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APRIL, 2026

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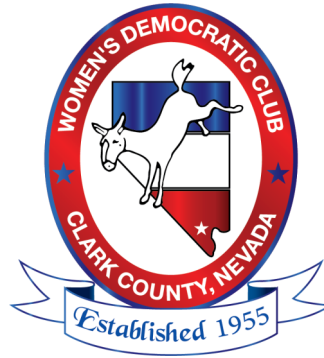
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**"You are entitled
to your opinion.
But you are not
entitled to your
own facts."**

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan

Women's Democratic Club of Clark County



Let's Talk About An Informed Voter"



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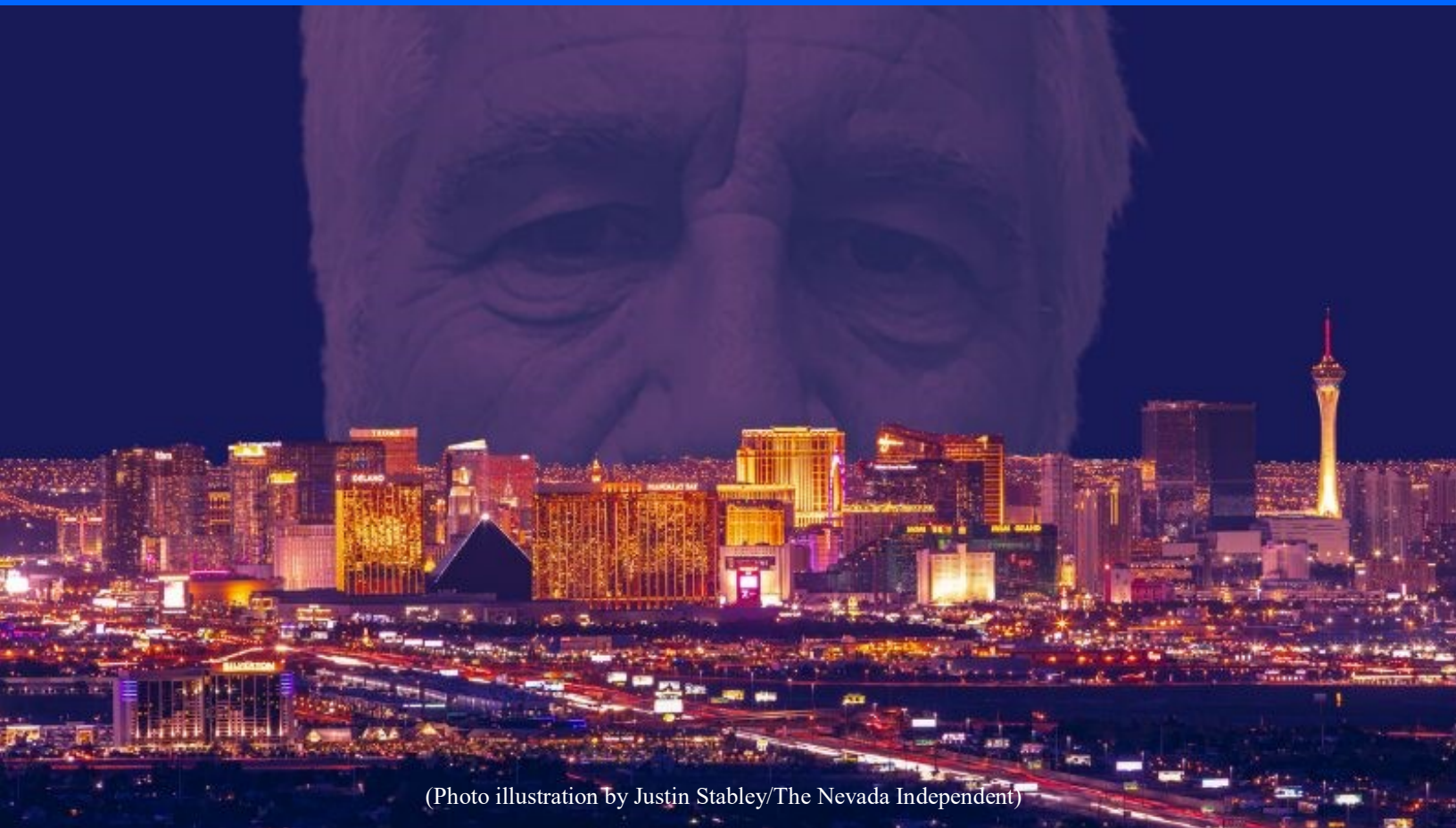
Date: Thursday, April 10, 2026
Place: Tuscany Suites, Tuscany Room, 2nd Floor
255 East Flamingo Road, LV, NV 89169
Use 2nd Portico (West Side), Park Free, Use Elevator
Extra Parking In Back Lot
Time: 11:30 a.m. Registration; Noon Luncheon/Program

Members = \$35 * Non-Members =
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All Registered Democrats Are Welcome To Attend

OPINION: Sex Traffickers Epstein And Nygard Lived In Las Vegas

By John L. Smith



(Photo illustration by Justin Stabley/The Nevada Independent)

It wouldn't be shocking to learn that international pedophile sex traffickers Jeffrey Epstein and [Peter Nygard](#) were acquainted. Although Epstein [once denied](#) a connection, it's certain the two shared a dark kinship.

In addition to being convicted sexual predators, they angled their way into elite social circles that at times overlapped. Both found it easy to charm suspected pedophile playboy Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor. The former prince and United Kingdom trade envoy is suspected of sharing confidential government information with Epstein. Former neighbors in the Bahamas, self-styled business guru Epstein and Canadian fashion mogul Nygard both recruited girls by accessing beauty pageants and modeling agencies. Nygard enjoyed the advantage of being in fashion, an industry forever in need of new talent. Epstein was partial to pageants, including one in the Virgin Islands where he was a judge and the Miss Teen USA Pageant when it was owned by his friend Donald Trump.

The record shows the two also lived large during separate visits to Las Vegas. Epstein's connection to Leon Black, former CEO of Caesars Entertainment operator Apollo Global Management, in 2013 [opened doors](#) for him at Caesars Palace. Nygard and his traveling harem found comfortable accommodations at The Palazzo, where he met privately with future Bahamian [Prime Minister Perry Christie](#) just before the country's 2012 election.

With help from partner in crime Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein recruited high school girls to his Palm Beach, Florida, mansion, located 1.6 miles from Mar-a-Lago. Nygard, meanwhile, had little difficulty coaxing aspiring models and financially desperate girls to his island estate. As one who knew Nygard well said, "He preys on poor people's little girls."

It's no wonder he's been called ["Canada's Jeffrey Epstein."](#)

The two men also shared a strange fascination with genetic research, stem cell editing and procreation. Epstein solicited the latest research from some of the scientists, geneticists and academics he cultivated and corrupted. Nygard was suspected of investing in a stem cell research company in the Bahamas.

Today, Nygard, 85, is serving an 11-year sentence in a Canadian prison after a 2024 conviction of four counts of sexual assault. More than 100 women have sued him for rape, sexual abuse and assault, and he has also been accused of raping girls as young as 14. He is under federal indictment in New York. He continues to deny all charges.

None of Epstein's high-flying contacts saved him. He died, officially by suicide, in August 2019 at age 66 while in detention on federal sex trafficking charges.

Whatever their relationship, when New York FBI agents went looking for leads in their investigations of Nygard, they called on the Las Vegas FBI for assistance, according to partially redacted email exchanges included in the Justice Department's voluminous release of documents in association with the Epstein case.

One particularly interesting document is a redacted internal email dated Sept. 10, 2019, in the Las Vegas FBI office whose unredacted recipients included veteran agent Elena Iartarola. At the time, [Iartarola](#) had recently returned to the Las Vegas office as its coordinator for the Crimes Against Children and Human Trafficking programs.

In addition to the redactions, the documents are coded in what one highly informed source I spoke with calls "Bureau-ese." Once deciphered, the mentions of Las Vegas and Nygard are linked to ongoing investigations in Miami, Cleveland, San Francisco and Dallas in addition to New York. The background information was accessed by the Las Vegas office's Field Intelligence Group (FIG) analysts using the FBI's [Sentinel](#) internal case management system and virtual library.

Among the findings:

A nascent federal public corruption inquiry out of the Miami field office included a 2016 U.S. Customs and Border Patrol interview of a longtime Nygard hospitality employee in Toronto. The source reported witnessing a plane land at Nygard's estate from Las Vegas carrying aboard "approximately 10 girls ... and some of them appeared to be under 18 years of age." The public official suspected of corruption was unnamed.

From the Cleveland office, an interview by a Las Vegas-based assistant U.S. attorney was conducted with a former Nygard girlfriend as part of a separate and ongoing investigation by U.S. Department of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) agents. The 2017 investigation sought information "regarding international sex trafficking of adults and juveniles." That investigation lasted less than a year before it was "unexpectedly closed down by HSI management," according to the memo. FBI efforts to gather information from HSI's investigation were unsuccessful at that time. The notation raises the question of whether the federal law enforcement agencies were competing instead of cooperating.

A partially redacted email sent on Jan. 2, 2020, by a supervisor in the Las Vegas office to the New York FBI may shed light on the closed HSI investigation: "We've had some interest from our USAO (United States Attorney's Office), dating back to September [2019] when we did some quick checks and determined we had nothing new, but continued to find some HSI taint, leading our USAO wanting us to reinterview (name redacted). ... Before we do anything, I want us to chat, because I'm not seeing a big nexus here, but don't want to miss any opportunities for you guys or the bigger case."

Perhaps the strangest Sentinel return emanated from the Dallas FBI office, which had opened an inquiry using a source associated with Tekstratex, a Dallas-based private security and executive protection company, then registered as a business in Nevada with the secretary of state's office. The company was hired by hedge fund billionaire Louis Bacon, who was locked in a [protracted civil dispute](#) with his neighbor Nygard, to persuade authorities to investigate his pedophile predilections.

The sourcing was decidedly thin, but the item of interest was certain to raise eyebrows: The source “was told the Tekstratex employees identified a young female boarding Nygard’s plane and departing Fort Worth, but due to low light, they were unable to get a good photograph of the girl. They could not determine how old she was.”

Another partially redacted memo lauds the efforts of an unnamed Las Vegas FBI analyst: “Just wanted to let you know that (redacted) helped our squad out a lot today. ... (Redacted) called me regarding some time-sensitive checks on a high profile individual tied to Epstein.”

The identity of the “high profile individual” is not disclosed.

The analyst “spent most of her morning pulling stuff on Peter Nygard and determined the scope of his nexus to Vegas. She did an awesome job finding everything even though some of it was gross/disturbing to read.”

The FBI estimates [more than 1,000](#) girls and young women were victimized by Epstein. Nygard investigators claim his toll of victims is [even higher](#), with some dating as far back as the late 1960s.

The press, public and political class continue to be fascinated by Epstein’s proximity to the powerful, including a current president and a former president. Stripping away the grotesquery of lies and felonies, the bold-faced names, speculation, conspiracies and outright mysteries, at the core are two pimps and extortionists who groomed and exploited girls and young women.

At some point, I hope we take more than a moment to focus on the wider issue of human trafficking and the toll it takes on its victims. Because most of the time, those victims don’t make the news and are rarely represented by outraged members of Congress.

The understandable intrigue surrounding Epstein and Nygard notwithstanding, I pray they’re always remembered as the pedophile pimps they were.

John L. Smith is an author and longtime columnist. He was born in Henderson and his family’s Nevada roots go back to 1881. His stories have appeared in New Lines, Time, Reader’s Digest, Rolling Stone, The Daily Beast, Reuters and Desert Companion, among others.

Memos From Morgan

By Morgan St. James



TRUMP IS OUT OF HIS DEPTH If He Had One

Every day it becomes more and more evident that everything about the Iran war was miscalculated and not planned for

Every day, it becomes increasingly evident that everything about the Iran war was miscalculated and poorly planned.

It is no secret that when the United States and Israel carried out their joint strikes on Iran on February 28, the country's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, along with other high-profile officials, was killed.

Iran followed through with retaliation, targeting Arab neighbors across the region that house U.S. bases. The fact that Donald Trump described Iran's response as a "surprise" can only be viewed as naïve—particularly for someone serving as Commander in Chief of the most powerful military in the world. Given his history as a five-time draft dodger, the lack of strategic foresight is hardly shocking.

The risk of retaliation should never have been abstract. Experienced generals and admirals undoubtedly understood the likelihood of escalation. Washington had to be aware that attacking Iran could trigger a broader regional conflict, yet the operation proceeded without Congressional approval.

Prior to the strikes, Secretary Rubio contacted members of the "Gang of Eight," successfully briefing seven of the eight. But notification is not authorization—and the distinction matters.

This president continues to act as though his decisions alone are sufficient, disregarding the Constitution's requirement for Congressional oversight and approval. With Democrats in the minority and many Republicans in lockstep with Trump—even when they know better—we are left to commend the few who dare to challenge what increasingly appears to be authoritarian behavior.

Trump's pattern is clear: he acts impulsively, assumes he knows best, and the consequences are often damaging to the American people and global stability.

Now, in multiple interviews, he criticizes NATO allies for refusing to commit troops and resources to a crisis he helped create in the Strait of Hormuz. He has alienated these allies through disrespect, tariffs, threats, and erratic policies—then expresses confusion when they decline to support him.

The behavior is reminiscent of a spoiled child who has never been held accountable—one who lashes out when others refuse to enable destructive decisions. In this analogy, Congress has too often played the role of indulgent parent, failing to impose even the mildest consequences for actions that include questionable tariffs, unilateral military engagement, and the misuse of taxpayer funds.

Let's be clear: this is a modern war, regardless of how it is labeled. Missile strikes, drone attacks, destroyed infrastructure, and the loss of thousands of lives—these are not abstractions. That is war.

Enter Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

During its prolonged conflict with Russia, Ukraine developed some of the most effective drone interception technologies in the world. Despite Trump's previous dismissive treatment, Zelenskyy offered assistance to the United States in countering Iranian drone attacks—the same types of drones Iran had supplied to Russia and that Ukraine has successfully neutralized.

Initially, Trump rejected the offer, just as he dismissed NATO support—only to later criticize those same allies. But reality has a way of asserting itself.

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry highlighted a stark cost contrast: the U.S. often deploys Patriot PAC-3 missiles costing approximately \$12 million each to intercept Iranian-designed Shahed drones, which cost about \$50,000. Ukraine's interceptor technology, by comparison, costs roughly \$5,000 or less per unit.

Ukraine can produce around 2,000 of these interceptors daily and requires only half that number for its own defense—leaving a surplus available to assist allied nations.

In August 2025, Zelenskyy offered this proven technology to the United States. It was declined. After Iranian drone attacks escalated in 2026, the U.S. reversed course and requested Ukraine's assistance.



Former interior designer MORGAN ST. JAMES, lives in Las Vegas with her rescue dog Cucumber and has been writing for over twenty years. She has 21 books in publication and over 600 published articles on diverse subjects. Morgan has appeared on radio, podcasts, television and author's panels. Her books include the Silver Sisters Mysteries series co-authored with her real life sister Phyllice Bradner, the Revenge is Fun series, stand-alone novels, the Writers' Tricks of the Trade book and short stories in six Chicken Soup for the Soul books. Morgan co-authored the multi award-winning memoirs: Rob and Cheryl Cuccio's Incest, Murder and a Miracle and Bella Capo's No More Crying Angels.

Sharing Our Legacy

By Judy Klein



Each of us walks through the doors of Women's Democratic Club in our own time. Some of us attend our first meeting with a member or a friend who shares our values. Others find us through word of mouth or by searching online. However we arrive, we are welcomed as if we have opened the door to our own home.

This has long been the tradition of Women's Demo. We open our doors, friendships are formed, and the Club continues forward—now entering its 71st year of existence.

We work together to bring our message forward through our monthly programs and through the communications we share with members. We encourage participation in electing Democrats to office, we help educate those who may be new to the political process, and we share our experiences and history so the values passed down to us continue for the next generation.

We ask that you join a campaign in whatever way feels comfortable to you so that we can help ensure Democratic victories. We encourage you to volunteer within the Club through our committees that reach out into the community and help bring facts and information to the public. And we ask that you participate in our meetings and events so that Women's Demo remains a vibrant political and social organization that supports our community and shares a message of hope and unity.

I am reminded of this especially now, during a time when many Americans feel that our democracy is facing serious challenges. Many people are still asking how our country reached this point and how divisions have grown so deep within the electorate.

In part, this moment developed from frustration and disengagement among voters who felt unheard or left behind. Many were drawn to promises that their lives and economic circumstances would dramatically improve and that a single leader could resolve complex national problems.

At the same time, distrust of political institutions and political parties had been growing for years. Some voters believed that those in Washington were disconnected from their daily struggles. Into that environment came powerful messaging through certain media outlets and commentary networks that repeated narratives and information that many accepted without question. Over time, the line between news, opinion, and misinformation became blurred for many viewers.

When leadership is built on messaging rather than experience and understanding of government, the consequences can be serious. Agencies and institutions require knowledge, stability, and respect for the rule of law. Without that, government can weaken from within as decisions are made without fully considering their long-term effects.

Our democracy also depends on the strength and courage of those elected to serve in Congress. Their responsibility is to uphold the Constitution, represent their constituents, and provide the checks and balances that protect our system of government. When that responsibility is not fully exercised, the health of our democracy is put at risk.

Many Americans saw warning signs years ago and remain concerned about the direction of our political system today. The challenges we face did not appear overnight, and they will not be solved quickly. But recognizing the problem is the first step toward addressing it.

Once decisions are made on the national stage, their consequences cannot easily be reversed. History teaches us that leadership requires knowledge, foresight, and respect for democratic institutions. Without those qualities, the stakes for our country become very high.

The question remains: how do we end this and still remain safe as a nation?

History reminds us that democracies are not lost in a single moment—they erode slowly when citizens disengage, when truth is replaced by misinformation, and when people begin to believe their voices no longer matter. The antidote to that erosion has always been the same: participation, courage, and community.

That is why organizations like Women’s Democratic Club matter now more than ever. We gather not simply to share a meal or hear a program, but to remind ourselves that democracy is sustained by ordinary people who refuse to give up on it. We educate, we organize, we support candidates who believe in democratic values, and we bring accurate information into our communities.

Each conversation we have, each campaign we assist, each new member we welcome strengthens the foundation of democracy. It may feel at times like the challenges are overwhelming, but history also shows us that committed citizens—working together—can change the direction of this country.

So we continue to open our doors. We continue to welcome those who share our values. And we continue the work that generations before us began: protecting democracy, electing leaders who believe in it, and ensuring that the promise of this nation remains alive for those who will come after us.

That is our responsibility. That is our mission. And together, we will continue the work.

Happy Birthday



APRIL

Venicia Considine
Michelle Gorelow
Judge Belinda Harris
County Assessor Briana Johnson
Pam Jones
Senator Roberta Lange
Lisa Levine
Ashley Lovell
Connie Munk
Debra Ochoa
Judge Danielle Pieper
Marta Schmitt
Sherry Strothers
Jennifer Valesquez
Lynn Wolfe

MAY

Jeri Burton
Kayla Furlong
Ida Gaines
Yelé Glaster
Misty Haji-Sheikh
LaVonne Hankins
Kara Jenkins
April Legere
Emerald Lucas
Assemblyman David Orentlicher
Nicole Stephens
Hanna Stotland
Jimmy Vega
Lana Whiteford
Former Senator Joyce Woodhouse

My Father's Democratic Legacy and Lessons

By Nancy Cannon Downey

At the recent March meeting I was so pleased to meet Renee Diamond and Judy Klein and learn that they had such fond memories of my father, the late U.S. Senator Howard W. Cannon (D-NV 1959-1983). Although I may be a new member of the Clark County Democratic Women's Club, I am not new to politics in Nevada.

I was six years old when my father was elected to serve as Nevada's United States Senator and our family moved from Las Vegas to the suburbs of Washington, D.C. in the middle of winter. I'm honored to be invited to share a little history about my father with you, so you'll understand why I'm so proud to be his daughter and am so dedicated to helping the Democratic Party revitalize our Democracy and lead us toward a more fair and just society.

When I think of my father, I am reminded of his strength, courage, and wisdom. He showed his strength when as a young man he trained wild horses and drove cattle over mountains and through the desert as a cowboy. He demonstrated his courage when he flew planes carrying troops into battle to hasten the Allied victory. He exercised his wisdom when he served in the U.S. Senate, shaping laws and working for justice for all our citizens. In my father's 90 years, he accomplished many remarkable things. Howard was born in 1912 in St. George, Utah and grew up in a loving Mormon family on a small farm. He played clarinet and led a dance band while pursuing his education and law degree in Arizona. He went on to serve as County Attorney in Utah until joining the war effort as a pilot in the U.S. Army Air Corps, ultimately being stationed in Exeter, England. From there he flew many missions piloting C47's to drop the paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division into battle. His was the lead plane for the D-day invasion of Normandy and on another mission in September of 1945, his plane went down over Holland and thankfully he and his good friend Col. Frank Krebs, evaded capture for 42 days with the help of the Dutch underground before reaching the safety of Allied lines. His awards include the Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with Two Oak Leaf Clusters, Purple Heart, European Theater Ribbon with Eight Battle Stars, and the French Croix de Guerre with Silver Star and Presidential Citation.

After leaving the Army Air Corps in 1946, Howard chose to remain active in the Air Force Reserve program and maintain his flying proficiency. By the time he retired from the Reserve as a two-star Major General, his civilian and military logbooks showed more than 5,000 flying hours. He flew all the Century series aircraft that have been in the Air Force inventory, including the controversial F-111, SR-71, and Supersonic F-15 and F-16 before voting to authorize federal funding for them as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. He told us that one of his biggest thrills came from flying the B-58 at Mach 2 back in 1961. He enjoyed pursuing all aspects of the relationship between aviation and national policy and because of his expert knowledge and contributions, he became widely known with fondness and admiration as 'MR. AVIATION' among his congressional colleagues. He had a knack for "working across the aisle" which is sadly lacking in the Congress today.

Howard married my mother, Dorothy, in December of 1946 and settled in Las Vegas in a little house on Bell Drive and became City Attorney. I have fond memories of my early years in their next ranch-style house on West Charleston Blvd. where we had cats, a dog, and a lovely apricot

orchard out front. My mom was one of the kindest, most gracious women I've ever known, and she was right by Dad's side during every grueling campaign, and they always made a wonderful team. I remember the disappointment we all felt when the final election results came in that ended his 24-year career in the Senate. As we were leaving to go home that night in 1982, I was in tears, and she tried to comfort me by saying: "sometimes a defeat is really a victory in disguise." In retrospect, I think she meant that she and Howard would now get to spend more time together to enjoy family and travel the world, which they did for many happy years after his retirement.

Over the years I've been asked why I didn't follow in my father's footsteps and go into politics and my answer has always been that I'm more of a private person, since I basically grew up living in a kind of fish bowl, where everything I did potentially reflected on my father's career – especially when as a teenager I was grounded for quite some time for participating in an anti-war march during the height of the Vietnam War. That is one area of politics where my dad and I had to agree to disagree, however, I was extremely proud when I learned that he had cast a deciding vote allowing the 1964 Civil Rights Act to pass into law. For my own career as a Sociologist, I preferred to study political history and processes and become an educator and activist as part of my social research consulting business and teaching jobs at UNLV and UNR. My favorite classes to teach included "History of the American Women's Movement", "Social Movements for Change", and "Gender and Society". When I lived in the Carson Valley, I participated with the Nevada Women's Lobby, served as Vice President and then President of the Douglas County Democratic Women, and I remain active with the American Association of University Women. I am currently the Treasurer of the Nevada Federation of Democratic Women, which is hosting the organization's national convention here in Las Vegas this year in June and we invite you to learn more and hopefully attend. (www.nvfdw.org)

Notably, the Nevada State Democratic Party awarded Senator Cannon the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2000, which was a proud moment for our family. Since my father's passing in 2002, it has been my goal to make every effort to continue to honor his legacy of service to Nevada so his many contributions to the state and the country are not forgotten. His senate papers and memorabilia are archived in UNLV's Special Collections Department in the Lied Library. The Howard W. Cannon Aviation Museum was established in 1999 where exhibits which commemorate his aviation career and those of others can be viewed inside Harry Reid International Airport on the second floor above the baggage claim area. I helped with the writing of his biography (*Senator Howard Cannon of Nevada* by Michael Verneti) which was published by the University of Nevada Press in 2008. We certainly need more men and women of his character and integrity to be elected to public office.

One of the most emotional and proud moments of my life was when, after donating many items related to my father's WWII military career, I was honored to make a speech at the opening ceremony of the museum in Normandy which showcases his role in the liberation of France on D-Day, June 6, 1944. The D-Day Experience Museum is in the town of Saint Come du Mont, where an amazing replica of his plane named "Stoy Hora" is the central exhibit, showcasing the story of his heroic mission and the bravery of the men of the 101st Airborne. (You can learn more about the museum at: <https://www.facebook.com/ddayexperience.stcome/>) They have created a place where many can be honored for their bravery and their sacrifices, and the sacred

grounds of Normandy should be a reminder for us all to continue to strive for peace in our world. My father has been an inspiration to me throughout my life and through this museum I feel he and his comrades will be an inspiration for many others who will respect and appreciate this "Rendez-vous" with history.

It is a privilege and honor for me to be the daughter of Howard W. Cannon. He wore many important hats and was an honorable and hard-working man. He led by example, by his actions and by his deeds and was a teacher with his life. He taught us how to shoulder responsibility, how to be patient and steady in the face of adversity, and be kind and generous to those we love. He taught us all what it means to love your family, to love your country and to love your life. He lived every day to the fullest and shared his strength, his courage, and his wisdom with others in countless ways. Most importantly, he taught me that Democracy is so precious that sometimes we must step up and accept responsibility and fight to protect our freedoms and liberties – especially in these critical and challenging times in America.



Trump's Trade Policy Hit H.S. Consumers and Producers Hard By One Country Project

90% of President Trump's tariffs have been charged to U.S. consumers.

After a flurry of executive orders, press conferences, threats, and concessions, the New York Fed recently said what we all knew would be true: It's American consumers who are getting the short end of the stick in these impulsive trade wars.

Tariffs are import taxes – they're an additional cost that American businesses pay on the price of imported goods: from computers and cell phones to farming equipment, industrial tools, and agricultural products, just to name a few.



Trump took had free rein to manipulate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) over the past year, threatening or imposing tariffs against nations that he said had been personally disrespectful to him and sometimes

lowering them when, as he claims, they begged his forgiveness. As the Supreme Court recently ruled, all of that behavior was illegal.

Immediately after the Supreme Court ruled his ability to unilaterally impose tariffs, Trump vowed to use a different mechanism to do the same thing and announced he will levy a 10% global tariff, followed by saying he will increase it to 15% the next day.

It's no more legitimate than a game of three-card Monty.

There is no real policy or rationale behind any of these absurd trade decisions.

They are simply contributing to higher prices, lower productivity, lost jobs, and for middle-class Americans bearing 90% of the price hikes, they're dealing with grocery and produce increases, higher utility bills, and more expensive consumer goods. Tariff costs passed on to consumers cost the average American family about \$1,700 last year.

There are numerous lawsuits currently pending seeking refunds for the tariffs paid. However, these lawsuits are filed by groups that -largely for political reasons- kept the real cost of tariffs hidden from consumers. So, those companies are likely to receive a refund and pocket it for their executives and wealthy shareholders. These tariffs are, ultimately, another Trump led scheme to transfer wealth from working Americans to the new leisure class of investors and inheritors.

When it's all said and done, it will take years of work after the era of tariffs to restore our economic standing. Other countries have already taken their business elsewhere – and it will take a significant show of good faith and good products for us to win them back.

OPINION: Book In Hand And Trump In Mind, Newsom Takes His Roadshow Through Boulder City

By John L. Smith



With his assured panache and a command of Western policy issues, the California governor tests a message for a post-Trump world.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) took his roadshow to bucolic Boulder City on Wednesday, regaling a packed house of partisans with tales from his new memoir and trolling President Donald Trump.

The leader of the world's [fourth-largest economy](#), a man raised in considerable privilege, was affable and relatable before a gathering of 150 as he dished scenes from [Young Man in a Hurry: A Memoir of Discovery](#), which its publisher calls "an intimate and poignant account of identity,

belonging, and the defining moments that inspired a life in politics." The book's recent debut also offers Newsom the opportunity to tour the country, testing a message that has some pundits talking about his potential as a presidential candidate in 2028.

That election is a long way off. At the rate Trump is tearing down the nation's economy and standing in the world, it will take an especially resilient person to attempt to pick up the debris field he leaves behind.

When it comes to authentic "street cred," or what one acerbic critic calls "[everyman credentials](#)," Newsom might be a tough sell. No matter his personal life's travails, family dysfunction and personal dyslexia, the handsome guy raised in the orbit of billionaire industrialists and Hollywood celebrities surely had it better than most. His log cabin creation story featured room service.

But, frankly, so what? Well-heeled FDR's sweeping social programs got him labeled "a traitor to his class" by the swells. JFK wasn't exactly born under a bridge. If Newsom lacks LBJ's hardscrabble upbringing, it may be the one thing he has in common with the current occupant of the White House.

In a week that featured an appearance on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, his Boulder City stop was more about political panache than policy. But if Newsom had been looking for a place to speak on the water, environmental and energy challenges that face the arid West, he could hardly have picked a better spot. The home of veteran Democratic Party activist Judy Hoskins offered a beautiful and heart-aching view of receding Lake Mead. The banks of the over-allocated Colorado River are mere miles away. An inland sea of solar energy sits silently a few miles west in Eldorado Valley.

In his second term, Trump's endless disinformation campaign continues to vilify environmental protection efforts and renewable energy, issues that former Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak says his friend Newsom cares about deeply.

"We could not have had a better partner than Gov. Newsom, and not just on renewables," Sisolak says from his place in the crowd. "On water, wildfires, the whole bit. He's always been there for us. He's a big state and we're a little one, but I know how important renewables are to him."

Too important to be added to the Trump scrap heap of deconstruction.

"There's never been an administration in modern American history that's vandalized environmental policy like this administration," Newsom says in a brief interview. "Ronald Reagan is rolling over in his grave. So is Richard Nixon, who had the [Clean Air \(Act\)](#), the [Clean Water Act](#) and the [EPA](#). So, the rest of the world is leaping ahead and China is going to leave us behind."

“In that space, we’ve had a very good collaborative relationship regardless of guys like me that come and go, Republican and Democratic governors,” he says. “Particularly in the renewable energy space. It’s all about abundant and cheap energy. And it’s about reliable energy. And Nevada and California should be the dominant leaders.”

As for the current anti-renewable political environment in Washington, D.C., Newsom remains sanguine.

“As a point of contrast, which gives me some confidence, states continue to lead despite the federal government,” he says. “So, it’s a way of sort of not necessarily falling prey to too much anxiety because Trump is temporary.” Cutting through the chaos, the states get it.

“I just feel like the market and Mother Nature are going to ultimately prevail in that debate.”

Presidential debates are another matter.

As Newsom’s roadshow continues, let’s see whether his message sells.

John L. Smith is an author and longtime columnist. He was born in Henderson and his family’s Nevada roots go back to 1881. His stories have appeared in New Lines, Time, Reader’s Digest, Rolling Stone, The Daily Beast, Reuters and Desert Companion, among others.

Trump's Reasons For Attacking Iran Don't Add Up

By Don Moynihan

You've probably heard Trump officials claim Iran was about to get nukes (again). But have you heard the rationale that Tehran actually started a war against the U.S. 50 years ago?

Why is American attacking Iran? It helps to have a coherent reason, to justify to the American public the costs in money and blood, to allies about the potential long-term risks, and to Iranians about the future of their country.

After 9/11, there was broad support for invading Afghanistan because the country hosted the attack's mastermind. In 2003, there was less support for what turned out to be the false claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. They didn't, but Saddam stuck a belligerent tone and kicked weapons inspectors out. In 2026, Iran was at the negotiating table and we invaded ... for reasons.

A couple of days before the attack Daniel C. Kurtzer, a Professor of Middle East Policy Studies at Princeton summed up the lack of clarity:

The bottom line is we don't really know why the U.S. appears to be preparing for war with Iran. Trump has not yet briefed Congress or spoken to the American people about a possible military action that could inflame regional tensions and spark a bloody conflict.

Clarity has not emerged since the bombs started dropping. Democratic Senator Mark Warner was briefed by the White House as senior member of the Senate Intelligence Committee. He said: "What was the imminent threat to America? I don't know the answer."

So lets review the various reasons the Trump administration and its supporters have articulated for a likely illegal war they are pursuing without Congressional permission.

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1. Iran Was Working on Nuclear Weapons

Trump discussed the potential for Iran acquiring nuclear weapons in his state of the union address. How close was Iran? We don't know. Trump negotiator Steve Witkoff said Iran was "probably a week away from having industrial-grade bomb making material." Trump himself claimed Iran was just "a few weeks away" from having a nuclear weapons.

But last June the Trump administration said it had "obliterated" Iran's nuclear facilities, and cited Israeli officials who said the nuclear program was set back by "years." How do you go from years to weeks in months?



There is also the point that Trump inherited a credible and carefully developed agreement to prevent Iran from acquiring weapons but tore up that agreement because it was negotiated by Obama. Recreating that agreement might have been on the table, but we will never know.

The world is far safer after President Donald J. Trump's highly successful, decisive precision strikes against the Iranian regime's key nuclear facilities.

At the State of the Union, Trump also said that Iran was "working to build missiles that will soon reach the United States of America." But this was exaggerated and not an imminent threat. According to the *New York Times*:

Three American officials with access to current intelligence about Iran's missile programs said that Mr. Trump exaggerated the immediacy of the threat posed to the United States. One official said some intelligence analysts were concerned that top aides have inflated the threats or that intelligence was being selectively presented or distorted as it was sent upward.

White House aides exaggerating threats to spur a war they already wanted has a very 2003 feel to it. Say what you will about the Bush administration, but when they sold a Middle-Eastern war, they took some pride in selling the lie.

2. Iran Interfered in U.S. Elections!



Trump has complained that Iran interfered in U.S. elections. Well, yes they did, but to no effect. And so did China and Russia, and we are not attacking them. Indeed, we are attacking anyone who implies that Russia tried to influence U.S. elections.

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Indeed, we are attacking anyone who implies that Russia tried to influence U.S. elections.

A bit more backstory. Stanford academic researchers and government investigators who identified the role of Iran's election interference in 2020, which included social media manipulation, were pilloried by the Twitter Files brigade as censors, hauled before Congress, and sued by Stephen Miller's American First Legal. CISA, the part of the federal government that monitored election interference, was gutted by the Trump administration and the Stanford Internet Observatory was shut down.

I'm inclined to believe if election interference was enough of a reason to attack a foreign country, the administration and its allies would not be punishing people who identified election interference as a problem.

Kate Starbird, who was one of the researchers targeted, summed it up this way:

The real story is that foreign governments try to interfere with elections in the U.S. all the time. In 2020 and 2024, the U.S. had private and public infrastructure in place to catch them, call them out, and mitigate the damage. Now, those mechanisms are gone, intentionally undermined and dismantled by the Trump administration.

3. Iran Actually Started the War

OK, I don't really understand this either. The U.S. clearly started the conflict, along with Israel, start the conflict by sending warships to the region and then bombing the shit out of Iran.

But what if, and bear with me here, the words "war" or "conflict" could mean whatever you wanted? With this linguistic freedom, we can say that Iran started the war by being an antagonist of the US, and having some low-level conflict with it. Here is what Hegseth said:

The United States did not start this conflict, but we will finish it. If you kill or threaten Americans anywhere in the world—as Iran has—then we will hunt you down, and we will kill you.

Another version, articulated by Republican House Committee is that Iran started a "forever war" with the 1979 revolution (don't ask about U.S. engagement in Iran before 1979!)

House Foreign Affairs Committee Majority
@HouseForeignGOP

Thank you, @POTUS.



It this sounds sort of nuts, be assured that for some Americans, the Iranian revolution, including its kidnapping of American hostages, felt like a declaration of war. For example, *The Free Press*, the best indicator of the editorial preferences of Bari Weiss, who runs CBS News, is resolutely supportive of the attack, presenting the it as “the end” of “our 50-year war with Iran.”



According to Trump mouthpiece and CNN commentator Scott Jennings, Iran was actually just about to attack the U.S. We stopped them in the nick of time. While the U.S. had warships at its door, Iran had planned a preemptive strike. I wonder if the officials Jennings refers to were the same administration officials that were saying that credible

Intelligence said that Iran would have nuclear weapons next week, or that it would be soon firing missiles at the United States.

5. Regime Change

In announcing his attack, Trump said: “To the great, proud people of Iran, I say tonight that the hour of your freedom is at hand. When we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take.” This would be good news for the people of Iran, who have been plainly unhappy with their brutal rulers. But they also have reason for caution.

Trump also offered immunity for members of the regime who lay down their arms, but its not really his immunity to offer if the people of Iran are to determine their future. In a social media post, Trump said that he hoped that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and other security forces would just merge with the people they have been killing, which seems a tad unrealistic:

Hopefully, the IRGC and Police will peacefully merge with the Iranian Patriots, and work together as a unit to bring back the Country to the Greatness it deserves,” the president added. “That process should soon be starting in that, not only the death of Khamenei but the Country has been, in only one day, very much destroyed and, even, obliterated.

After Trump previously encouraged protestors to rise up, tens of thousands were murdered by the regime. And if they look at Venezuela, or even in America, Iranians might see a Trump administration that does not see its mission as encouraging democracy. In Venezuela, a corrupt but pliable regime is preferred to the opposition who won the last election.

The Iranian hardliners might assume that Trump will not put boots on the ground, and they can hold onto power by offering concessions about external military and terrorism threats. Once the crisis has passed, they may reassert their brutal control over the Iranian people. Trump has already agreed to talk to the new leadership.

Beyond the Iranian people, advocates of regime change also see it as generating a new age of peace in the Middle East. See, for example, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham:

I fervently pray that the long-suffering people of Iran will have their oppression ended soon. I also fervently pray that we're on the verge of a new dawn in the Middle East, with historic opportunity for lasting peace and prosperity. As to our allies in Israel, President Trump and all under his command, your bravery has set in motion the end of evil and darkness, and the beginning of the light. Well done.

This is, to put it kindly, wishcasting that sounds very much like the neoconservative rationales for war in Iraq. Once Iraq is toppled, democracy would blossom and the region would stabilize. It seems like we are always just one expensive and bloody war away from stabilizing the Middle East! No downsides to the U.S.! Did I mention 22 people were killed in Pakistan when they tried storm the U.S. embassy?

In 2003, the wishcasting was accompanied with some efforts of nation building, poorly planned. But it appears that no such effort exists now. When Graham was challenged on *Meet the Press* on Trump's plan for Iranians, he snapped:

No, its not his job or my job to do this. How many times do I have to tell you? Our job is to make sure Iran is no longer the largest state sponsor of terrorism, to help the people to reconstruct a new government. No boots on the ground. You know the sign [that says] "you break it, you own it"? I don't buy that one bit.¹

6. Miscellaneous

Speaker Mike Johnson articulated some of the above reasons but also said that he was briefed that "that military action may become necessary to protect American troops and American citizens in Iran." What? America is bombing Iran to protect American citizens in Iran?

What Happens When You Don't Have a Clear Rationale

None of these feel like legitimate reasons, and the multiplicity of the reasons makes things worse. To be fair, its not unreasonable to have multiple goals with a military engagement, but Trump's tendency to exaggerate and undercut his rationales with contradictory statements creates a sense of incoherence. And the fact that Trump did not present his case to Congress further weakens the legitimacy of his efforts.

The reality is that this is a war of choice. Trump wanted to pursue it, and Middle Eastern allies who are sick of Iran's funding of terrorists encouraged or went along with the attack. According to reports, both Israel and Saudi Arabia, Iran's regional foes, urged Trump to attack. In part, this is because Iran is in a weakened state — already attacked by Israel, losing allies like Syria, and with its terrorist arms decimated — not because it is an imminent risk.

There might be a bunch of other, less articulated reasons, such as oil extraction (like Venezuela) and investment opportunities.

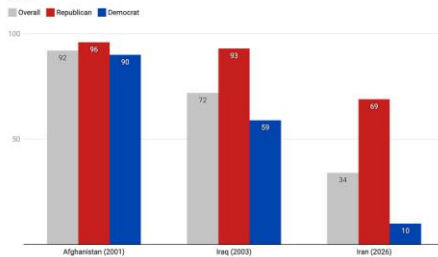
“We think Iran is a bad actor without an immediate threat to the U.S.” or “our regional allies really wanted this” are not especially compelling reasons for action. This has a couple of consequences.

First, there is not public buy-in for the war. It is worth remembering that the pattern of Middle Eastern wars is that they start as popular, and then become calamitous as time goes on. This one starts as unpopular because there is no compelling justification to rally around the flag.

Just 1 in 3 of those polled on the say of the strikes support the attack according to G. Elliott Morris. This is actually an improvement from previous polls. For example, two weeks ago, when just 1 in 5 supported a U.S. attack. More Republicans backing their President, but most Americans are unconvinced.

Support for striking Iran below prev. U.S. wars (post-attack)

Support for initial military action against each adversary in the poll taken as close as possible to the day after the action



Data: Various polls; YouGov poll Feb. 28, 2020
Source: [Numeris.com/en](https://www.numeris.com/en) | Created with [Dattablogger](https://www.dattablogger.com)

For Iranians on the ground, they now have to wonder, if the Trump administration has their best interests at heart. His track record, and mixed messages, make Trump unable to provide a credible commitment.

1 Here, Graham appears to be referring to Colin Powell’s Pottery Barn Rule that he articulated to Bush: “If you break it, you’ve bought it.” The Trump rule, it would appear is, you break it, someone else owns the mess.

2025



January

Ashley Delobel
Claudia Fabian
Attorney General Aaron Ford
Harriet Goldstein
Amanda Klein
Matt Lay
Denise Wright

February

Marilyn Caston
Nancy Downet
Judge Tara Clark-Newberrrt
Pam Jones
Carol Nerby

March

Elizabeth Lilly
Judge Jennifer Schwartz

April

May

June

July

August

September

October

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December 2025

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While We Slept, Donald Trump Launched A War...

On Our Constitution And The Rule Of Law

By Edwin Eisendrath

Americans awoke this morning in a new country. While we slept, Donald Trump launched a full-scale war to overthrow the regime in Iran and to disarm that nation. But it is our nation, our Constitution he has overthrown.

I pray for the people of Iran and of Israel, for our troops, and for those anywhere who might inadvertently find themselves in the sharp teeth of our out-of-control war machine.

This morning, America is no longer a democratic republic governed by the rule of law. It is a tyranny governed by a man. Everyone will cheer the end of the horrid reign of mullahs in Tehran. But everyone should weep at the fall of our great constitutional order.

Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution says Congress shall have the power to declare war. In common understanding it means a president cannot initiate a war. When George Bush took us into Iraq, he got an authorization to use military force (AUMF) from Congress. In fact, Congress passed three open ended authorizations, in 1991, in 2001, and in 2002.

On December 18, 2025 — just two months ago — Donald Trump signed the Defense Authorization bill that included a repeal of the 1991 and 2002 authorizations. Here's what Republican Congressman Chip Roy of Texas had to say at the time:

Securing the passage of this amendment corrects this long-standing failure and sends a clear signal that the legislative branch is finally reclaiming its authority over decisions of war and peace. The era of endless, undefined war authorizations must end.

The remaining AUMF is the one passed after 9/11. It is focused on counter-terrorism and authorizes the use of force only against those who planned, authorized, committed, or aided the September 11 attacks. Iran had no role in 9-11. The limitations of that authorization are why Bush sought additional ones to attack Iraq.

Donald Trump has no authority under law to take us to war. But he has the power. It is power exercised outside of the law, and thus a tyrannical power.

In his commentaries on the Laws of England, Blackstone noted that "the king has the sole prerogative of making war and peace." The founders knew this and chose a different path.

Here is what James Madison wrote in his famous *Helvidius* essay:

In no part of the constitution is more wisdom to be found than in the clause which confides the question of war or peace to the legislature, and not to the executive department. Beside the objection to such a mixture of heterogeneous powers: the trust and the temptation would be too great for any one man... War is in fact the true nurse of executive aggrandizement. In war a physical force is to be created, and it is the executive will which is to direct it. In war the public treasures are to be unlocked, and it is the executive hand which is to dispense them. In war the honors and emoluments of office are to be multiplied; and it is the executive patronage under which they are to be enjoyed. It is in war, finally, that laurels are to be gathered, and it is the executive brow they are to encircle. The strongest passions, and most dangerous weaknesses of the human breast; ambition, avarice, vanity, the honorable or venial love of fame, are all in conspiracy against the desire and duty of peace.

The founders understood that a President who can unilaterally declare war will do so. And he will do it not for the American people but for himself. They located the power to initiate war in Congress, to remove a powerful temptation from the presidency precisely to protect the rest of us.

Donald Trump has ignored our Constitution in many ways this past year. Courts have repeatedly declared his actions unconstitutional. Now, in ordering us into war without even so much as an explanation, let alone the legal authority to do so, he has torn it up.

Americans woke up in a new country this morning. But we are not powerless.

There are legal remedies, and litigation should begin today.

There are congressional remedies. The House and Senate should convene immediately and either declare war or end this war. They must assert the powers our Constitution reserves for them. They should impeach and remove the criminal whose high crime is nothing short of treason against the Constitution and the rule of law in America.

There are political remedies. Americans will answer the call when all else fails. We always have.

Edwin Eisendrath hosts It's the Democracy, Stupid on Lincoln Square and WCPT820 AM/Heartland Signal. He's the former CEO of the Chicago Sun-Times, a long-time management consultant, a former Chicago Alderman, HUD Regional Administrator and teacher in Chicago's public schools.

Imagine A World Where Accountability Wins

By Evan Fields

Imagine a world where the threat of ICE agents at polling places in the 2026 midterms — whispered, floated, trial-ballooned — doesn't scare people into silence but wakes them up.



Imagine a world where the plan backfires.

Imagine a world where the threat of ICE agents at polling places in the 2026 midterms — whispered, floated, trial-ballooned — doesn't scare people into silence but wakes them up. Imagine communities that have been told for the past decade to keep their heads down finally deciding they've had enough of that. Imagine election protection groups mobilizing at scale. Judges issuing injunctions. Local officials refusing to comply. Volunteers flooding precincts. Cameras everywhere.

Imagine the intimidation failing.

Imagine a midterm election where turnout doesn't quietly slide back into "normal," but instead shatters expectations — where participation clears the modern midterm high water mark, not because people are calm, but because they're angry. Focused. Clear-eyed. Imagine first-time midterm voters showing up in numbers not seen in a generation. Imagine the threat itself becoming the accelerant to the fire.

Imagine the result.

Imagine Democrats retaking the House. Not by a wave, but by the narrow margins that modern politics actually turns on. Three seats. Four. Five. A handful of districts where turnout nudged just enough, where fear gave way to resolve. Imagine a chamber that flips not because of slogans, but because people refused to be told their neighbors didn't belong in a democracy that was supposed to be for everyone.

Now imagine the Senate.

Imagine a map that was supposed to be hostile turning volatile instead. Imagine Republicans defending seats they assumed were safe while Democrats over-perform in places that were written off too soon. Imagine a net gain of four seats if the night breaks clean. Imagine a Senate that no longer exists to stall, delay, and launder abuse through procedure.

Imagine a divided government giving way to something rare in modern American politics: alignment over a single issue — Epstein.

Imagine what happens next.

Imagine a world where Democrats finally heed the message voters have been sending for years — not just that things are bad, but that *impunity* is worse. Imagine committees that don't exist

to posture, but to expose. Subpoenas enforced. Witnesses compelled. Financial records and Epstein files dragged into the light. Imagine oversight that treats the public like adults instead of an inconvenience.

Imagine accountability not as revenge, but as repair.

Imagine co-conspirators — in corruption, cover-ups, exploitation — facing consequences proportionate to their actions. Not through spectacle, but through process. Hearings that make denial impossible. Evidence laid out methodically, so no one can claim they didn't know. Imagine the machinery of government finally doing what it was designed to do: impose limits.

Imagine impeachment not as a partisan ritual, but as a constitutional obligation they got wrong last time. Imagine articles drafted because the facts demand them, not polling. Imagine a House that understands its role not to protect political careers, but to protect the republic.

And imagine the signal that sends.

Imagine a culture that begins to shift — not overnight, not magically — but perceptibly. Imagine cruelty losing its reward. Lying becoming a risk. Power discovering friction again. Imagine public office ceasing to function as a shield for private crimes.

Now imagine the horizon beyond the midterms.

Imagine 2028.

Imagine a presidential election that doesn't revolve around nostalgia or fear, but around direction. Imagine a progressive candidate who doesn't run from the word "mandate," but earns it by winning the popular vote decisively, expanding margins among young voters, working-class voters, and communities long treated as expendable. Imagine down-ballot strength reinforcing the result: wider House margins, a more stable Senate majority, state legislatures flipping where voter suppression once reigned supreme.

Imagine that victory not as a personality triumph, but as a decision by a coalition.

Imagine a country saying, in measurable terms, that it wants something different.

And then imagine the hardest part: what comes after.

Imagine a world where reform isn't deferred out of fear. Imagine leaders who understand that the old structures failed because they were never designed to withstand bad faith actors at this scale. Imagine them saying the quiet part out loud: that American democracy, as constructed, is too fragile for the era it's entered.

Imagine structural change.

Imagine an expanded Supreme Court — not as punishment, but as recalibration. Imagine Congress exercising a power it has always held but rarely dared to use, restoring balance to a judiciary that drifted far beyond democratic legitimacy. Imagine term limits. Ethics rules enforced. Transparency imposed where secrecy once thrived.

The FBI Is Stretched Thin.

Iran Knows It.

By Frank Figliuzzi

Iran has targeted Americans before. With war escalating, here's what you need to know about ways the regime could retaliate.

In physics, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. So, too, in war.

America's and Israel's [ongoing attack on Iran](#) has already triggered [foreseeable retaliation](#) from the Islamic Republic, primarily in the gulf region. Prudent war planning involves not only a strategy to execute successful attacks, but to also anticipate and defend against the capacity of the adversary to strike back in whatever forms its resources, skill sets and history indicate.

This means the [U.S. intelligence and security services](#), including the [Department of Homeland Security](#), and the FBI, along with our military, are on high alert to counter-threats that Iran and its surrogates pose to the homeland.

A salient example of the heightened domestic security posture and threat concerns raised by the war with Iran happened early Sunday morning in Austin, Texas. The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force immediately [responded to a mass shooting](#) in that city's entertainment district. Three people died, including the suspect, and 14 were wounded after a man in a large SUV circled the block and ultimately fired at pedestrians using a pistol and a rifle.

The [acting head of the FBI field office](#) said agents are examining potential signs that the suspect may be connected to terrorism:

“Obviously it's still way too early in the process to determine an exact motivation, but there were indicators on the subject and in his vehicle that indicate a potential nexus to terrorism.”

Whether or not this incident turns out to be related to international terrorism, we can expect this kind of federal response to such incidents until the threat of Iranian retaliation subsides – and that could take a very long time. As always, the threat of a lone actor will be the toughest to identify and defeat.

An [internal FBI email on Sunday](#), obtained by the *New York Times*, noted that Iran and its surrogates, “historically targeted U.S. interests in response to geopolitical events, and they are likely to increase their efforts in the near term.” ...

Hate ICE? Social Media Companies Will Snitch On You

By Frank Figliuzzi

What you need to know to stay safe out there.



ICE is using a little-known investigative tool, an administrative subpoena, to force social media platforms to identify anti-ICE account holders. And if that sounds like a potential infringement on civil liberties – you’re right.

Don’t be fooled when you hear the word subpoena and think court order, probable cause, judges, and lawyers. A real subpoena issued by a grand jury or a judge contains all those elements, but not the lowly administrative subpoena that our government is now abusing to determine if we’re critical of their conduct.

Here’s what you need to know about the inherent dangers of this initiative, how your social media platforms are responding, and how we might be plummeting down the slippery slope toward government surveillance of our legal communications.

ICE has issued hundreds of administrative subpoenas to Google, Meta, and other companies to ferret out who amongst us is critical of the agency. An administrative subpoena is little more than a fill-in-the-blanks government form. Once it’s signed by a designated agency employee – like an ICE agent or their supervisor, it becomes a legal means to compel production of records or even testimony without a judge or prosecutor ever knowing about it.

These forms are authorized by statute and designed to apply to certain regulatory and investigative missions where it makes sense to quickly check on compliance concerns. The Drug Enforcement Agency, for example, uses these to monitor pharmacies on how they dole out narcotics. The Federal Trade Commission regularly serves administrative subpoenas to help track adherence to financial regulations and consumer protection requirements.

What ICE is doing is different. They aren’t checking on whether we’re obeying regulations – they’re monitoring those of us who don’t like what ICE is doing..

Frank Figliuzzi is an FBI Assistant Director (retired); 25-year veteran Special Agent; and author of the national bestseller, The FBI Way, and Long Haul: Hunting the Highway Serial Killers

God Is Nonpartisan, Jesus Isn't A Registered Voter And Other Uncensored Lessons

By John L. Smith



Attempts to censor Stephen Colbert's godly guest backfire and ignite a scorching sermon heard around the world.

Democrat James Talarico is running for the U.S. Senate in Texas, but thanks to an act of presidential bullying and corporate kowtowing, his important message echoed across the land this week.

Fearing the sanction of President Donald Trump's Federal Communications Commission (FCC) police, on Monday pigeon-hearted CBS executives killed Talarico's interview with Stephen Colbert. *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* is already scheduled to go off the air in May — purely a ["financial decision,"](#) you understand — but this wasn't designed as a test run. It was [blatant censorship](#).

Wielding the FCC like a cudgel, the president continues to intimidate comedians and news networks. As Trump's popularity slides and midterm elections approach, he doesn't have to strain to see MAGA-red Texas losing steam and the Republicans' hold on their majority in Congress slipping. And yet too often his attempts to bully the [networks have worked](#).

Trump cowed CBS again but didn't deter Colbert. He [interviewed](#) Talarico on his show's YouTube channel. By Tuesday, the interview was ricocheting like a pinball on social media and racked up more than 3 million views in 19 hours, with unconfirmed estimates as high as 40 million. Talarico's straight talk on the First Amendment and the rise of Christian nationalism was easier to find than a commercial for those hard-to-spell Big Pharma miracle cures. He also made international news.

In essence, Talarico's message was simple: The First Amendment belongs to everyone and God doesn't wear a MAGA cap. The deity is nonpartisan and Jesus is not a registered voter. With Trump fueling the fire, [Christian nationalists](#) have greatly expanded their influence in the Republican Party. They veil their racism and bigotry behind cross and flag. With their pinched political worldview, their disdain for those who differ is palpable. They're doing real harm to the country they profess to love and the president adores them.

Seeking the Democratic nomination in the race to oust four-term incumbent Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX), Talarico is an eighth-generation Texan, a state representative and the grandson of a Baptist preacher. He's also a Presbyterian seminarian. In other words, he hasn't just posed with the Bible, he's actually read it.

He began by reminding us that Trump's efforts to censor critics are real and dangerous.

"This is the party that ran against cancel culture, and now they're trying to control what we watch, what we say, what we read," he said. "And this is the most dangerous kind of cancel culture, the kind that comes from the top. They went after [The View](#) because I went on there. They went after [Jimmy Kimmel](#) for telling a joke they didn't like. They went after you (Colbert), for telling the truth about [Paramount's](#) bribe to Donald Trump.

“Corporate media executives are selling out the First Amendment to curry favor with corrupt politicians. A threat to any of our First Amendment rights is a threat to all of our First Amendment rights.”

Then the grandson of a preacher did a little preaching himself.

“Jesus in [Matthew 25](#) tells us exactly how you and I and all of our fellow believers are going to be judged and how we’re going to be saved: By feeding the hungry, by healing the sick, by welcoming the stranger,” he said. “Nothing about going to church, nothing about voting Republican. It’s all about how you treat other people. I’ve said before, don’t tell me what you believe, show me how you treat other people and I’ll tell you what you believe.”

Another gem related to him from his grandfather: “When I was little, he told me that Christianity was a simple religion — not an easy religion, he would always clarify — but a simple religion because Jesus gave us two commandments: Love God and love neighbor — and there was no exception to that second commandment. Love thy neighbor regardless of race or gender, or sexual orientation or immigration status or religious affiliation.”

And then there’s something that puts the dangerous rise of Christian nationalism in our country into its proper perspective:

“When the church gets too cozy with political power, it loses its prophetic voice, its ability to speak truth to power, its ability to imagine a completely different world. And so, this separation between church and state is something we have to safeguard. It’s something we have to fight for, and I think we need someone in the U.S. Senate who is going to confront Christian nationalism and tell the truth, which is that there’s nothing Christian about Christian nationalism. It is the worship of power in the name of Christ and it is a betrayal of Jesus of Nazareth. ...

“What you’ve got is people baptizing their partisanship and calling it Christianity. When in reality your politics should grow out of your faith, not the other way around.”

By Wednesday, the outwardly humble Talarico [was crowing](#) on social media about the \$2.5 million his campaign raised in the previous 24 hours. Although it fed the fever of those who would demand equal time according to Trump’s version of the FCC’s doctrine, it was an even greater reminder that attempts at censorship often backfire on those who seek to control the First Amendment.

After listening to Talarico’s powerful message, it’s no wonder [one of the most powerful men](#) in the world tried to stop him from delivering it.

John L. Smith is an author and longtime columnist. He was born in Henderson and his family’s Nevada roots go back to 1881. His stories have appeared in New Lines, Time, Reader’s Digest, Rolling Stone, The Daily Beast, Reuters and Desert Companion, among others.

Letters From An American

By Heather Cox Richardson



Today, as the country enters its third week of war against Iran, President Donald J. Trump was on the golf course, illustrating the observation of journalist E.J. Dionne in the *New York Times* that “from the very beginning of this war, we got a sense that there wasn’t a great deal of serious thought put into it by the president of the United States about how it might end, what our objectives were, what needed to be done to protect Americans who are in the Middle East, what might happen to oil in the Strait of Hormuz.”

Although the administration appears to be trying to convince Americans that the U.S. military’s destruction of the Iranian military means the U.S. has won the war, Iranian leadership needed simply to continue in power to declare victory. Then, blocking the 20% of the world’s oil that flows through the Strait of Hormuz would give them leverage over the war’s outcome.

On March 10, Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt of the *New York Times* reported that senior defense officials told them the Iranian military is adjusting its tactics to strike at the communications and defense systems protecting U.S. troops. Those tactics include drone strikes. The same day, Marc Caputo, Barak Ravid, and Colin Demarest of *Axios* reported that Ukrainian officials had tried several months ago to sell the U.S. anti-drone technology for downing Iran-made drones as a sign of thanks for U.S. support and as a way to strengthen ties between the U.S. and Ukraine, but the U.S. did not pursue the offer.

White House spokesperson Anna Kelly responded: “This characterization made by these cowardly unnamed sources is not accurate and proves that they are simply outside looking in. [Defense] Secretary [Pete] Hegseth and the armed forces did an incredible job planning for all possible responses by the Iranian regime, and the undisputed success of Operation Epic Fury speaks for itself.”

And yet the fallout from the strikes on Iran by the U.S. and Israel appears to have caught the administration by surprise. Trump told Kristen Welker and Alexandra Marquez of NBC News yesterday that he was “surprised” that Iran attacked other countries after the U.S. and Israeli strikes. He also said strikes on Saturday on Kharg Island, which is about fifteen miles off the Iranian coast and is home to Iran’s primary oil export terminal, “totally demolished” most of the island but that “we may hit it a few more times just for fun.”

President Donald J. Trump posted on social media Saturday morning: “Many Countries, especially those who are affected by Iran’s attempted closure of the Hormuz Strait, will be sending War Ships, in conjunction with the United States of America, to keep the Strait open and safe. We have already destroyed 100% of Iran’s Military capability, but it’s easy for them to send a drone or two, drop a mine, or deliver a close range missile somewhere along, or in, this Waterway, no matter how badly defeated they are.”

Despite what Trump claimed was the utter destruction of Iran's military, he asked other countries to contribute to the effort to reopen the strait. "Hopefully China, France, Japan, South Korea, the UK, and others, that are affected by this artificial constraint, will send Ships to the area so that the Hormuz Strait will no longer be a threat by a Nation that has been totally decapitated. In the meantime the United States will be bombing the hell out of the shoreline, and continually shooting Iranian Boats and Ships out of the water. One way or the other, we will soon get the Hormuz Strait OPEN, SAFE, and FREE!"

Since he took office more than a year ago, Trump has gone out of his way to antagonize our allies and partners, warning them that the United States will act alone and working to undermine the international alliances the U.S. has shaped since World War II. Now, having sparked a regional war in the Middle East after ignoring what virtually everyone said would be the result of attacking Iran a second time, Trump is begging other countries to come to his aid.

In yesterday's NBC News interview, Trump told Welker and Marquez that several countries have committed to helping reopen the strait, but he declined to name them. "They've not only committed, but they think it's a great idea," he said. He also said that "Iran wants to make a deal," but he has declined "because the terms aren't good enough yet." Today Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, said Tehran had not even asked for negotiations, let alone a ceasefire.

That the White House is in turmoil showed this morning first of all in the fact that one of the people making the administration's case on the talk shows was U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Mike Waltz, the man who added *Atlantic* editor Jeffrey Goldberg to the Signal messaging app on which members of the administration were making plans to strike Houthi militants in Yemen, a chat that would hide administration discussions from the record-keeping required by public records laws.

On CNN's *State of the Union* this morning, over a chyron that read, "OIL PRICES SKYROCKET AS IRAN THROTTLES TRAFFIC IN STRAIT OF HORMUZ," Jake Tapper noted that while the U.S. has said it would soon send naval escorts through the strait, shipping executives have told CNN "that all their requests for escorts have...been rebuffed. Tapper asked Waltz if Trump is simply hoping other countries will send naval escorts through the Strait of Hormuz or if they had committed to it.

Waltz answered that "we have the energy dominance in place," then noted that in the past, other countries had worked alongside the U.S. to keep energy flowing through the strait, and Trump is calling on the world to do the same thing again. Waltz said: "We certainly welcome, encourage, and even demand their participation to help their own economies."

On *Face the Nation*, another odd salesperson for Trump's war, National Economic Council director Kevin Hassett, told host Margaret Brennan that "you have to understand that America is not going to have its economy harmed by what the Iranians are doing." Hassett implied that because the U.S. produces more oil now than it did in the 1970s, it doesn't really need oil from the Persian Gulf. The Iranians "think that they're gonna harm the U.S. economy and get President Trump to back down," he said. "There couldn't be anything that was a stupider thing to say. 'Cause the bottom line is that our economy has got all this momentum in the world, and we've got lots and lots of oil."

The U.S. does indeed produce more oil and natural gas than it consumes, but it cannot use much of what it produces. The key is prices and refineries. The U.S. tends to produce light, sweet crude oil, a term for oil that flows easily and has low sulfur content. Because it is easy to refine and more valuable than heavy, sour crude, U.S. producers have an incentive to sell it on the open market. Even if they wanted to keep it at home, U.S. refineries are set up to refine the cheaper heavy crude oil, so the U.S. does not have the refining capacity to process the oil it currently produces and must buy what it needs from elsewhere. This means the U.S. is inextricably tied to the international oil markets.

The administration appears to be taking the position that the problem is not Trump's launching an ill-thought-out war, but rather the media outlets' reporting on that war. Although Trump has been conversing freely with reporters by cell phone since the war broke out, yesterday morning he posted on social media: "The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal (in particular), and other Lowlife "Papers" and Media actually want us to lose the War. Their terrible reporting is the exact opposite of the actual facts! They are truly sick and demented people that have no idea the damage they cause the United States of America. Fortunately, as proven by our Great and Conclusive Election Win in 2024, the People of our Country understand what is happening far better than the Fake News Media!"

Less than two hours later, Trump posted an image titled "PRESIDENT TRUMP IS RESHAPING THE MEDIA," with three categories: "GONE," "REFORMS," and "WINNING." Under "gone" was the defunding of PBS and NPR, as well as a list of reporters who have been fired since Trump took office in 2025. Under "reforms," the image claimed Trump was the "Most Accessible POTUS Ever," boasted that under CBS's new ownership by Trump ally David Ellison the station has a "News Bias Ombudsman," and suggested that CNN would soon be under "New Ownership" as well. Under "winning" was a quotation from *The Guardian* that "Trump is waging war against the media—and winning."

Hours later, Federal Communications Commission chair Brendan Carr threatened the broadcast licenses of media stations. He quoted Trump when he posted: "Broadcasters that are running hoaxes and news distortions—also known as the fake news—have a chance now to correct course before their license renewals come up. The law is clear. Broadcasters must operate in the public interest, and they will lose their licenses if they do not.... It is very important to bring trust back into media, which has earned itself the label of fake news." Then Carr slipped in his own fake news, suggesting that Trump won "a landslide election victory" when in fact he received less than 50% of the vote, and concluded: "Time for change!"

The Framers of the U.S. Constitution understood that a free press is imperative for a democracy. They established the right to a free press in the First Amendment that begins the Bill of Rights. Silencing critics is the refuge of those who know what they are doing is unpopular and unjustifiable.

Jim Acosta, who left CNN, noted that while the administration is attempting to establish a state media, the American people increasingly have the option of reading independent journalism. "Yes," Acosta wrote, "Trump put me on his media hit list. I regret to report to the notoriously thin-skinned, twice elected, yet soon to be thrice-impeached president that I am still here, loving the freedom of independent media.... Living rent free in the mind of the president of the United States is indeed liberating, especially when you are coloring outside the lines of corporate media."

Yesterday evening, the official White House social media account on X tried to reassure Americans that Trump knows what he's doing. It posted an image of the American flag over a stealth bomber with the words "PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH" and "NO PANICANS!"

And yet, in what seemed to be panicked comments tonight, Trump on social media appeared to take on the rifts showing up among MAGA leaders over the Iran war, saying of isolationist America First MAGAs: “THEY ARE NOT MAGA, I AM, and MAGA includes not allowing Iran, a Sick, Demented, and Violent Terrorist Regime, to have a Nuclear Weapon to blow up the United States of America, the Middle East and, ultimately, the rest of the World.”

Another post blamed Iranian AI and disinformation for stories that he said are “FAKE and, in a certain way, you can say those Media Outlets that generated it should be brought up on Charges for TREASON for the dissemination of false information.” He reiterated support for Carr’s attack on the media and insisted he won the presidential election “IN A LANDSLIDE.”

In yet another post, the president’s account attacked the U.S. Supreme Court for declaring his tariffs unconstitutional, then blamed the justices for ruining the nation by permitting Democrat Joe Biden to be inaugurated rather than “call out The Rigged Presidential Election of 2020.”

In an interview with *Financial Times* published this evening, Trump warned that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) would have a “very bad” future if allies don’t help open the Strait of Hormuz. And tonight, on Air Force One, Trump told reporters: “Really, I’m demanding that these countries come in and protect their own territory, because it is their territory. It’s the place from which they get their energy, and they should come and they should help us protect it. You could make the case that maybe we shouldn’t even be there at all, because we don’t need it. We have a lot of oil.”

Vegas Police Are Big Users Of License Plate Readers. Public Has Little Input Because It's A Gift.

By Oona Milliken



Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department officers patrol the Las Vegas Strip on June 9, 2025. – Jeff Schied/The Nevada Independent.

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) [quietly entered an agreement](#) in 2023 with Flock Security, an automated license plate reader company that uses cameras to collect vehicle information and cross-reference it with police databases.

But unlike many of the other police departments around the country that use the cameras in their police work, Metro funds the project with donor money funneled into a private foundation. It's an arrangement that allows Metro to avoid soliciting public comment on the surveillance technology, which critics worry could be co-opted to track undocumented immigrants, political dissidents and abortion seekers, among others. "It's a short circuit of the democratic process," Jay Stanley, a Washington D.C.-based lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) who works on how technology can infringe on individual privacy and civil liberties, said in an interview with *The Nevada Independent*.

The cameras scan license plates as well as vehicles' identifying details — such as make, model and color — plugging that information into a national database that police can use to search the location of specific vehicles beyond their own jurisdictions. Flock operates more than [80,000 of these AI-powered cameras](#) nationwide, and the company's popularity has exploded in recent years, with police [touting it as a tool to solve crime faster and boost public safety.](#)

Although taxpayer dollars fund Flock cameras in other jurisdictions, most of the cameras in the Las Vegas area have been bought with money from the [Horowitz Family Foundation](#), a philanthropy group connected to the Las Vegas-based venture capitalist Ben Horowitz, co-founder of the firm [Andreessen Horowitz](#).

The Horowitz Family Foundation did not respond to a request for comment at the time of publication.

Metro told *The Nevada Independent* that it operates approximately 200 Flock license plate reader cameras on city or county infrastructure and it shares its Flock data with hundreds of state and local law enforcement agencies throughout the country.

Since late 2023, Las Vegas police have made more than 23,000 searches of vehicles, according to the website [Have I Been Flocked](#), which compiles public audit logs of Flock data.

As the cameras were not bought with public funds, Metro does not have to hold meetings with the public to comment on the technology, something experts say leaves citizens without any input on the policing method. In other cities, Stanley said Flock is often brought up and discussed during city council meetings or other public forums. It's not required to be on public meeting agendas in the Las Vegas area.

"Police departments serve the community and are supposed to make life in the community better. Does the community want this technology imposed on it?" Stanley said.

Though Horowitz's foundation donated additional funds for Flock cameras in October, it was not brought up at the Clark County Commission meeting that month, nor was their use discussed anytime in 2025, according to commission meeting minutes.

"Where's the oversight?"

Some municipalities in Clark County, such as the City of Las Vegas, have license plate reader policies that includes [a public Flock policy](#) with a dashboard on how many license plates Flock picked up (about 185,000 in the past month in the city), how many cameras were in use (22 in Las Vegas), and how many searches had been done on a monthly basis (five in the past 30 days). In comparison, Metro's policy is not publicly available online, though *The Indy* obtained a copy through a public records request.

Flock's most recent contract with Metro, [signed in 2023](#), stipulates that the company retains all rights in any recordings or data provided by the service and that Flock can use any of the data for "any purpose" at the company's discretion. The agreement also says that Flock recordings are not stored for longer than 30 days.

Meanwhile, [Metro policy says](#) that department members will not seek or retain license plate reader information about individuals or an organization based solely on their citizenship, social views, race or other classifications protected by law. The policy states that retained license plate reader data does not include specific identification of individuals. Misuse of the data will result in disciplinary action up to termination, according to the policy.

But for many, including a former officer who spoke to *The Indy* on the condition of anonymity for fear of professional repercussions, such policies are not enough.

"It's ripe for misuse," the officer said, pointing to examples around the country of people using [Flock to look for current and former romantic partners](#) and track their movements. A police chief in [Kansas used Flock](#) to track his ex-girlfriend 228 times in four months. An officer in South Carolina used [public cameras to monitor his wife](#), who he suspected was having an affair.

The former Metro officer said his major concern was not the technology itself, but the fact that there was little transparency on how the technology was being used or what the department's policy was on Flock usage. "If you look around the country where license plate readers are being used, there's some kind of public meeting, there's some kind of public process," the officer said. "What's happening here is on a very large scale — they're putting out surveillance technology — and there's no public disclosure."

Privacy concerns

The Horowitz Foundation donation in October included a software subscription to Flock's Nova feature, which allows officers to easily access private license plate information alongside [other personal data](#), such as Social Security numbers, credit scores, property and occupancy information, as well as [emails or social media handles](#).

Experts say this data could be used to identify [undocumented immigrants, political protesters](#) and people traveling across [state lines to obtain abortions](#).

Athar Haseebullah, the executive director of the ACLU of Nevada, said that Flock not only poses a heightened risk for immigrants, but anyone engaged in actions that are found to be politically defiant. He pointed to a case in Texas where police [conducted a nationwide search](#) using Flock technology for a woman who self-induced an abortion.

“This could be ripe for abuse by ICE (Immigrations and Customs Enforcement), but it could also be ripe for abuse by other government entities,” Haseebullah said. In 2025, the ACLU pushed back against [a measure](#) that would allow local jurisdictions to use automated traffic cameras to crack down on speeding and red-light crossings, although the bill was never voted on.

Flock has received backlash nationwide for allowing federal agencies such as [Customs and Border Patrol](#) to tap into their data. The company has said [it does not work with ICE](#) after [evidence was found that the agency](#) used Flock data for immigration investigations. Several cities have [terminated or modified their](#) Flock agreements after realizing they were inadvertently sharing their data with other agencies.

However, though Flock might not want to partner with ICE, it has little choice — Flock is obligated to fulfill subpoenas from ICE and can’t refuse a legal warrant, Andrew Ferguson, an attorney and a professor researching tech and police surveillance at [George Washington University](#), said.

Flock’s surveillance cameras are meant to catch crime, though experts say it could deter certain behaviors if citizens are aware they are being watched.

“There’s a chilling effect knowing that your government is essentially tracking you wherever you go,” Ferguson said. “It might be even more chilling if you put cameras in sensitive places, like a medical clinic, or a Gambler’s Anonymous meeting, or a church.”

In a city such as Las Vegas, known for drinking, gambling and a hearty party culture, surveillance is the last thing people are interested in, according to Ferguson.

“Things are happening in Vegas that are not going to stay in Vegas,” Ferguson said. “They’re going to be broadcast through Flock.”

Public private partnerships

As recently as October of last year, the Horowitz Family Foundation donated almost \$1.9 million for Flock license plate readers and another \$2.47 million for supporting software for Flock machines, according to the minutes of an [LVMPD fiscal affairs committee meeting](#).

Because the donations aren’t coming directly to Metro, but to the nonprofit LVMPD foundation, also known as “Friends of Metro,” any discussions on the cameras’ use aren’t subject to Nevada’s [open meeting laws](#). The license plate readers and their supporting software are not the only gift that the Horowitz Family Foundation, led by Ben Horowitz’s wife, Felicia Horowitz, has donated to Las Vegas police. The foundation has also gifted drones, as well as Tesla Cybertrucks, to the agency.

Proponents have billed the gifts as morale boosters for police that help the agency stay on the cutting edge without tapping into limited taxpayer dollars. Critics, such as the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Southern Nevada, [have suggested](#) that the Cybertrucks show that Metro is “prioritizing corporate giveaways.” Felicia Horowitz said she is focused on “creating the best community in America” in Las Vegas, according to [her bio from a local nonprofit organization](#) that she sits on the board of. Part of that is combating crime and keeping citizens safe. In a *Wall Street Journal* article, Felicia Horowitz emphasized how crime and weak policing had hurt Black communities across the country.

“The new policies — defund the police, don’t prosecute crime — are destroying the communities where I grew up,” Felicia Horowitz, who is Black, told the *WSJ* in 2024. Felicia Horowitz was raised in Los Angeles and the Horowitzes relocated to Las Vegas around 2021 and 2022 after decades in California.

So far, the foundation has not publicly commented on whether it will continue donating money for Flock services. Some experts think the donations might be a strategy called “[penetration pricing](#),” where a company gives free or reduced products or services in order to hook consumers before charging them.

“There’s no question that there’s a financial interest in them proving that the Flock technology works in Las Vegas so that they can sell it to other places,” said Ferguson.

The former police officer said he was concerned about taxpayers having to cough up funds to continue Flock services if the Horowitz money ran dry.

“Once you start relying on a certain type of policing, it’s going to be hard to switch over, and then who will foot the bill?” the officer said.

America's Gestapo

By Robert Reich



Today I want to talk about who's getting the most out of Trump's war.

That war is costing the U.S. about \$1 billion a day. The Pentagon's budget is around \$1 trillion this year, and Trump wants an additional \$500 billion. Because of the war, the cost of oil has topped \$100 a barrel, and the price of a gallon of gas at the U.S. pump now averages [\\$3.67](#) — up from [\\$2.92](#) before the war.

The strain on the federal budget has given Republicans an excuse to demand further cuts in federal assistance to people in need. JD Vance recently kicked off a “war on waste and fraud” by announcing suspension of Medicaid payments to Minnesota, charging that the program is rife with fraud perpetrated by “[bad actors in our society](#) ... [who] [decide to make themselves rich](#).”

But if you want to find real waste and fraud, look no further than Pete Hegseth's “Department of War.”

A new analysis by government watchdog [Open the Books](#) found that as the 2025 fiscal year was ending, Hegseth's Pentagon spent: nearly \$100,000 on a Steinway grand piano to outfit the home of the Air Force chief of staff; \$60,719 on premium office furniture, including at least one luxurious \$1,844 Aeron Chair; \$12,540 for three-tiered fruit basket stands; \$2 million on Alaskan king crab, \$6.9 million on lobster tail, \$15.1 million on ribeye steak, and \$1 million on salmon; \$124,000 for ice cream machines; and \$26,000 for sushi preparation tables.

The Pentagon has [failed every audit since it was legally required to start submitting them in 2018](#), and reports say [it will continue to fail them at least through 2028](#).

The ballooning profits of military contractors are helped by their near monopoly on defense production. Since the 1990s, the number of prime contractors for the Defense Department has shrunk from [55 to five](#).

Keep following the money.

These giants have been spending more on enriching their investors than expanding production. Between 2020 and 2025, top military contractors devoted [\\$110 billion](#) to stock buybacks and dividends — more than double what they spent on capital expenditures — which boosted their stock values and the pay packages of their CEOs.

And who are their biggest investors and CEOs? Trump loyalists.

Larry Ellison's Oracle provides Hegseth's war machine with cloud infrastructure and enterprise software. (Reminder: Ellison is the [second-richest](#) person in America and a Trump loyalist on the verge of owning a media empire comprised of CBS, CNN, TikTok, Comedy Central, and HBO.)

Elon Musk's SpaceX has secured billions in contracts for launching sensitive satellites and space surveillance. Musk's xAI has received a Pentagon contract to develop advanced AI tools. (Reminder: Musk is the richest person in the world and spent a quarter of a billion dollars getting Trump reelected in 2024.)

Peter Thiel's Palantir Technologies has landed multibillion-dollar defense contracts, including a \$10 billion agreement with the U.S. Army to provide AI-driven data analytics and software to integrate AI, surveillance, and battlefield management systems. (Reminder: Thiel is a billionaire who contributed \$1.25 million to Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, including \$1 million to a pro-Trump super PAC, and then \$10 million to getting JD Vance elected to the U.S. Senate in 2022.)

Not to forget Big Oil, now enjoying windfall profits as global oil prices soar. (Recall Trump [asking](#) oil company executives for \$1 billion for his 2024 campaign, in return for undisclosed favors.)

Among others benefitting from the turmoil is Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and one of the U.S. government's chief negotiators in the Middle East, who's [busily raising](#) at least \$5 billion or more for his private-equity investment firm from governments in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund.

Finally, there's Trump's on-again, off-again ally Vladimir Putin. In just two weeks of war, Russia has reaped an estimated [\\$6.9 billion](#) from the increase in oil prices and the easing of sanctions.

What to do? At the very least, Congress should:

Prohibit defense contractors from making campaign donations or lobbying Congress. Why should taxpayers subsidize these activities?

Tax windfall profits from Trump's war (or from any war). America has had windfall profits taxes during wartime before. Given the size of current windfalls, we need it again.

Cut the defense budget. Start by cutting it 10 percent each year it fails audits. This is particularly important during the Trump-Hegseth era of defense bloat.

As long as Trump and his Republicans control Congress and the executive branch, these reforms don't have a prayer. Still, Democrats should introduce them and push for them. Let Trump and his Republicans go on record voting against them.

The Billionaires' War

By Paul Krugman



The ultrawealthy put Trump in power but other people will pay the price

It becomes clearer with each passing day that the people who took us to war with Iran had and have no idea what they're doing — that they're adolescents who think they're playing video games while thousands die and the world careens toward economic crisis. The New York Times reports that Trump officials dismissed warnings that attacking Iran could disrupt world oil supplies. Among other things, the Times reports that

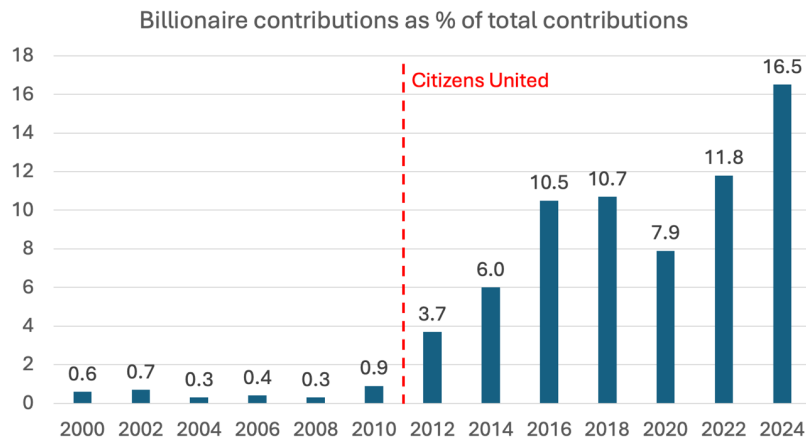
Mr. Trump, both publicly and privately, has been arguing that Venezuelan oil could help solve any shocks coming from the Iran war.

In 2024 Venezuela produced 900,000 barrels of oil per day; normally 20 million barrels a day transit the Strait of Hormuz. But arithmetic has a well-known woke bias.

Meanwhile, the Washington Post reports that the Pentagon has barred press photographers from briefings about the war after they published photos of Pete Hegseth that his staff considered “unflattering.” Priorities!

Amid the bloody shambles, one big question is, who put The Gang That Couldn't Think Straight in power? In an immediate sense, Trump was put over the top by low-information voters — defined by G. Elliott Morris as voters who don't know which party controls Congress. But the groundwork for the MAGA takeover was laid well before by the Roberts Supreme Court and by right-wing billionaires that the court enabled.

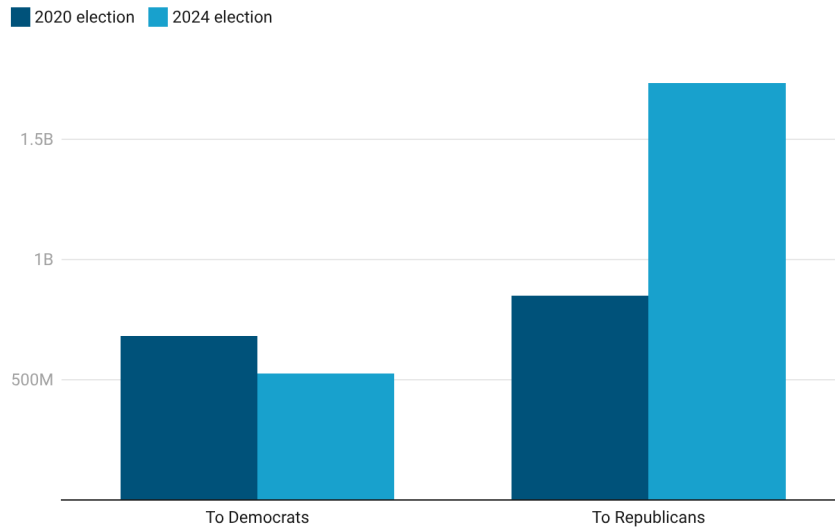
A few weeks ago I wrote about Billionaires Gone Wild, the extraordinary influence acquired by a tiny group of ultra-wealthy men. I shared this chart on campaign contributions, based on estimates from Americans for Tax Fairness:



On Monday the Times published a deeply reported [story](#) about billionaires' influence that, among other things, found that the chart above somewhat *underestimates* their role in campaign finance: According to the Times, they accounted for 19 percent of contributions in 2024, not 16.5 percent.

The Times also pointed out that the big money swung hard right in the 2024 election. The magnitude of the largesse showered on Republicans is clear in OpenSecrets data on the top 100 donors in different cycles:

Contributions by top 100 donors



Source: Open Secrets · Created with Datawrapper

Moreover, the Times presents numbers that are even more extreme than the Open Secrets data:

In past elections, as ultrawealthy donors became more active, both major parties reaped rewards. But there was a stark divergence in 2024, with less money flowing directly to Democrats and a sharp increase in the amount donated to Republicans.

For every dollar donated by billionaires and their immediate families to a candidate or committee associated with Democrats, five dollars went to Re-

publicans.

Much of that was a result of ultrawealthy people in the tech industry, who aligned with Mr. Trump's tax and deregulation policies. More than a dozen billionaires were awarded roles in his administration.

And these explicit money flows don't capture the immense effect of other deployments of billionaires' wealth, notably the subversion of both conventional and social media. Elon Musk purchased Twitter in 2022 and quickly began converting it into the Nazi-friendly cesspool it is today — and no, that's not hyperbole. How much did this contribute to the degradation of public discourse? Paramount, controlled by Larry Ellison and run by his son, has taken over CBS News — which is rapidly going downhill — and is on the verge of taking over CNN too. And Jeff Bezos is gutting The Washington Post, although kudos to the remaining reporters who are still trying to do their jobs.

There is, however, something that is still puzzling me: To a large extent billionaires bought themselves a government friendly to their interests. Trump and company have granted many items on the tech brologarchy wish list, from tax breaks to deregulation to promotion of crypto and unregulated AI. But why the abject incompetence? Couldn't billionaires find political allies who wouldn't plunge the country into a potentially disastrous and historically unpopular war without considering the risks?

I have two tentative answers.

One is that no, competent allies weren't available. Money buys a lot of influence, but to actually take over the U.S. government requires more than money — it requires politicians who are utterly corrupt. In his first administration, Trump learned that hiring people who were even modestly competent eventually presented barriers to his

authoritarian instincts – for example, his former Vice President Mike Pence. Hence Trump learned that in choosing his political hires the more incompetent, the more venal, the more bigoted, and the more cruel, the better.

You might think that presidential pardons for scammers, money launderers and outright crooks are unrelated to the ill-advised war on Iran. But corruption is a key feature of a billionaire-installed regime, and corruption and incompetence go hand in hand.

My second answer is that the vast wealth of tech billionaires has made many of them unconcerned with the little people's lives — and deeply unpatriotic. If Americans are being brutalized and murdered by rogue ICE agents...well, that's not their problem. If the Justice Department and the FBI are totally subverted and operate as Trump's enforcers, they know that vindictive, unlawful tactics will never touch their lives. If Republican budget cuts decimate rural hospitals and deprive hundreds of thousands of health insurance...well, they have their own private doctors and clinics. If Trump starts an ill-conceived war that doubles the price of oil...well, they can certainly afford the higher gasoline bills for their limousines and yachts. And it won't be their kids hunkered down in a bunker in the Middle East.

So if you want to understand how this country has degenerated to such a state, how we can be spending nearly \$2 billion a day attacking Iran without a clear endgame in sight, while children go without healthcare, nursing homes are understaffed because their workers have been deported, home electricity bills skyrocket due to data centers, consider who benefits and who isn't hurt.

This is a billionaire's war, waged at everyone else's expense.



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