaking news standpoint, the biggest stories had to do with us nailing down, for instance, the system of communication that existed between the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, about two dozen different tech companies, including Twitter, Facebook, and Google, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. They not only had regular meetings, they had a system that involved flagging requests and sending them to each one

of these companies. They had regular communication flow back and forth. We identified all of that and showed exactly how the process worked and in what direction the information flowed. I think that was the headline revelation. I can get into some of the bigger picture ideas that have only recently come into relief because that, I think, is going to end up becoming the more important consequence of this research. There was a lot that we just couldn't get to at the time because it wasn't clear, and we're only now starting to understand it.

What do you have in mind when you talk about the bigger, more consequential discoveries?

So there's this whole gigantic complex of governmental organizations, law enforcement organizations, intelligence agencies, then there are NGOs, there are civil society organizations, then there's the news media. There's a whole gigantic mix of characters and it took us a long time to figure out who they all were. The biggest story in the end, I think, turned out to be that a lot of these organizations that are supposed to be providing checks on each other, for instance, the news media against government, or corporate organizations are supposed to sometimes push back against regulatory initiatives. They were all actually cooperating in what one of the actors called the shared endeavor of censoring, basically the general public. And that is a total corruption of how democracy is supposed to work.

These groups are supposed to be checking each other's influence, and instead they were coordinating to create essentially a kind of subterranean bureaucratic state. This is very hard to explain, but I think it's a very powerful, scary story that was under the surface of these documents. And we're only just now kind of putting together how all that works.

What is really striking to me is the alacrity with which these employees



of the social media companies like Twitter were happy to collaborate with government officials in this censorship project.

Yes, there's a tone that's very strange. Normally, when the government knocks on the door of a corporation and says, "Hey, we want you to do this, or else there are going to be regulatory consequences," what you would expect to see is a series of executives saying, "Alright, how do we push back against this? How do we make sure that the boundaries are established so that we don't have to give away the store to the federal government every single time?" But instead of that kind of adversarial relationship, which we saw a bit of at the beginning of this process like in 2016 or 2017, it very quickly

"They call information that is true but has a so-called adverse consequence *malinformation*, which is an Orwellian idea. We found countless examples of this in the files."

devolved into an open partnership where essentially all these different government agencies are calling the Trust and Safety employees at Twitter.

They're just sort of freely associating about which groups they're going to clamp down on. There's no representation of the people in all this, but there is a very, very tight bond both socially and professionally between these executives and the officials in government where there should be a barrier between them, and it's just not there. It's also not there between the company and people who work in news media — they would both be collaborating about which kinds of accounts should be taken down. As a

reporter, it was very odd for me to see the nature of that relationship.

Regarding censorship and the information contained on Hunter Biden's laptop — the relevance lies in the documents found as they relate to then-candidate Biden. Many people think that the suppression of that story really played a significant role in the 2020 presidential campaign.

It very easily could have played a significant role. It was very strange to look at the internal discussions about this because the primary motivation of Twitter, at least internally at the company, was not to have a repeat of 2016. They were worried about what they called hack and leak, or hack and dump, operations. They've been warned about this by officials at the FBI. But as a journalist, I know that that kind of reporting is expressly allowed in American journalism. The Supreme Court has ruled allowing us to publish documents that are stolen, but in the public interest — we do it all the time. For instance, during the War on Terror period and WikiLeaks, which was a partner to all these major news organizations. Whistleblowers bring us things that are taken from their workplaces, and we publish them; that's legitimate and goes back a long way to the Pentagon Papers.

One of the scarier things we found in the Twitter Files was a discussion about the reversal of what they called the Pentagon Papers principle, which is the idea that we should publish anything that's true irrespective of the provenance or political purpose of those documents. Again, I was raised as a traditional journalist, so I'm not supposed to care about which way the facts break. My job is supposed to be narrowly focused on, "Is this true? Can I prove that? And if so, I'll put it out there." And then the public can figure out what to do with that information. But now there is a new idea, which is we have to think about how the public is going to perceive this



Dan Goldman, (D) congressman from New York

"He was basically asking me to pledge my allegiance to the Russia investigation."

information. Is it going to cause them to vote for the wrong person? Is it going to cause them to avoid being vaccinated? So they call information that is true but has a so-called adverse consequence *malinformation*, which is an Orwellian idea. We found countless examples of this in the files.

It wasn't a question of trying to stop the propagation of information that was false — in fact, they acknowledged truths at times — but they'd rather people not learn about it.

Yes. And that's also the basis of the current litigation that's moving toward the Supreme Court, the *Missouri v. Biden* case about internet censorship. It's rooted in the experiences of three highly credentialed academics, one from the University of California system, one from Stanford, and one from Harvard. They were arguing against lockdowns and saying there are negative mental health consequences and they had signed what's called the Great Barrington Declaration.

This gets to the issue of why we don't have a media regulator in America — because truth squads are almost always susceptible to getting things wrong. And in this case, these doctors were de-amplified, blacklisted, and put on algorithmic suppression lists because they were advocating against federal health policy. But they weren't wrong. It was an opinion about policy that was just being suppressed. It's a violation

of the First Amendment, but it's also a violation of what I would call free speech culture: The idea that we arrive at the truth by freely talking about things. It's a fundamental American idea, and it's just been shoved aside without any debate. And this is another thing that we saw a lot in the files.

Again, this is very upsetting for me personally in my own field of journalism. The way this first presented itself was when journalists strayed from this model of just reporting the facts, and then it's up to the audience to make sense of it. Our job is to make sure that we get it right, and then we're upholding our part of the democratic contract. Your part of it is to evaluate this information as citizens. There was something touching and inspiring about that model — we believed in it, and audiences believed in it, and they held us to a standard, and suddenly, people in my business started to say, “We don't trust audiences to make the right call anymore. We're going to tell them overtly how to interpret facts that they get. We're going to constantly stick the words in, ‘without evidence.’ I always understood if it's a big story, I want to put it out. If it's against the Republicans or if it's against Democrats, whatever. It's not my job to worry about that, but they do now, and it's antithetical to free speech culture.

There were White House officials who were engaged in part of this censorship.

That's some of the worst evidence in the *Missouri v. Biden* case. For instance, there was a meme that somebody put on Twitter basically making a joke about the vaccine and saying, 10 years from now you're going to have class action attorneys doing commercials. If you took the vaccine, call 1-800 whatever — it's a joke, but the Biden administration was furious. They wanted that down

immediately, and there's an email record where they're openly saying, “This has to come down ASAP.” That's very strong evidence of a direct First Amendment violation, and the judges have said as much. They wanted to remove Tucker Carlson's broadcasts. They were very upset that Joe Biden's personal account had been de-amplified inadvertently when he was talking too much about vaccines. That actually triggered an

who are building this capability, irrespective of politics, and it doesn't really matter which administration is in power. They're much more interested in expanding capability than in suppressing particular points of view, although that's also happening.

Many people viewed the Twitter Files as being a real revelation. You were called upon to testify in front of the House Weaponization of the Federal Government Subcommittee. What kind of reception did you get from the Democrats on that committee?

I'm a lifelong Democrat and the reception was beyond hostile. Dan Goldman, the congressman from New York, was holding up indictments that he had worked on with the Mueller investigation and asked me if I agreed with the idea that Russians were interfering with our election. He was basically asking me

to pledge my allegiance to the Russia investigation. He's a lawyer. I had to remind him that indictments are not facts, they're just charges. I can't agree or disagree. It was terrifying and hostile in many other ways, too.

An IRS agent had come to my door as I was testifying. When I got home, my wife handed me a note that said, “Call me back in four days.” When I finally reached them, it was about two very strange issues. One of them was totally ridiculous, and the other one was minor that they could have dealt with by correspondence. I told the people on the subcommittee that the IRS came by and this might be witness intimidation and they may want to look into it. And they did. I didn't say anything publicly about it until we got back some information that was kind of upsetting, specifically that the case had been opened on me on Christmas Eve, which was a Saturday, and the day that probably the biggest Twitter File story came out. ★



Taibbi testifies in front of the Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government on March 9, 2023 about investigating the Twitter Files.

algorithmic response that de-amplified his account, which they demanded to be fixed right away.

Is there any indication that Trump was involved in the censorship or knew about it?

We didn't find Trump's fingerprints, per se, on any documents, although we were told that he had personally written to some of the people at Twitter demanding that this account or that be taken down or he was upset about somebody tweeting about him.

Yes, there were some Trump officials who were involved at the State Department, for instance. But most of what we were looking at I would describe as nonpartisan. It's permanent security and law enforcement officials

THE GREAT MIGRATION

Data shows more people are walking away from Minnesota — or aren't coming here at all.



John Hinderaker

Today, there are more young Minnesotans going to South Dakota for more productive lives than are moving in the other direction.

In this issue of *Thinking Minnesota*, Martha Njolomole relates how she came from Malawi, in Southeast Africa, to Minnesota. It is an inspiring story. My own journey to Minnesota was much shorter; I grew up in South Dakota. But, much as Martha came to the United States in search of opportunity, I came to Minnesota for the same reason. When I was growing up, ambitious young people in South Dakota often moved to Minnesota in search of a better job and a better life.

After finishing high school in South Dakota, I went to college and law school in the Northeast. Upon graduating from law school, I took a job with a Minneapolis law firm. Why did I do that? Because at that time, 1974, Minnesota was seen as a prosperous and desirable place to live. It was just one year after the *Time* magazine cover story that called Minnesota “the state that works.” That *Time* article was the background for the cover story in the summer 2023 issue of *Thinking Minnesota*, in which economist John Phelan asked the question, does Minnesota still work? Sadly, in many ways it does not.

We can debate the pros and cons of the policies that Minnesota has pursued in recent years: high taxes, massive government spending, pervasive regulations, schools effectively run by the teachers’ union, and so on. What is not debatable is that both Minnesotans and non-Minnesotans are voting with their feet. On a net basis, people are fleeing Minnesota.

American Experiment has been tracking the numbers on interstate migration ever since the Internal Revenue Service made its massive database publicly available in 2016. In a seminal paper, our Peter Nelson made three basic points: 1) More people are moving out of Minnesota than are moving in. 2) It is not just that Minnesota is losing “the rich” or the elderly. On the contrary,

Minnesota loses residents to other states, on net, at every income level over \$50,000, and some of our biggest losses are among the young. 3) People leaving Minnesota is only one-half of the story. Equally important is the fact that not many people from other states choose to move here.

Many Minnesotans didn’t want to believe that our state was in decline. But the data uncovered have been reinforced each time the IRS has updated its database. The pace of Minnesota’s losses is accelerating. In 2022, we recorded our largest net loss ever, 19,400 residents.

Among the states to which Minnesota loses residents, year after year, is South Dakota. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s young people in South Dakota saw Minnesota as a promised land, today, young people are moving to South Dakota for better job opportunities and lower taxes. While Minnesota lost 19,400 net residents in 2022, South Dakota gained 8,424. No doubt that is partly because since 2018, South Dakota ranks second among the states in growth in median family income.

Today, there are more young Minnesotans going to South Dakota for more productive lives than are moving in the other direction. If that is fine with you, I say, don’t change a thing. But if you want to reverse that population flow, you are going to have to enact better policies.

Martha Njolomole is one of many thousands of Africans who emigrate to America every year in search of a better life. Why can’t Minnesota be a similar beacon, not just to residents of other countries, but to our fellow Americans? Our governor’s office can put out all the press releases it wants about how great Minnesota is. But until we are a state that people move *to*, not *away from* — a state like Florida, Texas, Tennessee, South Dakota and others — those press releases will ring hollow. ★

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