



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2019 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry? A series of editorials about Little Rock's school district and changes endorsed, and made.

Date(s) of publication? Fall of 2018, various

Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? Above

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.) For years, Little Rock's school district has been failing its students. In some of the most challenging ZIP codes, students don't even show up much of the time. But that's not surprising. At these schools, many TEACHERS are considered chronically absent. And although a state law grants the district the ability to more easily remove these teachers, the law wasn't used. That is, until the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette began editorializing on the matter. After several months and many editorials, the governor finally got involved, and . . . success! Here is a sampling of those editorials. Enjoy.

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EDITORIALS

Chronic absenteeism

Is 52 percent high enough to get attention?

WHEN IT comes to problems in Little Rock's public schools, can anything surprise anymore? Is anybody—outside Mike Poore's office—interested? If so, we must've missed the news conference of lawmakers, businessmen and the whole of the executive branches of the city and state governments when the paper published the story on chronic absenteeism the other day.

Is nobody surprised that more than half of the kids supposedly “attending” J.A. Fair were what experts call “chronically absent” last school year?

That is, they missed at least 10 percent of the school year. In a 178-day school year, that'd be about 18 days.

Eighteen days. At least. Some of us might remember back to high school, and the kid who got mono. And had to do catch-up work at home, and might have been given special permission to walk at graduation.

But half of the school chronically absent? This should be treated as a crisis, and not just by the school system.

The paper said that 451 of the 865 kids at J.A. Fair were chronically absent last year—that's 52 percent. At Hall High, 601 of 1,216 were as well. As were 402 of the 834 students at McClellan High. For those kids (not) attending J.A. Fair and McClellan, they're getting a \$100 million new school next year. We wonder if the school will be used much. (As a reform, the More Money Approach makes a great problem.)

A recent national report with several sponsors says that 15 percent of the nation's kids were chronically absent last year. And the Hamilton Project allows anybody to see such rates in your local school. It's an interesting website, at <https://bit.ly/2wXXtxv>, and easy to navigate.

Central High is about average on absenteeism. Several elementary schools in the Little Rock district are below average. But some of the schools, such as the ones mentioned above, have a shockingly high rate of absent kids.

For their part, folks at district HQ are aware of the problem. For they've started a “Feet to the Seat” campaign to address it. According to Cynthia Howell's reporting in your statewide paper, the campaign “will go beyond banners and Sunday night phone calls to parents to also include professional development teams that will work with schools on how to use the data to identify the needs and plan accordingly.” Which sounds like something school administrators would be good at: forming

teams and planning professional development. It might even help a little.

But again, is anybody outside of the superintendent's office interested? The state has taken over Little Rock's schools, which means the state is accountable for them now, which means the governor is. Will Asa Hutchinson see Little Rock's failing schools as part of his legacy? The rest of us will. Where are lawmakers? As a presidential candidate named Bob

Dole once asked, “Where's the outrage?”

And what about the other school districts in the state that have high absentee rates? Check out that website at the Hamilton Project. You'd be surprised.

Maybe this newspaper, at least the editorial column, is partly to blame. When half the kids in some schools, in what has traditionally been the state's largest school district, don't show up to class, why are we just now crying bloody murder? Answer: Because we've just found out.

There have been a lot of words written in the opinion section of this paper, and not just this paper, about how to make Little Rock more livable. To make it more attractive. To change the image it has—the one that led to a stampede at War Memorial Stadium a few weeks ago when somebody shouted, “Gun!”

FOLKS, Little Rock will not get better without the public schools getting better. And although absent kids missing 10 percent of the year isn't the only problem, it's a big one. Students can't learn if they aren't there.

A school district that fails its kids is taken over by the state—because that's a crisis. When the opioid epidemic hit, the United States Senate passed a response act—because that's a crisis. A federal agency, FEMA, is ready when a hurricane hits the coasts—because that's a crisis.

Half the kids at some of Arkansas' schools aren't showing up to class. How is this not a crisis?

What are we afraid of? It can't be failure. We're already familiar with that.

Now and then the cloud bank of verbiage covering education in this state may part and give view to what's really going on in the classrooms. This time it ain't pretty. But fear not, we're sure to hear from those who've mastered two unintelligible languages, educanto and lawspeak. They'll surely explain to us civilians that things aren't what they appear.

But then we'll send them to a math teacher, and have “52 percent” explained to them.

OTHERS SAY

Vape attack

THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Many teens have wised up to the disastrous health effects of cigarettes. They don't—and won't ever—smoke. Unfortunately, a fast-rising number of high schoolers and even younger teens have started vaping in the past few years.

Young people may think e-cigarettes are less dangerous than tobacco products—that's true—and they're attracted to the sweet but nicotine-laced vapors they inhale. Taking a furtive hit from a dispenser that resembles a pen or a lipstick tube is easier and less noxious than lighting up a cigarette.

But teen use has ballooned into an “epidemic,” warns Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Scott Gottlieb. On Wednesday, he announced a major crackdown against retailers for allegedly selling vaping products to those younger than 18. He also warned manufacturers that they face more draconian action unless they prove they can keep their products away from underage consumers: The agency could ban some or all flavored products used in the e-cigs.

What prompted Gottlieb's sudden call to arms? One possibility is new statistics that show an alarming rise in

vaping. The FDA has unpublished preliminary data that shows a 75 percent increase in e-cigarette use among high school students this year compared with 2017, *The Washington Post* reports.

Yes, we know e-cigarettes can help current tobacco smokers quit. That's a tremendous health benefit for them and their families.

But vaping also can start teens on the self-destructive path toward cigarettes.

Cracking down on retailers and marketers that sell to minors illegally sends a powerful message to the retailers. There's another way to crimp this epidemic: Ban the sale of tobacco and e-cigarettes to anyone younger than 21. That's the law in Chicago and some other cities and states. On Aug. 24, however, Gov. Bruce Rauner vetoed a bill that would have raised to 21 from 18 the legal age to buy tobacco or e-cigarette products. We hope legislators override that veto.

Gottlieb's alarm also should resonate in households across America. Parents who may have been relieved that their kids are merely vaping—not smoking—should now be aware of the risks, if they weren't already. Vaping may not be as harmful as cigarettes. But for young people in particular, it's harmful enough.



MIKE LESTER
9-13-18
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COLUMNISTS

Days of fear

Paul Krugman



Lehman Bros. failed 10 years ago. The U.S. economy was already in a recession, but Lehman's fall and the chaos that followed sent it off a cliff. Six and a half million jobs would be lost during the next year. It was a terrifying time.

Still, we didn't experience a full replay of the Great Depression, and some have argued that the system worked, in the sense that policymakers did what was needed to avoid catastrophe.

But this is only half right. We avoided utter disaster, but nonetheless experienced a huge sustained employment slump, one that inflicted immense human and economic cost—and may well have helped set the stage for our current constitutional crisis.

Why did the slump go on so long? There are multiple answers, but the most important factor was politics—cynical bad-faith obstructionism on the part of the Republican Party.

One crucial point I still don't think is widely understood is that, scary and damaging though it was, the financial crisis—the disruption of credit markets that followed Lehman's collapse—was quite brief. Measures of financial stress, which include things like interest rate spreads on risky assets, spiked for a few months but quickly returned to normal. The purely financial aspect of the crisis was basically over by the summer of 2009.

But the broader economic crisis went on much longer. Unemployment rose to almost 10 percent, then came down with painful slowness; it didn't get back to 5 percent until seven years after Lehman's fall. Why didn't rapid financial recovery lead to rapid economic recovery?

At a basic level, the answer is that the financial crisis was only one symptom of a bigger problem: the collapse of a gigantic housing bubble. The bursting bubble exerted a powerful down-draft on the economy, because it led to a plunge in residential investment and because it was a huge hit to household wealth, which reduced consumer spending.

What the crisis called for, then, were policies to boost spending, to offset the effects of the housing bust. But the normal response of cutting interest rates wasn't available, because rates were already near zero. What we needed instead was fiscal stimulus: increased government outlays and tax cuts for lower- and middle-income families, who would be likely to spend them.

And we did indeed get substantial stimulus. But it wasn't big enough, and even more important, it faded out much too fast. By 2013, with unemployment still above 7 percent, government at all levels was providing barely more economic support than it had in 2007 when the housing boom was still running strong.

Why did the response to a depressed economy fall short? We can debate endlessly whether the Obama administration could have gotten a bigger, more sustained stimulus through Con-



gress. what's clear is that some officials failed to see the need for stronger policies. When Christina Romer, the administration's top economist, argued for more stimulus, Tim Geithner, the Treasury secretary, dismissed it as “sugar.”

Beyond that, efforts to fight unemployment had to deal with a bizarre Beltway consensus that despite high unemployment and record low interest rates, debt, not jobs, was the real problem.

But the most important reason the great slump lasted so long was scorched-earth Republican opposition to anything and everything that might have helped offset the fallout from the housing bust.

When I say “scorched earth,” I'm not being hyperbolic. Let's not forget that in the summer of 2011 Republicans in Congress threatened to provoke a new financial crisis by refusing to raise the debt limit. Their goal was to blackmail President Barack Obama into cutting spending at a time when unemployment was still 9 percent and U.S. real borrowing costs were close to zero.

Republicans claimed that their opposition to anything that might limit mass unemployment was driven by a deep commitment to fiscal responsibility. But this was complete hypocrisy—something that was obvious to anyone who looked at the actual content of GOP budget proposals, which gave smoke and mirrors a bad name. You had to be extremely credulous to take fake GOP deficit hawkery seriously; unfortunately, there were a lot of credulous pundits out there.

Anyway, the events of the past two years have made the reality of what happened crystal clear. The very same politicians who piously declared that America couldn't afford to spend money supporting jobs in the face of a deep prolonged slump just rammed through a huge deficit-exploding tax cut for corporations and the wealthy even though the economy is currently near full employment. No, they haven't abandoned their commitment to fiscal responsibility; they never cared about deficits in the first place.

So if you want to understand why the great slump that began in 2008 went on so long, blighting so many American lives, the answer is politics. Specifically, policy failed because cynical bad-faith Republicans were willing to sacrifice millions of jobs rather than let anything good happen to the economy while a Democrat sat in the White House.

Paul Krugman, who won the 2008 Nobel Prize in economics, writes for the New York Times.

'Tis the season

JONATHAN BERNSTEIN
BLOOMBERG VIEW

The 2018 primary season came to an end Thursday in New York—the Empire State's federal primaries were held several weeks ago, but the state breaks up its primaries, and this year added the twist of putting the state-level vote on a Thursday.

Nevertheless, a lot of people showed up on the Democratic side, which is where the action was, and they made a big statement by defeating six of the eight state Senate Democrats who had caucused with Republicans to give the minority party control of the upper chamber. That means Democrats have a very good chance to finally take over unified control of New York government; even though the state is overwhelmingly Democratic, gerrymandering and chicanery had somehow prevented the party from gaining a working majority in the state Senate for decades.

In a lot of ways, this result was a good example of what Democrats have been up to this year. This wasn't a socialist takeover of the party. It was a surge of new energy, particularly among women. It was also a party newly open to black candidates and other ethnic minorities that Democrats (sometimes including leaders from those groups) had for many years feared running in white-majority districts.

All of that meant that Democrats were choosing from a much deeper pool of candidates this year than ever before. (It also means Democrats are now choosing from a much deeper pool of

candidates than Republicans have to work with, given that Republicans are still reluctant to nominate women.)

Some of those—such as actress Cynthia Nixon, who lost a doomed campaign against incumbent Governor Andrew Cuomo—turned out to be duds on the campaign trail (although an argument can be made that Nixon's candidacy did achieve some of its goals). But a lot of them have turned out, at least so far, to be a fresh injection of excitement for the party. We have yet to see how all the newcomers who won primaries will do in November, and then how they'll do in office should they win. There's not much sign that they will produce the same kinds of problems Tea Party radicals did for Republicans.

That's because their energy, while very much an effect of Donald Trump's presidency, has appeared to be more partisan and pragmatic than ideological. Serious primary challenges, for example, have been focused on safe districts (such as the two members of the U.S. House who were defeated in New York and Massachusetts during this cycle) and, in many cases, districts where the incumbent was out of step with the district.

So that's it for the primaries—unless you count Louisiana's jungle primary on election day, which isn't really a primary but a first-stage general election. The general election campaigns have begun; early voting in many states is just around the corner. If you haven't tuned in yet, it's been a fascinating election year, with more to come.

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EDITORIALS



Bricks in the wall
If the kids were in school, so what?

“The paper said that 451 of the 865 kids at J.A. Fair were chronically absent last year. At Hall High, 601 of 1,216 were as well. As were 402 of the 834 students at McClellan High. For those kids (not) attending J.A. Fair and McClellan, they’re getting a \$100 million new school next year. We wonder if the school will be used much.”
—editorial, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* yesterday

THE PARAGRAPH above is soooo Saturday. This is Sunday. Let us move on, shall we, to the next problem facing education in Little Rock’s schools: absenteeism. That is, teacher absenteeism. Last week, the news side of this outfit published a story detailing the concerning, and disconcerting, absentee rate among kids in some of Little Rock’s schools. A student was said to be chronically absent if he missed 10 percent of the school year. In some schools, that kind of absenteeism approached, then zoomed by, 50 percent. It surpasses all understanding, which may be the only thing it has in common with the peace of God. What most folks don’t know, however, is how many *teachers* aren’t showing up when the bell rings. The state’s Department of Education might not noise it about, but it produced something of a legislative update for the Little Rock School District earlier this year. Given the poets who name these things, it was called the Legislative Update for Little Rock School District.

Deep into the report/numbers/weeds are the rates for teacher absences, too. We don’t know what’s more vexing, truant students or truant teachers. In the update for January-March of this year, page 73 specifically, are the numbers for Hall High School. In one quarter, 46 percent of teachers missed 5 days or more. Not just any teachers. But teachers defined as “core” teachers, those who teach math or science or social studies and the sort. Over at J.A. Fair, one quarter saw the absentee rate top 40 percent. Same at Mabelvale Middle. A couple of schools had more than 30 percent of its teachers taking extended time off. If these schools didn’t have such a problem with kids skipping school, would it make any difference? For the teachers aren’t there. Even those running the schools understand the problem. You can find a little comfort, very little comfort, in the comments section. At least nobody’s denying the facts. The state apparently asked questions about the data, and

asked the schools to explain. Here’s an exchange between the state and those at Hall High:
Q: Did teacher absenteeism impact student learning? How do you know?
A: If teachers are not in the classroom, the student is not learning at capacity. The belief of the school leadership team is that if there is no teacher, learning is limited.

Well. The various schools on the state’s watch list blamed the flu, sick kids, and time off for teacher training. But there’s going to be some sort of flu every year. And professional development should help educate kids, not hamper. Should that need to be said aloud? One unnamed apparatchik in the school system wrote this in the report, to excuse teacher absences: “Teachers get stressed from all their efforts to help these students and need the time to take a day to re-energize and regroup so that they can push on with helping our children grow.” Teachers need to take days off work from educating students, so they can be energized to better educate students. Neat. If some teachers are so stressed from their jobs that weekend reboots don’t do the trick, then maybe they’d be better in another line of work. But that’s another rub. It’s infamously hard to fire teachers for the minor detail of not doing their jobs. Or, apparently, not showing up for work.

THERE ARE no easy answers here. But big problems call for big ideas. Our betters in the state’s legislative and executive branches need to find ways to blow some stumps. It must become easier to reconstitute schools, hire the best teachers and principals, and provide a better education, and future, for Little Rock’s public school students. If there’s a bit of hope, it may be this: Little Rock will open a new high school in 2020 for the neighborhoods now sending kids to McClellan and J.A. Fair high schools. That school should be able to hire the best teachers, not the most senior and most adept at gaming the system—to make it a true new school, not just the same old one with better paint. The way would be cleared for a new birth in local education—instead of still more failure. And if the teacher unions go apoplectic, so be it. What’s happening now can’t continue. It’s going to take bold, determined, courageous action on the part of the state’s leadership to make hope a reality. That’s the nature of education, and life.

OTHERS SAY

Truth isn’t truth (again)

NEWSDAY
As Hurricane Florence pounds the Southeast, don’t forget that the region’s struggles are only beginning. This hurricane is forecast to deliver a prolonged assault—feet of rain water and battering winds. Perhaps those in the Carolinas will only have months of cleanup ahead. For others, the days after the storm will be ones without power or drinking water, waiting for emergency rations from the first responders. We know all this from our experience with superstorm Sandy, which devastated Long Island, New York City and New Jersey in 2012. The return to normalcy was slow. Homes were flooded. Communities were destroyed, businesses shuttered. For some, it took years to get back home. Other major hurricanes like Katrina and Harvey have forced similarly painful recoveries. And, of course, Hurri-

cane Maria slammed Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, precipitating a year of lost power and chaos for those in the Caribbean. President Donald Trump appears oblivious to the impact of that storm, fending off criticism of a bungled federal response. Last week, he tweeted that “3000 people did not die” as a result of the two hurricanes that battered Puerto Rico last year. This is ignorance. An August report from George Washington University, commissioned and accepted by Puerto Rico’s government, estimated 2,975 more people than expected died on the island in the six months after Maria than the number of deaths that normally might have happened in the same period. Trump is trying to muddy the record. Don’t buy it. Natural disasters carry a long tail of devastation. Hurricane victims need our support long after hurricane season ends.



COLUMNISTS

Unifying a state



Rex Nelson

Hunter Yurachek, the relatively new athletic director at the University of Arkansas, is scheduled to address the Little Rock Touchdown Club on Monday. I look forward to meeting him and thanking him for making a sincere effort to understand this unique state, its people and what makes us tick. The fact that Razorback football teams will continue to play games at War Memorial Stadium in Little Rock tells me a lot. Yurachek is a native of Richmond, Va., who earned a bachelor’s degree in business management from Guilford College in Greensboro, N.C., in 1990 and a master’s degree in sports administration from the University of Richmond in 1994. He was a four-year basketball letterman at Guilford and came to Arkansas from a similar position at the University of Houston. Before the official announcement in May that the UA will continue to play football at War Memorial, Yurachek had made it clear that he realizes Razorback football is about more than money. It’s something his predecessor Jeff Long never seemed to comprehend. “It’s not just a decision about the University of Arkansas and our football program,” Yurachek told KATV back in February. “I think this impacts our entire state and a variety of constituents. If it was just a decision based on dollars and cents, it’s an easy decision for a director of athletics to make. But there’s a lot more that goes into this decision than just pure dollars and cents.” Tuesday marks the 70th anniversary of the first football game played at War Memorial. It was built for the Razorbacks. In a story on the cover of this section, I detail the history of the stadium and the role it played in making the Razorbacks a statewide brand. At a time when so much revenue comes from television contracts, ticket revenue doesn’t have as big of an impact as it once did. When recently released evidence showed that fewer than 40,000 people were in the stands for several games at Fayetteville last season, it made it even easier to justify the continuation of Little Rock games.

I travel the state a great deal, which is the most enjoyable aspect of this job. I’m fascinated by current trends in which the state is gaining population overall at a time when two-thirds of Arkansas is losing population. There are three primary growth areas: northwest Arkansas, the Little Rock metropolitan area, and the Jonesboro-Paragould corridor. How do we continue to unify this state of only 3 million people in an era of drastic demographic changes? I’ve written before that I see three major unifying forces in Arkansas: the Razorbacks, a strong governor, and a quality statewide newspaper. I mention the unifying power of Razorback athletics with all due respect to my friends at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro. I’ve never understood why Arkansans find it so difficult to pull for all four of the state’s NCAA Division I programs at the same time. After all, Arkansas is in the Southeastern Conference, Arkansas State is in the Sun Belt Conference, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff is in the Southwestern Athletic Conference, and the University of Central Arkansas is in the Southland Conference. They aren’t battling each other for conference titles, as is the case with the University of Alabama and Auburn University. With that said, I hope the UA’s recent decision to play UALR and UAPB in baseball will open the door for competition between the flagship

university and ASU. I’m among those who believe that a football game between the Razorbacks and the Red Wolves to open each season at War Memorial would be a good thing. It could serve as a unifying rather than a divisive force. The wonderful thing about Razorback games in Little Rock is that they resemble a giant family reunion. I can stand at a tailgate party behind the press box and see friends from every part of the state due to the central location of the capital city. I’m confident that Yurachek will consider such a game as he learns more about the state. As far as a strong governor, we’re fortunate that Asa Hutchinson has chosen to govern in the same pragmatic style as predecessors Mike Beebe and Mike Huckabee. Hutchinson appears to be cruising to re-election in November, and rightfully so. Even though he was raised in the far northwest corner of Arkansas, Hutchinson has spent a great deal of time as governor in south and east Arkansas. He played a key role in ensuring that Razorback football games will continue to be played in Little Rock. He knows what those games mean to residents of the Delta and the pine woods of south Arkansas. We’ve had a good run of governors for more than half a century, ever since Winthrop Rockefeller was elected in November 1966 after 12 years of Orval Faubus in the governor’s office. Since Rockefeller was sworn into office in January 1967, there have been five Democratic and four Republican governors. None of them have been extremists. All have governed from the middle. They’ve listened to voices from every corner of Arkansas. Given the current culture of corruption in the Arkansas Legislature, we’re fortunate to have a chief executive such as Hutchinson.

THAT BRINGS us to a quality statewide newspaper. I was fortunate this summer to have been asked to represent the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* at civic club meetings in several counties where we’re moving from home delivery of the print edition to online delivery for subscribers with iPads the newspaper gives them. It’s a bold experiment in this period of transition for the newspaper industry, and people across the country are watching us to see if it succeeds. In all of those speeches, I made clear that this newspaper will continue covering all 75 counties of Arkansas. There once were a number of statewide newspapers in places like Des Moines and Louisville that covered entire states. The *Democrat-Gazette* now stands as one of the few newspapers that attempts to do that. It’s good that people in Texarkana can see obituaries from Blytheville. It’s good that readers in Little Rock know what the school board in Fayetteville is doing. There are so many factors out there these days that divide us as Arkansans. We should cherish and hold onto the handful of things that unite us.

Rex Nelson is a senior editor at the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

The way we see things

FAYE FLAM
BLOOMBERG VIEW

Humans are by nature social learners. We know how to tap into the wisdom of the crowd, when, for example, we’re given the opportunity to poll the audience on a game show. Recently, an intriguing new study showed that people naturally tapped into crowd wisdom to improve their ability to interpret a climate-related graph—but their ability to learn was ruined by the mere suggestion of political labeling. In that study, researchers asked several thousand people who had identified as a Democrat or a Republican to forecast the future using a NASA graph tracking the amount of Arctic sea ice. Study author Damon Centola of the University of Pennsylvania said that Republicans were more likely than Democrats to fall for so-called endpoint bias—the often erroneous assumption that the noise at the tail end was more important

in predicting the trend than the long-term data. Participants got a lot smarter when they could see the answers of 40 other people assigned to the same task. After consulting with the wisdom of the crowd, 85 percent of Republicans got the trend right—slightly outperforming the Democrats. But that changed once the researchers started adding the Republican or Democratic logos to the bottom of the participant’s screens in a way that suggested these labels would apply to their erstwhile collaborators. Then nobody learned anything. With labels often comes dismissal. It’s easier for some people to brush off a useful or even brilliant idea if it’s perceived as coming from a sanctimonious liberal or a stodgy conservative, a member of the elite, or a person without sufficient education. If only we could attain liberation from the self and its biases.

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Arkansas Democrat-Gazette
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EDITORIALS

Definition of a crisis

What else would you call this?

The three worst schools in Arkansas are three of the five high schools in Little Rock—J.A. Fair, McClellan, and Hall. That's not according to us; that's according to the state of Arkansas, which just released the ratings for all 1,034 public schools in the state.

If this is not an educational crisis, what would a crisis look like? Certainly preventing black students from going to school with white students in 1957 created a crisis. But what about assigning low-income and minority students to failing schools—and doing nothing about improving those schools?

Unfortunately, far too many people don't consider this situation to be a crisis. It's simply the status quo—one they are willing to live with, both now and in the future.

Little Rock's Cloverdale is 13th from the bottom, and Henderson is 41st from the bottom. Out of 1,034 schools. Both of these failing middle schools feed failing high schools.

Four of those schools have an F rating from the state—Henderson has a D. These are five of the six schools that put the Little Rock School District in academic distress and caused the state takeover of the school district.

The state has had supervision of the district for four years now. How would you rate its management of these schools? Would you give it an F? The state has a year left to improve the schools. How much would you wager that it will get the job done in 12 more months?

Now consider this: Taxpayers in Little Rock are spending \$100 million to build one of the most expensive schools in Arkansas history to merge two failing

schools, J.A. Fair and McClellan. If the leaders who made this decision think a new building is going to solve the education problems in the schools, they simply haven't consulted the research. It shows that buildings, no matter how new and shiny, don't improve education.

It's quality teachers and principals that improve education.

Why are these kids getting such a poor education? Consider this: At Hall

High, there are 10 classrooms devoted to teaching English as a second language. We've been told that only one of the 10 teachers speaks Spanish. If you were confronted with such a problem, wouldn't you find the teachers who spoke Spanish, even if you had to pay them more, maybe \$5,000 a year more?

Of course you would, but the principal at Hall High does not have the authority to do that. He is blocked by the teachers' union contract that prevents such a common-sense approach.

Arkansas law permits waivers. So the state, which is responsible for the schools, does not have to abide by such nonsensical rules. To seek a waiver, it takes courage, and apparently there's been a great lack of courage by Superintendent Michael Poore, Commissioner Johnny Key, and Governor Asa Hutchinson to do something about these struggling schools.

In 1957, it was the state of Arkansas that created the crisis in the Little Rock schools. Today it's the state of Arkansas that has failed to address the crisis of these five failing schools—which are failing low-income minority students.

With only a little more than a year left, it's time for the state to take action. Past time.

The court speaks

WITH THURSDAY'S ruling from the Arkansas Supreme Court, the state's voter identification law has been declared seaworthy, no holes. And now we can put one more matter to bed before early voting starts in a couple of weeks.

It's not an undue burden to require identification before casting a ballot, and the law sees to it the defense liberals typically use against the measure is disarmed. Opponents have argued requiring an ID card to vote is too burdensome because ID cards cost money. And if you have to pay money for an ID card, you're essentially having to pay for the constitutionally given right to vote.

Thankfully, our betters in the Ledge provided a way to solve this problem in their recently-upheld law. The Arkansas Secretary of State's office told us anyone who needs one can pay a visit to their county clerk and be provided a voter identification card, no charge. How

about that? No charge.

Our county clerks have been given equipment that can produce a voter identification card the same day it's requested and without financial burden to the person who needs it. Now even those who struggle to make ends meet can still get a card and vote.

And if you happen to forget your ID card when you go to vote? No worries. The law states you can still cast a provisional ballot. Seems like all the loose ends have been tied up, and no dead folk will be voting in this upcoming election.

The ID issue on the ballot early next month? It's a backstop, we're told, to enshrine such requirements in the state constitution. So a court can't come along later, maybe much later, and throw the whole thing back into doubt and confusion. Either way, for now, the law's on the books. Have your ID ready when you vote.

OTHERS SAY

Sears could have saved itself

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

The most impressive statement to make about Sears as it seeks bankruptcy court protection is also the most damning: Sears was the Amazon of its time.

Impressive because Sears really was that influential long ago. Damning because the company's decline wasn't pre-ordained. Sears could have maintained pre-eminence and elbowed out Amazon and other retailers. Some companies do preserve and build on success through reinvention. Look at McDonald's, to choose another great Chicago-area company that has survived challenges and remains the iconic name in its industry. There was no law that said the biggest hamburger chain of the 20th century should still be competitive in 2018. McDonald's kept up with changing consumer demands. Sears instead became a victim as its customers found other retailers who would better meet their needs.

On Sunday night, Hoffman Estates-based Sears filed for bankruptcy protection. The company's future now likely rests with outsiders, including its

creditors and a federal judge.

The dominance Sears squandered is breathtaking to consider. Richard Sears and Alvah Roebuck founded the company in 1893—125 years ago—to sell watches by mail. As recently as the 1960s, Sears was known as the “colossus” and “paragon” of American retailing. By 1972, two of every three Americans shopped at Sears in any three-month period, and more than half of households had a Sears credit card, according to *The Big Store*, an engaging 1987 biography of the company by Donald R. Katz.

Almost two out of three U.S. adults purchased something via Amazon in a three-month period in 2017, according to market researcher Packaged Facts. Amazon's \$177 billion in revenue last year is in the neighborhood of 1 percent of GNP.

The question of what befell Sears isn't hard to answer. It was internal attitude as much as external forces. The company survived the turbulence of decades, then slowly lost relevance. The most impressive statement may now be its epitaph: Once and long ago, Sears was a mighty retailer.



COLUMNISTS

We'll have to get used to it



Philip Martin

They say we're going to have to get used to these storms, that we're past the point where anybody can do anything about them. The temperatures and sea levels are going to rise, the woods are going to burn, there's going to be misery. Just as you can tell it's going to be a rough winter by the thickening of a cow's nape, you can divine the coming apocalypse in the contingency escape plans of Silicon Valley dudes with homesteads in New Zealand.

Scientists say that no matter what measures we take now, average temperatures on the planet are going to go up at least four degrees by the end of the century, and the results are going to be catastrophic. The Trump administration says it's not that bad; it's worse. Temperatures are going to rise about seven degrees, and there's no use worrying about it.

Because people are driving the world, and avoiding the coming horror show would require us to make very serious cuts in our carbon emissions, which would be highly inconvenient. Because somewhere back in the day we lost the ability to do hard things. Or as the statement drafted in August by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to justify President Trump's decision to freeze federal fuel-efficiency standards for cars and light trucks built after 2020 puts it, to do so “would require substantial increases in technology innovation and adoption compared to today's levels and would require the economy and the vehicle fleet to move away from the use of fossil fuels, which is not currently technologically feasible or economically feasible.”

Since we're on double secret probation anyway, we might as well throw a toga party.

I for one am relieved. I once got scolded for throwing an empty water bottle in the trash can rather than the recycling bin (which looked exactly like another trash can) and I've resented all this do-goodery ever since. I cheered in that episode of *Mad Men* where the Drapers went on a picnic and left their garbage to rot on that verdant hillside. That's when America was great, before that old fraud Iron Eyes Cody shed his snowflake tear and guilted us all into behaving like responsible caretakers of a world we're only passing through.

The earth is ours because we took it from the dinosaurs, right? It's our property and we can do whatever we want with it. And, let's be honest, it's got some miles on it—it's kind of a beater. It can't last forever anyway. So let's just cancel the insurance and push it 'til it drops. Worst case, we got maybe 50 years? Are you going to be around in 50 years? Even if you are, a lot can happen in 50 years. Maybe Matthew McConaughey will lead us through a wormhole to a new home in the sun.

Relax. We're all going to die. (Unless you get your consciousness uploaded into the cloud and downloaded into a succession of increasingly advanced androids. Or into some virtual cosmos. What's dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio?)

We're going to bull our way through this, like a Senate Judiciary Committee with an under-vetted candidate. Call it a triumph of the will. We might as well make a show of our obstinance. Live fast, die hard and leave no witnesses behind. Nothing matters anyway, it's all a game to see who can build the bigger house, amass the most toys, have the most selfies taken with celebrities,



and pay the lowest tax rate.

Or we can close our eyes and wish real hard. Like the man said, climate change could be good, right? Not that it exists; despite his administration's assumptions, Trump has often described anthropogenic climate change as “fake news.” And fewer Americans probably believe it now—according to a Yale University study, 72 percent of us credited climate change as a fact back in

2008, while only 63 percent believed it in 2013, well before Donald Trump emerged as a bully boy for the insensible logic of wishfulness. (But not before Florida Gov. Rick Scott forbade the state's Environmental Protection Agency from using the terms “climate change” and “global warning” and to characterize sea-level rise as “nuisance flooding.” Call it the “nyah-nyah-nyah-I-can't-hear-you” method of dealing with catastrophe.)

Still, for those of us in Arkansas, this could be a good thing. If the ocean takes back some real estate, then the value of the real estate that's not been taken back by the ocean goes up, right? Someone's formerly landlocked property is going to become beachfront. And if you look at a satellite photo of Louisiana, you might wonder if someday El Dorado won't have a port.

Miami, as we know it, is over. Sea walls won't save it because the city is built largely on porous limestone. Sea water is seeping up from the ground. By the end of the century, they'll have structures on stilts, maybe floating buildings, but the city proper is drowning.

Manhattan may be a different story. There's talk of a \$3 billion project that would build a berm around Lower Manhattan, from 42nd Street in the east to 57th Street on the west. (Build the wall.) Wall Street and Tribeca would be protected. But Queens is just going to flood—neighborhoods in and around Jamaica Bay already flood during high tide; Howard Beach will likely be uninhabitable in a few years.

The dispossessed are going to have to go somewhere. No doubt there are those who see that as opportunity.

Like the Christian Bale character in *The Big Short*, who at the end of the movie has decided to go all in on water rights in anticipation of the coming droughts. Or the cruise line that, thanks to the melting polar ice caps, can now offer a cruise through the Northwest Passage from Alaska around Greenland then on to New York.

The softening of the polar ice caps means that we've gained access to a lot of heretofore unavailable oil and natural gas reserves. The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that up to 25 percent of the world's undiscovered fossil fuel has been buried under ice. Now we can go and get it.

So we'll have plenty of gas to drive ourselves over the cliff.

Philip Martin is a columnist and critic for the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. Email him at pmartin@arkansasonline.com and read his blog at blooddirtandangels.com.

Don't ignore climate change

KIM COBB
THE WASHINGTON POST

This past week was a grim one in climate history.

First, an international group of scientists released a long-anticipated report detailing in excruciating detail the extra damages we can expect unless we slam our foot on the fossil fuel brakes right now. A few days later, Hurricane Michael came barreling out of the Gulf of Mexico with a late-breaking intensification that transformed the Florida Panhandle into a landscape straight out of a horror movie.

We are exceptionally ill-prepared for the climate threats that are unfolding today, let alone those of the next decades. Rising seas caused by warming and rising oceans and melting ice are already bringing low-lying coastlines under threat from so-called “blue sky flooding.” And studies now show that there are plenty of reasons to think that hurricanes will get stronger and wetter as the ocean and the overlying atmosphere warm.

As the climate report indicates, we need to be preparing for things to get worse. Scientists can provide decision-makers with estimates of the rates of sea-level rise over the next decades. But we also need to consider how the natural and built environments may compound or mitigate flood risks to communities. And policymakers must decide how to allocate finite public resources to protecting lives and property.

The new climate report outlines a path for an aggressive drawdown of atmospheric carbon dioxide levels that would avoid some of the worst damages associated with climate change, and we must get started in earnest on a host of no-regrets actions toward this end. Federal action is long overdue.

Kim Cobb is the Georgia Power chair and professor in the School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences and director of the global change program at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

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EDITORIALS

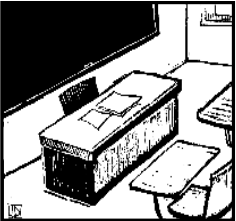
Definition of a crisis II

When will leaders make the tough calls?

THE STATE'S website announces the individual Web pages for every school thusly: "Accountability At-a-Glance." But something strange happened on the way to real accountability for Arkansas' schools. It sorta disappeared.

Over the weekend, the news folks published a story regarding school grades in this state. A lot of schools did just swell. Others, not so much.

Forty-four schools in Arkansas, including nine high schools, received F grades, according to the news story written by our Cynthia Howell. This was based on something called the ESSA School Index scores. For the record, Little Rock's district had eight schools with



Fs—this in a district that was taken over by the state in 2015 because of poor performance.

But down deep in the story, and the weeds, was this telling paragraph:

"Johnny Key, Arkansas' education commissioner, said Friday that the newly released scores and letter grades carry no threat of penalties for low-scoring campuses."

Unlike the previous No Child Left Behind law, which penalized poor-performing schools by allowing kids to transfer out of them, or even in extreme examples shutting down schools, the current accountability plan is mostly plan, little accountability.

Or as Johnny Key put it: "There are expectations for meaningful plans and meaningful results. But [the current system] is different. No Child Left Behind created a fear of being punished. We are really trying to use our ESSA plan to change it from a fear of the punishment that might come to a recognition that, 'We do need help and the department and the education service cooperatives are there to help us overcome the challenges we have so we can drive better student results.'"

So . . . The state has expectations. Of meaningful results. But if those results aren't forthcoming, then what? We'll ex-

pect meaningful results really hard next time?

The assistant commissioner for public school accountability told our reporter: "Our ESSA plan allows us to individualize, to work with the district and the school to see what a school needs."

What if what it needs, is to be closed? And its teachers sent packing, along with its principal? If a school can't improve an F grade after three years of state control, then maybe, just maybe, the personnel therein aren't up to the task. Is there any other occupation in which a group of people can fail to do their jobs, year after year, and put up the worst numbers in the field, and still not only hold onto their jobs, but expect to?

For goodness sake, the paper reports that schools among the bottom 5 percent can expect "extra support" from the state—read: money—and might also be eligible for federal school improvement grants. Why reward that behavior? Can we reward the A-rated schools with federal grants next?

IT'S NOT all bad news out there. After the grades for the schools came in, several were noted for above average improvement. Our story noted schools like Harmony Grove High in Saline County, Ballman Elementary in Fort Smith, and others that improved tremendously, in some cases moving up a couple of letter grades.

Why not go to those schools, grab the elbow of the principal, and ask her what's going on? Maybe recruit teachers at those schools to replace teachers at the failing ones. Perhaps pay them more. Or would that be unspeakably levelheaded and justified? Not to mention a favor to our kids and their futures?

If the holdup is a fear to take on teachers' unions and upset the educational apple cart, then students in these failing schools will continue to suffer. Sometimes apple carts need to be turned over.

Credit where it's due

Economic pressure on Turkey pays off

FOR ALL the negative press our president gets, let's give him credit when it's due. On Friday, the results from our dealmaker-in-chief finally came to fruition.

American pastor Andrew Brunson was arrested in Turkey during all the chaos of a failed coup. The papers say Rev. Brunson was held for a year without any charges at all. Then, when the authorities decided that looked bad, he was charged with terrorism, of all things. For a time he was held in a prison cell with 21 others. (That cell, by the way, was made for eight people.) And while in prison, he lost 50 pounds, the hard way.

He was later moved to house arrest but was still unable to leave the country. And Americans tend to get a little angry when our citizens are wrongfully held abroad. Rev. Brunson, a Presbyterian minister, had a small church over in Turkey. Since 2016, evangelical leaders here in America have been trying to bring him home, and thanks to our president, that's happened.

The Washington Examiner reports: "A judge ordered Brunson's release as part of a reported deal in which President Trump will 'ease economic pres-

sure.'" Prosecutors aren't dropping their ridiculous case, but Mr. Brunson will be allowed to leave the country.

Maybe other countries holding American citizens on flimsy charges will take note. We don't take kindly to our citizens being wrongfully held in shoddy cases, with shoddy evidence and shoddy charges.

When Turkey initially refused to release our pastor, President Trump laid down the law, in his style. And through some fast-acting and rather tough sanctions, Turkey's economy took more than a few lumps. The papers say its currency has been declining for a while now, but the commander-in-chief's moves sure didn't help.

For the American president, this was a fulfilled campaign promise. Mr. Trump said he intended to bring the pastor home, and now that's done. Check the box. It's a promise kept, and we're making note of it.

As for Mr. Brunson, welcome home, sir. Giving up the congregation you've worked more than two decades to build won't be easy. Give it a while.

For now, just take a deep breath of free air.

OTHERS SAY

Into the trap

THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Elizabeth Warren, a U.S. senator who's putting forward serious ideas about how to build a fairer economy, earned a top teaching job at the University of Pennsylvania law school in the late 1980s purely on the merits, before she ever made any claim to Native American ancestry.

It was in late 1995, nearly three years after she was offered a professorship and five months after she started in her tenured position, that she marked

"Native American" as her ethnic status, prompted, she said, by family conversations about Cherokee roots on her mother's side.

For a man who specializes in racially divisive mockery, this is enough to hang the nickname "Pocohantas" around Warren's neck.

Warren didn't need to play the president's game. She did.

Warren walked into Trump's trap. Let's hope, if she's running for president in 2020, she sidesteps the next one.



COLUMNISTS

Why vote for Democrats?



Cal Thomas

Given what the Trump administration is saying are record achievements for a president at this stage in office, why would anyone consider voting for Democrats in the upcoming midterm elections?

Writing in *The Washington Examiner*, Paul Bedard lists 289 accomplishments of the Trump administration, beginning with the obvious one, the economy: "They include 173 major wins, such as adding more than 4 million jobs, and another 116 smaller victories, some with outsize importance, such as the 83 percent one-year increase in arrests of MS-13 gang members."

They also include two justices now on the Supreme Court and 82 other federal judges confirmed to lower courts.

As the White House has touted, unemployment in all demographics is the lowest it has been since 1969. Despite a recent blip in the stock market, portfolios have grown fatter since Trump became president. An analysis in *The Wall Street Journal* predicts economic growth is likely to continue "for years."

Other positives include updated trade deals with Mexico and Canada that will produce benefits for American manufacturers and workers far more than the old NAFTA deal ever did.

Consumer confidence reached an 18-year high in September, according to Lynn Franco, director of Economic Indicators at The Conference Board, which conducts the Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index.

Top this off with the successfully negotiated release of Pastor Andrew Brunson from a Turkish prison and a more realistic foreign policy in confronting America's enemies.

According to Gallup's weekly tracking poll, for the week of Oct. 7, the president's approval rating jumped a percentage point, from 42 percent to 43 percent. His disapproval rating holds at 53 percent, though that number is down three percentage points from the week of Sept. 16.

Rasmussen, which tends to be more favorable toward Republicans, puts the president's approval at 51 percent. That is higher than President Obama achieved at a similar point in his presidency. Presidential polling does not necessarily forecast voter behavior in state and local races, though one Quinnipiac University Poll shows that Sen. Ted Cruz (R, Texas) has a nine-point



likely voter lead over his opponent Rep. Beto O'Rourke (D, Texas).

In view of Republican successes, including tax cuts and the booming economy, what Democratic policies would produce results better than these? Other than spite for the president, why would voters elect candidates who want to return to a past where things were far different?

Do people who didn't have jobs during the previous administration want to embrace policies that kept them unemployed? Do businesses

once prevented from hiring people because of regulations now wish to have regulations re-imposed and to lay off workers they recently hired?

By what logic do some people wish to return to the recent past, including a recent past that includes Republican presidents who cannot lay claim to the type of successes

President Trump is enjoying?

Perhaps most amazing is the president's growing approval among African American voters, whose votes he is openly campaigning for as evidenced by rapper Kanye West's endorsement and the president's reciprocal embrace. *USA Today* reported on a new Rasmussen poll that shows "approval rating among African Americans is at 36 percent, nearly double his support at this time last year."

Despite the NAACP's hostility toward the president, African American voters seem focused more on results than symbolism.

Polls have been wrong in the past—take the 2016 election as the latest example—but the president has begun touting his record while campaigning for candidates. That record appears to be resonating with voters, at least in some states. Never has the Ronald Reagan question "Are you better off than you were four years ago" seemed more relevant. Never has the answer appeared more obvious.

Cal Thomas is a columnist for the Tribune Content Agency.

Low ball

DAHLEEN GLANTON
THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

On Monday, I lost a great deal of respect for Sen. Elizabeth Warren.

She allowed Donald Trump to bully her into taking a DNA test that revealed nothing that most of us didn't suspect all along. Yes, she probably has a little bit of Native American blood in her. So do a lot of people.

Science has long proven that there is no pure race in America, especially when it comes to European Americans. We are all mixed with a little bit of something. That makes this entire debate over Warren's ancestry foolish.

But more than that, this senseless feud between Warren and Trump trivializes the struggle Native Americans face in a country that has taken away everything that once belonged to them.

Most of us weren't surprised last year when Trump cracked a joke about Warren's ancestry at the most inappropriate time. It was supposed to be a ceremony honoring a small group of Navajo code talkers at the White House. But Trump couldn't resist.

"I just want to thank you because you're very, very special people," he said. "You were here long before any of us were here. Although we have a representative in Congress who, they say, was here a long time ago. They call her Pocahontas."

Since then, Trump has continued to use the nickname at political rallies, though it is widely considered to be offensive. During a rally in July, Trump offered to donate \$1 million to a charity of Warren's choice if she took a DNA test and "it shows you're an Indian."

For whatever reason, be it political or personal, Warren took the bait. She enlisted Stanford University professor Carlos Bustamante, an expert in the field of DNA, to do an analysis. The results were less than shocking. Six to 10 generations back, it turns out, a Native American likely was part of her family.

If that's the case, I might even be more Native American than Warren is. I haven't had a DNA

test, but like Warren, my family has passed stories of our ancestry down through generations, too.

My great-grandmother was half Creek, the daughter of a slave and a Native American who owned a plantation along the Chattahoochee River in Heard County, Ga. If the story is true, that would make me three generations removed from Native American heritage. I have a framed picture of my grandma Sarah Jones in my hallway, along with photographs of other relatives.

But I don't claim to be Native American. I am African American. Warren is a white American.

Back in the 1990s, when she was a professor at Harvard University, she listed herself as a minority in an Association of American Law Schools directory. She insists that she never benefited from it, and that she did it in hopes of networking with others who have Native American roots.

There are lots of people out there who would try to use a minority status if they thought it could help them get a job, win a contract or get some other advantage.

For Native Americans, though, race is not just about leveling the playing field. It is about preserving a fading presence on American soil. It is about recognizing a heritage that represents fortitude, bravery and allegiance.

There is nothing we can do that would make up for the terrible way we've treated Native Americans over time and continue to dismiss them today. The least we can do is stop trying to get a piece of the little they have left of this country.

Trump has no intention of donating that \$1 million to the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center as Warren suggested.

As much as I dislike his politics, Trump doesn't owe her a dime. However, it would be a wonderful gesture if he made a donation to the program that protects Native American women from violence anyway.

But Elizabeth Warren is not Native American. If anything, the DNA test proved nothing. Shame on her for continuing to insist that she is.

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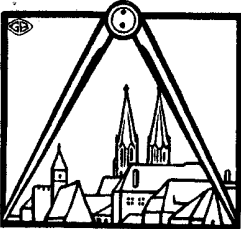
EDITORIALS

Progress! Progress!

Shout it from the rooftops!

THIS WEEK, the head of a teachers' union in Little Rock described her members as disappointed, concerned and angry. And brother, they aren't the only ones.

Disappointed, concerned and angry describes a lot of people in Little Rock, especially after seeing the grades at some of Little Rock's public schools. For three years, the state has run the school district, with the state's education commissioner acting as a one-man school board. Why? Because several schools have been chronically bad at, well, being schools. In 2015, as allowed under state law, the state dismissed the school board and took over.



Still ... We count more than 20 schools in the district, half of them, that have either D or F grades, as based on a formula using test scores, improvement, graduation rates, etc. How many generations of kids have to be told to wait while the school system figures out a way to do the job of educating them?

It appears that now, real movement is in the works. And families all over the city, especially in the most challenging parts of the city, are shouting hallelujah.

Johnny Key, may his tribe increase, has called for a waiver—allowed under state law—that will make it easier to replace teachers in these failing schools. Mr. Key, the education commissioner, will take the idea to the Education Board in a couple of weeks.

Imagine! Imagine being able to replace somebody who's not doing the job. Actually, we suspicion that Gentle Reader doesn't have to imagine that at all. It's likely a part of everyday life for most people. Most people don't have tenure rules that might allow them to sleep-late to retirement.

Commissioner Key rejected the same-old, same-old teacher contract before him and told the superintendent of schools to take it back to the negotiating table and reach an agreement with the union to waive “cumbersome” teacher dismissal rules for all those schools not making the grade(s).

At first blush, as the ink from yesterday morning's paper is still drying, we note the following:

■ If the teachers' unions are disappointed, concerned and angry, they've got nothing on parents who miss out on the selection for charter schools, can't afford private schools, can't move out of certain Little Rock ZIP codes, and have to send their kids to a school in which no education is happening. Here's another way to describe them: dispirited, anxious and terrified.

■ Before Johnny Key spoke about his decision on Tuesday, the usual suspects—union representatives and those

politicians beholden to them—spoke to reporters. Before putting on their solemn faces for the meeting, they complained that many teachers won't want to work at schools where these waivers are available. Our considered editorial opinion: Good! Maybe a cleaning-out would be best for these schools anyway.

■ The union tried to brush off the failing scores at these schools by blaming principals. We will allow that principals make the biggest difference at schools. But if principals are not able to replace teachers—in some cases, they aren't allowed to *talk*

to teachers about job performance without union representatives in the room—then how effective can principals be? We have heard stories, anecdotal of course, that suggest principals would love to replace some teachers at these schools, but cannot.

Until now, perhaps.

NOW LET us praise the state government, the governor, and the Arkansas General Assembly. For last year, the government gave schools this waiver option with Act 930. According to the papers, that act finally provided waivers in these all-too-unyielding teacher employment rules. That is, waivers in failing schools.

Which can't be emphasized enough. *We're talking about failing schools here.*

If you live in Sherwood, and you like your child's elementary school teacher, this isn't going to affect your life or your family's. Folks living in the most affluent ZIP codes in Little Rock, or who can move to Chenal or Indian Hills, or who are already sending their kids to schools with A, B or C ratings, will see no changes in the classroom.

This waiver from the teacher dismissal law will only happen for schools in Little Rock that aren't meeting basic requirements. But even bad teachers pay union dues, so expect them and the recipients of their political donations to squeal loudest. Even if that means putting them on the wrong side of education—and our children's futures.

It'll take key acts, such as this waiver law, to make real changes in this entrenched education system.

It'll take key acts to force bad teachers from the classroom.

It'll take key acts to take the handcuffs off principals and let them run their schools like any CEO.

It'll take key acts.

Thankfully, Key has acted. Commissioner Key.

Onward. Progress. Advance. Our kids are worth it.

Maybe we should shout that last sentence, just to be heard over the union bosses.

OTHERS SAY

And from the other side?

BLOOMBERG VIEW

By one estimate, a caravan of some 7,000 migrants from Central America is marching north through Mexico, heading for the U.S. border. A collision seems imminent. Thoughtful solutions are scarce.

Principles first. The U.S. border and the immigration laws that defend it are necessary pillars of U.S. sovereignty. Marching on the U.S. border is misguided and dangerous; those who attempt it should understand that it does not result in automatic admission or asylum. Entry into the U.S. is a privilege, not a right.

In response to the march, President Donald Trump has tweeted his intention to deploy the U.S. military to “close our Southern border.” He's also threatened to halt U.S. aid to the governments concerned as punishment for failing to block the caravan.

And in response to the president? Well, Democrats have been ominously silent. This is a mistake—and an abdication of responsibility. Democrats, who are trying to make the case for their ascension in the midterm elections, need to make clear that they agree with Trump on the need for a secure border

and that they are prepared to work with him to ensure that it remains so.

The first step ought to be straightforward. Democrats should call on the marchers to turn back, far and away the best solution. In this, they ought not to shrink from saying they agree with the president.

Democrats can also underscore the importance of looking beyond the political moment and toward actual remedies. U.S. aid can help stabilize Central American countries, giving people fewer reasons to flee. U.S. leadership can call out feckless leaders, who have profited from corruption, stolen elections, and been unwilling to provide for their citizens. From this perspective, the Trump administration has failed—by cutting foreign aid and by looking the other way during Honduras' flawed 2017 vote and Guatemala's attempts to stymie corruption investigations.

Democrats are right to demand compassion for the migrants. But they will be failing the test of leadership if they seem to say the border doesn't matter or if they cede the governing to Trump. The caravan is coming, and they've given no sign that they know what to do.



COLUMNISTS

The backfire?



Victor Davis Hanson

For progressives, the looming midterm elections apparently should not hinge on a booming economy, a near record-low unemployment rate, a strong stock market and unprecedented energy production. Instead, progressives hope that race and gender questions overshadow pocketbook issues.

The media is fixated on another caravan of foreign nationals flowing toward the United States from Central America. More than 5,000 mostly Honduran migrants say they will cross through Mexico. Then they plan to crash the American border, enter the U.S. illegally, claim refugee status and demand asylum. Once inside the United States, the newcomers will count on a variety of ways to avoid deportation.

This gambit appears mysteriously timed to arrive right before the U.S. midterms—apparently to create empathy and sway voters toward progressive candidates supporting a more relaxed immigration policy.

Open-borders advocates and progressives assume that if border-security officials are forced to detain the intruders and separate parents who broke the law from their children, it will make President Trump and Republican candidates appear cold-hearted and callous.

Earlier this year, a similar border melodrama became sensationalized in the media and almost certainly dropped Trump's approval ratings. But this time around, the optics may be different.

The new caravan appears strangely well organized. The marchers, many of them young men, do not appear destitute. They do not seem to fit the profile of desperate refugees whose lives were in immediate danger in their homeland.

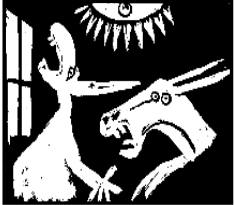
For many Americans, the would-be refugees may seem presumptuous in assuming that they have the right to barge into someone else's country. Most Americans realize that if an organized caravan of foreigners can simply announce in advance plans to crash into the U.S. illegally, then the concepts of a border, citizenship, sovereignty or even a country itself no longer exist.

A number of other events on the eve of the midterm elections also may have the opposite of the intended effect on voters.

The Supreme Court nomination hearings for Brett Kavanaugh ended up as scripted melodrama. Protestors disrupted the Senate on cue. They screamed from the gallery. Democratic senators staged a walkout. They filibustered and interrupted the proceedings.

Their collective aim was to show America that male Republican senators were insensitive to the feelings and charges of Christine Blasey Ford, and therefore callous and sexist.

Many Americans finally concluded that there was no reason to deny Kavanaugh's nomination to the court. To find Kavanaugh guilty of Ford's charges, Americans were asked to suspend the very ideas of due process and Western jurisprudence.



The furious demonstrations that followed Kavanaugh's confirmation only made the optics worse.

Republican senators were confronted at their offices and on elevators. Protestors broke through police cordons and beat and scratched at the Supreme Court doors, apparently in vain efforts to break in and disrupt the swearing-in ceremonies.

Liberal icons such as Hillary Clinton, former Attorney General Eric Holder and Sen. Cory Booker seemed to encourage the incivility and disruptions.

Did the ongoing chaos work to change public opinion in their direction?

Perhaps not.

Most Americans do not want frenzied shriekers scratching at doors on Capitol Hill. They are turned off by shouters popping up in Senate galleries. Few are comfortable with efforts to bully or intimidate senators rather than to persuade them.

In yet another misreading of the public, Sen. Elizabeth Warren produced the results of a DNA test to prove she had properly claimed advantageous minority status on the basis of her alleged Native American family history.

But the test only confirmed that Warren might be 1 percent (or less) Native American, and probably not from a tribe in the continental U.S.

If Warren's video emphasizing her DNA claims was intended to be persuasive, it sadly ended up confirming her farce. Most Americans could claim a similarly minuscule bloodline but would not do so to game the system for careerist advantage.

On the eve of the midterms, progressives believe that these public spectacles showcasing feminist, immigrant and identity issues trump the booming economy and might galvanize independents and fence-sitters to vote for liberal candidates.

Yet the caravan, the Kavanaugh hearings and the Warren fiasco remind voters of the very opposite of what was intended.

Every country requires a border and the rule of law. Due process cannot so easily be thrown out in a moment. There can be no Senate without safety and calm inside its halls. Powerful, privileged Washington officials should be the last to game a system designed to help the underprivileged.

Americans know all that. Strangely, progressive activists don't.

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Another bad treaty

ELI LAKE
BLOOMBERG NEWS

According to the Russians, President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty will bring the world closer to the nuclear apocalypse.

The last time the issue of arms control was this dramatic was during the era of the Betamax, Cabbage Patch Kids and Ronald Reagan. But before you sign up for that peace march, you might want to consider the context of Trump's decision.

The INF treaty was supposed to eliminate all missiles with a range of about 300 to 3,500 miles. When Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev signed that agreement in 1987, they ended a dangerous standoff in Europe, where both sides had deployed hundreds of nuclear-tipped weapons.

For 21 years, it worked. The U.S. stopped producing intermediate-range missiles, and so did the Russians. But in 2008, the same year Russia invaded Georgia, Moscow began to cheat. That's when Russia began testing “a ground-launched cruise missile that flies to ranges banned by the treaty,” said Rose Gottemoeller, President Barack Obama's undersecretary of State for arms control and international security. The U.S. began calling out Russia on those tests in 2013, she said, and the two nations have “been butting heads ever since.” Faced with these facts, Trump had to make choices. He could continue to do what the

Obama administration had done and try to shame the Russians into compliance. He could have sought to renegotiate the INF Treaty to account for the new Russian deployments. Or he could do what he just did and withdraw from a treaty to which only America adhered.

Trump made the right choice. Again, it's worth recalling the lead up to the original INF Treaty. In the early 1980s, Reagan was under enormous pressure from western European allies to hold off on deploying the Pershing II missiles to counter the Soviet SS-20s. He resisted, and the Pershing II missiles were deployed.

That chess move paid off. The deployment was one factor that helped persuade the Soviets to negotiate seriously for the INF Treaty in 1987. The lesson: Some short-term proliferation may be necessary for long-term arms control.

Trump is taking a similar approach today. He has said he is open to a new INF Treaty—one that Russia honors which China joins. (An estimated 95 percent of China's missiles would be prohibited by the INF Treaty, to which China is not currently a party.) As it now stands, the U.S. is the only great power keeping to the terms of the 31-year-old treaty.

For Russia and other Western arms-control enthusiasts, Trump's withdrawal is a dangerous gamble. But it's a gamble worth taking. What's the point of upholding an arms-control treaty that only constrains America? Better to pull out now in the hopes of getting a real treaty later.

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