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Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)

The Chattanooga Times

ESTABLISHED 1869
ADOLPH S. OCHS
PUBLISHER 1878-1935

PAM SOHN
TIMES PAGE EDITOR

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COMMENTARY

WILL CNN'S NEW FACEBOOK AD BE EFFECTIVE?

You see an apple.

But not just any apple. Perfect in color, perfect in shape and without blemish, this is the apple other apples dream of being. It is the acme of apples, the most apple-y apple you ever saw, and you'd never mistake it for something else.

"This is an apple," says a male voice, as a piano idles aimlessly. "Some people might try to tell you that it's a banana. They might scream, 'Banana, banana, banana,' over and over and over again. They might put BANANA in all caps. You might even start to believe that this is a banana. But it's not. This is an apple."

The apple's bona fides thus established, a tagline flashes onscreen: "Facts First." Then comes a logo: CNN.

Thus goes an ad that debuted Monday on Facebook. Here's hoping it's effective. The truth needs all the help it can get in an era where untruth spews from the highest levels of American governance with a brazenness and frequency never seen before. Still, there's something a little rich in the fact that the spot was produced by a network known for shows where pundits in boxes yell half-truths over one another.

The best of them, meaning the worst of them, was Jeffrey Lord, the Donald Trump surrogate who, before he was fired in August for tweeting a Nazi salute, made jaws drop on a regular basis with the crazy things he said. Such as when he called the Ku Klux Klan a "leftist terrorist organization." And said Black Lives Matter caused the rise of white supremacy. And blamed singer Ariana Grande for the terrorist attack at her concert in England.

It's bad enough Lord spewed that nonsense. What's worse is, CNN gave him the platform to do so. The network would likely say that it just wants to make sure all viewpoints are represented. But the barrenness of that rationale was exposed 13 years ago in a commentary Emory psychology professor Drew Westen did for NPR. He had noticed how CNN brought in Republican and Democratic flacks to comment on "claims" that weapons were missing from an Iraqi munitions dump.

But those were not "claims," said Westen. It was a fact the weapons were missing, and also a fact that this was an embarrassment for the Bush White House. He concluded that CNN failed to frame it as such, brought in left and right talking heads to cover itself, out of fear that reporting the truth would be seen as bias. "We have," he said, "grown accustomed to hearing two versions of every story, one from the left and one from the right, as if the average of two distortions equals the truth."

That's how squeamish news media were over a decade ago. It has only gotten worse since then.

To be sure, CNN does not bear all or even most of the responsibility for America's retreat into facts-free incoherence. For that, blame the internet (which gave lies greater reach), the schools (which did not demand critical thinking), the politicians (who acted like politicians), and all of news media, both print and electronic.

CNN, like many others, has embraced false equivalences in the search for that mythic beast, "objectivity," has sought to suspend the role of judgment in journalism — as if the one did not, by definition, require the other. Now the proverbial chickens come home to roost.

Our president is a liar, our Congress is a circus, our friends are frightened, our enemies emboldened and our society is pulling itself apart. This, we are told, constitutes making America great again. And some people believe it. Why not?

A country that can't tell apples from bananas is a country that will swallow anything.



EDITORIAL

ALL POLITICS ARE LOCAL, ESPECIALLY WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

First it was foxes-to-guard-the-hen-house political appointments. Then it was undoing environmental protections.

Later came drastically cut environmental protection budgets; the erasures of publicly available data on everything from regulatory violations, violators and sanctions, to the simple words "climate change" from the website of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Now we have the actual muzzling of EPA scientists who were told last week that they could not present their research on climate change at a conference in Rhode Island.

If you think this is just more partisan, inside baseball in the beltway bulls-eye of Washington, think again.

The Clean Air Act took Chattanooga from its "dirtiest" air label to the "Scenic City" outdoor mecca it is today, fueling a \$1.2 billion tourism industry here.

EPA's \$25 million Superfund effort dug 108,000 tons of coal tar quicksand from our Chattanooga Creek to pave the way for new development in Alton Park and along South Broad Street. It also forced the Department of Defense to pay for the cleanup of contamination left from the making of TNT at what once was the Volunteer Army Ammunition Plant. That site now is our very successful Enterprise South industrial park — home to our Volkswagen auto assembly plant.

Likewise, EPA forced the removal of acid-making metal residues from 10,000 acres in the Copper Basin, and that action brought life and fish back to the once-dead Ocoee River after copper smelting left a red stain near Copperhill, Tenn., that astronauts could see from space. The now green and beautiful Ocoee region became the 1996 Olympic whitewater rafting venue.

EPA scientists and engineers oversaw the cleanup of the Kingston Ash Spill after 1.1 billion gallons in slushy, toxic ash rolled liked a slow-motion tsunami from a TVA coal power plant's 60-year-old landfill to swallow 300 acres of suburban land and a 100-acre finger of the Emory River in upper East Tennessee. Today, the site is a community park.

Federally directed environmental efforts have a hand in our future, too.

It was EPA lawyers, after Volkswagen's diesel fraud became clear, who negotiated as part of VW's restitution that the Chattanooga VW plant may become a site for the manufacture of future VW electric cars.

And when people buy carpet in Dalton (and when Dalton residents drink their water), they are far less likely today and tomorrow to risk being affected by a chemical known as perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA, which has been linked to kidney cancer, birth defects, immune system disorders and other serious health problems. The chemical that once made Teflon non-sticky and Stainmaster carpet somewhat stain resistant was outlawed, though residue may remain on land and in water.

So it would be a mistake to think that what happens to EPA in Washington isn't a local issue — whether we're talking policy about climate change and air, or about policy pertaining to chemicals and clean water.

That makes downright scary the recent New York Times report that the Trump administration's EPA abruptly canceled the presentations of two agency scientists and an EPA contract consultant who contributed substantial material to a 400-page report about the impact of climate change on Narragansett Bay, the largest estuary in New England.

"This type of political interference, or scientific censorship — whatever you want to call it — is ill-advised and does a real disservice to the American public and public health," said Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I. "We can debate the issues. We can have different viewpoints. But we should all be able to objectively examine the data and look at the evidence."

Robinson Fulweiler, a Boston University ecosystems ecologist, went a step further in an interview with The Washington Post, calling EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's move an "abuse of power."

"The silencing of government scientists is a scary step toward silencing anyone who disagrees," Fulweiler said. "The choice by our government leaders to ignore the abundant and overwhelming data regarding climate change does not stop it from being true or prevent the negative consequences that are already occurring and those that are on the horizon."

But there's more. Pruitt — a longtime ally of fossil fuel interests who, as the former Oklahoma attorney general sued the EPA at least nine times — isn't the only industry toadie who's been given the green light to roll back or dull environmental protections.

Nancy B. Beck, after she joined EPA's toxic chemical unit in May as a top deputy, went right to work rewriting a rule to make it harder to track the health consequences of PFOA — that chemical we have a lot of in the Dalton area. And if it's harder to track health consequences, it becomes harder to regulate it.

For the five years before Beck was appointed to EPA, she was an executive at the American Chemistry Council, the chemical industry's main trade association. Before that, she had worked in a testing lab at Estée Lauder, as a toxicologist in the Washington State Health Department, as a regulatory analyst in the White House. And, oh yeah, she once did a fellowship at EPA.

The New York Times recently noted that an EPA Office of Water top official warned in a memo obtained by the newspaper that the changes directed by Beck may result in an "underestimation of the potential risks to human health and the environment" caused by PFOA and other so-called legacy chemicals no longer sold on the market.

Like the chemicals in coal tar? Coal ash? TNT?

All politics are local.

COMMENTARY

LAST GENERAL STANDING GUARD

And then there was one.

In March, I wrote a column in the form of a memo to Secretary of Defense James Mattis, National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, then-Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly, CIA Director Mike Pompeo and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

It began: "Dear Sirs, I am writing you today as the five adults with the most integrity in the Trump administration. Mattis, McMaster and Kelly, you all served our nation as generals in battle. Pompeo, you graduated first in your class at West Point... Tillerson, you ran one of America's largest companies. I am writing you directly because I believe you are the last 'few good men' who can stand up and reverse the moral rot that has infected the Trump administration from the top."

Well, so much for that.

McMaster doesn't seem to have built much of a relationship with Trump, not one that can constrain him. Tillerson blew himself up by reportedly calling the pres-



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ident a "(bleeping) moron" and then starring in a hostage video in which he sang the president's praises and assured us that Trump was actually "smart."

After Trump tweeted that Tillerson was wasting his time negotiating with North Korea, Tillerson had to publicly assure us that he had not been "castrated" by Trump — which meant that he had.

Finally, sadly, Kelly squandered his moral authority by starring in his own White House podium hostage video. It began well. Kelly spoke eloquently and with great dignity about the pain of losing a son in battle, as he and his wife did, and about certain bedrock values that our society has lost in how we treat one another. He even seemed to explain how the president's phone call to the widow of a Green Beret killed in Niger got garbled.

If only he had stopped there. But instead, he began to talk like Trump, gratuitously smearing a black congresswoman who was a friend of the Green Beret's bereaved family — with provably false charges. It was tragic. In an instant, he went from Kelly to Kellyanne Conway, just another Trump apologist.

Sarah Huckabee Sanders must have known that Kelly had

lost his moral authority, because, the next day, when reporters challenged Kelly's comments about the congresswoman, the White House spokeswoman tried to shut them up by holding up Kelly's formal uniform, saying, "If you want to get into a debate with a four-star Marine general, I think that's something highly inappropriate." Sorry, Sarah, when a general lies, he loses his moral and formal credibility.

That leaves Mattis as the last man standing — the only one who has not been infected by Trump's metastasizing ethical cancer, the only one who has not visibly lied on Trump's behalf, and who can still put some fear into Trump.

Well, Mattis, here's some free advice to the last man standing: Don't just stand there. If you just stand there, you'll be next. Because Trump and Sanders will be looking to enlist your old uniform next in their defense — that is, if Trump doesn't throw you under the bus first to escape responsibility for the bungled operation in Niger.

Secretary Mattis, we don't need any more diagnosis of the problem. We need action. And I am not talking about a coup. I mean you need to lead McMaster, Tillerson and Kelly (Pompeo

is a lost cause) in telling Trump that if he does not change his ways, you will all quit, en masse.

Trump needs to know that it is now your way or the highway — not his. That is how you talk to a bully. It's the only language he understands.

Tell him: No more ridiculous tweeting attacks on people every morning; no more telling senators who forge bipartisan compromises on immigration or health care that he's with them one day and against them the next; no more casual lying; no more feeding the base white supremacist "red meat" — no more distracting us from the real work of forging compromises for the American people and no more eroding the American creed.

Led by you and you only, Mattis, your little squadron with Tillerson, Kelly and McMaster still has power. And if you can't together force Trump onto an agenda of national healing and progress, then you should together tell him that he can govern with his kids and Sanders — because you took an oath to defend the Constitution, not to wipe up Trump's daily filth with the uniform three of you wore so honorably.

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COMMENTARY

AMERICA
REPUDIATES
ITS PRESIDENT

A remarkable thing has happened. You might have missed it, because while it happened in plain sight, it also happened in increments. You had to put the pieces together to appreciate the magnitude of it.

You see, America repudiated its president.

This, of course, was in response to that pathetic performance in the wake of the tragedy in Charlottesville, Va., when he suggested moral equivalence between white supremacists and those who protest them. In response, America — a pretty broad swath of it, at least — has condemned him.

The reference is not to the shel-lacking he took from pundits or the reprovals of GOP leaders Mitch McConnell and Paul Ryan. These things were to be expected.

But you did not expect the chairman and CEO of Merck to quit the president's American Manufacturing Council. And Ken Frazier's departure, which he framed as "a matter of personal conscience," was just the opening salvo. He was followed through the door by members of that panel and others.

Soon, two presidential business advisory groups had ceased to exist and plans for a third had been scrapped. Members of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities also resigned en masse.

Meantime, Mar-a-Lago, Trump's club and de facto presidential getaway in Florida, saw a rash of charities canceling their fundraising events. The Washington Post listed the Salvation Army, the American Red Cross, Susan G. Komen and the American Cancer Society among those who have chosen to hold their galas elsewhere.

And there is yet more. Bob Corker, a respected Republican senator who has heretofore sought to engage with the president, raised sharp questions not just about Trump's competence, but also his "stability," and called for "radical changes" in the White House. Five military chiefs also spoke out against the bigotry in Charlottesville, in a striking reproach of their commander.

Graduates of Liberty University called on fellow alumni to return their diplomas to protest LU president Jerry Falwell Jr.'s support for Trump. And it was recently announced that the president would not be attending the Kennedy Center Honors in December, nor host the traditional White House reception for the five honorees after three of them had spoken of boycotting the event. And really: How toxic are you when Lionel Richie doesn't want to shake your hand?

It seems that a great many Americans reached a moment of decision after Charlottesville and reacted as you would have hoped. Trump and his apologists and enablers should take note, because this does not bode well for them.

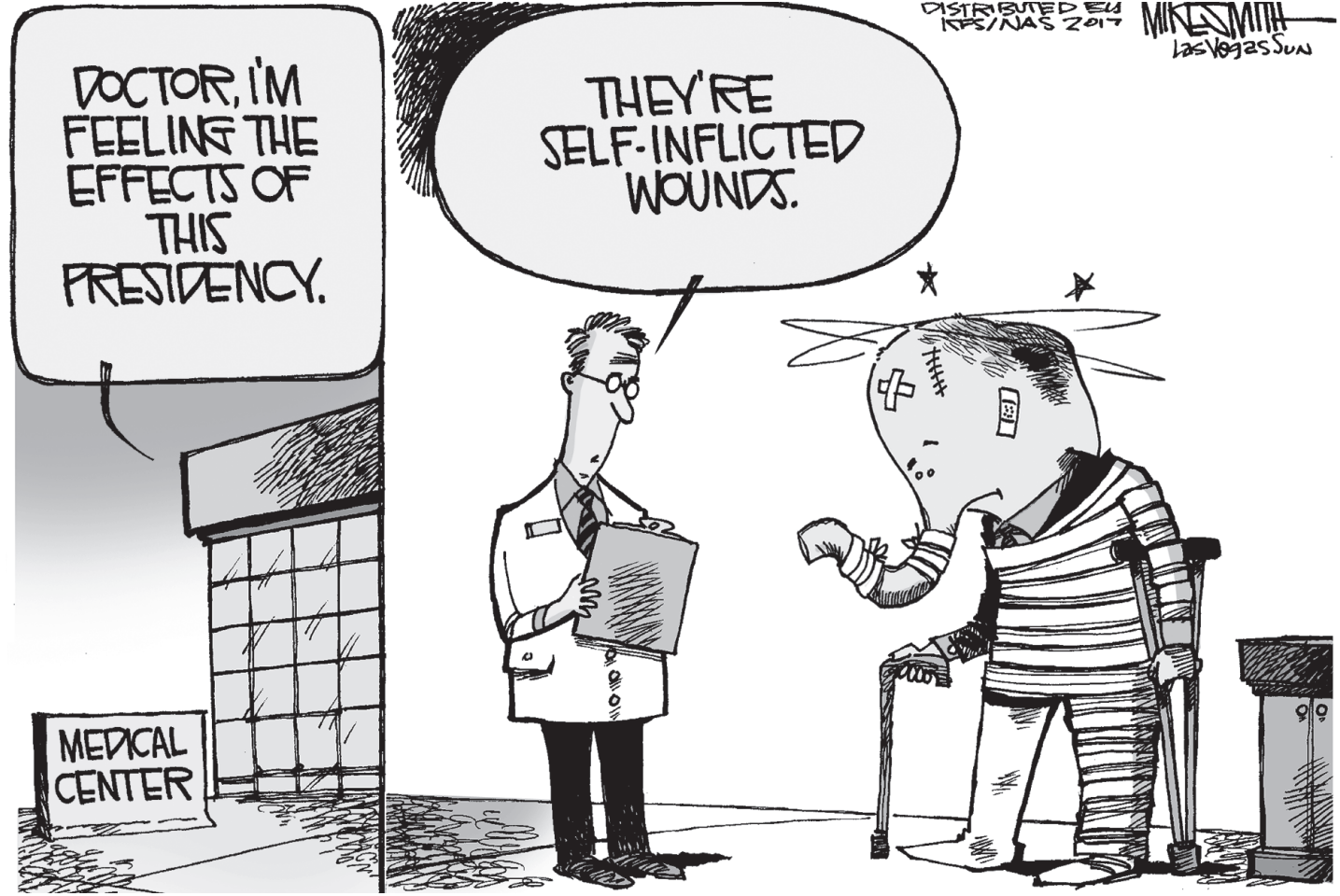
For all its powers of lawmaking, war making, budget drafting, and diplomacy, the presidency also embodies the power of moral suasion. A president uses what Theodore Roosevelt called "the bully pulpit" — the honor and prestige of his office — to stand for what is right and remind us to do likewise.

Problematically, that office is occupied now by a man with no moral compass, a man whose only true North is self. So what happened was sadly predictable.

What was not predictable was this chorus of castigation from such a wide spectrum of American life. The stunning rebuke offers heartening evidence that we have not yet completely abandoned who and what we are supposed to be.

Again, this is a moment of decision. Those who chose to separate themselves from Trump last week declared their values — and character.

Those who supported him did, too.



EDITORIAL

CITY: DON'T DUMB-DOWN
STORMWATER RULES

When raindrops reach the earth, their impact is shaped by geography and by the surface they hit.

Rain on a lawn or field sinks in to give plants a long drink, but rain on a roof or pavement creates a torrent of runoff that carries with it whatever dust, dirt, fertilizer, oil, even raw sewage is in its path until it forms a puddle, a pond, a ditch or finds a storm sewer leading to a waste treatment plant. Either way, it eventually winds up in the nearest river — with or without any filtering.

Here, that would be the Tennessee River. And in Chattanooga, where some 70 miles of downtown sewers built more than a century ago mix stormwater runoff with sewage, the result of a heavy rain means that overflows with raw sewage go straight to the river on a fairly regular basis. And in the South Chickamauga Creek area, it means that polluted runoff floods streets and communities before it slowly drains off to sewers or the river.

Chattanooga's bowl geography makes us unique in many ways. Unique in beauty. Unique as an air pollution pocket under some circumstances. And unique as a Nature-made rainfall runoff catchment system.

So when Chattanooga followed state guidelines and EPA advice a decade or so ago to set storm runoff standards that builders now are chaffing under, city planners and officials were taking our geography and city pocketbook into consideration. Those standards require the first inch of rain falling in a 72-hour period be kept on-site at any new building, subdivision or business. In the flood prone South Chickamauga watershed, the standard was set at holding 1.6 inches. The standards also called for green-design concepts like rain gardens to accomplish the requirements.

But now, as Chattanooga public works officials last week outlined a number of changes to ease those requirements for new developers and builders, we're taking a step backward.

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In Chattanooga, where normal yearly rainfall is 52.4 inches, 80 percent of rain events total at least 1 inch in 72 hours, according to the state officials who drafted state permit proposals that city leaders initially followed.

Developments such as subdivisions and shopping centers can alter how water flows or settles at a site. That's because development produces more areas — roofs, streets and parking areas — where water cannot soak into the ground. With nowhere to go, the water becomes its own force — along with the oils dripped from cars, fertilizers from yards and sewage from leaky or old stormwater drainage systems.

Consider just one downtown building: A 2010 estimate found that in a normal year, more than 1.5 million gallons of stormwater gushed from the roof and parking spaces of Chattanooga's City Hall, ran to a street grate and were carried — hopefully — to the Moccasin Bend Sewage Treatment Plant, then the Tennessee River.

That's enough water from one building and its parking lots to fill the tanks of one-and-a-half Tennessee Aquariums. When the same rains fall on the entire city, overflows often send sewage-tainted stormwater straight to the river — the drinking water source for 4.7 million people.

The trouble — and beauty — of street sewers is that they fool us into thinking that all our pollution-laden storm runoff has been swept away. Out of sight, out of mind.

What most Chattanoogaans don't realize is that much of that runoff in heavy rains winds up in enormous underground concrete holes where it's stored until the rain surge subsides and the "gates of hell" three stories underground at the Moccasin Bend plant can handle the flow from the entire greater Chattanooga area.

On a sunny day, the massive hole at those "gates" carries 65 million to 70 million gallons a day of raw sewage and sewage-tainted stormwater into the 50-year-old treatment plant that has been upgraded or expanded at least three times. Rainy days give the 140-million-gallon-capacity plant a workout. Plant officials have said that a quick one-inch rain can jump the inflow to 100 million gallons, and a two-inch rain can spell overflows.

In most sewage treatment systems, rain has little impact. But Chattanooga's system is one of only three in Tennessee and about a half dozen in the Southeast that includes stormwater runoff in what's known as a combined sewage overflow system.

• • •

So why is the city now looking to ease standards?

Because state politics got redder and the state, too, backed away from its own stronger standard, according to environmental watchdogs.

Last year, the Tennessee General Assembly passed a law that makes it harder for state and local water managers to require stormwater management measures beyond minimum standards set by the EPA. Gov. Bill Haslam signaled his displeasure with the new law, but he let it go into effect without his signature.

That's why local builders have been pressuring the city to back away. They claim the rules add nearly 25 percent to the cost of building a new home in Chattanooga and that the rules have unnecessarily held up new development.

Funny thing, though. Homebuilding permits on small lots are only down 2 percent this year and the city is flooded with a 57 percent increase in complex projects over an acre in size. So larger residential and commercial projects here are booming.

Be a voice that's louder than developers. Tell your City Council member you believe clean water and safe, unflooded streets are worth the extra time and trouble for developers. As for their claim of additional cost? They'll pass that on to buyers anyway. And it's a sure bet that buyers want clean water in and around their homes.

COMMENTARY

FROM KABUL TO BAGHDAD, MY BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

BAGHDAD — I just spent eight days traveling with the Air Force to all of its key forward bases in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. So the president's speech Monday night was very timely for me. It was also unnerving.

It was so full of bombast and clichés, so larded with phrases like "we will break their will," so lacking in details and, most of all, so lacking in humility in confronting a problem and a region that has vexed better men for ages that I still don't know where he's going — only that he is going there very definitively.

Let me explain what I saw here — three things in particular: I saw a new way of mounting warfare by the United States in Iraq. I saw in this new warfare a strategy that offers at least a glimmer of hope for Iraq, if and when ISIS is defeated. But, though only a glimpse, I saw in Afghanistan an eroding stalemate — with all the same issues that have undermined stability there for years: government corruption, distrust among



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Afghans and perfidious interventions by Pakistan and Iran.

For years we've measured our involvement in Middle East wars by one pair of indexes — boots on the ground and killed in action. Because of that, most Americans are now paying scant attention to Iraq, where our boots on the ground have shrunk to a few thousand and where there have been just 17 U.S. military deaths since we re-engaged in Iraq to defeat ISIS in 2014.

The real story is wings in the air. We are involved in a gigantic military enterprise in Iraq. But it's with massive conventional air power married to unconventional special forces, who are advising the Iraqi army that is actually doing the ground fighting.

Ironically, it may never have happened had President Barack Obama not withdrawn our combat troops from Iraq in 2011, because Iraqis couldn't agree on a legal formula for their staying.

After that, the then-Shiite-led Iraqi government began abusing Sunnis, and ISIS emerged in response. Obama then slowly reintroduced U.S. Special Forces back into Iraq and, for the first time, sending some into Syria, but in a totally new context. When George W. Bush invad-

ed Iraq in 2003 to topple Saddam Hussein, we destroyed the government from the top down. We toppled Saddam's statue. It became our war.

Even though ISIS emerged after we left, we have now returned at the invitation of Iraqis from the bottom up — making our presence much more legitimate and sustainable for any long fight. Iraqi Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds were forced to unify, at least minimally, to defeat ISIS, opening new possibilities. This is Iraq's war of liberation. They own it.

I met Marine Col. Seth Folsom, who commands a forward special operations air base, Al-Asad, in the western Iraqi desert.

"I was here in 2003 and in 2008," he told me. In those days, if he had a convoy going through a town it would speed 100 mph not to get shot at or blown up, pushing Iraqi cars out of the way, creating resentments. "Now we are driving with the Iraqis. ... It doesn't even seem like the same country to me. Now I am saying to my Iraqi counterparts, 'What do you want to do?'"

Alas, the war in Afghanistan is different. The air power component is there, but U.S. Special Forces are still doing too much fighting and dying. And Trump

talked Monday night like they will now do more. And we don't have the legitimacy you now feel in Iraq.

Personal security for our Afghan allies is still minimal. I stood on the tarmac at Bagram Airfield and listened to a U.S.-trained Afghan pilot tell me that the last thing he does before climbing into the cockpit is call home to be sure his kids have not been abducted by the Taliban, who know that he works with the U.S. and have threatened him repeatedly. Again, that this pilot is still ready to fly with the U.S. takes real courage. He wants something different for his country, and he's not alone. But is he in the majority? Clearly he's got neighbors who don't think that we, or the Afghan government we're supporting, are legitimate. Culture trumps strategy.

This is going to take ages to fix, and if you fix Afghanistan, well, you fix Afghanistan. So what. If you fix Iraq with a real power-sharing accord you create a model that can radiate out across the Arab world, because Iraq is a microcosm of the Arab world, with Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, Turkmen, Christians and many others.

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COMMENTARY

FAITH LEADERS
URGE SUPPORT
FOR DACA

As faith leaders in Chattanooga representing a diverse array of perspectives and traditions, we have been dismayed by President Trump's decision to terminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, ripping away opportunity from 800,000 young immigrants across the country.

The falsehoods and half-truths offered by the White House regarding DACA recipients are shocking and disappointing: conflating the Central American migrant crisis (which was due to an uptick in gang-related and paramilitary violence) with DACA application; misrepresenting the impact of DACA applicants on the economy; and laying accusations of higher crime at the feet of DACA recipients (one cannot have a criminal record and be a DACA recipient).

These accusations are, to use a phrase familiar to the Abrahamic traditions, bearing false witness.

The truth is that more than 8,300 Tennesseans have benefited from the DACA program. They've been working as nurses, teachers, and small business owners. Taking away their opportunity to work and give back, and putting those young people in the deportation pipeline undermines our values and hurts our community and our state. We claim these young people as our own because they have proven themselves to be so.

A growing chorus of business leaders, civic leaders, elected officials, and clergy from a variety of traditions have been calling on the president to defend DACA and for Congress to pass legislation that offers permanent protection for Dreamers — including House Speaker Paul Ryan, Sens. Orrin Hatch and Jeff Flake, and Florida Gov. Rick Scott. Even Tennessee's Attorney General came out strongly in support of DACA recipients and has urged support for the Dream Act. Our nation's immigration system needs thoughtful attention, but targeting the Dreamers is simply a cruel and ineffective attempt to appear to address this issue.

We call on all people, whether of faith or of secular goodwill, to support these young immigrants. They are an integral part of our communities, our state, and our country. Let us tell the truth. Let us be just. Let us work for fairness. Let us let these dreamers be part of the America they have long loved. Let us dream alongside them.

- Rev. Brandon Gilvin, First Christian Church
- Rev. Laura Becker, Northminster Presbyterian Church
- The Rev. Zack Nyein, Grace Episcopal Church
- Rev. Christopher A. Smith, Trinity Lutheran Church
- Pastor Jeff Crim, Ascension Lutheran Church (ELCA)
- Rev. Dr. Clay Thomas
- Rev. Candace A. Worth, New Hope Presbyterian Church
- Rev. Josh Woodrow, Bridge City Community (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod)
- Rev. Carol Howard Merritt, Presbyterian Church (USA)
- The Rev. April Berends, Christ Church Episcopal
- Rev. Jason Emerson, Episcopal Church of the Nativity
- Rev. Dr. Paul Rader, Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Rev. Tricia Dillon Thomas, campus minister at The Hope House, UT Chattanooga
- Rev. Christy Bonner
- Rev. V. Tom Banks, Ashland Terrace Christian Church
- Rev. Jonathan Hyde, Associate Minister, First Christian Church
- Reverend Christine Grace, Unity Minister
- Rev. Frank Jump, Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Rev. Jay Banasiak, Presbyterian Church (USA)



Chattanooga Times Free Press *Bennett*

EDITORIAL

WACKER OWES COMMUNITY
RESPECT, SAFETY AND HONESTY

In April 2016, a Times Free Press front page story and pictures showed Wacker polysilicon chemical officials and Tennessee politicians cutting a thick red ribbon at the \$2.5 billion plant's opening. Wacker officials even announced that they would soon start work to build a second plant adjacent to the new Charleston, Tenn., facility just 45 miles northeast of Chattanooga.

On Friday, almost a year and a half later, Wacker was again on our front page — this time with a white vapor plume rising from the plant beside a headline reading “Wacker blast spews gas; Plant sustains second incident within 8 days.”

An explosion at the plant involved a chemical called chlorosilane and released hydrochloric acid. Hazardous materials emergency responders closed down nearby roads and Interstate 75, forced nearby residents and school students within a 1.5-mile radius to “shelter in place” with closed windows and switched off heat and air conditioning units.

Area 911 dispatchers reported that people called experiencing skin burning sensations and difficulty breathing, and eight people went to hospitals with symptoms related to the incident.

In a news release, Wacker officials made light of the blast and the long-lasting plume. They termed the day's event as a “mechanical incident [that] resulted in a hydrogen chemical release.” The statement claimed that the cloud appeared to be steam, and that air quality being tested by Wacker was at a safe level. There was no danger to the public, they said.

Steam, by the way, is mostly invisible and certainly not long-lasting.

On video, Wacker Vice President and site manager Mary-Beth Hudson said she did not know why people had to be treated for irritation despite officials saying there was no threat to safety.

“I don't know that we can speculate why they went to the hospital,” she said.

But Troy Spence, director of the Bradley County Emergency Management Agency, in that same video, said, “We do know that the vapor was HCl.”

HCl is the chemical formula of hydrogen chloride and hydrochloric acid. At room temperature, hydrogen chloride is a colorless to slightly yellow, corrosive, nonflammable gas that is heavier than air and has a strong irritating odor. On exposure to air, hydrogen chloride forms dense white corrosive vapors, and inhalation of the fumes can cause coughing, choking, inflammation of the nose, throat, and upper respiratory tract, and in severe cases, pulmonary edema, circulatory system failure, and death, according to the Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry, a federal public health agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Both hydrogen chloride gas and hydrochloric acid are important in technology and industry, but ATSDR says skin contact with the gas can cause redness, pain, and severe skin burns. Hydrogen chloride may cause severe burns to the eye and permanent eye damage.

EPA rates and regulates the gas as a toxic substance.

Just over a week before, five plant workers were hospitalized with chemical burns. The newspaper has been unable to determine what happened or what their conditions may be now.

This is unacceptable.

The people of Charleston spent several terrorized hours Thursday, and they deserve complete transparency from this company about what happened, and what could have happened. Residents do not deserve to be told — in effect — that nothing happened.

The plant manufactures hyperpure polysilicon in the making of solar panels, but already it has a spotty history.

Records from the Tennessee Occupational Safety and Health Administration show Wacker was cited for dangerous working conditions in the spring and summer of 2016 and fined \$8,500. In October, a faulty gasket in a distillation device released a small cloud of chemicals, but no one was injured. Then there were the two incidents this year.

Chemicals can make our lives better, but they can also be dangerous.

What makes them more dangerous is pretending danger doesn't exist, or giving a middle finger to the public — as happened in the explosions at the flooded Arkema Chemical plant in Crosby, Texas, after Hurricane Harvey swamped an organic peroxides facility and emergency officials ordered evacuations in a 1.5-mile radius because the unrefrigerated chemicals there would (and did) inevitably explode.

The Arkema official wouldn't tell the public what chemicals were spewed in the black smoke that followed the explosions. He even declined to call it a chemical release. What's worse is that he had help from the Texas government that gives chemical companies legal cover to hide the locations of their EPA-regulated chemicals — despite a Congress-passed federal law known as the Community Right to Know Act.

That 1986 federal law requires companies with large stores of chemicals onsite to report on the storage location, use and releases of hazardous substances to federal, state and local governments and to readily provide that information to homeowners, the media and emergency responders. The law was passed on the heels of a 1984 cyanide gas leak at a U.S. multinational Union Carbide Corp plant in Bhopal, India, that killed thousands. The law orders each plant's chemical reports be compiled in a publicly accessible database every two years. The most recent available is from 2015. Wacker didn't open until 2016 — so the Bradley County public can't look for help there.

Accidents happen. Natural disasters happen.

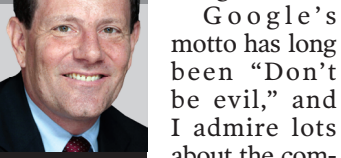
But neither should give corporate officials the right to stonewall their neighbors.

We and our Bradley neighbors must make sure that our Tennessee elected officials and our corporate leaders don't try to make end runs around the very common-sense Community Right-to-Know Act. And we must make it plain that they owe us the respect of straight, direct and honest information.

COMMENTARY

GOOGLE AND SEX TRAFFICKERS LIKE BACKPAGE.COM

Sex traffickers in America have the police and prosecutors pursuing them, but they do have one crucial (if secret) ally: Google.



Nicholas Kristof

Google's motto has long been “Don't be evil,” and I admire lots about the company. But organizations it funds have for years been quietly helping Backpage.com, the odious website where most American victims of human trafficking are sold, to battle lawsuits from children sold there for sex.

Now Google is using its enormous lobbying power in Washington to try to kill bipartisan legislation that would crack down on websites that promote sex trafficking.

“I wanted to bring to your attention an issue that is picking up steam in the Senate and the House,” a Google lobbyist, E. Stewart Jeffries, wrote in a letter to congressional offices last month. He urged House members not to co-sponsor the legislation targeting sex trafficking.

It's not that Google is taking ads from Backpage (it doesn't) or giving it money. But as Back-

page fights off prosecutors and worries about the legislation, the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act, Google has emerged as its behind-the-scenes champion.

Why? Why would Google ally itself with Backpage, which is involved in 73 percent of U.S. cases of suspected child sex trafficking, which advertised a 13-year-old whose pimp had tattooed his name on her eyelids?

The answer has to do with Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which protects internet companies like Google (and The New York Times) from lawsuits — and also protects Backpage. Google seems to have a vague, poorly grounded fear that closing the loophole would open the way to frivolous lawsuits and investigations and lead to a slippery slope that will damage its interests and the freedom of the internet.

That impresses few people outside the tech community, for the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act was crafted exceedingly narrowly to target only those intentionally engaged in trafficking children. Some tech companies, including Oracle, have endorsed the bill.

“This bill only impacts bad-actor websites,” notes Yiota Souras, general counsel at the

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. “You don't inadvertently traffic a child.”

Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, the lead sponsor of the legislation, says that it would clearly never affect Google.

“We've tried to work with them,” Portman told me.

I write about this issue because I'm haunted by the kids I've met who were pretty much enslaved, right here in the United States in the 21st century. I've been writing about Backpage for more than five years, ever since I came across a terrified 13-year-old girl, Baby Face, who had been forced to work for a pimp in New York City.

Baby Face said that when she balked, the pimp threw her down a stairway. Finally, one day she was hurting badly and could not bear to be raped any more. So when her pimp sold her on Backpage in Brooklyn and waited outside the building, Baby Face pounded on the door of another apartment, begged to use the phone and called her mom. Police rescued her and the pimp went to prison.

But it's not enough to send a few pimps to prison; we should also go after online marketplaces like Backpage. That's why Google's myopia is so sad.

The Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act won't end trafficking any more than laws end bank robbery, but 50 attorneys general around the country have signed a letter saying that this kind of legislation would help — an astonishing unanimity.

In response to my inquiries, Google issued a statement: “Backpage acted criminally to facilitate child sex trafficking, and we strongly urge the Department of Justice to prosecute them for their egregious crimes against children. ... Google will continue to work alongside Congress, antitrafficking organizations and other technology companies to combat sex trafficking.”

Fine, but then why oppose legislation? Why use intermediaries to defend Backpage? To me, all this reflects the tech world's moral blindness about what's happening outside its bubble.

I asked Nicole, a mom in Washington state whose daughter was trafficked on Backpage at the age of 15, what she would say to Google.

“Our children can't be the cost of doing business,” she said.

Google understands so much about business, but apparently not that.

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COMMENTARY

HOW TO WIN AN ARGUMENT ABOUT GUNS

Tragically, predictably, infuriatingly, we're again mourning a shooting — this time at YouTube's headquarters — even as the drive for gun safety legislation has stalled in Washington. Polls show that nine out of 10 Americans favor basic steps like universal background checks before gun purchases, but the exceptions are the president and a majority in Congress.

Usually pundits toss out their own best arguments while ignoring the other side's, but today I'm going to try something new and engage directly with the arguments made by gun advocates:

You liberals are in a panic over guns, but look at the numbers. Any one gun is less likely to kill a person than any one vehicle. But we're not traumatized by cars, and we don't try to ban them.

It's true that any particular car is more likely to be involved in a fatality than any particular gun. But cars are actually a perfect example of the public health approach that we should apply to guns. We don't ban cars, but we do work hard to take a dangerous product and regulate it to limit the damage.

We do that through seat belts and air bags, through speed limits and highway barriers, through driver's licenses and insurance requirements, through crack-downs on drunken driving and texting while driving.

We relied on evidence and data to reduce the carnage from cars. Why isn't that a model for guns?

Because of the Second Amendment. The Constitution doesn't protect vehicles, but it does protect my right to a gun.

Yes, but courts have found that the Second Amendment does not prevent sensible regulation (just as the First Amendment does not preclude laws on defamation). There is no constitutional objection to, say, universal background checks to obtain a gun.

We all agree that there should be limits. No one argues that there is an individual right to own an anti-aircraft gun. So the question isn't whether firearms should all be sacrosanct but simply where we draw the line. When more Americans have died from guns just since 1970 (1.4 million) than in all the wars in U.S. history (1.3 million), maybe it's worth rethinking where that line should be.

Whoa! You're inflating the gun violence numbers by including suicides. Almost two-thirds of those gun deaths are suicides, and the blunt reality is that if someone wants to kill himself, he'll find a way. It's not about guns.

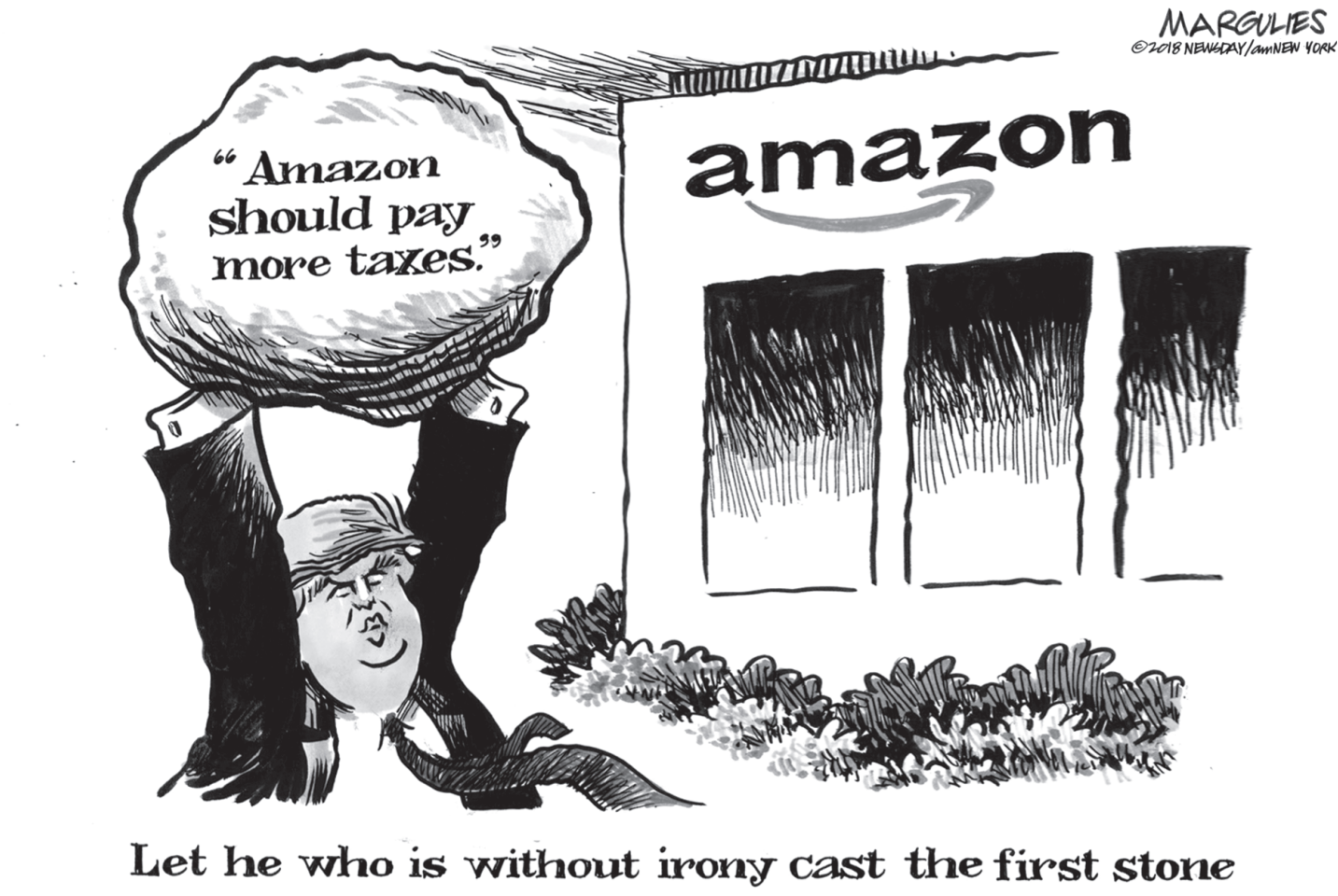
Actually, that's not true. Scholars have found that suicide barriers on bridges, for example, prevent jumpers and don't lead to a significant increase in suicides elsewhere. Likewise, almost half of suicides in Britain used to be by asphyxiating oneself with gas from the oven, but when Britain switched to a less lethal oven gas the suicides by oven plummeted and there was little substitution by other methods. So it is about guns.

If you have a swimming pool or a bathtub, that's more dangerous to neighborhood kids than a gun is. Kids under age 14 are much more likely to die from drowning than from firearms. So why this crusade against guns, but not against bathtubs and pools?

Your numbers are basically right, but only because young children routinely swim and take baths but don't regularly encounter firearms.

Note also that a backyard pool isn't going to be used to mug a neighbor, or to invade a nearby school. Schools don't have drills for an "active pool situation." And while some 200,000 guns are stolen each year, it's more difficult to steal a pool and use it for a violent purpose.

Moreover, we do try to make pools safer. Many jurisdictions require a permit for a pool, as well as a childproof fence around it with self-locking gates. If we have permits and safe storage requirements for pools, why not for guns? What's wrong with trying to save lives?



Let he who is without irony cast the first stone

EDITORIAL

TIME AND THE TENNESSEE RIVER

Rivers are the water of life, and the Tennessee River is a mighty life giver.

At 652 miles long, she flows from Knoxville through Chattanooga and on to Huntsville, Ala., before turning north to dip into a corner of Mississippi and then straight up to Paducah, Ky., where she spills into the Ohio River and eventually mingles into the Gulf-bound Mighty Mississippi.

But she completely misses Georgia — by a mile and a fluke of historical fate.

That doesn't keep thirsty Atlanta from eyeing this jewel to the north. Nor does that keep Georgia politicians from threatening every few years to make a Tennessee land and water grab.

"I just want to threaten them and then stick a straw into the Tennessee River," Georgia Senate President Pro Tempore Butch Mill, R-Gainesville, said last month.

The problem dates back to the early 1800s when land surveyors using rudimentary tools and the stars set the Tennessee-Georgia border one mile farther south of the 35th parallel mark that Congress had decreed. Now Georgia lawmakers want to move 51 miles of state line and pipe away hundreds of millions of gallons of water a day from the natural watershed basin that geology — not mapmakers — made for the Tennessee River.

The patch of land that Georgia's Legislature says it will settle for without a lawsuit is a grassy stand just across Georgia's northwest border near what we know as Nickajack Cave.

In recent years, nothing much has happened over Georgia's on-again, off-again threats — save the laughter of a few Tennessee lawmakers. But this year, when Tennessee Rep. Marc Gravitt, R-East Ridge, begged for a resolution urging Gov. Bill Haslam not to participate in the Peach State's renewed attempts to negotiate the dispute, the resolution died for lack of a motion — even a lack of discussion — in the House Delayed Bills Committee.

This question isn't just an oddity or a joke. With growing populations and rising temperatures, water is becoming the new gold. Instead of planning how to steal it, we need to plan now to conserve it. And if you're one of those who says Tennessee, as home to the fifth largest river system in the nation, has plenty of water so why not just share, consider the Colorado River story.

The Colorado — still the fourth largest river system in America — once flowed from the Rockies into Mexico and then to the Gulf of California. But now, after being diverted hundreds of miles outside its natural basin to Los Angeles, San Diego and Phoenix, 70 percent of the Colorado's water is siphoned away. What was once a lush delta in Mexico where the river joined the ocean is now arid.

That could easily happen to the Tennessee River if Atlanta and Georgia "stick a straw" into the Tennessee and siphon off the 1.5 billion gallons a day that Georgia lawmakers believe should be theirs. For context, one Georgia consultant recently told the Atlanta

Journal-Constitution that the Tennessee has "1 billion gallons per day of excess capacity." Do the math, and remember that plenty more cities downstream of Chattanooga and Nickajack Lake drink water and manufacture and irrigate crops from the Tennessee River.

A river system gets its water from tributary streams that flow downhill to the river in the geographic bowls that form that river's "watershed." The Tennessee drains a nearly 41,000-square-mile watershed area.

Picture a stream in your backyard that starts from a spring two houses up the street from you and ends in a lake two houses down from you. You and your four neighbors are a basin — a watershed.

But the neighbor just upstream from you decides to build a koi pond and divert water from the stream. He lets the excess water from the pond run to his garden. Any trickles left flow into the sewer drain. Suddenly the stream in your yard is much diminished. And by the time it reaches the neighbor's lake on the other side of you — the downstream side — it can no longer keep the lake filled except in times of very heavy rain.

Your upstream neighbor's drain is moving water out of your basin — your watershed — and not returning any leftovers.

Diverting water from the Tennessee at Nickajack Lake and sending it to Atlanta would be like the neighbor's koi pond that overflows to the sewer. The water — even as wastewater, treated or untreated — never comes back to recharge the stream.

Even within its own "basin," the Tennessee River in dozens of ways serves 4.5 million people — an increase in population of about 15 percent just since 1990, according to a U.S. Geological Survey report.

Atlanta is one of the few cities on the continent that was not built on a river or water source that could sustain it. It keeps growing — both in the city limits and out into suburbs, but neither the city nor Georgia is dealing with that growth in any durable way — except to model the Los Angeles/Colorado "straw" method and to threaten the Tennessee River. And it isn't that Georgia doesn't understand what happens downstream. The state has been locked in lawsuits for years with Alabama and Florida over depleting water from other rivers that should be flowing across its state line to those states.

In 2013, the Tennessee American Water Co. said Chattanoogaans on average use 95 gallons of water per person per day. In Atlanta, that per-person number is 151 gallons a day — despite Georgia summer watering bans and public appeals for conservation, according to Georgia officials.

The great pity is that we — all of us in any state and on any waterway — haven't quite figured out how to save the billions of gallons of flood waters that just flow away and through our reservoirs when seasonal heavy rains blanket the Southeast.

We need second cups for storage when our first cups runneth over.

COMMENTARY

IS PUTIN A CIA AGENT?

Is Putin a CIA Agent?

President Donald Trump's steadfast reluctance to say anything negative about Russia is so striking that a former director of national intelligence, James Clapper, once observed that Vladimir Putin manages Trump as if he were a Russian intelligence "asset." He may be. But if I were a Russian citizen, I'd be asking this question: Is Putin a U.S. agent?

Why? Because Putin has undertaken so many actions in recent years that contributed to the weakening of Russia's economy and human capital base that you have to wonder whether he's secretly on the CIA's payroll.

Beginning around 2007-08, Putin appears to have decided that rebuilding Russia by nurturing its tremendous human talent and strengthening the rule of law was just too hard — it would have required sharing power, holding real, competitive elections and building a truly diverse, innovation-based economy. Instead, Putin decided to look for dignity for Russia in all the

wrong places: by tapping his oil and gas wells, not his people; by strengthening the Russian military, instead of the rule of law; and by enriching himself and his circle of oligarchs while wrapping himself in a cloak of Russian Orthodoxy and Russian nationalism that appealed to his base.

For all his shirtless bravado, and despite all the recent talk about how Putin is proving to be a successful authoritarian, I have one question: Then why is Putin so insecure about his real popularity in Russia that even after nearly 20 years at Russia's helm, he was afraid to allow a single credible independent candidate to run against him in the latest presidential election?

Here's the real truth: Putin consistently acts like a farmer who sells his most valuable beef in return for cubes of sugar. That is, he looks for short-term sugar highs to boost his popularity with his Russian nationalist base, because he is insecure, and pays for it by giving up real beef, leaving Russia weaker in the long term.

Beef for sugar — not a good trade.

For instance, in 2014 Putin seized Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine with disguised Russian troops — to get a short-term sugar boost with the Rus-

sian electorate — and in return, he has had to live with long-term economic banking sanctions imposed by the West that help to slow Russia's growth.

Putin's latest beef-for-sugar trade was his apparent ordering of the use of a military-grade nerve agent, produced only in Russia, to poison the former Russian spy Sergei V. Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, in the English city of Salisbury. The Western response has been what British Prime Minister Theresa May described as the biggest collective expulsion of alleged Russian intelligence officers ever — over 100 from more than 20 countries.

Whether timed or coincidental, the poisoning attack and the Western backlash helped Putin run up his vote totals in his latest phony presidential re-election — another sugar high. But the morning after, Putin's Russia is more isolated than ever.

And then there is Putin's long-range strategy — to bet against Mother Nature, human nature and Moore's Law, all at once. He's betting against Mother Nature — that the world will indefinitely remain addicted to his oil and gas in an age of disruptive climate change. He's betting against human nature — that his young people won't

want to be free to realize their full potential, not just live off sugar-high memories of historical greatness. And he's betting against Moore's Law — that the steady growth of technology won't empower Russia's youth to connect and collaborate, and see through his charade.

Putin's troubles are nothing I celebrate. I was against NATO expansion; I wanted Russia integrated into the family of European democracies. A weak, isolated and humiliated Russia is a dangerous animal. But to thrive in the long term, Russia needs a "reset," and it can come only from within, but Putin won't press the button.

It's sad to see a country that gave us Tchaikovsky, Tolstoy, Spassky, Sakharov, Stravinsky, Shiskin, Dostoyevsky, Solzhenitsyn, Pushkin, Nureyev and Google co-founder Sergey Brin become better known for giving the world Novichok, the deadly Russian nerve agent used in Britain; "little green men," the disguised Russian soldiers who seized eastern Ukraine; and Gucifer 2.0, the Russian cyberagent who hacked the Democratic National Committee in 2016.

It's all beef for sugar — and that's Putin's legacy.

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COMMENTARY


WHAT HAPPENED IN STARBUCKS ISN'T REALLY ABOUT STARBUCKS

I don't drink coffee, so I can't boycott Starbucks. But I wouldn't if I could.

Yes, I understand — and share — the national anger over viral video of last week's arrest of two African-American men at one of the company's Philadelphia stores. The men, who have yet to be identified, were reportedly doing nothing more threatening than waiting quietly to be joined by a man they were meeting there, having asked to use the restroom and been refused. Their waiting apparently scared the bejeezus out of the manager, who called police.

Cellphone video of the incident shows a white guy asking if the men are being arrested because "they were black guys, sitting there."

An officer, attempting facetiousness, says yes.



Leonard Pitts

But his facetiousness is misplaced because obviously, that's exactly why they were arrested. On the video the white customers are upset, but the men accept it placidly, as befits veterans of the exhausting job of Being While Black.

Now Starbucks faces a public-relations nightmare as people swear off its lattes and macchiatos. Protesters have appeared at the Philadelphia store. "Starbucks Coffee is Anti-Black" they chanted. "Shame on Starbucks," one sign declared.

But Starbucks isn't the point. To pretend it is is a comforting fiction. It allows the company to apologize, vow to do better and move on. It allows protesters to feel righteous at having proven they will not tolerate intolerance.

Meantime, we know as a statistical matter of fact that somewhere, a little boy was just suspended from school for a minor infraction because he is black. A desperately ill woman was just denied sufficient medication to ease her pain because she is black. A highly qualified applicant was just passed over for the job of her dreams because she is black. And sometime soon, another unarmed man will be shot by police because he is black.

Most of it won't make the news. If it does, we will treat it as we are now treating Starbucks — as an individual, albeit outrageous, story requiring good people to rise in protest. But you see, these are not individual stories.

No, it's all the same story. The circumstances change, yes, but the story never does. Nor does the moral thereof: America is a nation still infected with the same idiocy that has bedeviled us since before Thomas Jefferson wrote those noble words he didn't believe about all men being created equal. Now, as then, some of us think you can judge a person's intentions and worth from the color of his skin.

They may heatedly deny that they believe this. They may not even know that they believe this. But they believe it just the same.

So it's useless to single out Starbucks for opprobrium. Granted, it may come out that it — like Denny's and Cracker Barrel before it — has a corporate culture of denigrating black customers, in which case, the company deserves all the opprobrium we can muster.

But absent that development, what happened in Starbucks isn't really about Starbucks. Nor are police shootings of unarmed black men really about police or the denial of palliative care to sick black people really about doctors. No, it's the same story and the story is all about us, about we the people and the truths we claim to hold self-evident but don't.

Last week, the story unfolded at Starbucks. It could just as easily have been Red Lobster or McDonald's. It still could. So to make this about Starbucks is to let the real culprit off the hook.

This is the coffee maker's embarrassment, yes.

But it's America's ongoing shame.



EDITORIAL

REMEMBER EARTH DAY — EVERY DAY

It's Earth Day.

Half of the world's tropical and temperate forests are gone. Global warming and other ecological imbalances are leading to frequent flooding, hurricanes, forest fires and other severe weather outbreaks.

Rising temperatures caused 70,000 deaths in Europe alone in 2003 — 15 years ago — and global temperatures have risen steadily since then. In fact, 17 of the 18 warmest years in the 136-year record have occurred since 2001. Food prices are expected to increase by 50 percent by 2030 — only because of climate change.

About 2 million people globally die prematurely due to indoor and outdoor pollution, and 5,000 die every year because of dirty drinking water.

Some 20 percent of earth's population consumes 80 percent of its resources, and here in America — where we make up 5 percent of the world's population — we consume 20 percent of earth's resources.

Our president has pulled the United States out of the climate accord, and our government seems bent on ignoring climate science and science all together.

Outside of the Washington, D.C., beltway, we busy ourselves with insider politics while the earth burns — thanks to ever-rising carbon pollution, ever-more chemicals that we create without knowing their future disastrous potential, ever-more ocean-choking plastics that we numbly accept at our stores and constantly growing piles of long-lived nuclear waste that we shove out of our conscious thinking while we crank our thermostats up or down.

What's wrong with this picture?

Take a breath. And another.

Here in the Southeastern corner of the nation, we have little control — for now — over the ridiculous energy and environmental policies of our government. But that doesn't mean we can't make a difference — one driveway at a time, one shopping trip at a time, one home at a time, one yard at a time.

One driveway at a time, we can choose hybrid cars, buses, bicycles or our own feet.

One home at a time, we can weatherize, layer to stay warm or wear less to stay cool and look for common-sense ways to save both energy and money.

One yard at a time, we can reject pesticides and herbicides that kill vital pollinators, looking instead for native plants that don't need so much weeding, chemical controls or constant mowing.

One shopping trip at a time, we can reward environmentally friendly businesses with our dollars and punish bad actors with our avoidance.

This year's Earth Day theme is "End Plastic Pollution," and it's



Red Bank Middle School students in 2016 worked on an Earth Day poster.

not just feel-good stuff.

By 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in our oceans. Plastic and its chemicals already have moved into the tissues of half of sea turtles and almost all marine birds.

Between California and Hawaii, a massive floating island of plastic is growing rapidly and now is three times the size of France and more than twice the size of Texas, according to a study published last month in Scientific Reports. It's not the only plastic island in the Earth's oceans — just one of the largest.

Shockingly, half of all plastic produced is used just once then thrown away.

Of course, there is no "away."

All those trashed plastic bags and cups and straws and containers are either in or on the ground, or in the ocean. That's not "away." More than 8 million tons of plastic — think how light plastic is — get dumped in oceans every year.

As daunting as that seems, it can be stopped or at least slowed by reducing our own plastic use and recycling the plastic we must accept.


The trouble with Earth Day is that it is celebrated to raise our awareness only once a year.

We have to make it a daily habit.

COMMENTARY

THE REAL NEXT WAR IN SYRIA: IRAN VS. ISRAEL

SYRIA-ISRAEL BORDER, Golan Heights — Ever since the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran and Israel have been fighting each other in the shadows — through proxies, assassination squads and cybervirus attacks, but never as rival armies meeting on the field of battle. That may be about to change, and if it does, it will have vast implications for Syria, Lebanon and the whole Middle East.



Thomas Friedman

I'm sure neither side really wants a war. It could be devastating for Israel's flourishing high-tech economy and for Iran's already collapsing currency. But Iran's Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force seems determined to try to turn Syria into a base from which to pressure Israel, and Israel seems determined to prevent that. And in the past few weeks — for the first time ever — Israel and Iran have begun quietly trading blows directly in Syria.

They have already gone through two rounds, and Round 3, now pending, could blow Syria sky-high.

Round 1 occurred on Feb. 10,

when an Iranian drone launched by a Quds Force unit operating out of Syria's T4 air base was shot down with a missile from an Israeli Apache helicopter that was following it after it penetrated northern Israel airspace.

Initial reports were that the drone was purely on a reconnaissance mission. But the Israeli army's spokesman, Brig. Gen. Ronen Manelis, said Friday that the flight path and Israel's analysis of the drone indicated that its mission was "an act of sabotage in Israeli territory."

"This is the first time we saw Iran do something against Israel — not by proxy," a senior Israeli military source told me. "This opened a new period."

It certainly did, because in Round 2, on April 9, Israeli jets launched a missile strike on T4, the drone's home base — directly targeting, for the first time, an Iranian facility and personnel in Syria. Seven Quds Force members were killed, including Col. Mehdi Dehghan, who led the drone unit.

While the Israeli army spokesman refused to confirm or deny the Israeli raid, Iran's government unusually highlighted it — and Iran's casualties — and vowed to take revenge.

"The Zionist entity will sooner or later receive the necessary response and will regret its mis-

deeds," Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Bahram Qasemi, said Monday.

So now the whole neighborhood is holding its breath: Will there be a Round 3?

Iran has legitimate security concerns in the Gulf; it faces a number of hostile, pro-American Sunni Arab powers trying to contain its influence and undermine its Islamic regime. From Iran's perspective, these are a threat. I get that.

But what is Iran doing in Syria?

Tehran's building of bases and missile factories in Syria, after having helped President Bashar Assad largely crush the uprising against him, appears to be a move by the Quds Force's Suleimani to extend Iran's grip on key parts of the Sunni Arab world and advance his position at home in his struggle for power with Hassan Rouhani, Iran's president. The Quds Force now more or less controls — through proxies — four Arab capitals: Damascus, Beirut, Baghdad and Sanaa.

Even before the recent clashes with Israel, many average Iranians were publicly asking: What is Iran doing spending billions of dollars — which were supposed to go to Iranians as a result of the lifting of sanctions from the Iran nuclear deal —

fighting wars in Syria, Lebanon and Yemen? That concern is surely one reason Iran, for all its fist-shaking — has not retaliated — yet.

Suleimani could opt to strike back at Israel through proxies, either in the Middle East or against Israeli targets globally. But he now has to think twice about that, both because his forces in Syria are exposed — and for another reason: Iran is exposed financially. Iran's currency is collapsing back home. The Iranian rial has lost one-third of its value just this year, which a wider confrontation with Israel would only exacerbate.

But economic restraints have never stopped Suleimani and his Quds Force before and may not now. Their ambitions are big — to create a base to pressure Israel directly, to dominate the Arab states around them and to maintain the fervor of the Islamic Revolution. Everyone is basically awaiting Suleimani's next move. Does he back down, lose a little face, and wait until he is stronger? Does Israel let him?

These are momentous days for both countries. One thing I know for sure. The status quo is not sustainable.

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COMMENTARY

THE QUESTION TRUMP FAILED TO ANSWER

This is about a question Donald Trump failed to answer.

Granted, there are a lot of those, but this was a particularly tough one. Indeed, it was likely more difficult in its way than anything April Ryan or Lester Holt has ever asked him. But then, they're only adults. Ava Rose Olsen is 7 years old.

As anyone who has experience with human beings of that age can attest, no one asks more pointed questions. And the one she posed in a letter to Trump last August was a whopper:

"I hate guns," she explained in her little girl's scrawl. "One ruined my life and took my best friend. I don't want that to ever happen again. Are you going to keep kids safe? How can you keep us safe?"

The best friend she refers to is — was — 6-year-old Jacob Hall, who was shot in September 2016 on the playground of Townville Elementary School in South Carolina. Police say his assailant was a 14-year-old boy who took his father's handgun from a nightstand, shot the man in the head, then drove to the school and opened fire, screaming, "I hate my life."

Two others were also hit, but survived. Jacob suffered massive blood loss and died three days later. He was buried in a Batman costume. He loved superheroes.

And Ava loved Jacob. In fact, she had already told her mother that, someday, she was going to marry him. She was on that playground the day he was shot. What she saw traumatized her.

In the days and weeks afterward, Ava took to pulling out her eyelashes and hitting herself. She clawed at her own skin. And she began repeating the shooter's words. "I hate my life," she said.

A doctor diagnosed Ava with post-traumatic stress disorder, and her parents took her out of Townville Elementary. She's home-schooled now.

Think of that. This is now a country where even 7-year-olds have PTSD.

We are indebted to The Washington Post for its reportage on all this. This week, it published the letter Trump sent Ava just before Christmas. In it, he praised her bravery, offered his prayers and said the safety of children is his goal as president.

He said a lot of things, but he didn't answer her question, didn't say how he would keep her safe. Ava noticed. Last month, she sent a follow-up. In it, she thanked Trump for his prayers and offered some security ideas of her own.

One was to "move the schools to a safer area." Another was to "have people around to make sure that nobody can hurt us." Still another was to build school campuses in circular shapes with playgrounds in the middle, inaccessible from the street.

"Somehow," she pleaded, "help people to understand what happens to kids like me who have seen and heard what happens when a gun hurts someone."

In his State of the Union speech, Trump made a point of shouting out to the Second Amendment. He made no mention of the kids — 135,000 according to a Post analysis — who have experienced school shootings since the 1999 Columbine massacre. Already this year, there have been at least six such incidents resulting in injury or death. It's February.

In a nation awash with guns, where conservative orthodoxy holds that even the most modest effort to restrain this American carnage runs afoul of the sacred Second, Ava cuts through the political babble with the directness of a child.

"How can you keep us safe?"

How, indeed?

Trump sought to deflect her fears with platitudes. But this little girl asked a serious question. She deserves a serious answer.

We all do.



EDITORIAL

ENDING EMISSIONS TESTING WOULD THREATEN JOBS

Lonely Planet, which calls itself a leading media company and the world's No. 1 travel guidebook brand, just ranked Chattanooga the nation's third top spot for travel in 2018.

Does anyone think we'd get that kind of accolade with the smog we had before our air got cleaned up?

Not even close — no matter how many downtown revitalizations we managed or how many aquariums we could have built.

But two Tennessee legislators — specifically Mike Carter, R-Ooltewah, and Bo Watson, R-Chattanooga —are introducing a bill to scrap vehicle emissions testing in Tennessee.

They say that since Hamilton County is now "in attainment" — bureaucratic words that mean we don't on a regular basis violate the state and nation's air quality controls — our vehicle emissions testing requirement is no longer needed in Hamilton County and five other counties.

They are wrong. Dead wrong.

What's more, ending emissions testing would threaten Chattanooga jobs.

After all, cleaning up our air brought us jobs.

Long-time Chattanooga residents will remember when smog regularly hung in the air here so thickly that you couldn't see the mountains from downtown Chattanooga, or the valley from atop those mountains.

The first big step to cleaning up our air was to require local foundries to install scrubbers on their manufacturing units. Some, like the Volunteer Army Ammunition Plant that made TNT until the Vietnam War ended, just went out of business. That was a big help, but it still wasn't enough — which is why the city and county adopted outdoor no-burning policies in certain months and also required car emissions testing to ensure efficient vehicle exhaust systems.

If you don't think we still need efficient vehicle exhaust systems, sit in your closed garage with your vehicle's motor running for a few minutes until your eyes start to water.

No, really, don't do that!

Carbon monoxide is a highly toxic gas produced when fuels burn incompletely. The typical internal combustion engine used in most cars and trucks can produce extremely high concentrations of carbon monoxide and raise concentrations in a closed building to a deadly level in only seven minutes.

Multiply that by at least 275,910. That's how many cars and

trucks were registered in Hamilton County in 2016 alone, according to the Hamilton County Clerk's office.

It was 2011 before the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at long last said Chattanooga, after decades of trying to clean up its dirty air image, was finally meeting what had proved to be the toughest of our challenges to completely comply with federal clean air standards. That toughest push was meeting the regulations that limit fine-particulate emissions like dust, soot or smoke and the regulations governing ground-level ozone, which comes primarily from vehicle and power plant emissions. Both particle pollution and ground ozone contribute to smog.

It was a monumental turnaround: After all, EPA in 1969 designated Chattanooga as the "dirtiest air" city in the country.

"The private and corporate citizens of Hamilton County again have shown that they can meet any challenge," said Bob Colby, director of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Air Pollution Control Bureau, at the time.

But it was our payoff that was truly sweet. The new designation and clean air meant that new and recruited industry permits no longer had to depend on offset pollution emissions from the reductions or closed doors of other businesses.

It quite literally made the recruitment of our newest major manufacturer, Volkswagen, possible.

Even in 2011, Colby was asked if the breakthrough meant less need for emissions testing and burning bans. Not likely, he said.

"With tighter standards always coming down the pike [from EPA], I don't think that is likely. Certainly not in the near future," he said.

Even today, even in a political era in which standards are not tightening, if our state lawmakers are successful in rolling back Tennessee laws and policies to do away with vehicle emission testing, then Hamilton County (and other counties that use it) will have to find another way to meet the EPA requirements. One of those ways could still be to require existing industries like VW to reduce emissions — even if it means slowing production, not adding new vehicle assembly lines or even closing.

So you decide: What's the better trade-off for clean air — \$9 vehicle emissions testing (and sometimes costly auto repairs) or the likelihood of fewer jobs?

COMMENTARY

EVERYONE IS GOING ALL THE WAY

TEL AVIV, Israel — It is hard to spend a week in Israel and not come away feeling that Israelis have the wind at their backs.

They've built an awesome high-tech industry, and everyone's kid seems to work for a startup. Regionally, the Arabs and Palestinians have never been weaker, and under President Donald Trump, Israel has never had a more unquestioningly friendly United States.

Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, asking Israel for nothing in return. The Arab states barely made a peep.

Alas, though, all of this wind has whetted the appetite of Israel's settlers and ruling Likud Party to go to extremes.

Reuters reported on Dec. 31 that the "Likud Party unanimously urged legislators in a nonbinding resolution ... to effectively annex Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, land that Palestinians want for a future state."

I've seen this play before. It was May 17, 1983 — the day Israel, a year after invading Lebanon, signed a peace accord with Beirut. "Signed" isn't exactly right. Israel (backed by the U.S.) imposed virtually all its security demands on a weak Lebanese government, including a framework for normalizing trade and diplomacy.

Back then, Egypt had just signed a peace treaty and dropped out of the conflict, and another young Arab leader — Lebanese Christian warlord Bashir Gemayel — beckoned Israel to join him in crushing the Palestinians and remaking



Thomas Friedman

the Middle East together.

My Washington Post Beirut colleague Jonathan Randal wrote a book about that moment, "Going All The Way: Christian Warlords, Israeli Adventurers and the War in Lebanon."

I always loved that title — going all the way. It's a recurring theme out here, and it almost always ends with a "Thelma and Louise" moment — partners driving over a cliff — and so it did with Israel in 1983.

Lebanese militias, led by Hezbollah, quickly emerged to resist the May 17 treaty. On March 5, 1984, only 10 months after it was signed, I wrote in this paper from Beirut: "Lebanon today formally canceled its troop withdrawal accord with Israel," marking "the end of the so-called 'Israeli era' in Lebanese politics and to shift Lebanon solidly back into the Syrian-Arab fold."

Why do I tell this story? Because everywhere I look today I see people going all the way.

I see Republicans trashing two of our most sacred institutions — the FBI and the Justice Department. I see Iran controlling four Arab capitals: Damascus, Sanaa, Baghdad and Beirut. I see Hamas still more interested in building tunnels in Gaza to kill Israelis than schools to strengthen Palestinian society.

I see Turkey's president silencing every critical journalist in his country. I see Bibi Netanyahu trying to derail a corruption investigation by weakening Israel's justice system, free media and civil society — just like Trump and for the same purposes: to weaken constraints on his arbitrary use of political power.

Worst of all, I see an America — the world's strongest guardian of truth, sci-

ence and democratic norms — now led by a serial liar and norms destroyer, giving license to everyone else to ask, why can't I?

Can anything stop this epidemic of going all the way? Yes: Mother Nature, human nature and markets.

How? Well, look at Gaza. Due largely to Hamas' malevolence and incompetence, but also some Israeli restrictions, Gaza has limited hours of electricity each day. Result: Gaza's already inadequate sewage plants are often offline, and waste goes untreated straight into the Mediterranean.

Then the prevailing current washes Gaza's poop north, where it clogs Israel's big desalination plant in Ashkelon — which provides 15 percent of Israel's drinking water. In both 2016 and 2017, the Ashkelon plant had to close to clean Gaza's crud out of its filters. It's Mother Nature's way of reminding both that if they try to go all the way, if they shun a healthy interdependence, she'll poison them both.

Iran's military boss, Qasem Soleimani, thinks he's a big man on campus. His proxies control four Arab capitals. All bow down. But then out of nowhere Iranians back home start protesting against Soleimani's overreach.

And if you don't think markets have a way of curing excesses, you haven't been reading newspapers this week.

So to all of you going all the way, I say: Watch out for the market, Mother Nature and human nature. Because, noted Israeli political theorist Yaron Ezrahi, the first two are "uncontrollable and the other is irrepressible."