

Sent: Tue, 20 May 2014 06:13:22 -0400

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Subject: Vice Presidential News Clips for Tuesday, May 20, 2014

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TO: THE VICE PRESIDENT AND STAFF

DATE: TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2014 -- 6:15 AM EDT

-----TODAY'S EDITION-----

BIDEN IN THE NEWS:

- + Biden Returns To Europe In Wake Of Ukraine Crisis (MCT)
- + Biden's Cyprus Stop Will Honor Slain Ambassador (WT)
- + Biden To Reassure Romania, Cyprus Of U.S. Support In Ukraine Crisis (REU)
- + Biden Heads To Romania, Cyprus With Moscow On His Mind (AFP)
- + Biden Will Raise Campaign Funds At Tom Steyer's Home (USAT)
- + Biden To Attend Fundraiser With Keystone XL Opponent Steyer (REU)
- + Biden To Attend Fundraiser At Tom Steyer's Home (AP)
- + Biden To Headline Fundraiser At Billionaire Climate Activist Tom Steyer's Home (HILL)
- + Tom Steyer To Host Joe Biden For May 28 DNC Fundraiser (POLITICO)
- + Obama's Day: Commanders And Donors (USAT)
- + Iowa Activists Provide Early Perceptions Of A Potential Hillary Clinton Presidential Bid (WP)
- + Joe Biden, The Thinking Woman's Sex Symbol (WP)
- + How Biden Became Diamond Joe Six-Pack (BLV)
- + Biden Sends Corsage To Prom Inviter (USAT)
- + Connecticut Teen Asks Joe Biden To The Prom; VP Sends Her A Corsage (MCT)
- + Joe Biden Got Asked To Prom And Sent A Corsage In His Absence (WP)
- + Biden Can't Go To High School Prom But Sends Corsage With Note (AP)
- + Joe Biden Sends Corsage To Teen Who Asked Him To Prom (WT)
- + Teen Invites Biden To Prom (HILL)
- + Joe Biden Says 'No' To Prom Invite (POLITICO)
- + A Connecticut Teenager Asked Joe Biden To Prom. He Said No. (NATJO)
- + Deeply Confused Teen Asks Joe Biden - 'The Most Delightful Man In America' - To Prom (CALLER)
- + Joe Biden: Prom Date? (CBSNEWS)
- + Joe Biden Gets Invited To Prom By 17-Year-Old Girl (ABCNEWS)
- + Biden Turns Down Prom Invite With A Corsage (MSNBC)
- + If Joe Biden Can't Come To Your Prom, He'll Still Send A Corsage (THEWIRE)
- + Teenage Girl Who Asked VP Joe Biden To Prom Invited To White House (UPI)
- + Joe Biden Turns Down Conn. Prom Invite, Sends Corsage Night Before (BOSDOTCOM)
- + Newington Teen Asks Joe Biden To The Prom; VP Sends Her A Corsage (HARTC)
- + Joe Biden Declines Invite To Prom, But Sends Student Corsage And Note (NYDN)
- + Connecticut Teen Receives Corsage From Biden After Asking Him To Prom « CBS New York (WCBSTV)
- + Girl Asks Biden To Prom, He Sends Corsage (CNN)
- + VP Biden Turns Down CT Prom Invite, But Sends Corsage (WFSBTV)
- + Obama-Biden Photo Caption Winner | The Reliable Source (WP)
- + The Most Memorable Lines From 2014 Commencement Speeches (YAHOO)
- + Del. Court Overturns Conviction And Death Sentence (AP)

NEW YORK TIMES AND WASHINGTON POST OP-EDS:

- + What AT&T's Satellite Deal Might Mean (NYT)
- + Primary Day On The Far Side (NYT)
- + South Korea Searches For Answers (NYT)
- + A Cancer Treatment In Your Medicine Cabinet? (NYT)
- + Hillary's Obstacle Course (NYT)
- + The Big Debate (NYT)
- + China's Pollution Challenge (NYT)
- + Bankrupt Housing Policy (NYT)
- + Myanmar's Buddhist Bigots (NYT)
- + Gettysburg On The Maidan (NYT)
- + D.C. Officials Need A Hand From The Hill On Budget Autonomy (WP)
- + Russia's Interference In Ukraine's National Election Must Carry Consequences (WP)
- + Commencement Protests Make A Mockery Of Academic Freedom (WP)
- + Love And 'The Normal Heart' (WP)
- + Women Falling Off The Glass Cliff: When Leaning In Is Not Enough (WP)
- + Sanctions On Venezuela Would Be Counterproductive (WP)
- + The Bluster Imbalance (WP)
- + Heads Need To Roll At The VA (WP)
- + The Holocaust Is Not A He-Said, She-Said Debate (WP)
- + Indiana's Gov. Pence Taking The Obamacare Money And Running With It (WP)

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL STORIES:

- + GOP Demands Cuts As Del. Tax Estimates Fall (WILNJ)
- + EPA Issues New Rules For Industry Cooling Water (WILNJ)
- + 2 Delaware Animal Shelters Expand (WILNJ)
- + Test-maker CD Diagnostics Settles In In Delaware (WILNJ)
- + Ellendale Leaders Call For Cleaner Water (WILNJ)
- + Specialisterne Links Businesses, Autistic Workers (WILNJ)
- + Wilmington Council, Mayor Reach Budget Deal (WILNJ)

WILMINGTON JOURNAL NEWS EDITORIALS:

- + Did Jeb Magruder Tell All About Watergate Scandal? (WILNJ)
 - + Obamacare Critic Sets Himself For A Fall In Column (WILNJ)
 - + Attorney General Cites True Threat To Civil Rights (WILNJ)
-

BIDEN IN THE NEWS:

BIDEN RETURNS TO EUROPE IN WAKE OF UKRAINE CRISIS (MCT)

By Lesley Clark

McClatchy, May 20, 2014

Vice President Joe Biden leaves tonight for Romania and Cyprus, his latest trip aimed at reassuring European countries rattled by Russian President's Vladimir Putin's incursion into Ukraine.

Biden, who will be accompanied by his wife, Jill, will discuss the international community's response to what the White House says is Russia's "illegal military intervention and destabilizing actions in Ukraine." He'll also talk about deepening economic ties, including through the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and steps to bolster Europe's energy security. The trip comes as Putin has said he'll order troops on the Ukrainian border to return to their bases, but a White House official who briefed reporters on Biden's trip said the U.S. hasn't yet seen any evidence.

In Bucharest, Biden will meet with Romanian President Băsescu and Prime Minister Ponta. He will also deliver remarks to Romanian civil society and youth leaders, and will meet with American and Romanian troops conducting a joint capacity-building exercise.

In Cyprus, Biden will meet with political leaders from the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, civil society representatives, and faith leaders. The White House says he will "emphasize the United States' strong support for a comprehensive settlement to reunify the island as a bizonal, bicomunal federation with political equality."

Biden will be the highest ranking U.S. official to visit Cyprus since then-vice president Lyndon B. Johnson in 1962. While there he will mark the 40th anniversary of the shooting death of Rodger P. Davies, the U.S. ambassador to Cyprus who was killed by sniper fire during a demonstration against American policy by Greek Cypriots at the embassy in Nicosia on Aug. 19, 1974.

Davies' secretary, Antoinette Varnava, was also killed. Davies, a Berkeley, Calif. native, had been appointed ambassador to Cyprus only a month before his death. He had served as the director of the United States Department of State's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, and later the deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs.

Biden has been a "frequent flyer to Europe, as of late, flying across the Atlantic on a monthly basis since February," writes Heather Conley, a senior fellow and director of the Europe Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. She said Biden "has become the 'Reassure-er-in-Chief,' offering words of consolation and American solidarity for increasingly nervous governments in Central and Southern Europe and the Baltics. These countries fully understand the deleterious effects of Russian aggression and European inaction which is why they actively seek American reassurance."

Conley notes that Biden's trip on Cyprus comes amid a "glimmer of hope for fruitful negotiations between the Greek Cypriot community and the Turkish Cypriots who live in the internationally unrecognized North."

"This is what brings an American Vice President to Cyprus after 52 years," she said, "the promise of a diplomatic success-something that has eluded the Obama foreign policy agenda for quite some time."

The Cyprus Mail notes his visit already is drawing mixed responses. And it's not without some controversy at home: the White House last week sought to downplay news that Biden's youngest son, Hunter, has been appointed head of legal affairs for Cyprus-based Burisma Holdings - Ukraine's largest private gas producer.

Though the U.S. has touted the need for Ukraine to boost its energy independence, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said the position was unrelated to any official government stance. "Hunter Biden and other members of the Biden family are obviously private citizens and where they work does not reflect an endorsement by the administration or by the Vice President or President," Carney said.

BIDEN'S CYPRUS STOP WILL HONOR SLAIN AMBASSADOR (WT)

Killing in 1974 has parallels to Benghazi

By Dave Boyer

Washington Times, May 20, 2014

Vice President Joseph R. Biden will travel to a Mediterranean country this week to pay his respects to a U.S. ambassador killed during an attack on the American diplomatic facility.

No, Mr. Biden won't be honoring Ambassador Christopher Stevens, who was killed with three other Americans in Benghazi, Libya, in September 2012. Instead the vice president will attend a brief ceremony to mark the 40th anniversary of the slaying of Ambassador Rodger Davies in Cyprus. Mr. Davies was shot to death at the U.S. Embassy in Nicosia in 1974 by Greek Cypriot gunmen who were protesting Washington's failure to stop Turkish troops from taking control of part of the island. The ambassador was seeking shelter in a hallway when a bullet struck him in the chest. An embassy secretary, Antoinette Varnavas, also was killed.

An aide to Mr. Biden briefing reporters Monday didn't say whether the vice president plans to draw any comparisons with the death of Mr. Stevens, who was killed during a terrorist attack that the administration initially blamed on a protest over an anti-Islamic video. A special House committee has been appointed to investigate the slayings in Libya.

Time magazine said the Cyprus incident was "eerily similar" to the Benghazi attack, with initial media reports claiming that gunmen stormed the embassy in Nicosia under cover of demonstrators screaming "Kissinger! Kissinger!" (Henry Kissinger was U.S. Secretary of State at the time).

But the culprits were brought to justice in the 1974 killings, while no perpetrators have been located in the Benghazi attack. The Cyprus government charged six people. Two men charged with manslaughter received lengthy prison sentences, although the sentences were later reduced and they were freed after 18 months.

The anniversary of the Cyprus attack is actually Aug. 19, but a senior administration official said Mr. Biden will lay a wreath at the embassy on Thursday after meeting with civil and religious leaders on the still-divided island nation in the eastern Mediterranean.

In August, embassy staff in Nicosia will hold another ceremony in which the ambassador's residence will be renamed the Davies House, and a lounge in the embassy will be named after Ms. Varnavas.

Mr. Biden's trip will start on Wednesday with a visit to Romania, where he will meet with the country's leaders to reassure them of the U.S. commitment to protect its NATO allies in light of Russia's "destabilizing" actions in Ukraine, a senior administration official said.

The vice president's wife, Dr. Jill Biden, will accompany him on the trip.

BIDEN TO REASSURE ROMANIA, CYPRUS OF U.S. SUPPORT IN UKRAINE CRISIS (REU)
Reuters, May 20, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

BIDEN HEADS TO ROMANIA, CYPRUS WITH MOSCOW ON HIS MIND (AFP)

By Stephen Collinson

AFP, May 20, 2014

Washington (AFP) - Vice President Joe Biden will underscore a firm US commitment to defend NATO partners and rally support for tougher potential sanctions against Russia on a trip to Romania and Cyprus this week.

Biden will arrive in Bucharest on Tuesday at what one senior official called a "complicated and challenging time in Europe" fostered by Russia's "destabilizing" actions in Ukraine.

Biden's primary mission in Romania is to reassure leaders of the former Warsaw Pact state, and now a member of NATO, that nobody should doubt Washington's commitment to Article Five of the alliance's charter, which states that an attack on one member is an attack on all.

US defense guarantees have taken on heightened importance in eastern Europe following Russia's annexation of Crimea and its massing of troops on Ukraine's borders and what Washington sees as Moscow's support for pro-Kremlin militia groups during unrest in eastern Ukraine.

While in Bucharest, Biden will meet President Traian Basescu and Prime Minister Victor Ponta and deliver a speech to young people on the importance of democracy and the rule of law.

"He will simply underscore that we couldn't ask for better allies," the senior US official said.

Emphasizing the US-Romania security relationship, Biden will meet US and Romanian aircrews taking part in joint maneuvers in an operation known as Carpathian Spring.

The vice president's trip will represent his latest foray into eastern Europe, a region on which he has particularly focused as vice president - an interest that has intensified since the start of the Ukrainian crisis.

In March, Biden visited Lithuania and Poland and traveled to Ukraine the following month.

President Barack Obama will also travel to Poland next month on a visit celebrating the 25th anniversary of the country's post-communist elections, which has taken on extra importance because of the worst East-West showdown since the end of the Cold War, over Ukraine.

The confrontation between Russia and the West will also be a key issue in Cyprus where Biden will arrive on Wednesday.

- Cyprus: exposed to Russian money -

The Cypriot government has warned of the devastating impact that any new sanctions directly targeting the Russian economy could have on its own fortunes, given that its finance industry is a key conduit of Russian investment and savings.

The senior US official noted that Cyprus, as a European Union member, was party to the bloc's decision making and actions in imposing sanctions on Russia over Ukraine.

"We are aware and understanding of the exposure of Cyprus to Russian economic activity and

Russia economy pressure," the official said.

He added, however, that if further sanctions are needed against Russia - Washington has warned that if Moscow disrupts the Ukrainian election this week it could face new measures - a way to do so could be found without victimizing Cyprus.

Biden will meet President Nicos Anastasiades after he arrives on the divided island and efforts are also being made to discuss the quickening peace process with Turkish Cypriot leaders, officials said.

But the senior official insisted that Biden would not try to seek solutions or impose pressure on the two sides.

Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders have vowed to seek an end to the island's four-decade division as soon as possible, and relaunched peace talks on February 11 after a nearly two-year hiatus.

BIDEN WILL RAISE CAMPAIGN FUNDS AT TOM STEYER'S HOME (USAT)

USA Today, May 19, 2014

Vice President Joe Biden will headline a fundraiser for Democrats later this month at the home of liberal billionaire Tom Steyer, who has pledged to make environmental protection and climate change a key issue in November's midterm elections.

Biden will head to San Francisco on May 28, according to a Democratic National Committee official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the event had not been formally announced. The event will benefit the DNC.

Steyer's action is the latest sign that he is reaffirming his ties to the Democratic Party. The retired hedge fund executive recently donated \$5 million to the Senate Majority PAC, a super PAC working to help Democrats retain their majority in the Senate, The New York Times reported over the weekend.

Steyer is a vocal foe of the Keystone XL pipeline, which would carry carbon-heavy oil from the tar sands of Alberta, Canada to Gulf Coast refineries. Earlier this year, Steyer had signaled that he might be willing to target those in his own party who back the pipeline, such as Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu - one of the most vulnerable Democrats up for re-election this fall.

Last month, the administration extended a decision on the controversial project, potentially delaying final action until after the election.

Steyer has pledged to raise \$100 million to influence this year's elections and to elevate climate-change issues.

BIDEN TO ATTEND FUNDRAISER WITH KEYSTONE XL OPPONENT STEYER (REU)

Reuters, May 20, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

BIDEN TO ATTEND FUNDRAISER AT TOM STEYER'S HOME (AP)

Associated Press, May 20, 2014

WASHINGTON - Vice President Joe Biden is planning to headline a fundraiser for Democrats at the home of billionaire Tom Steyer.

That's according to a Democratic official who demanded anonymity because the event hasn't been officially announced.

Biden will travel to San Francisco for the May 28 event benefiting the Democratic National Committee. The committee is working its way out of millions in debt it racked up helping President Barack Obama get re-elected.

Steyer was a major donor to Obama's campaign and has increased his political activity in recent months. He's a prominent environmentalist and opponent of the Keystone XL pipeline.

Steyer hosted another Democratic fundraiser last year that Obama attended. He's vowed to spend \$100 million on the 2014 midterm elections.

Politico first reported the news of the Biden fundraiser.

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BIDEN TO HEADLINE FUNDRAISER AT BILLIONAIRE CLIMATE ACTIVIST TOM STEYER'S HOME (HILL)

By Laura Barron-lopez

The Hill, May 20, 2014

Vice President Biden plans to headline a Democratic fundraiser at climate activist Tom Steyer's home

Two sources close to the event planning, including one DNC official, told The Hill that Steyer would be hosting Biden for a Democratic National Committee fundraiser at his San Francisco home on May 28.

Steyer, a staunch advocate of climate policies and Keystone XL opponent, has raised his political profile in the past year, vowing to funnel a significant amount of money into 2014 races.

Republicans have pitted Steyer as the Democrats' version of the Koch brothers, and have blamed him for Democrats' insistence on what they consider dangerous climate policies.

The billionaire environmentalist has held fundraisers in the last year which both President Obama and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) attended. The latest fundraiser signals Steyer's increasing commitment to the Democratic party.

TOM STEYER TO HOST JOE BIDEN FOR MAY 28 DNC FUNDRAISER (POLITICO)

By Andrew Restuccia

Politico, May 19, 2014

Liberal billionaire Tom Steyer will host Vice President Joe Biden at his San Francisco home May 28 for a Democratic National Committee fundraiser, according to a source familiar with the event's planning.

It's the latest indication that Steyer, a vocal opponent of the proposed Keystone XL oil pipeline and an outspoken advocate for tackling climate change, is building strong ties to Democrats in Washington.

President Barack Obama and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid have both made appearances at Steyer-hosted fundraisers in the past year.

News of the event comes as Steyer, a former hedge fund manager, is laying plans to make climate change a major issue in the midterm elections. Steyer has said his super PAC, NextGen Climate Action, could spend more than \$100 million - half from his personal fortune and half from green-minded donors - this year. NextGen is slated to detail its midterm strategy at a briefing in Washington, D.C., this week, a source familiar with the issue said.

Steyer spent millions last year on the Massachusetts Senate and Virginia governor's races. While the totality of his 2014 plans remains unclear, Steyer has said he hopes to spend money in the Florida governor's race and the Iowa Senate race.

Republicans have criticized Steyer's growing involvement in politics. They've also bashed Reid and other Democrats for attending his fundraisers at the same time that railing against the Koch brothers has become a prominent liberal theme.

A DNC spokesman confirmed the news of the fundraiser.

OBAMA'S DAY: COMMANDERS AND DONORS (USAT)

By David Jackson, Usa Today

USA Today, May 20, 2014

President Obama spends Monday with military commanders and Democratic campaign donors.

Obama and Vice President Biden have lunch with Combatant Commanders, who lead U.S. troops across the globe.

In the evening, Obama headlines a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee fundraiser in suburban Maryland.

IOWA ACTIVISTS PROVIDE EARLY PERCEPTIONS OF A POTENTIAL HILLARY CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL BID (WP)

By Dan Balz And Philip Rucker

Washington Post, May 20, 2014

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa - Eleven Iowa Democratic activists had been talking about the state of the country, the politics of 2016 and a prospective presidential campaign by Hillary Rodham Clinton

one recent night when they were asked two questions.

The first was whom they would invite to a dinner party if they could choose from among four prominent Democrats. Six picked President Obama. Two each named Vice President Biden and former president Bill Clinton. A lone woman said she would invite Hillary Clinton.

Next they were asked whom among that same group they would call first if they faced a family emergency. The response was overwhelming: Seven of the 11 wanted Clinton at their side.

Their answers crystallized nearly two hours of conversation and captured the range of Democratic sentiment about Clinton, whose possible candidacy is eagerly anticipated by people in her party. But a separate conversation with a smaller group of Republican activists highlighted the degree to which she remains a polarizing figure - though they acknowledged that she would be a more formidable candidate than last time.

During her 2008 campaign, no state frustrated Clinton more than Iowa, which launched Obama, then a senator from Illinois, and dealt her a demoralizing third-place finish.

Back then many Iowans thought Clinton and her national campaign team came across as aloof and presumptuous.

"They just left a bad taste in a lot of people's mouth," said Dale Todd, 57, a Democrat and developer of affordable housing. "The BlackBerry was more important than the contact with [people]. We would be sitting right here, and they would be working their BlackBerry, and you just felt like you weren't getting through."

"They were just going through the motions," added Kay Hale, 62, a school-bus driver.

"It was like, 'We're here, and we can't wait until we get out of here,'" Todd said.

Today, Iowa activists see Clinton through a new lens. Democrats, including those who backed Obama in 2008, are offering strong encouragement.

When Clinton ran the first time, Hale worried that she couldn't "bring the country together" and backed then-Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (Conn.). Now she says of Clinton: "I think we're ready for her. . . . I think she's proved herself. She's earned it."

At the same time, these Democratic activists offered warnings, saying that Clinton must run a different kind of campaign and show a warmer side of her personality if she hopes to be successful.

"I think she's going to have trouble with the middle class," said Charles Crawley, 60, a technical writer. "She went to Wellesley College, Yale Law School, and from that point on she's been in the upper class. She may have middle-class parents, but that was a long time ago."

'Time heals lots of wounds'

The observations in this article come from two sessions with Iowa activists. The first included 11 Democrats from Linn County, around Cedar Rapids. The second session was with six mostly establishment Republicans in suburban West Des Moines, part of Dallas County.

Their opinions and observations are their own, and are not meant to be a representation of the broader electorate or a scientific sample. But because these are among the most politically engaged Iowans, their views provide an early look at perceptions of Clinton in a state that brought her disappointment in 2008.

Of the 11 Democrats, two supported her then, while six backed Obama. But ask them today for a brief description of Clinton, and the responses are all positive: "Seasoned." "Capable." "Smart." "Strong." "Competent." "Amazing." "Intelligent." "Experienced." "Decisive." "Tested."

When Clinton ran in 2008, she had two big liabilities in Iowa. One was her 2002 vote authorizing President George W. Bush to go to war in Iraq, a vote she never truly recanted. The vote alienated the state's liberal activists and put her at odds with Obama.

Among the Linn County Democrats, the Iraq issue has faded in importance. "I think some Democrats in Iowa may have put her in the penalty box eight years ago because of Iraq," said Nate Willems, 34, a labor lawyer. "We've moved past that. . . . Time heals lots of wounds."

On policy issues, these Democrats offered little to suggest that they fear that Clinton would be too hawkish for their tastes or that her economic ideas would be too centrist. Many expressed deep concerns about the growing divide between rich and poor in the country but said they believed she would share that concern, even if she did not use the type of fiery rhetoric associated with Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and others.

Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and others.

The other problem was a perception that Clinton and her campaign entourage were aloof, distant and lacking a common touch. "Bad manners," said Libby Slappey, 62, a fundraiser. That still

concerned many of those around the table.

One after another expressed disgruntlement with the way Clinton and her team conducted themselves in 2007 and 2008. "People felt like her campaign thought they had a sense of entitlement because they were the Clintons," said Gretchen Lawyer, 41, a teacher and Obama volunteer.

The consensus among this group was that the Obama campaign outhustled Clinton in Iowa. "She was left in the dust by the organization of the Obama campaign, and I truly believe it emanated from the top," Slappey said. "I truly believe that Barack Obama said to the next level, 'This is how I want my campaign to run,' and that level said it to the next level. And it was a beautiful Amway kind of thing."

Mike Robinson, 51, a registered nurse and former Linn County Democratic chairman, defended Clinton. "I found her to be very genial. I met her on a few different occasions. I was very depressed, disappointed, when she was portrayed otherwise. She's very kind."

'Come here more than once'

These Democrats may eagerly await Clinton's candidacy, but all had advice for her about how to run a different campaign in 2016 than she ran in 2008.

"Come shake our hands," said Kathy Robinson, 51, a property manager who was a Clinton supporter in 2008 when she lived in Illinois. "Talk to us. Ask us our feelings, and ask our opinions. But come here more than once. Don't ignore Iowa."

Lawyer urged Clinton to "get in touch with regular people." She noted that when Obama started out in Iowa, he and Michelle Obama were still paying off their student loans. "How long has it been since she [Clinton] was a normal person outside of public life?" she said, adding: "When was the last time she drove a car? I see that as a liability she needs to think about."

Bret Nilles, 55, the current Linn County Democratic chairman and a finance manager, said Obama's campaign was more open. "Hillary's campaign was more controlled," said Nilles, who backed her that year. "There was a sense that they were going to win it, so all they had to do was make the rounds."

Laura Bell, 54, an accounts manager who supported then-Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich (Ohio) in 2008, said, "I would want to encourage her to remember that there are people in this party [whose] opinions are closer to Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, and do not forget about us."

Todd said that Clinton should "leave the consultants at home." He recalled her first campaign:

"When she would walk in the room and the entourage was larger than the group you're meeting with, that didn't go over well. But the reality is, these are the Clintons, and it's going to be tough to do what we are sort of used to."

Roy Porterfield, 63, an automotive service manager, defended Clinton against the perception that she holds herself above others. "She came from perfectly ordinary beginnings," he said. "She didn't grow up a Bush or a Rockefeller or whatever. I don't think she's lacking a common touch. . . . I see her as a perfectly good, solid, honest, ordinary citizen who just happens to have a brilliant mind and vast, useful political experience."

'There's a trust issue'

The Republicans from Dallas County see Clinton as the inevitable Democratic nominee and as a worthy opponent who has bolstered her résumé since her first campaign for the White House. But when they were asked to offer a word to describe her, their answers reflected a sharply negative view of the former secretary of state, senator and first lady: "Political." "Politician." "Schemer." "Tactical." "Manipulative." Only one offered a positive description: "Strong."

Those in the group questioned Clinton's honesty and said they do not trust her. They also see her as vulnerable on issues including Benghazi and health care, citing her role in shaping her husband's failed effort to reform the health-care system when he was president.

"She's tenacious, but she's manipulative," said Lisa Schneider, 41, who works at the governor's residence in Des Moines as a communications and events coordinator. "I don't think she would do right by the country. She has her own agenda, and she's going to do whatever she wants to get there."

Christina Taylor, 43, a physician, said: "I think there's a trust issue with her. I think it's a truthfulness or candor issue. We all say she's very politically astute, politically savvy, she's tactical. I think people have an undertow of wondering, not only with Benghazi but even in her previous past - everything is to get the win, and so can you trust that she is being honest? I think people will

continually question, 'Is she telling me the truth?' And you won't know."

"I think she would be polarizing, as polarizing as Obama has been," added Charles Schneider, a state senator and Lisa Schneider's husband.

But Taylor acknowledged the potency of a Clinton candidacy. "I think women want a strong woman," she said. "They're willing to be a Hillary supporter because she's the only one they've got to grab onto. Which is kind of sad, but I think that's true."

These Republicans applauded House Republicans for their decision to launch another investigation of what happened in Benghazi, Libya, in September 2012 and said the issue will not recede if Clinton is a candidate.

"She was in charge of the State Department, and I think it's not necessarily politics. I think the American people deserve to know the truth," said Chad Airhart, 37, the Dallas County recorder. Among the Democrats, Clinton engendered respect and admiration, but not the kind of excitement that surrounded Obama in his first campaign. When they were asked to name the most exciting person in their party, the activists mentioned nine people, but no one said Clinton. "I'm borderline enthusiastic already," Porterfield said. "But do I think she's exciting? No, not really."

There was little appetite for a Biden campaign in 2016, though he is well liked in the state. On the question of whether a primary contest would be good for Clinton, there was division.

Todd said he hopes that the Democrats can avoid a serious nomination contest in order to be better prepared for what he said will be "nuclear war" in the general election. "You need a powerhouse like a Clinton to be able to stand up to these forces, the Koch brothers, the way politics has changed from 2008."

But Crawley said that even if Clinton faces no serious competition for the nomination, "she needs to consider herself the underdog. . . . If she comes in prom queen, this is a cakewalk to the presidency, the thing I'm worried about . . . is we've got a candidate over here who's not being tested in some way. I think that can work against her in a general election."

JOE BIDEN, THE THINKING WOMAN'S SEX SYMBOL (WP)

Washington Post, May 19, 2014

Vice President Joe Biden kisses his wife, Jill Biden, after a 2012 debate with vice presidential nominee Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) at Centre College in Danville, Ky. (David Goldman/Associated Press)

During his tenure as vice president, the Onion has had a field day with Joe Biden. The satirical publication's fictionalized version of the second-most powerful man in America is the kind of guy who washes his Trans Am shirtless, gets banned from Dave and Buster's, and flees to Mexico. But at the same time, another pop cultural narrative has emerged more quietly: Joe Biden as smart-girl sex symbol.

On "Parks and Recreation," eager Indiana public servant Leslie Knope (Amy Poehler) has harbored a long-standing crush on the man from Delaware, whom she considers the sexiest man in America. Leslie is so devoted to Biden that she went completely to pieces when she met him during a trip to Washington. "You don't let anything happen to him, do you understand me?" Leslie lectured his Secret Service detail. "He is precious cargo!"

More recently, it turns out that Biden became part of the current fad high school students have for asking famous people to prom on a lark. In most cases, the people doing the asking are young men hoping that gorgeous adult women will help them make a splash. Sometimes, female celebrities actually bow to the opportunity to cement their status as fantasy objects and say yes when the requests are made to them publicly.

Talia Maselli, a Connecticut high school senior, took a different approach. She wrote to Vice President Biden privately, and with no real expectation that anything would come of it, to ask him to be her date. Rather than implying that Biden would look mean or superior if he turned her down, she offered a puckish alternative - asking House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) as a backup.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote, according to the Hartford Courant. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Biden, of course, could not make it. But rather than leaving the letter, which Maselli sent last fall, unanswered, Biden arranged to have a corsage delivered to her and is setting up a visit to Washington for her and her family. The gesture was perfectly appropriate, given Biden's age and

station: He made Maselli feel special and encouraged her interest in politics and public service without making himself the center of attention or taking anything away from other prom attendees. He did the same on "Parks and Recreation" for Leslie, who is rising in the bureaucracy, by telling her how great her work is.

Biden's response is charming, and it explains why a 71-year-old with a somewhat strange job and an intense passion for Amtrak as one of his defining features has become an unlikely sex symbol. What is funny about the Onion's version of Biden is that it is so incongruous and plays to the idea of the vice presidency as a somewhat do-nothing job, where eccentrics can thrive. But when he has control of his own image in both fictional and real scenarios, Biden - without taking himself too seriously - is showing himself to be someone who is interested in women's minds.

There is a lesson here for all of those teenage boys trying to get the Kate Uptons of the world to go to prom with them. Fellows, listen up: You may make your reputation with other boys by convincing an attractive girl (or woman) to grace your arm for an evening. But being the object of kindness and admiration is not actually the same thing as being liked.

By contrast, if you are looking to make a long-term connection, Joe Biden is a pretty good role model for how to find and build a relationship with that special someone. His interest in smart women is not just a put-on. His wife, Jill Biden, did not quit her career when Biden's job took him to One Observatory Circle, choosing instead to keep teaching at a community college and using her platform to advocate for community college students. In both his own life, and in his role as a public figure, Joe Biden sends the message that if you want someone to genuinely like and be interested in you, you have to start by doing the same for her.

HOW BIDEN BECAME DIAMOND JOE SIX-PACK (BLV)

Bloomberg View, May 19, 2014

Josh Marshall at TPM wants to know: Where did the legend of Joe Biden come from? And by that I mean, the current wildly popular Biden alter-ego or maybe the real guy - not sure - the sixty-something, aviator-glass wearing, Camaro-driving bad-ass who has become a staple of DC and political junkie culture over the last half dozen years. There are variants. The Mustang driving geezer stocking up on Schlitz, Viagra, Camels and ammo for a mad weekend.

The first thing I'd say is that this Joe Biden is popular only among Democrats. There is another Joe Biden who is ... well, I'm not sure I understand the conservative vision of the vice president, but I'm sure it involves impressive levels of incompetence and stupidity.

My second thought is that although the immediate source of the Biden image seems to be The Onion, it's obvious that it ultimately derives from the vice presidency itself. All veeps become ridiculous; the only question is how. That applied to poor hapless Dan Quayle, who was a perfectly respectable senator until George H.W. Bush selected him, and it applied to Hubert Humphrey, who was one of the greatest politicians of the 20th century until Lyndon Johnson elevated him, if that's how to describe it. When Bush occupied the post under Ronald Reagan, "Doonesbury" said he had "placed his manhood in a blind trust."

What matters is that once the Onion came up with the image, it seemed to fit really well. I think we can thank Biden for that. But we can also thank Richard Ben Cramer's classic description of the Delaware senator as over-the-top, impulsive, and filled with awesomeness (at least if you're sympathetic) that wasn't quite under control. See Chapter 17, "The Night of the Bronco."

As I've said, all of that makes Biden ideal for the vice-presidency. He comes ready-made for late-night comics, but he also (notwithstanding his conservative avatar) is about as ready for the presidency in an emergency as anyone could be, even though his past presidential campaigns make it clear that no one really wants him in that role. Which is why my advice, mostly tongue-in-cheek, is that whoever the Democrats nominate for president in 2016 should keep him on - and that the Republican nominee should give serious thought to asking him to stick around, too. He really is the Practically Perfect Veep.

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BIDEN SENDS CORSAGE TO PROM INVITER (USAT)

By David Jackson, Usa Today

USA Today, May 20, 2014

A Connecticut high school student didn't get Joe Biden as a prom date, but did receive a note and a vice presidential corsage.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," Biden said in the note to Newington High School student Talia Maselli, reports The Hartford Courant.

"But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine," Biden added. Maselli told the Courant that she sent a prom invitation to the vice president seven months ago for a very simple reason.

"Joe Biden makes me laugh," she said. "He just cracks me up."

In her note, Maselli wrote: "I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it. I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Last week, on the eve of the prom, Maselli received the note and corsage from Biden, who also invited Maselli to the White House.

Reports The Hartford Courant:

"Maselli's first thought was that someone was playing an elaborate practical joke on her. She even called her mother to ask if she was in on it.

"She had no idea what I was talking about," Maselli said.

"Then she called a number for Biden's assistant that was on a separate card. The assistant immediately recognized Maselli's name, and Maselli realized the corsage and the note were real.

"A day later, Maselli and her family were still in shock.

She didn't go to the prom.

"But," she said, "If he had said yes, I would have gone."

CONNECTICUT TEEN ASKS JOE BIDEN TO THE PROM; VP SENDS HER A CORSAGE (MCT)

By Christopher Hoffman

McClatchy, May 20, 2014

NEWINGTON, Conn. - When Talia Maselli envisioned her perfect prom date, one man immediately sprang to mind: Vice President Joe Biden.

"Joe Biden makes me laugh," the Maselli said. "He just cracks me up."

So she mailed Biden a handwritten note last fall asking him to escort her to the Newington High School prom.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in her letter. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

If Biden turned her down, Maselli warned that she might ask Speaker of the House John Boehner, R-Ohio, in his place.

"And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Maselli, who says she's interested in politics, considered the invitation a lark and never expected to hear back. A staff member would glance at the note and toss it, she figured.

At about 10 a.m. Thursday, on the eve of the prom, Maselli got a shock. Her doorbell rang, and a deliveryman handed her a wrist corsage. Inside was a handwritten note from Biden.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the vice president said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Biden goes on to invite Maselli to visit him at the White House.

Maselli's first thought was that someone was playing an elaborate practical joke on her. She even called her mother to ask if she was in on it.

"She had no idea what I was talking about," Maselli said.

Then she called a number for Biden's assistant that was on a separate card. The assistant immediately recognized Maselli's name, and Maselli realized the corsage and the note were real.

A day later, Maselli and her family were still in shock.

"It's just been crazy," she said. "I definitely didn't expect him to answer seven months after the letter."

A spokeswoman at Biden's press office said that the vice president read Maselli's invitation and was touched by it. He personally picked the corsage of white roses, baby's breath and red, white and blue ribbons, she said.

"He wanted her to feel special at her prom, even though he wasn't able to come," she said. Unfortunately, Maselli, now 18, didn't end up going to prom. "But if he had said yes, I would have gone," she said. That's OK with Maselli, who will study theater sets and lighting at Central Connecticut State University starting in the fall. She's more excited about going with her family to the White House and meeting Biden, a visit the vice president's office is arranging for July. "I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli said. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington, D.C." Maselli will hold on to the bracelet and is keeping the corsage in the refrigerator. She is unsure what to do when the flowers wilt, although her grandmother has a suggestion. "She said I should press them in a book," Maselli said.

JOE BIDEN GOT ASKED TO PROM AND SENT A CORSAGE IN HIS ABSENCE (WP) Washington Post, May 19, 2014

A Connecticut teen asked Vice President Biden to her high school prom never expecting to get a response. But the day before prom, a note and corsage showed up on the 17-year-old's doorstep. Talia Maselli, a senior at Newington High School, wrote to the vice president last fall. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America," said Maselli in the note, reports the Hartford Courant. Months later, Biden responded, saying his schedule would prevent him from making it. "I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine," the vice president wrote to Maselli and tweeted earlier today. The teen told Biden in her note that she may have to ask House Speaker John Boehner if her request was turned down.

"And we can't have that now can we," she wrote. The corsage must have smoothed things over because there are no signs that Boehner went instead.

More from the Reliable Source:

Patrick Stewart dines at Oyamel before a stop at the Smithsonian

Will Jill Abramson remove her New York Times tattoo?

This Obama-Biden photo is asking for a caption

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BIDEN CAN'T GO TO HIGH SCHOOL PROM BUT SENDS CORSAGE WITH NOTE (AP) Associated Press, May 20, 2014

HARTFORD, Conn. - What happens when you invite Vice President Joe Biden to your prom? Chances are he won't show. But he doesn't ignore it, either.

Talia Maselli invited Biden to her high school prom in Newington, Conn. She reached out last fall, knowing Biden's dance card likely would fill up.

Biden couldn't make it, but he sent a handwritten card and a corsage - baby's breath, white roses and red, white and blue ribbons. Biden's office says he was touched by the invitation and personally picked out the corsage so Maselli would feel special.

When the vice president's package arrived at the Masellis' home last Thursday, a day before the prom, the family thought it was a prank.

"But then we called the number that came with it, and it was his personal secretary," said Maselli, 18. "I was just shocked."

Maselli said the invitation to Biden began as a joke between her and her friends and she thought it would get lost in all the other mail he gets. She said she always thought the vice president was funny and she didn't invite President Barack Obama because she thought he would be too busy. "You know how people have a celebrity crush?" she said. "Well, I don't, but I thought he would be fun to hang out with."

Maselli said in her letter to Biden in September that she was inviting him so far in advance because she had to beat other teenage girls to the punch. She didn't go to her prom Friday, as planned.

"I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in all of

America - Joe Biden," she wrote. "I fear if you turn me down, I may have to invite Speaker John Boehner, and we can't have that now can we."

Biden said in his reply that he was flattered by the invitation but his schedule wouldn't let him attend. Biden's office is arranging for Maselli to meet him at the White House in July.

Dawn Maselli said her daughter, who plans to study theater at Central Connecticut State University in the fall, has been downplaying getting a response from the vice president, saying it's no big deal. That's not how mom sees it, though.

"It's wild. It's fun," Dawn Maselli said. "I told her to just enjoy it."

Lederman reported from Washington.

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JOE BIDEN SENDS CORSAGE TO TEEN WHO ASKED HIM TO PROM (WT)

By Jessica Chasmar

Washington Times, May 20, 2014

Vice President Joseph R. Biden sent a corsage Thursday to 18-year-old Talia Maselli and invited her to the White House after she asked him to be her prom date, a Connecticut newspaper reported.

"Joe Biden makes me laugh," she told the Hartford Courant. "He just cracks me up."

The teen sent Mr. Biden a handwritten invitation last year asking him to prom.

"I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America," Talia said in her invite.

A delivery man reportedly showed up at her Newington home at about 10 a.m. Thursday - the eve of the prom - and handed her a wrist corsage.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," Mr. Biden said in an accompanying note, the newspaper reported. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Mr. Biden's office said he was touched by the invitation and personally picked out the corsage of baby's breath and white roses so that the teen would feel special for her big night.

The vice president also invited her to visit the White House in July.

"It's just been crazy," she told the Hartford Courant. "I definitely didn't expect him to answer seven months after the letter."

The teen unfortunately never made it to her prom, "but if he had said yes, I would have gone," she told the paper.

TEEN INVITES BIDEN TO PROM (HILL)

By Justin Sink

The Hill, May 20, 2014

Connecticut teenager Talia Maselli said she could only envision going to her high school senior prom "escorted by the most delightful man in America" - Vice President Biden.

So the 17-year-old student mailed the vice president a handwritten note last fall, asking Biden if he might accompany her to the dance.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in the letter, according to a report in the Hartford Courant.

In an appeal to Washington sensibilities, the teenager offered both a carrot and a stick - warning Biden that she would ask Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) if he turned her down.

"And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Biden couldn't make the dance, but the vice president still responded, sending Maselli a corsage and a handwritten note inviting her to the White House.

"He wanted her to feel special at her prom, even though he wasn't able to come," a representative for the vice president told the Courant.

In the note, Biden says he's flattered, but his schedule would not permit him to be in Connecticut.

"But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine," the vice president said.

Maselli and her family are planning to visit the vice president in Washington later this summer.

JOE BIDEN SAYS 'NO' TO PROM INVITE (POLITICO)

By Jonathan Topaz

Politico, May 20, 2014

High school student Talia Maselli's top choice for prom date turned her down. But he invited her to visit him at the White House instead.

Vice President Joe Biden wrote a handwritten note to Maselli to tell the Connecticut high school student he would be unable to accept her request to join her at prom, according a story from the Hartford Courant published Monday, but the vice president included a corsage and an invitation to meet him at the White House.

Maselli wrote the vice president's office last fall asking Biden to her prom, but said she never expected any kind of response.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in the letter. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

She warned that if he turned her down, she might have to invite a second choice - Republican House Speaker John Boehner.

Last Thursday, the night before her prom, Maselli received a handwritten note from the vice president. The letter included a red, white and blue corsage that his office said he picked out personally.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," Biden wrote. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Maselli, who said that receiving the letter was "crazy," didn't end up going to prom. But she certainly doesn't intend on missing out on her trip to meet the vice president, which will likely be scheduled for July.

"I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli said. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington D.C."

A CONNECTICUT TEENAGER ASKED JOE BIDEN TO PROM. HE SAID NO. (NATJO)

National Journal, May 20, 2014

High school kids have a tendency to ask famous people to their prom. Their dream dates are usually actors, singers, or supermodels. But for one Connecticut teenager, it was the vice president of the United States.

Last fall, Talia Maselli, a student at Newington High School, mailed Joe Biden a handwritten note asking him to be her prom date, the Hartford Courant reports.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

She also warned the vice president that if he turned her down, she would ask Speaker John Boehner to be her date instead. "And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Maselli, now 18, did not hear back from the White House until last week, when a delivery man showed up at her home in Connecticut with a wrist corsage and a note from Biden.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the vice president wrote. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine." He also invited her and her family to visit the White House.

A Biden spokeswoman told the Courant that the vice president was touched by Maselli's invitation, and personally picked out the corsage of white roses, baby's breath and red, white, and blue ribbons.

Maselli didn't attend her prom, but she and her family took up Biden's invitation and are heading to Washington in July. "I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli said. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington, D.C."

DEEPLY CONFUSED TEEN ASKS JOE BIDEN - 'THE MOST DELIGHTFUL MAN IN AMERICA' - TO PROM (CALLER)

By Brendan Bordelon

Daily Caller, May 20, 2014

Connecticut teenager Talia Maselli dodged a bullet last week, after Joe Biden regretfully informed her that he would not be able to attend the high school prom she asked the vice president to seven months ago.

The clearly mixed-up Newington high schooler sent Biden an invitation to her prom last fall. "I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," she wrote, according to newspaper The Hartford Courant. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America." "Joe Biden makes me laugh," she explained. "He just cracks me up."

She also warned that should he refuse, she would ask Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner as a back-up date. "And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Maselli wrote the letter back in October and never expected to receive a reply. So she was shocked (and a little skeptical) when she opened a handwritten letter containing a red, white and blue corsage last Thursday.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," Biden wrote. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine." The vice president went on to invite the girl to visit the White House this summer.

Maselli - clearly too cool to tolerate "a high school dance" - didn't make it to her prom last Friday. But she's keeping the corsage fresh in her refrigerator and is gleefully awaiting her July visit with Uncle Joe.

"I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli said. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington D.C."

Follow Brendan on Twitter

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JOE BIDEN: PROM DATE? (CBSNEWS)

CBS News, May 20, 2014

Connecticut teen Talia Maselli really wanted Joe Biden to be her prom date, so she sent a handwritten note to the vice president seven months ago, certain there would be plenty of demands on his time.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote, according to the Hartford Courant. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America." Maselli, who attends Newington High School, also warned Biden that if he wasn't available, she might ask House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, instead. "We can't have that now can we," she wrote.

She did not immediately hear back from Biden's office, but received a delivery the day before the prom with a corsage and a note written by the vice president himself.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," he wrote, according to the Courant. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

A spokeswoman for Biden's press office confirmed to the Courant that the vice president read the invitation and picked out the corsage - of white roses, baby's breath, and red, white and blue ribbons - himself.

The kicker? Maselli didn't even end up going to the prom. But she said that if Biden had been able to attend, she would have. She plans to save the corsage.

She is looking forward to paying him a visit this summer in the White House, per Biden's invitation in the note.

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JOE BIDEN GETS INVITED TO PROM BY 17-YEAR-OLD GIRL (ABCNEWS)

ABC News, May 20, 2014

Ask a teenage girl who her dream date to prom would be, and you would expect to get an answer such as Justin Bieber or Harry Styles. But for one Connecticut teen, that dream date was 71-year-

old Joe Biden.

At the age of 17, Talia Maselli of Newington, Conn., invited the vice president to attend her high school prom, calling him "the most delightful man in America," The Courant reported today.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in her letter to the the vice president.

Biden turned down the invitation, but he did have a surprise for her, according to an account in The Courant:

At about 10 a.m. Thursday, on the eve of the prom, Maselli got a shock. Her doorbell rang, and a deliveryman handed her a wrist corsage. Inside was a handwritten note from Biden.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the vice president said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Maselli, now 18, ended up not attending her prom. SHOWS: Good Morning America

BIDEN TURNS DOWN PROM INVITE WITH A CORSAGE (MSNBC)

MSNBC, May 20, 2014

Months ahead of her high school prom, one Connecticut teen knew exactly who would be her dream date: Vice President Joe Biden.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Talia Maselli wrote in a letter to the veep. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

She warned that if the vice president didn't accept her invitation, she'd be forced to ask out House Speaker John Boehner instead, The Hartford Courant reported.

"And we can't have that now can we," she teased in the letter.

But instead of her date showing up at her front door, Maselli received a delivery of a corsage of roses and a note handwritten by the vice president himself.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," Biden said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

As it turns out, Maselli, now 18, did not attend her prom. But had 71-year-old Biden agreed to escort her, she said she would have gone.

IF JOE BIDEN CAN'T COME TO YOUR PROM, HE'LL STILL SEND A CORSAGE (THEWIRE)

The Wire, May 20, 2014

Vice President Joe Biden leaves a trail of heartbreak wherever he goes. But he always sends flowers. And so it went for young Talia Maselli of Newington, Conn., who wrote a letter last fall to invite the 2016 not-so-hopeful to the prom.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in her letter. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

First of all, say whaaaaaat? As an added safeguard, perhaps a page right out of our promposal handbook, Maselli threatened to bring House Speaker John Boehner if the Veep declined.

Would Joe break her heart? Unfortunately, yes.

Would he at least try to salvage of the pieces? A million times yes. On the Thursday morning before prom, Maselli received a little package of Joe-mentum, which included a note and a red, white, and blue corsage. Hartford Courant

The note read:

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening. But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

There's a lot to unpack here. The severity of Biden's tone. Also, the mention of how much Biden enjoyed his prom. Moreover, she wasn't joking around about not being able to tolerate prom without Biden. In the end, Maselli ultimately decided *not* to go to prom.

Maselli's apparently not the only girl dreaming of Biden-laden prom.

TEENAGE GIRL WHO ASKED VP JOE BIDEN TO PROM INVITED TO WHITE HOUSE (UPI)

UPI, May 20, 2014

WASHINGTON, May 19 (UPI) --WASHINGTON, May 19 (UPI) --A teenage girl in Connecticut who sent a letter to Vice President Joe Biden asking him to her senior prom is going to the White House to meet her political crush in person.

17-year-old Talia Maselli was not planning to attend her senior prom, but last fall sent a letter to the Vice President's office saying she would if the popular politico would be her date.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Months later, she was shocked to receive a handwritten note and corsage from Vice President Biden.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," Biden's note read. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Biden went on to invite Maselli to the White House, a trip that will probably occur July.

"I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli told the Hartford Courant. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington D.C."

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JOE BIDEN TURNS DOWN CONN. PROM INVITE, SENDS CORSAGE NIGHT BEFORE (BOSDOTCOM)

Boston.com, May 19, 2014

If nothing else, Vice President Joe Biden is a charming man with a handsome set of teeth. There's no doubt he is the type of person who can let loose and have a good time, no matter the setting. That's what one Newington, Connecticut girl seemed to be thinking when she invited the Vice President to her high school prom.

The Wire reported that Talia Maselli was so eager to bring Mr. Biden that she asked him last fall. But even with more than half a year's notice, Biden is a busy man who cannot make promises when it comes to proms. His dance card fills up quickly, so to speak.

So when prom season rolled around, and all the other high schoolers were asking annoying celebrities to come to their dance, Maselli was not so lucky. She received a rejection letter in the mail. But it's not all gloom and doom for the 17-year-old. Biden's letter was touching and considerate, and it came with a corsage for her to wear to the prom.

Sadly, the special night was not to be without Joe. The Wire report said Maselli was working with a "Biden or Bust" platform and decided not to attend the dance without the Veep. You can reach me at douglas.saffir@globe.com. Follow me @dougassafir

NEWINGTON TEEN ASKS JOE BIDEN TO THE PROM; VP SENDS HER A CORSAGE (HARTC)

Hartford (CT) Courant, May 16, 2014

NEWINGTON - When Talia Maselli envisioned her perfect prom date, one man immediately sprang to mind: Vice President Joe Biden.

"Joe Biden makes me laugh," Maselli said. "He just cracks me up."

So she mailed Biden a handwritten note last fall asking him to escort her to the Newington High School prom.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in her letter. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

If Biden turned her down, Maselli warned that she might ask Speaker of the House John Boehner in his place.

"And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Maselli, who says she's interested in politics, considered the invitation a lark and never expected to hear back. A staff member would glance at the note and toss it, she figured.

At about 10 a.m. Thursday, on the eve of the prom, Maselli got a shock. Her doorbell rang, and a deliveryman handed her a wrist corsage. Inside was a handwritten note from Biden.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the vice president said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Biden goes on to invite Maselli to visit him at the White House.

Maselli's first thought was that someone was playing an elaborate practical joke on her. She even called her mother to ask if she was in on it.

"She had no idea what I was talking about," Maselli said.

Then she called a number for Biden's assistant that was on a separate card. The assistant immediately recognized Maselli's name, and Maselli realized the corsage and the note were real.

A day later, Maselli and her family were still in shock.

"It's just been crazy," she said. "I definitely didn't expect him to answer seven months after the letter."

A spokeswoman at Biden's press office said Friday that the vice president read Maselli's invitation and was touched by it. He personally picked the corsage of white roses, baby's breath and red, white and blue ribbons, she said.

"He wanted her to feel special at her prom, even though he wasn't able to come," she said.

Unfortunately, Maselli, now 18, didn't end up going to prom.

"But if he had said yes, I would have gone," she said.

That's OK with Maselli, who will study theater sets and lighting at Central Connecticut State University starting in the fall. She's more excited about going with her family to the White House and meeting Biden, a visit the vice president's office is arranging for July.

"I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli said. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington D.C."

Maselli will hold on to the bracelet and is keeping the corsage in the refrigerator. She is unsure what to do when the flowers wilt, although her grandmother has a suggestion.

"She said I should press them in a book," Maselli said.

JOE BIDEN DECLINES INVITE TO PROM, BUT SENDS STUDENT CORSAGE AND NOTE (NYDN)

New York Daily News, May 20, 2014

The captain of the football team has nothing on the Vice President of the United States.

An eager Connecticut teen asked Joe Biden to her Senior Prom, but when the Vice President was unable to attend, he sent the politics-minded student a beautiful corsage in his stead.

Talia Maselli, a senior at Newington High School, in central Connecticut, mailed Biden a handwritten note last fall asking him to escort her to her prom.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote, according to the Hartford Courant. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America." She says she never expected a response.

But last Thursday, the night before the dance, she received a surprising delivery - a beautiful hand corsage and a handwritten note from Biden himself.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," he wrote. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Biden also invited Maselli and her family for a trip to the White House.

A Biden spokesman told the Courant that he was so touched by the letter that he not only personally responded to it but hand-picked the corsage - of white roses, baby's breath and red, white and blue ribbons - himself.

The entire incident floored Maselli.

"It's just been crazy," she said. "I definitely didn't expect him to answer seven months after the letter."

Unfortunately, Maselli, who will attend Central Connecticut State University in the fall, only had eyes for Biden and didn't end up going to her prom.

"If he had said yes, I would have gone," she said.

CONNECTICUT TEEN RECEIVES CORSAGE FROM BIDEN AFTER ASKING HIM TO PROM « CBS NEW YORK (WCBSTV)

WCBS-TV New York, May 19, 2014

NEWINGTON, Conn. (CBSNewYork) - A Newington, Conn., teen received flowers from Vice President Joe Biden last week, after she invited him to her high school prom.

Talia Maselli, 18, wrote to Biden and invited her to prom seven months ago, CBS Connecticut reported.

Quoted by the Hartford Courant, Maselli wrote in part: "I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Maselli wrote that if Biden turned her down, she might have to ask U.S. House Speaker John Boehner instead, "and we can't have that now, can we," the Courant reported.

This past Thursday, on the eve of the prom at Newington High School prom, Maselli received a red, white, and blue corsage with a handwritten letter from the vice president, CBS Connecticut reported.

Biden said his schedule would not permit him to be in Connecticut for the prom and he could not attend, but that he hoped she had a great time, the newspaper reported. He also invited her to visit the White House.

Newington said while other girls her age have celebrity crushes, she prefers politics - and chose Biden because he "cracks her up," CBS Connecticut reported.

She plans to take him up on the offer and visit the White House this summer. You May Also Be Interested In These Stories

GIRL ASKS BIDEN TO PROM, HE SENDS CORSAGE (CNN)

By Ashley Killough

CNN, May 20, 2014

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I am sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, & I had to beat them to it. I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be accompanied by the most delightful man in all of America-Joe Biden," she wrote.

In the letter, Maselli said she'd ask House Speaker John Boehner if Biden turned her down. "And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Maselli assumed her letter would get brushed aside by an aide. But much to her surprise, she received a delivery last Thursday, the day before prom. The florist said it was from the Secret Service.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the vice president said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

At first, Maselli told CNN, she thought it was a prank from her mom. After realizing it wasn't a prank, her mom called the number on the card accompanying the corsage. Expecting the florist, Maselli said her mom was connected to a secretary in the vice president's office.

Maselli said she was "shocked" not only that Biden responded but that he invited her to the White House.

Maselli, however, didn't end up going to prom.

"I'd rather go to the White House anyway!" she said.

And what will she do with the flowers?

Right now, the red, white and blue corsage is in the refrigerator. There are three bracelets attached to the flowers, which Maselli said she'll definitely be holding onto.

CNN's Dana Davidsen contributed to this report.

VP BIDEN TURNS DOWN CT PROM INVITE, BUT SENDS CORSAGE (WFSBTV)

WFSB-TV New Haven (CT), May 20, 2014

NEWINGTON, CT (WFSB) -

Vice President Joe Biden has been asked to do many things in his career, including run for office, fundraise and even fill in for the president at meetings. But Talia Maselli, 17, of Newington, CT, had a different request for him this week.

Maselli said she didn't have a date for the Newington High School prom and thought maybe the Vice President of the United States might be available.

"Most girls invite their celebrity crushes and stuff and I don't have a celebrity crush," Maselli said.

"But Joe Biden cracks me up so I thought he'd be a good person to ask."

She crafted an official invitation.

"Dear Mr. Vice President, man of many chuckles, I'd like to formally invite you to my senior prom,"

Maselli said.

She even joked that if the VP rejected her request, "I have to invite (House) Speaker John Boehner and we can't have that now can we?"

Last September, she mailed the letter and waited.

"When I sent it, I thought there's no way it's going to get through to him," Maselli said. "No one is going to show this to him."

It turns out that Biden did get the letter. Eight months later, he ordered a special surprise from Kim's Flower Shop in Wethersfield for the occasion.

Kim Notaro, who is the owner of Kim's Flower Shop said he ordered "white roses and a red, white and blue ribbon."

Biden tweeted "I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine," and also included a handwritten note with the corsage.

"Dear Talia. Thank you for your lovely invitation to be your escort for your prom. I'm flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the letter read.

But Biden had a request of his own.

"I would now like for you to be my guest to the West Wing as soon as you are available, if you're willing," Maselli said.

It didn't take her long to say yes to the man of many chuckles.

Talia said she plans to visit the West Wing in July, Right before she starts as a technical theatre major at Central Connecticut State University.

Sadly, Talia said she opted to skip the prom.

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OBAMA-BIDEN PHOTO CAPTION WINNER | THE RELIABLE SOURCE (WP)

Washington Post, May 19, 2014

President Obama and Vice President Biden meet with local workers at the Dupont Circle location of Shake Shack in Washington, D.C. (Alex Wong/ European Pressphoto Agency)

We asked our Source readers (Sourcers?) to come up with a caption for this photo of Obama and Biden lunching at Shake Shack in Dupont Circle on Friday. After much deliberation over some really clever responses, we have a winner:

Chris Hannas @cjhannas

@jmckellogg @reliablesource "Oh I double-dip chips left and right at the White House. YOLO! Isn't that what the kids say, Mr. President?"

Thanks to all who kept us entertained with your captions.

THE MOST MEMORABLE LINES FROM 2014 COMMENCEMENT SPEECHES (YAHOO)

By Dylan Stableford

Yahoo!, May 20, 2014

Secretary of State John Kerry returned to his alma mater of Yale University on Sunday to take a swipe at disgraced Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling.

"You are graduating today as the most diverse class in Yale's long history," Kerry said. "Or, as it's called in the NBA, Donald Sterling's worst nightmare." According to the Associated Press, the comment drew laughs from the crowd, which included graduates from 61 countries.

Kerry's zinger was one many memorable moments from the 2014 crop of commencement speeches.

At Howard University earlier this month, music mogul Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs quoted the late rapper Biggie Smalls in his speech to graduates.

"It was all a dream," Combs said in his speech on May 10. "I used to read Word Up magazine."

Combs, who left Howard before earning his bachelor's degree, recalled his time at the historically black college.

"My mind was blown when I saw so many beautiful shades of brown," Combs said. "I never heard so many accents, never seen so many beautiful women - and we all know Howard has the most beautiful, intelligent women in the world."

On Friday, first lady Michelle Obama gave an impassioned speech on diversity to high school graduates in Topeka, Kansas, where the landmark Brown v. Board of Education case started.

"You all are the living, breathing legacy of this case," Obama said. "Many districts in this country

have pulled back on efforts to integrate their schools. Many communities have become less diverse."

Obama also delivered the commencement address to graduates of Dillard University in New Orleans.

"No dream is too big, no vision is too bold," she said on May 10. "As long as we stay hungry for education and let that hunger be our North Star, there is nothing, graduates, nothing, that we cannot achieve."

At the University of Massachusetts Lowell on Sunday, Bill Nye had a similar message for graduates: "Change the world."

"I'm not kidding. Change the world in new, exciting and big ways," Nye, better known as "The Science Guy," said. "Keep reaching. Keep seeking. Keep using your abilities to bring out the best in those around you, and let them bring out the best in you."

Nye also railed against climate-change deniers. "Conspiracy theories are for lazy people," he said. "People that don't want to get down to the business at hand. ... Instead of just doing less, we have to find ways of doing more with less. That's the key to the future." Also, he added, "if you smell fresh paint, don't walk under the ladder."

Attorney General Eric Holder also brought up the Sterling scandal in a speech to graduates at Morgan State University in Baltimore on Saturday, saying "subtle racism" still exists in the United States.

"Over the last few weeks and months, we've seen occasional, jarring reminders of the discrimination and the isolated, repugnant, racist views," Holder said. "These outbursts of bigotry, while deplorable, are not the true markers of the struggle that still must be waged. ... The greatest threats do not announce themselves in screaming headlines. They are more subtle. They cut deeper."

On May 3, Vice President Joe Biden delivered the commencement speech at Miami Dade College in Florida, the nation's largest community college.

"My name is Joe Biden, I am Jill Biden's husband," Biden joked. "On every community college campus, that's how I'm known." (In her own commencement speech at Villanova, Jill Biden told the graduating class, "Show your heart to the world.")

The vice president then urged Congress to act on immigration reform. "It's time to get done what an overwhelming number of Americans want to do," Biden said. "Act now and take these people out of the shadows."

Jill Abramson, who was fired as executive editor of the New York Times last week, honored her commitment to speak at Wake Forest's graduation on Monday.

"What's next for me? I don't know," Abramson said. "So I'm in the same boat as many of you!" Puff Daddy was among several unconventional choices for commencement speakers.

On May 10, Tiger Woods's ex-wife, Elin Nordegren, received a roar of applause from Rollins College graduates when she mentioned her divorce.

"When I entered my student adviser's office in the fall of 2005, I was 25 years old. I had just recently moved to America. I was married without children," Nordegren said, according to ABC News. "Today, nine years later, I'm a proud American, and I have two beautiful children - but I'm no longer married."

"It was right after I had taken Communication and the Media" class, she said, "I was unexpectedly thrust into the media limelight. And I probably should have taken more notes in that class."

At the University of Colorado Boulder, the May 9 commencement speech was delivered by Eric Stough, animation director for Comedy Central's "South Park" and a CU grad.

"Good morning, class of 2014," Stough, better known as the voice of several characters on the show, said. "As Mr. Hankey, the Christmas poo, would say, 'Howdy ho!'"

Stough, the voice of "Butters," also had a serious message for graduates about to enter the real world: "We need you. Your diploma is an inanimate object, so be the animator, and bring it to life."

DEL. COURT OVERTURNS CONVICTION AND DEATH SENTENCE (AP)

By Randall Chase

Associated Press, May 20, 2014

DOVER, Del. (AP) - The state Supreme Court on Monday overturned the conviction and death sentence of a man who has spent more than two decades on Delaware's death row.

The justices ruled unanimously that Jermaine Wright, 41, is entitled to a new trial because prosecutors repeatedly withheld potentially exculpatory evidence in his 1992 murder trial. Wright was convicted of killing Phillip Seifert, 65, a clerk at a liquor store and bar outside Wilmington.

Monday's ruling came after the Supreme Court last year reversed a lower court ruling overturning Wright's conviction and death sentence. Wright's attorneys then raised issues they said were not settled when the Supreme Court reinstated Wright's conviction and death sentence.

Before his conviction was thrown out in 2012, Wright had spent more time on death row than any other Delaware inmate currently facing execution.

"Wright is not entitled to a perfect trial, but he is entitled to a fair one where material exculpatory and impeachment evidence is disclosed and not suppressed," Justice Henry duPont Ridgely wrote in Monday's ruling.

Herb Mondros, an attorney for Wright, said he was gratified by the ruling but that it would be "unconscionable" for prosecutors to retry the case.

"It's time for this to end," Mondros said. "I think they should drop the prosecution."

Joe Rogalsky, a spokesman for Attorney General Beau Biden, said prosecutors respect the court's ruling.

"We will in short order assess the feasibility of retrying a case that's 20 years old," Rogalsky said.

In overturning Wright's conviction and death sentence in 2012, Superior Court Judge John Parkins Jr. noted that Wright was under the influence of heroin and not properly advised of his rights during a lengthy police interrogation that resulted in a confession. Parkins also said Wright's trial attorneys were never given potentially exculpatory information suggesting that Seifert may have been killed by two men who tried to rob another liquor store earlier that night.

The Supreme Court overturned Parkins, saying arguments about the confession were procedurally barred, and that evidence about the earlier robbery attempt would not have led to a different result. Defense attorneys subsequently argued that prosecutors failed to disclose that Gerald Samuels, a jailhouse informant who testified against Wright, had obtained a plea deal for testifying against a co-defendant in an earlier drug case, and that Samuels expected similar leniency for testifying against Wright.

Wright's attorneys also argued that prosecutors failed to divulge information about another witness, who they argued had committed the liquor store killing with a cousin. Wright's attorneys said prosecutors knew but failed to divulge that Kevin Jamison, who had been called as a witness by defense attorneys, committed perjury in testifying against Wright.

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NEW YORK TIMES AND WASHINGTON POST OP-EDS:

WHAT AT&T'S SATELLITE DEAL MIGHT MEAN (NYT)

By The Editorial Board

New York Times, May 20, 2014

In the telecommunications industry, the big only seem to get bigger. Three months after the nation's top two cable companies, Comcast and Time Warner Cable, announced they were merging, the nation's largest telephone company, AT&T, said on Sunday it would buy the biggest satellite-TV business, DirecTV, for \$48.5 billion.

Megamergers always raise lots of questions. And that's particularly true of the telecommunications industry with its high barriers to entry and limited competition. AT&T says that its purchase of DirecTV will be good for consumers, and it is promising several goodies like a pledge to bring high-speed Internet service to rural America to get regulators to look favorably upon the deal. But the company has not yet made a convincing case. As with the Comcast-Time Warner Cable deal, regulators should carefully analyze this acquisition for its impact on the market for paid TV service. AT&T executives say that their acquisition is not driven by Comcast's purchase of Time Warner Cable, but that's hard to believe. AT&T is no longer just a phone company. It has long been in the wireless business, and, in recent years, it has established a big presence in the TV business, which it hopes to expand substantially with this purchase. Buying DirecTV with its more than 20

million American subscribers (it has 18 million customers in Latin America, too), would give AT&T the national reach in paid television that it needs to compete with a bulked-up Comcast for subscribers and for the opportunity to buy the rights to TV shows, sports and movies.

AT&T wants to sell to its customers multiple services like wireless, broadband and satellite TV, which it already does in parts of the country where it has a wired network, but not where it has no such network. DirecTV has the advantage of reaching all parts of the country; it has deals with other telecom companies to provide high-speed Internet and telephone service to its customers. Companies now feel that they have to offer combination packages because customers are less likely to switch providers if they have signed up for several services.

The biggest potential losers of this deal are consumers in 22 states, including California, Texas and Illinois, where AT&T already provides its own TV service through its U-Verse network. A merger with DirecTV would be bad for these customers because it would reduce choices in markets where AT&T currently competes with cable companies as well as the two national satellite-TV firms, DirecTV and Dish Network. At the end of March, AT&T had 5.7 million TV subscribers; by comparison, Comcast had 22.6 million video customers and Verizon had 5.3 million TV customers. (AT&T is in the process of selling its wireline network in Connecticut to Frontier Communications.)

Elsewhere in the country, where AT&T does not have customers, its acquisition of DirecTV might allow it to compete more aggressively with Comcast and other cable companies. But given the rich price AT&T is paying to get into the satellite business, there might be limits to how much money the company is willing to spend on discounts to get customers to switch to DirecTV.

AT&T has said it is willing to commit to offering satellite-TV plans, which are not bundled with its other services, at prices that are the same for all customers regardless of where they live for at least three years. That is nice, but it is a limited and temporary promise. And so is the company's pledge that it will not block or interfere with the delivery of Internet content on its network for three years. The Federal Communications Commission had issued such Internet rules in 2010, but a federal court struck them down in January.

This much is clear about AT&T's move to buy DirecTV, along with the Comcast-Time Warner Cable deal: These mergers will encourage other telecom companies like Dish Network, Verizon, Charter, Sprint and T-Mobile to contemplate deals of their own. Officials at the F.C.C. and the Justice Department, who have to review mergers for antitrust concerns, need to make sure consumers are not left worse off by these deals.

PRIMARY DAY ON THE FAR SIDE (NYT)

By The Editorial Board

New York Times, May 20, 2014

Wearing a black leather vest that barely covered the cigar tucked into his pocket, a man named Harley Brown was allowed to join the debate among candidates for governor of Idaho last week, holding forth on discrimination against bikers and the presidential seal tattooed on his shoulder after God told him he would one day occupy the White House. Another candidate, Walt Bayes, railed against "a bunch of eastern idiots" pushing the country toward Sodom and Gomorrah. If you thought that this was nothing but a stunt designed by Gov. Butch Otter to distract attention from his real opponent, you'd be right. But you'd also be missing the larger point: Republican primaries around the country have largely degenerated into self-parodies. They may lack the flowing beards of Mr. Brown and Mr. Bayes, but many of the other candidates in the party's primaries - a large number of which will take place on Tuesday - are running on ideas only slightly less extreme.

One of the candidates with a serious shot at making the primary runoff in the House race for Georgia's 10th district is Jody Hice, a pastor and talk-show host who says homosexuals have the right to be married, just not to each other. (In 2010, he ran billboards linking President Obama with the hammer and sickle.) Another is Mike Collins, a trucking executive who demonstrated the perils of the Affordable Care Act by running a video that showed him riding between two trucks, stuntman style.

The congressman that both are hoping to replace is Paul Broun, a Tea Party adherent who is running for the nomination for an open Georgia Senate seat against six others in a field that has moved ludicrously far to the right. Mr. Broun, best known for calling evolution "lies straight from the pit of hell," gave up his House seat to run, as did Phil Gingrey, who thinks there's some truth to the

idea that after a "legitimate rape," women's bodies can shut down conception.

A leading candidate in the race, Karen Handel, formerly secretary of state of Georgia, used to work for the Susan G. Komen breast cancer group and led the fight to stop paying Planned Parenthood for mammograms because it performs abortions. She wants to repeal the constitutional amendment allowing an income tax. David Perdue, a businessman considered the front-runner in the race, committed a Republican heresy last week by saying the government may need more revenue to reach a balance. To quell the immediate furor, he quickly made it clear he would never consider any tax increases.

In Kentucky's Senate primary, the Tea Party candidate, Matt Bevin, has accused the Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell - one of two men most responsible for immobilizing Congress and preventing the passage of job-creating legislation - of being insufficiently conservative. In Pennsylvania, Travis Schooley, a conservative challenger to Representative Bill Shuster, pounced on the Republican incumbent for voting to continue the food-stamp program. "If we had jobs and work ethic and didn't have these programs lying in wait," Mr. Schooley said at a recent debate, "safety nets, charities and faith-based organizations would be doing these things."

The list goes on and on. No Republican has a shot in this year's party primaries without paying homage to extremist ideas. Whether the Tea Party is still a political force is a moot point; the radicalism of 2010 and 2012 is very much alive in 2014.

SOUTH KOREA SEARCHES FOR ANSWERS (NYT)

New York Times, May 20, 2014

The April 16 ferry disaster in South Korea that left 304 people dead or missing did more than cause immediate outrage. It also forced ordinary Koreans to examine themselves and their country, and what they saw was a society and a national government that were not nearly as well put together as they and the rest of the world had believed.

Now President Park Geun-hye has declared war against the country's entrenched culture of collusive ties between businesses and government regulators, which has encouraged acceptance of poor safety standards throughout the society. She promised to break those collusive links by revising laws to tighten the screening of officials looking for private-sector jobs after retirement, and she vowed to disband the Coast Guard, which she said failed to do enough to save the passengers, most of them high school students.

Other recent accidents have added to the national soul-searching. On May 2, for instance, a signal failure caused a subway train to run into the back of another train stopped at a station in Seoul, injuring nearly 200 people. South Koreans have begun to see such incidents not as isolated accidents but as consequences of a broken regulatory system. More broadly, there is a mounting sense that these accidents represent, in some way, the dark side of South Korea's success as a global economic power - that in its rush for wealth the country has not only neglected safety but also turned a blind eye to other ills. During the past two decades, as the country joined the ranks of developed countries, its suicide rate more than tripled. Nearly half of its citizens over age 65 live below the poverty line.

"The sinking of the Sewol will stay as a hard-to-erase scar in our history," President Park said. "If we cannot reform ourselves in a situation like this, we will become a nation that will never be able to achieve reform." The ferry disaster was a terrible thing. But there will be some consolation if it yields, from the top of the government on down, an examination of the society's shortcomings.

A CANCER TREATMENT IN YOUR MEDICINE CABINET? (NYT)

By Michelle Holmes And Wendy Chen

New York Times, May 20, 2014

WE believe that it might be possible to treat breast cancer - the leading cause of female cancer death - with a drug that can already be found in nearly every medicine cabinet in the world:

Aspirin.

In 2010, we published an observational study in The Journal of Clinical Oncology showing that women with breast cancer who took aspirin at least once a week for various reasons were 50 percent less likely to die of breast cancer. In 2012, British researchers, by combining results from clinical trials that looked at using aspirin to prevent heart disease, found that aspirin was also associated with a significantly lower risk of breast cancer death.

And yet, until now, there have been no randomized trials (the gold standard of research) of aspirin use among women with breast cancer.

It's not hard to see why: Clinical trials are typically conducted on drugs developed by labs seeking huge profits. No one stands to make money off aspirin, which has been a generic drug since the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, and which costs less than \$6 for a year's supply.

Thankfully, the first randomized clinical trial is now going on in Britain, made possible by funding from a nonprofit group, Cancer Research UK. But the British study is looking at four cancers, and won't be done until 2025. If we in the United States had funding to do a similar trial, we could combine our data and get answers much faster. If the United States is to maintain its role as the global leader in biomedical research, it must fund its own trial of aspirin in breast cancer.

Aspirin was originally derived from willow bark, which has been used as a painkiller since the time of Hippocrates. We don't know exactly why it appears to work in fighting cancer. Aspirin reduces inflammation, and that may play a role in inhibiting the growth of tumors - perhaps by slowing the development of new blood vessels that nourish them, or by fighting old cells that keep growing when they should be dying off. It may also inhibit estrogen production, and we know that estrogen fuels the growth of most (but not all) breast cancers.

If we could prove that aspirin was an effective treatment in a clinical trial, it would have major implications, especially for low-income patients. Modern hormonal treatments, used after surgery to try to prevent cancer from recurring, last a standard five years and can cost between \$1,200 and \$2,300 a year. But not everyone who needs them is actually taking them. Higher co-pays reduce the number of women who fill their prescriptions, according to a 2011 study.

And that is just in the United States. Africa, Asia and Central and South America already account for more than 60 percent of the world's cancer cases and about 70 percent of cancer deaths, according to the World Health Organization. The majority of the impact of the disease will be felt in those areas in the coming decades. Aspirin's minimal cost would make it available in every country on earth, and for millions of women it could mean the difference between some treatment and none.

It may also offer an alternative treatment to women who cannot tolerate widely used cancer drugs because of debilitating side effects. For example, Columbia University researchers found that half of breast cancer patients taking hormonal treatments (specifically, tamoxifen and aromatase inhibitors) were unable to take the drugs for the recommended five years. A survey by the advocacy group Breast Cancer Action found that the predominant reason was joint pain. The most serious possible side effects of taking aspirin are gastrointestinal bleeding and stroke, but they are rare.

If aspirin truly works, we estimate that we could save 10,000 lives per year in the United States, and 75,000 in the developing world.

It won't take much to find out. A randomized study of approximately 3,000 women with Stage 2 and 3 breast cancer, lasting five years, would cost around \$10 million. (We wouldn't study women with Stage 1 disease because they have such a high survival rate already, nor women with Stage 4 cancer, because there is not enough evidence that aspirin would help when the disease has advanced that far.)

Although \$10 million is a relatively small amount for a large pharmaceutical company, it is too big for most federal grant mechanisms and nonprofit foundations. Our repeated attempts since 2010 to seek funding through federal grant mechanisms have been rejected.

Yet even as government funding for research is slashed, the government is still willing to test new cancer drugs pushed by pharmaceutical companies, despite very high failure rates for those drugs. Federal grant review panels have no direct financial interest in the studies they approve for funding, but inevitably they are seduced by the more novel treatments - the scientific equivalent of the latest smartphone. And generic drugs, particularly ones as old and familiar as aspirin, just aren't sexy.

There's a saying attributed to Hippocrates that extreme remedies are appropriate for extreme diseases. But in the case of breast cancer, the most simple of drugs may be the next great weapon.

Michelle Holmes and Wendy Chen are physicians and faculty members at Harvard Medical School.

HILLARY'S OBSTACLE COURSE (NYT)

By Frank Bruni

New York Times, May 20, 2014

Reince Priebus made a joke on Sunday.

I don't know that he meant to - comedy isn't his forte - but the only way to hear one of his comments on "Meet the Press" was as a put-on. He said that Hillary Clinton wouldn't run for the presidency if "she has another month like she just had," with questions about Monica, about Benghazi, about Boko Haram, about her brain.

I almost fell down. For one thing, she's had countless months like that. For another, they're the only kind on the horizon: Hillary as the fodder for the morning talk shows (on Sunday's panels, she came up 98 times, according to a Washington Post tally) and Hillary as a piñata for late-night comedians; strenuously marketed Hillary scandals with a modicum of merit and strenuously marketed Hillary scandals with none.

If Republicans believed in global warming, they'd surely divine her hand in it. Speaking of body parts, I suspect we'll move from Hillary's brain to her heart, probably her liver, possibly her pancreas and maybe even her pinkie toe. What Hillary goes through in the public arena isn't an examination. It's a vivisection.

That she endures it is admirable. That she's so willing to is scary. With all politicians, you worry about the intensity of the hunger that enables them to suffer the snows of Iowa and the slings and arrows of outrageous pundits. With Hillary and Bill, you worry that it's rapaciousness beyond bounds.

You also grow weary. The Clintons are exhausting. And that's just one of many drawbacks worth discussing as Hillary plays Hamlet, mulling what to do.

She's without doubt the contender to bet on. But she's a contender with baggage and obstacles that get woefully short shrift in all the nonstop chatter about her inevitability.

For starters, Americans have been in a pessimistic mood for an unusually sustained period, their faith in the political system at rock bottom. How does someone who's been front and center in that system for more than two decades - who's a symbol of intense partisan warfare - become the voice of change? There's no "Don't Stop (Thinking About Tomorrow)" for Hillary. Tomorrow was yesterday.

Remarks she made in Washington on Friday illustrated that point. At a conference titled "Big Ideas for a New America," she mused about what "the 1990s taught us," looking into the future by traveling into the past, which isn't the terrain on which presidential elections are typically won.

Bill traveled there just two and a half weeks earlier, in a speech of his own at Georgetown University. "Speech" is too paltry a word; this was one of those ego extravaganzas, like his aria at the Democratic National Convention, that went on and on and reaffirmed his talent for making everything, including the current income-inequality debate, about him. In this case he was singing the praises of his own presidency's economic record.

He was also serving notice that despite his screw-ups during Hillary's 2008 campaign, it may be impossible to muzzle him in 2016. Just last week, on yet another stage, he again joined the fray, proclaiming Hillary blameless for Benghazi and vouching that her concussion was merely that. There's a thin line between chivalry and butting in. Can he stay on the right side of it? If not, he could hurt her candidacy, overshadowing her and undercutting her feminist story line.

She has additional challenges. If Obama's approval rating doesn't rise, his would-be successors will be best served by breaking with him. For Hillary that's hard. Given her history on health insurance, she can't run against the Affordable Care Act. Given her role in his administration, she can't run against his foreign policy.

How does she simultaneously defend and defy him? It's a balancing act that Al Gore never perfected in regard to her husband.

The last month has indeed been instructive, demonstrating how practiced Republicans are at attacking her - and how exuberant they are about it. I think they want her to run. She's the devil they know. She's the dragon worth slaying.

She's considered inevitable in part because she's political royalty, awash in money and celebrity endorsements, but is royalty what an economically frustrated, embittered electorate wants? With fame of her duration and magnitude, how does she find a common touch?

And how does she show us anything that she hasn't shown us before, introducing or even

reintroducing herself?

Maybe any sense of staleness will be expunged by the prospect of a first female president, but she lacks an opportunity that many successful presidential candidates enjoyed: that period of the rollout when a more detailed biography emerges, a personality is defined and voters get a chance to swoon.

We can't fall in love that way with Hillary, not at this point. We're too far past the roses and Champagne.

THE BIG DEBATE (NYT)

By David Brooks

New York Times, May 20, 2014

It's now clear that the end of the Soviet Union heralded an era of democratic complacency. Without a rival system to test them, democratic governments have decayed across the globe. In the U.S., Washington is polarized, stagnant and dysfunctional; a pathetic 26 percent of Americans trust their government to do the right thing. In Europe, elected officials have grown remote from voters, responding poorly to the euro crisis and contributing to massive unemployment.

According to measures by Freedom House, freedom has been in retreat around the world for the past eight years. New democracies like South Africa are decaying; the number of nations that the Bertelsmann Foundation now classifies as "defective democracies" (rigged elections and so on) has risen to 52. As John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge write in their book, "The Fourth Revolution," "so far, the 21st century has been a rotten one for the Western model."

The events of the past several years have exposed democracy's structural flaws. Democracies tend to have a tough time with long-range planning. Voters tend to want more government services than they are willing to pay for. The system of checks and balances can slide into paralysis, as more interest groups acquire veto power over legislation.

Across the Western world, people are disgusted with their governments. There is a widening gap between the pace of social and economic change, and the pace of government change. In Britain, for example, productivity in the private service sector increased by 14 percent between 1999 and 2013, while productivity in the government sector fell by 1 percent between 1999 and 2010.

These trends have sparked a sprawling debate in the small policy journals: Is democracy in long-run decline?

A new charismatic rival is gaining strength: the Guardian State. In their book, Micklethwait and Wooldridge do an outstanding job of describing Asia's modernizing autocracies. In some ways, these governments look more progressive than the Western model; in some ways, more conservative.

In places like Singapore and China, the best students are ruthlessly culled for government service. The technocratic elites play a bigger role in designing economic life. The safety net is smaller and less forgiving. In Singapore, 90 percent of what you get out of the key pension is what you put in. Work is rewarded. People are expected to look after their own.

These Guardian States have some disadvantages compared with Western democracies. They are more corrupt. Because the systems are top-down, local government tends to be worse. But they have advantages. They are better at long-range thinking and can move fast because they limit democratic feedback and don't face NIMBY-style impediments.

Most important, they are more innovative than Western democracies right now. If you wanted to find a model for your national schools, would you go to South Korea or America? If you wanted a model for your pension system, would you go to Singapore or the U.S.? "These are not hard questions to answer," Micklethwait and Wooldridge write, "and they do not reflect well on the West."

So how should Western democracies respond to this competition? What's needed is not so much a vision of the proper role for the state as a strategy to make democracy dynamic again.

The answer is to use Lee Kuan Yew means to achieve Jeffersonian ends - to become less democratic at the national level in order to become more democratic at the local level. At the national level, American politics has become neurotically democratic. Politicians are campaigning all the time and can scarcely think beyond the news cycle. Legislators are terrified of offending this or that industry lobby, activist group or donor faction. Unrepresentative groups have disproportionate power in primary elections.

The quickest way around all this is to use elite Simpson-Bowles-type commissions to push populist reforms.

The process of change would be unapologetically elitist. Gather small groups of the great and the good together to hammer out bipartisan reforms - on immigration, entitlement reform, a social mobility agenda, etc. - and then rally establishment opinion to browbeat the plans through. But the substance would be anything but elitist. Democracy's great advantage over autocratic states is that information and change flow more freely from the bottom up. Those with local knowledge have more responsibility.

If the Guardian State's big advantage is speed at the top, democracy's is speed at the bottom. So, obviously, the elite commissions should push proposals that magnify that advantage: which push control over poverty programs to local charities; which push educational diversity through charter schools; which introduce more market mechanisms into public provision of, say, health care, to spread power to consumers.

Democracy is always messy, but, historically, it's thrived because it has been more flexible than its rivals. In 1787, democracy's champions innovated faster. Is that still true?

CHINA'S POLLUTION CHALLENGE (NYT)

By Benjamin Van Rooij And Alex Wang

New York Times, May 20, 2014

China's national legislature has adopted sweeping changes to the country's Environmental Protection Law, revisions that have been hailed as major steps toward saving China's environment from rampant degradation.

The authorities will now have stronger enforcement powers, including the right to detain persistent violators for up to 15 days and to fine polluters more heavily than before. Some legally registered civil-society organizations will now be able to initiate public-interest litigation as well.

The law, approved late last month, solidifies the use of environmental targets to assess bureaucrats, who for too long have been measured primarily on economic performance. It also increases transparency by requiring major violators to disclose pollution data and local governments to release information on environmental quality and enforcement.

These changes offer hope to the hundreds of millions of people exposed to the extraordinary risks of China's severe air, water and soil pollution. We believe the new Environmental Protection Law is a signal from the government that it is taking the issue seriously. Moreover, it is a victory for the countless people in China who have worked for years for environmental change. Even a decade ago, most of the amendments to the law would have been unthinkable.

And yet the new law alone may end up doing little to end the impunity that polluters regularly enjoy. Only deep and fundamental changes in the organization of the party-state can bring down the extreme levels of pollution in China.

Environmental law enforcement has failed across the country largely because the regulatory agencies face conflicts of interest that limit their ability to do their jobs. Local governments provide most of the budgets for local environmental bureaus, but also maintain strong economic and political ties to the companies that pollute. Moreover, a significant part of local environmental regulatory budgets comes from pollution-discharge fees. Because these fees are based on the amount of pollution, this leads to the perverse result that reduced pollution can mean the loss of crucial environmental enforcement funds.

If systemic problems like these are not resolved, it is unlikely that the environmental authorities will avail themselves of the stronger enforcement powers granted to them by the new law. The introduction of more stringent environmental targets for local leaders is a step in the right direction, but it does not fully resolve the core conflict between environmental regulation and polluting industries.

These problems are well known in China, as are potential solutions, such as a recentralization of enforcement authority away from local governments, further decoupling of relations between the state and the companies it controls, and full payment of the regulatory budget out of sources unrelated to pollution enforcement. Such reforms go far beyond the reach of mere environmental law, however, and will require a basic rethinking of central-local relations and the operations of state capitalism.

Experience in both developed and emerging economies shows that citizens and civic

organizations are necessary to oversee polluting companies as well as regulators. In this vein, China's new law promotes "societal supervision" of polluters and regulators through greater transparency, public participation and the right to sue polluters.

The nation's leaders nevertheless remain fearful of citizen unrest breaking out over pollution violations, and preventing social unrest remains the top priority. The government continues to restrict citizens from exercising their legal rights to help control pollution. Other laws limit the registration of civic organizations, making it nearly impossible for national or regional environmental organizations to develop.

At present, petitioners and advocates for the environment run the risk of harassment and arrest. Courts often refuse to even accept difficult or sensitive cases. The Supreme People's Court has adopted rules for breaking up class-action lawsuits and relegating individual suits to co-opted lower-level courts. Citizens are therefore often unable to use the law against polluters, especially ones with strong ties to the government. As a result, citizen supervision has been blunted and pollution only grows. The new law may empower citizens, but it still fails to correct systemic barriers that restrict citizen action in practice.

China's half-hearted effort at legal reform is a major risk for the party-state. It raises public expectations for a better environment, but fails to lay sufficient groundwork for improvements in environmental performance. The resulting growth in under-regulated pollution will lead to more public grievances. While many citizens may not be willing to risk aggressive action, an increasing number will conclude that only disruptive activism can force the government's hand. Ever-increasing environmental protests throughout the nation have already highlighted the costs of this approach to the party-state.

In the end, protecting China's beleaguered environment will require the government to reach beyond its comfort zone and confront the limits of its economic and political model. It will require the courage of the central leadership to face down vested interests in the state and industry that oppose the creation of impartial administrative and judicial institutions to regulate pollution. It will also require the good sense to allow society the genuine freedom to act as environmental watchdog without fear of repercussion.

These suggestions would touch the heart of the current power structure - but so does the country's immense environmental crisis. China's new leadership has shown the courage to confront corruption at the highest levels of power. Surely, it can now demonstrate the same commitment toward saving the nation's environment.

Benjamin van Rooij is a professor of U.S.-China business and law at the University of California's Irvine School of Law, and the author of "Regulating Land and Pollution in China." Alex Wang is an assistant professor at the U.C.L.A. School of Law and the former director of the China Environmental Law & Governance Project at the Natural Resources Defense Council in Beijing.

BANKRUPT HOUSING POLICY (NYT)

By Joe Nocera

New York Times, May 20, 2014

The publication of Timothy Geithner's memoir, "Stress Test," has caused all the old arguments that were fought during the financial crisis to come rushing to the surface again.

Did the government make a mistake in allowing Lehman Brothers to file for bankruptcy? Was it right to bail out the too-big-to-fail banks despite all the harm they had done to the economy? As Sheila Bair, the former chairwoman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, put it in her review of "Stress Test": "Tim's book has reinvigorated a much-needed debate about whether our financial system should be based on a paradigm of bailouts or on one of accountability."

And one other thing: It has re-raised the question of why the government wasn't willing to do more for struggling homeowners, who bore the burden of the Great Recession. In his book, Geithner, the former Treasury secretary, devotes a handful of pages to the Obama administration's mortgage relief efforts, though the writing comes across as halfhearted, not unlike Geithner's efforts while he was running the Treasury Department.

But, in the course of perusing another new book about the financial crisis, "Other People's Houses," by Jennifer Taub, an associate professor at Vermont Law School, I was reminded of an effort that took place in the spring of 2009 that could have made an enormous difference to homeowners, one that would have required no taxpayer money and might well have become law

with a little energetic lobbying from the likes of, well, Tim Geithner. That was an attempt, led by Dick Durbin, the Illinois senator, to change the bankruptcy code so that homeowners who were underwater could modify their mortgages during the bankruptcy process. The moment has been largely forgotten; Taub has done us a favor by putting it back on the table.

As she notes, thanks to a 1993 Supreme Court decision, homeowners saddled with mortgage debt on their primary residences have not been able to take refuge in the bankruptcy courts. The unanimous ruling by the court found that when Congress rewrote the bankruptcy code in 1978, it specifically gave "favorable treatment" to mortgage lenders "to encourage the flow of capital into the home-lending market," as Justice John Paul Stevens wrote in a concurring opinion. Durbin was trying to get rid of that favorable treatment.

Why? Because, as Bair told me in an email, "It would have been a powerful bargaining chip for borrowers." Without the ability to file for bankruptcy, underwater homeowners unable to pay their mortgages were helpless to prevent foreclosures. With it, however, servicers and banks were far more likely to negotiate the debt load. And if they weren't, a bankruptcy judge would rule on the appropriate debt to be repaid. For all the talk about the need for principal reduction, this change would have been the easiest way to get it.

Indeed, although the financial services industry had pushed hard for their bankruptcy carve-out, they would have been helped, too. Knowing that a borrower can avail himself of bankruptcy court would undoubtedly have a sobering effect on lenders, making them more cautious about underwriting standards.

As the financial crisis heated up during his first presidential run, then-candidate Obama said that he favored changing the bankruptcy laws "to make it easier for families to stay in their homes." But he became convinced that the Democrats should not push for it as part of the controversial bailout legislation, so he backed off, promising to push it once he was in the White House.

Once he was president, however, Obama was rarely heard from on the subject. In late April 2009, with a bankruptcy bill having already passed the House, Durbin offered his amendment on the Senate side. The financial services industry pulled out all the stops, arguing that a right of bankruptcy for a homeowner would increase the cost of home loans, undermine the sanctity of contracts and promote (of course!) moral hazard.

Adam J. Levitin, a professor at Georgetown Law School, believes that nothing untoward would have happened if Durbin's amendment had passed. He and another researcher looked at interest rate and loan size data from 1978 to 1993 when some jurisdictions did allow homeowner bankruptcies. "The effect on interest rates was small," he told me. "The sky didn't fall."

He added, "This should have been a no-brainer."

As it turns out, there is one other person who was opposed to the bankruptcy option. That was Tim Geithner. He writes in his book that he didn't think it was "a particularly wise or effective strategy." Although Geithner says the votes weren't there for Durbin's amendment, it did get 45 votes. How many more might it have gotten if the Treasury Department and the White House had come out strongly in support?

Which leads to one other unanswered question about the financial crisis. Why is it that the fear of moral hazard only applies to homeowners, and not to the banks?

MYANMAR'S BUDDHIST BIGOTS (NYT)

By Kenan Malik

New York Times, May 20, 2014

LONDON - There is perhaps no religion that Western liberals find more appealing than Buddhism. Politicians fawn over the Dalai Lama, celebrities seek out Buddhist meditation, and scientists and philosophers insist that Buddhism has much to teach us about human nature and psychology. Even some of the so-called New Atheists have fallen for Buddhism's allure. For most of its Western sympathizers, Buddhism is a deeply humanist outlook, less a religion than a philosophy, a way of life to create peace and harmony.

The Rohingya people of Myanmar take a very different view of Buddhism. The Rohingya are Muslims who live mostly in Rakhine, in western Myanmar, bordering Bangladesh. Early Muslim settlements there date from the seventh century. Today, in a nation that is 90 percent Buddhist, there are some eight million Muslims, of whom about one in six is Rohingya.

For the Myanmar government, however, the Rohingya simply do not exist. The government is

conducting a national census; 135 ethnic categories are listed on the form. One ethnicity is conspicuously absent: the Rohingya, who the government insists must define themselves as "Bengalis" (that is, as foreigners). "If we ask a family about their ethnicity and they say Rohingya, we will not accept it," a presidential spokesman, Ye Htut, said recently.

The problems faced by the Rohingya are far graver than a refusal by the state to acknowledge their identity. Their very existence is under threat.

Since 2012, there has been a vicious series of pogroms against the Rohingya. Villages, schools and mosques have been attacked and burned by Buddhist mobs, often aided by security forces. Hundreds of Rohingya have been killed, and as many as 140,000 people - more than one in 10 of the Rohingya population- have been made homeless. A report last September from the independent Sentinel Project for Genocide Prevention suggested that "recent violence has moved beyond mere pogroms" and toward "the ethnic cleansing of entire regions."

The anti-Muslim campaign has been led by Buddhist monks, who say their actions are in keeping with the demands of their faith. The principal anti-Rohingya organization, the 969 movement, takes its name from the nine attributes of Buddha, the six qualities of his teachings and the nine attributes of the monks. Its leader, a monk named Wirathu, has reportedly called himself the "Burmese Bin Laden." Muslims, he told an interviewer, "breed quickly and they are very violent." Because "the Burmese people and the Buddhists are devoured every day," he argued, "the national religion needs to be protected."

The extremist monk has proposed a "national race protection law" under which a non-Buddhist man wishing to marry a Buddhist woman would have to convert to Buddhism and obtain permission from the state. The proposal has won support from Myanmar's president, Thein Sein, and may become law by the end of June.

How do we reconcile the perception of Buddhism as a philosophy of peace with this ugly reality of Buddhist-led pogroms in Myanmar?

Few would suggest that there is anything inherent in Buddhism that has led to the persecution. Instead, most would recognize that the anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar has its roots in the nation's political struggles.

The military junta that came to power in 1962 has frequently sought to build popular support by fomenting hatred against minority groups. It has stripped the Rohingya people of citizenship, and placed restrictions on their travel, education and land ownership. It has even imposed a "two-child policy" on Rohingya families, to limit their population.

Paradoxically, the recent successes of Myanmar's democracy movement have only worsened the problems of the Rohingya. In an effort to bolster its position, the government has sharpened its rhetoric of hate, while opponents of the regime have refused to support the Rohingya for fear of alienating the Buddhist majority.

The leader of the democracy movement, the Nobel Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has been shamefully silent, willing only to condemn violence in general. Members of her National League for Democracy are openly involved in extremist anti-Rohingya organizations. It is not that tenets of the Buddhist faith are responsible for the pogroms, but that those bent on confrontation have donned the garb of religion as a way of gaining a constituency and justifying their actions. What is true of Myanmar applies to many other conflicts involving religious groups - from Pakistan to Nigeria, from Indonesia to the Central African Republic. The spawning of such violence has led many to see religion itself, and Islam in particular, as the root of conflict.

Religion does, of course, play a role in these confrontations, but it would be wrong to see them as purely religious. When groups vying for political power exploit religion, its role is often to establish the chauvinist identities by which other groups are demonized and the actions of one's own are justified.

The anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar may make us doubt our preconceptions about Buddhism. It should certainly make us question the stance of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, generally seen in the West as a fearless warrior for liberty.

While many Western observers acknowledge the political roots of Myanmar's sectarian violence, it is notable that few are willing to be as nuanced about other conflicts involving Islam. Perhaps the plight of the Rohingya will prompt us also to think again about global confrontations where religion plays a role, and will push us to adopt a less black-and-white view.

Kenan Malik is a writer, lecturer and broadcaster, and the author of "From Fatwa to Jihad: The

Rushdie Affair and Its Aftermath."

GETTYSBURG ON THE MAIDAN (NYT)

By Roger Cohen

New York Times, May 20, 2014

KIEV, Ukraine - Ukrainians are reluctant to dismantle the symbols of their revolution on streets that have become the hallowed ground of democracy and a nation-constituting struggle. On Independence Square, known as the Maidan, and in the surrounding area, makeshift barricades of tires and timber, impromptu shrines to the more than 100 dead, and Ukrainian flags flanked by that of the European Union constitute a stage set of defiance against Russian aggression.

This unusual urban landscape, at once stirring and vulnerable, surrounds the office of Arseniy P. Yatsenyuk, the acting prime minister and a man now forged, like many young Ukrainians, in the bloodshed of defiance.

"Putin is caught in the cell of his own propaganda," Yatsenyuk said of the Russian president. "We can offer him an off-ramp. It is called 'Get out of Crimea.' I spoke to his envoy and I told him that even the Roman emperors disappeared, and one day we will have Crimea back."

His words may appear quixotic, given Russian might and Ukrainian weakness, but Yatsenyuk's determination reflects a clear choice that has emerged from the success of the Maidan uprising and the ousting of the former president and corrupt Putin toady, Viktor F. Yanukovych: in favor of European pluralism and against a Eurasian imperium.

Ukraine is today the pivot of a struggle between individual freedom and imprisoning empire. There is no halfway house in this confrontation and no escaping the imperative of moral clarity in picking sides. Vladimir V. Putin's unleashed nationalism and Crimean land grab represent a return to Europe's darkest days. Americans and Europeans need to stand together to resist this threat.

"I don't know what's in Putin's head or what his final destination is," Yatsenyuk said. "Luhansk? Lviv? Lisbon? Ask our Polish friends. They are afraid of Russian troops. A permanent member of the United Nations Security Council has decided to grab the land of an independent country."

The prime minister was speaking to a small group of American, Canadian and European visitors, including the Polish author and former dissident, Adam Michnik; the former French foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner; the literary editor of The New Republic, Leon Wieseltier; and the Yale historian, Timothy Snyder.

Snyder has recently written in The New Republic: "We easily forget how fascism works: as a bright and shining alternative to the mundane duties of everyday life, as a celebration of the obviously and totally irrational against good sense and experience."

The fact that Putin has chosen the label "fascists" for the likes of Yatsenyuk in Kiev (even as the Kremlin maintains excellent relations with extreme-right parties in Western Europe) only underscores the Orwellian mind games of his resurgent nationalism. It is typical of fascism to twist history into a narrative of national humiliation justifying the apotheosis of an avenging leader bent on righting these supposed wrongs - be they in the Sudetenland or Ukraine.

During an hourlong conversation, Yatsenyuk said Russia would do its best to "disrupt and undermine" Ukraine's May 25 election, suggesting there were now up to 20,000 armed people in the eastern part of the country orchestrated by several hundred well-trained Russian agents.

Nevertheless, he said, a credible election across most of Ukrainian territory is possible. "We need a legitimate president," he said.

He rejected the federalization of Ukraine - "Buy every governor; that is the Russian planning behind so-called federalization" - but spoke strongly in favor of the devolution of power and the rights of Russian speakers. "My wife speaks Russian and she does not need any protection from President Putin," he declared.

Putin must recognize that Ukraine is a "European state" that will go ahead with its contested association agreement with the European Union and recognize the results of the election, Yatsenyuk said. He said Ukraine is ready to pay its debts to Gazprom, the Russian energy company, on condition that Russia adopts "a market-based not a politically-based approach" - cutting off trade when it suits Putin to punish Kiev.

Asked about American policy toward Ukraine, the prime minister sighed deeply. He said he recognizes that every nation has its limits and constraints. But he continued: "The United States is the leader of the free world. You have to lead. If someone crosses a red line, he is to be

prosecuted for this in all ways." As for American military support, he said, "I never ask in case I don't get it," adding that he would of course be "happy to have Patriot missiles on Ukrainian soil." There is no question that Putin has exploited a perception of American weakness that began in Syria with President Obama's retreat there from his "red line" against the use of chemical weapons - a retreat that at once underwrote President Bashar al-Assad, strengthened Putin and undermined American credibility. Ukrainians have now died fighting for American and European values of liberty and pluralism. After its Gettysburg on the Maidan, a free and independent Ukraine is a critical U.S. interest and test.

D.C. OFFICIALS NEED A HAND FROM THE HILL ON BUDGET AUTONOMY (WP)

By Editorial Board

Washington Post, May 20, 2014

THE D.C. Council will appeal Monday's decision by a federal judge invalidating the District's budget autonomy law. We hope the appeals court finds the council more persuasive than did U.S. District Judge Emmet G. Sullivan. If not, Congress should finally take it upon itself to bestow upon the District a right enjoyed by every other local jurisdiction in the country.

Judge Sullivan struck down the city's efforts, through a ballot referendum voters approved last year, to gain more spending freedom. The argument that voters could amend the city's charter to provide for local control over local spending "simply cannot withstand judicial scrutiny," the judge wrote.

In affirming that only Congress could make this change, Judge Sullivan sided with Mayor Vincent C. Gray (D) and Chief Financial Officer Jeffrey S. Dewitt against the council. But neither side in this lawsuit disagreed on the justice of budget autonomy - only on the means of attaining it. Even the judge seemed to go out of his way to stress the "extraordinarily powerful" policy arguments in support of budget autonomy.

No doubt there are complex legal issues - including statutory interpretations not addressed in Judge Sullivan's 47-page opinion - that are worthy of further review by an appeals panel. Most intriguing is the argument by council attorneys that Congress spelled out areas it wanted exempted from local charter amendment, and it did not include local budget issues.

Nonetheless, the city shouldn't place all its hopes for winning budget autonomy with the courts. The referendum was always seen as part of a "two-track approach." Judge Sullivan's decision - eloquently making the case for budget autonomy and making clear there is no question of Congress's power to grant it - should prod the city's political leaders to redouble their efforts on Capitol Hill. This isn't about federal funds: The District is asking only for the right to spend money that the District raises from local taxpayers.

RUSSIA'S INTERFERENCE IN UKRAINE'S NATIONAL ELECTION MUST CARRY CONSEQUENCES (WP)

Washington Post, May 20, 2014

THE ENCOURAGING news from Ukraine is that a crucial presidential election planned for Sunday is likely to go forward in much of the country, and to be free and fair. "The legal framework, administrative capacity and political will in place suggest that a democratic process will be feasible in the vast majority of polling places," said a report Monday by the National Democratic Institute, which has deployed an observer team. "Candidates have been able to campaign with minimal interference, the media [are] pluralistic and there have been few formal complaints about election law violations or pressure on voters."

At the same time, it is already clear that in two eastern provinces, where 14 percent of the electorate lives, balloting will be next to impossible, thanks to forcible disruption by Russian-backed militants. The United States and its European allies have said they will impose additional sanctions on Russia if it disrupts the election or fails "to use its influence to prevent those efforts," as White House spokesman Jay Carney put it last week. Six days before the election, that failure is blatantly evident.

"There is intimidation," a senior U.N. official told the Reuters news agency in describing the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Ivan Simonovic, the assistant U.N. secretary general for human rights, said that a number of presidents and vice presidents of local elections commissions had been abducted or otherwise mistreated. Reuters reported that the last election commission

attempting to operate in the city of Donetsk shut down Monday, leaving no voting operation in an urban area of 1 million people. Concluded the interior minister of Ukraine's interim government: "It will be impossible to hold normal elections over the huge territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions."

Russian President Vladimir Putin seems to think that he can avoid responsibility for the disruption with rhetoric that suggests the opposite of Moscow's actual behavior. For the third time, Mr. Putin announced Monday that the 40,000 Russian troops deployed on Ukraine's border were withdrawing; for the third time, NATO's secretary general and the White House said they had detected no such movement.

The empty announcements may at least mean that Mr. Putin has set aside the option of an overt military invasion of eastern Ukraine for the time being. But dozens of operatives of Russia's military intelligence service have been spotted in eastern Ukraine, where they have directed takeovers of government buildings. Mr. Putin could use those forces to clear the way for Sunday's voting, or at least withdraw them and their sophisticated weapons so that the Ukrainian army could clear the remaining rebels. He has made no move to do so.

In the coming days, the focus of U.S. and other Western officials will be, appropriately, on supporting the staging of the elections. Negotiations between the interim government and representatives of the eastern regions are also worth encouraging, though they appear unlikely to produce results in the short term. But President Obama, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other E.U. leaders must also confront the reality that the latest "red line" they drew for Mr. Putin has been ignored. That must lead to the consequences they have promised: meaningful sanctions on the pillars that prop up the Russian economy.

COMMENCEMENT PROTESTS MAKE A MOCKERY OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM (WP)

By Editorial Board

Washington Post, May 20, 2014

ON MONDAY, reporters scrutinized the commencement ceremony at Wake Forest University, where Jill Abramson, the recently ousted New York Times executive editor, delivered a modest address. But to our minds, the bigger news this graduation season has been the large number of colleges and universities that have been impoverished by intolerance as student and faculty activists chased away public figures.

Former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice pulled out of speaking at Rutgers University following objections to her involvement in the Iraq war. International Monetary Fund Managing Director Christine Lagarde withdrew from offering an address at Smith College after a student petition protested the IMF's "strengthening of imperialist and patriarchal systems that oppress and abuse women worldwide." Students and alumni at Harvard's Graduate School of Education demanded that the school rescind its invitation to Colorado state Sen. Michael Johnston (D), because he "embraces a vision of education reform that relies heavily on test-based accountability." Haverford College lost the opportunity to hear from a leader in higher education when students and staff dissuaded Robert J. Birgeneau, former chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley, from addressing its graduates.

Activists at the Pennsylvania school objected to Mr. Birgeneau's role in the forceful dispersion of a 2011 Occupy protest at Berkeley, and they sought to condition his appearance on his compliance with a series of "restorative" measures that included "a full accounting of one's violation," an open letter about "what you learned" and a "pledge to become a leader in how universities ensure that protesters' rights are respected." Instead of submitting a Soviet-style forced confession, Mr. Birgeneau declined to appear.

Haverford's commencement ceremonies went on with a pinch-orator, former Princeton president William G. Bowen. Rather than shy from the controversy, Mr. Bowen on Sunday admirably defended the principles that some in attendance had renounced: the essential value of open debate and orderly disagreement.

"I am disappointed that those who wanted to criticize Birgeneau's handling of events at Berkeley chose to send him such an intemperate list of 'demands,'" Mr. Bowen said, according to the Philadelphia Inquirer. "In my view, they should have encouraged him to come and engage in a genuine discussion, not to come, tail between his legs, to respond to an indictment that a self-chosen jury had reached without hearing counter-arguments."

Responding to a student's comment that keeping Mr. Birgeneau off campus was a "minor victory," Mr. Bowen said, "I regard this outcome as a defeat, pure and simple, for Haverford - no victory for anyone who believes, as I think most of us do, in both openness to many points of view and mutual respect."

Mr. Bowen also faulted Mr. Birgeneau for allowing himself to be cowed, failing "to make proper allowance for the immature and, yes, arrogant inclinations of some protesters. Aggravated as he had every right to be, I think he should be with us today."

The Haverford mess is not the only or even the most upsetting example. Should we be encouraged that Harvard is turning out future educational leaders who take pride in blocking speech with which they might disagree? Commencement addresses should not be limited to quotations from Dr. Seuss and unremarkable advice to which no one could possibly object. Good for Mr. Bowen, who declined to insult the intelligence of supposedly educated women and men by letting the loudest voices in the audience win.

LOVE AND 'THE NORMAL HEART' (WP)

By Richard Cohen

Washington Post, May 20, 2014

Eddie called himself a private detective, although all he really did was repossess cars. He would show up around 4 p.m. at the cafe where I worked after school, have his usual cup of coffee and tell me a thing or two about what we used to call "real life." One day he told me how he used to load his coat pockets with brass doorknobs, which he used to "put out the lights" of homosexuals. I was 16 and getting an education of sorts.

That was long time ago. America then was steeped in bigotry of all kinds, but homophobia was not even on the radar. We knew of racism and anti-Semitism and, in a dim way, sexism. Yet gays were supposedly in a different category, which is to say no category at all. Whoever they were - and wherever they were - they deserved what they were getting. Besides, who even knew any? Well, I did, but I was not aware of that at the time. Now I have male friends who have married other male friends and female friends who have done the same. I still have momentary vertigo figuring out who the husband is and who the wife is, but I exult in a social revolution that has shattered all sorts of arbitrary categories and recognizes the power and universality of love.

This revolution has been so long in coming - and yet so quick in arriving. HBO on May 25 will air Larry Kramer's "The Normal Heart," a movie version of his play. It is semi-autobiographical and about the onset of the HIV-AIDS epidemic and the adamant refusal of some political leaders, most prominently President Ronald Reagan and New York Mayor Ed Koch, to even acknowledge what was happening. An epidemic was sweeping the gay community, men were dying hideously and often at a very young age - and no one much gave a damn.

The HBO movie is rough on Reagan and Koch. They earned it. Reagan had gay friends and associates and was in no way a bigot. But he was clearly afraid of alienating his conservative base. The Moral Majority's Jerry Falwell characteristically said later that "AIDS is the wrath of a just God against homosexuals." Reagan did not even mention the word AIDS until the disease was impossible to ignore and his friend Rock Hudson had died from it.

As for Koch, mayor of a city hugely impacted by the epidemic, the movie flat-out declares him to have been a closeted homosexual - afraid to acknowledge the reality of AIDS lest his own secret be revealed. Koch always put his private life off-limits. He was entitled to this - but not at the price of ignoring a public health menace that needed immediate attention. The tendency then and somewhat still today was to blame gay men for their plight. The proposed remedy was to deprive them of their sex life - a remedy some felt was worse than the disease.

"The Normal Heart" is heavy on politics but heavier still on love. There's plenty of male-male sex in it and some nudity. But by far its message is about the love the Kramer character shares with his partner who dies from the very disease they're both fighting. AIDS mocks the poet. It's a messy death.

This love of men for men and women for women is no different and no less powerful than the love of men for women and women for men. It can drive any of us mad, turn us into operatic cliches, cause us to endanger careers - take long walks on the Appalachian Trails of our choice. It's the stuff of songs. It's the stuff of life.

It is this love that is at the heart of the same-sex marriage movement. It was an appreciation of this

love that got the politically odd couple of uberlawyers David Boies and Ted Olson to defend same-sex marriage. They are both, at heart, admirably romantic.

HBO's "The Normal Heart" has concussive power. It is a gripping drama - some of it downright shocking - but it is, for all of that, just another love story. That it can be seen this way testifies to how far America has come since Eddie the private eye told me it was good sport to beat up gays. See "The Normal Heart." If you are the least bit homophobic, it will change yours.

WOMEN FALLING OFF THE GLASS CLIFF: WHEN LEANING IN IS NOT ENOUGH (WP)

By Amanda Bennett

Washington Post, May 20, 2014

Amanda Bennett, a journalist and author, is a former editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer.

On June 2, 2003, I was named editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer and became - as Jill Abramson did later at the New York Times - the first female editor in a storied institution's hundred-year-plus history. In November 2006, I achieved another distinction that Abramson last week came to share: I was fired after a tenure of only about three years.

The difference in the public reaction to those events tells me something both wonderful and terrible about what has changed in the world that working women inhabit.

Terrible because, whatever the facts of Abramson's departure, it exposed in a raw way the reservoirs of resentment, hurt and mistrust that women feel at work.

Wonderful, because it is clear that something fundamental has changed in just those seven short years. Women now feel not only resentful but also, finally, entitled: Entitled to lead. Entitled to be paid equally. Entitled to be flawed. Entitled to be fired, yes, but also entitled to point out the fact that to us seems so obvious: Men with even more spectacular and difficult flaws than ours get not only longer tenures but also much softer and more dignified landings.

I know Abramson, her successor, Dean Baquet, and Arthur Sulzberger, the publisher. I like and admire all three. I know absolutely nothing about what went on among them. This is not about them. It's about me and other women like me and why this event hit like a lightning strike to dry tinder.

What experiences can I contribute? The first is what it is like to be fired in an unnecessarily unpleasant and hurtful way.

To be clear: I was never going to remain editor of the Inquirer after Knight Ridder, a legendary newspaper chain, sold the paper to a local business group headed by a PR guy. He told me quickly I would be replaced, but if I kept things running smoothly till he found a successor, he would make the transition easy.

A few weeks later, he informed me that my successor had been chosen and that, in two hours, it would be announced that I was being reassigned as a suburban columnist, an egregiously demeaning demotion. If I fought back, his chief lieutenant said, his boss would play hardball.

Is it any wonder that the narrative that sprang up after Abramson's firing seemed so familiar to me? My path out was paved not with the face-saving transition that one saw for men removed from similar jobs at the Wall Street Journal or The Washington Post but rather with the marshaling of evidence that I had caused this demotion myself - that I had lost the support of my peers and of the newsroom reporting to me. The same hints that I was difficult to work with. Remote. Aloof. Disconnected. Did I have those flaws? I guess. Were they worse than the flaws of the men who preceded and succeeded me? I doubt it.

I did what most self-respecting female leaders do: I blamed myself. I did negotiate, but barely (I didn't become a suburban columnist; I did get a modest severance) and backed out quietly with gentle words about my successor. The stories didn't use the word "fired." The support I got from other women was muted and behind the scenes.

The second thing I know from experience is why the charge of unequal pay - that Abramson reportedly alleged and Sulzberger vigorously disputed - landed with such force. I have managed at five organizations over nearly 20 years. At each of them I saw women paid less than men in what I thought were identical positions.

Was everyone lying who said they were committed to equal pay? I came to believe not. It was worse than that. It became clear that we saw things differently. I saw two people who, I believed, were doing the same work but being paid unequally. Those above me saw a story and a history, something that they thought caused the man to deserve higher pay: This one had just stepped

down from a senior position and taken his higher pay with him. That one had been hired from a higher-paying organization. Yet another had been offered a job with a competitor. How many women in the past decade have been promoted past their peers, only to see in the spreadsheets the sad evidence that their own stories were apparently not as persuasive?

So what caused the dam of silence to break? Why are women so openly furious about something that we barely noticed in the past? For one thing, there is now a growing body of women who - like Sheryl Sandberg, chief operating officer of Facebook and author of "Lean In" - are undeniably successful and not afraid to talk about their experiences as women. For another, there is the equally growing body of women like me, with whom stories like Abramson's resonate because of our own experiences.

Whatever else happens as a result of Abramson's firing, it has already begun the more difficult conversation about what we do when we lean in and it doesn't work. This transparency will beget yet more transparency, which in turn will make it easier and less scary to look at the still difficult reality of female life at the top.

The writer, a journalist and author, is a former editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer

Read more about this issue: Ruth Marcus: Democrats' revolting equal-pay demagoguery Dana Milbank: Republicans can kiss votes from women goodbye Catherine Rampell: Hiring women can boost the bottom line Jena McGregor: Why pay equality and work-life balance aren't just women's issues Kathleen Parker: Tweaking real life

SANCTIONS ON VENEZUELA WOULD BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE (WP)

By David Smilde

Washington Post, May 20, 2014

David Smilde is the Charles A. and Leo M. Favrot Professor of Human Relations at Tulane University and a senior fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America.

Over the past three months, Venezuela has seen significant street protests against the government of Nicolás Maduro and its failures to address crime, inflation and food scarcities. The government's use of force against protesters has added fuel to the fire, sparking a wave of mobilizations that has not subsided. At least 41 people have died. Congress is considering legislation to impose sanctions on Venezuelan government officials responsible for human rights abuses.

There is no doubt that the government's response has been excessive and that the international community has a role to play in ensuring that human rights are respected. But lawmakers would be wise to vote against sanctions, which will only be counterproductive.

In a recent Senate hearing, Assistant Secretary of State Roberta Jacobson - no fan of the Venezuelan government - argued that sanctions at this time would be unhelpful. Even targeted "intelligent" sanctions would short-circuit dialogues in recent weeks between the Venezuelan government and the opposition.

The dialogues have not been easy. Nonetheless, they represent the most significant negotiation between the two sides in 10 years and have substantial support among the Venezuelan population and important regional actors.

Critics are right to suggest that it is not clear that the Maduro government is committed to these dialogues. Indeed, the opposition coalition recently put its participation on hold to protest a lack of progress. But keeping the dialogue process going is critical to resolving the ongoing political crisis in Venezuela.

This dialogue process is the product of a high-level delegation from the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) at the end of March. In their visit, the foreign ministers of UNASUR countries spoke with the Maduro government, opposition leaders and human rights groups. They managed to get the two sides to agree to terms and sit down face to face in mid-April. After a first, nationally televised debate between the government and opposition leaders, working groups were formed and three more meetings have been held.

This was certainly not the response the Maduro government had in mind from UNASUR. Maduro clearly would have preferred an unqualified letter of support. But UNASUR's independence should be no surprise. While UNASUR includes clear Venezuelan allies such as Bolivia and Ecuador, it also includes U.S. allies such as Chile, Peru and Colombia. Indeed, nobody has worked harder to make this dialogue happen than Colombian foreign minister María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar. Also

involved in the dialogue is Vatican Secretary of State Pietro Parolin , who was the Vatican nuncio, or diplomatic representative, to Venezuela for five years before being elevated to his new position by Argentine Pope Francis. They both maintain a significant interest in Venezuela.

Supporters of sanctions have argued that they would provide motivation for the Maduro government to take the dialogues seriously. That seems unlikely in this case. It is true that sometimes sanctions work: In the 1980s, sanctions against South Africa clearly contributed to the demise of apartheid. In that case, the South African government considered itself an outpost of the West in Africa. To have other Western countries boycotting it was an affront difficult to digest and difficult to explain to the population.

But just as often, sanctions fail. It is clear that more than 50 years of various U.S. sanctions have done little to change the Cuban government. Indeed the evidence suggests that sanctions have contributed significantly to the Castros' permanence in power.

The same would happen in Venezuela. Like Cuba, the Venezuelan government is based on a Marxist ideology that portrays the United States as an imperialist power conspiring to undermine its revolutionary government. In this view, the United States wants to undermine Venezuela not only to control its oil, but also because it feels threatened by the success of its socialist alternative. U.S. sanctions would allow the Maduro government to back away from the dialogues, saying it cannot negotiate while it is being sabotaged by the United States. Any kind of sanctions would effectively be used to turn what should be a conflict between the Venezuelan government and its opposition into a conflict between the Venezuelan government and the United States. That would allow the Maduro government to distract attention from its own shortcomings and deflect the legitimate grievances that have driven the protests. Perhaps worse, it would disarm UNASUR's ability to keep the Maduro government at the negotiating table.

In this case, U.S. unilateral sanctions would undermine UNASUR's regional approach to problem-solving, will harden the Maduro government and could result in an end to dialogue between Maduro and the opposition. This is probably not what members of Congress want, but if they don't think twice about this sanctions vote, it is likely to be what they get.

David Smilde is the Charles A. and Leo M. Favrot Professor of Human Relations at Tulane University and a senior fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America.

THE BLUSTER IMBALANCE (WP)

By Catherine Rampell

Washington Post, May 20, 2014

Maybe women are not sufficiently full of themselves. But let's not coach them to be full of something else, either.

Read the rash of corporate self-help books and articles lately unleashed upon the world's white-collar women - such as "The Confidence Code" and "Lean In" - and you'll learn that there is a yawning "confidence gap" between the sexes.

Among the alarming symptoms and evidence: We women, even the most successful of us, are riddled with self-doubt. We second-guess our next moves constantly and "ruminate" over past failures. We withhold our opinions in big meetings, while less-informed men freely bluster and bloviate, one-upping and interrupting each other. Even in anonymous political opinion polls, women are more likely than men to say "I don't know" when pressed for a view on something about which we actually know quite a bit.

When we do express opinions, we too often apologize for or prematurely disclaim them ("I'm not sure about this, but . . .") or intonate them as questions rather than statements. We don't throw our bonnets into the ring for promotions and raises for which we're surely qualified, whereas men toss in their cowboy hats even when their own credentials appear comically deficient.

The self-assurance deficit reinforces the glass ceiling because confidence seems to help people perform better on certain tasks - and, perhaps more important, swagger leads others to perceive us as more competent. One study that asked business school students about imaginary historical people and events (like a "Queen Shaddock" and a "Galileo Lovano") found that those who feigned familiarity with the fictional figures also achieved the highest social status among their peers.

These are familiar, broad-brush gender stereotypes, of course, often underpinned by tiny lab experiments conducted on callow university students or by corporate surveys administered with

little outside scrutiny. But many of them ring true to me - both as a young woman with brilliant and accomplished but perpetually self-doubting girlfriends and as an opinion journalist. (Op-ed pages are often criticized for their dearth of female voices, but the gender imbalance is because men are much more likely to submit unsolicited guest columns and to accept direct invitations to write.) So sure, whether because of biology or socialization, women are underselling themselves, and could stand to be a little more self-promotional.

Still, it's not clear to me why this so-called "confidence gap" has been framed exclusively as a women's problem or why the optimal solution is for women to ape the men with whom they compete.

Those very same studies that show women to be underconfident often show men to be overconfident. "The Confidence Code" cites one Columbia Business School study documenting that men typically rate their performance 30 percent better than it actually is. Likewise, a survey released last week by YouGov found that, when asked to compare their own intelligence to that of the "average American," about a quarter of men declared themselves "much more intelligent," vs. just 15 percent of women. Lake Wobegon, it seems, is brimming with testosterone.

In short, men seem much more willing to be blowhards than women are - during dinner parties, at the office, on anonymous phone surveys and in the nation's fine op-ed pages. And as long as both employers and peers continue to conflate bluster with aptitude and to reward bombast with respect and job promotions, the only way women can successfully compete with men is to be not just more confident but overconfident in everything they do, too.

Like thrift, bluffing may be a good strategy for individuals who want to get ahead but destructive to society at large. An arms race in B.S.ing seems unlikely to lead to better-run companies, at least, and it certainly isn't creating more informed political discourse. (Ever watch cable news shows or presidential debates? You'll notice the words "I don't know" are generally frowned upon.) I realize it's easier to teach women to increase their swagger than to tell grown men to temper theirs. So maybe the solution involves trying to change Americans' perceptions of bluster rather than their skillfulness at wielding it. Rather than advocating that an entire class of people start faking it 'til they make it, maybe we should be coaching voters, students, bosses and viewers at home how to be a bit more skeptical of the loudest guy (or gal) in the room.

Read more about this issue: Amanda Bennett: Recovering from a fall off the glass cliff
Ruth Marcus: Democrats' revolting equal-pay demagoguery
Dana Milbank: Republicans can kiss votes from women goodbye
Catherine Rampell: Hiring women can boost the bottom line
Jena McGregor: Why pay equality and work-life balance aren't just women's issues
Kathleen Parker: Tweaking real life

HEADS NEED TO ROLL AT THE VA (WP)

By Eugene Robinson

Washington Post, May 20, 2014

Finally, an authentic scandal: incompetence and deception at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Given what we know so far, more heads need to roll - and a criminal investigation should be launched.

Republicans have accused the Obama administration of so many faux scandals that it's hard to recognize the real thing. Yes, the Internal Revenue Service seems to have given extra scrutiny to conservative organizations, but it gave extra scrutiny to liberal groups, too. Yes, Operation "Fast and Furious" was a mistake, but it wasn't some kind of sinister plot. No, it doesn't matter whether the evil people who took four American lives in Benghazi, Libya, are called terrorists, militants or simply killers.

The VA situation, however, looks more serious day by day. If VA hospitals really are falsifying records to disguise lengthy waiting times - and if veterans are dying as a consequence - then President Obama needs to bring in new management to fix the problems and fast.

White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, speaking Sunday on CBS's "Face the Nation," described Obama as "madder than hell" about the VA scandal. By now, we should all be used to the fact that Obama is never what you would call demonstrative with his anger, at least publicly. No frothing, no foaming, no gnashing of teeth. I take McDonough at his word that the president is royally steamed.

We also should be used to the fact that Obama is extremely loyal to the members of his team.

Despite the disastrous launch of the HealthCare.gov Web site, the president declined to dismiss Kathleen Sebelius as head of the Department of Health and Human Services, allowing her eventually to leave on her own terms.

I don't see how he can take a similar path, however, with Gen. Eric K. Shinseki at the VA. Sebelius at least made it clear that she understood the magnitude of the problem her department faced.

Shinseki thus far has failed to telegraph comprehension, much less inspire confidence.

"Any allegation, any adverse incident like this makes me mad as hell," Shinseki told the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee last week. I doubt there has ever been a four-star general who didn't know how to get angry, but Shinseki's ire had to be drawn out of him. If he was seething inside, he hid it well.

Perhaps that's unfair; perhaps he should be evaluated only on his performance at work, not on whether he emotes before the television cameras. "This is not a job," he said at the hearing. "I'm here to accomplish a mission I think [veterans] critically deserve and need, and I can tell you over the past five years we've done a lot to make things better."

The all-too-obvious rejoinder is: Not enough.

The allegation that VA officials in Phoenix cooked the books to cover up the fact that veterans had to suffer unacceptably long waiting times before they received care - and that 40 veterans died while enduring such delays - is shocking in isolation. But if reports are true that there may have been similar practices in Albuquerque and perhaps in other cities, the problems begin to look systemic.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) said there is "solid evidence" of "a pattern, apparently, of manipulating lists, gaming the system . . . which is not just an impropriety or misconduct, it is potentially a criminal act."

The VA's Office of Inspector General is on the case, Shinseki told senators. But I agree with Blumenthal's assessment that it's time to bring in some outside help, such as the FBI, and that the investigation needs to ascertain not just whether rules were broken but whether crimes were committed.

Shinseki inherited an agency ill-equipped to cope with the tsunamis that were about to overwhelm it: the return of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and the rapidly growing medical needs of Vietnam veterans now entering their later years.

It is important to keep the VA scandal in context. Conservatives who crow that this shows government cannot competently provide health care are wrong. VA hospitals see more than 200,000 veterans a day and rank among the highest in the nation in customer satisfaction, according to surveys.

At issue is how long veterans have to wait before they can receive that care - and whether employees are lying about those waiting times, with the result that people are dying.

The solemn promises we make to our veterans cannot be broken. There's no need for histrionics from President Obama. But he does need to clean house.

THE HOLOCAUST IS NOT A HE-SAID, SHE-SAID DEBATE (WP)

By Michael Gerson

Washington Post, May 20, 2014

Several years ago, I attended the bar mitzvah of a friend's son. Uniquely in my experience - and, I'd bet, most people's experience - all of the boy's four grandparents were Holocaust survivors. In the middle of the ceremony, one grandfather interrupted: "I have something to say." He recalled holding his grandson for the first time 13 years earlier and exclaiming aloud, "Hitler, you bastard, I beat you!"

Most Holocaust survivors did not have the option of direct vengeance against their oppressors. They counted their victories in survival, in descendants, and in the transmission of memories. But nearly 70 years after the end of World War II, the stock of living memories is dwindling. Not many remain who can still address the Fuhrer in the first person: "I beat you."

According to a recent global survey by the Anti-Defamation League, two-thirds of respondents either had never heard of the Holocaust or believed historical accounts were exaggerated. And the ignorance is concentrated among the young. This school year, in California's Rialto Unified School District, eighth-grade students were asked to write an essay on whether they believed the Holocaust "was an actual event in history, or merely a political scheme created to influence public

emotion and gain wealth."

Note "scheme" and "wealth" - words that Jews have heard before. School officials were forced to cancel the assignment. Which National Review's Charles C.W. Cooke described as a "damn shame" - the cancelation, not the assignment. Cooke complained that academic discussion is too often "conducted between narrow and sternly policed rails." The purpose of education is to cultivate critical thinking, not "to indoctrinate our children with the values of the state."

The application of ideology in this case - an all-purpose conservative critique of political correctness - is intellectually lazy. But the assumption of two-sidedness when considering the Holocaust is positively dangerous.

The argument requires a morally offensive false equivalence. Academics, for example, vigorously debate the causes of grievances that lead to international terrorism. Crackpots claim that the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks were plotted by the Jews. Any teacher who confuses these two types of argument cultivates ignorance and bigotry. The same is true for an eighth-grade teacher who poses the questions: Was Anne Frank's diary a forgery? Was the Wannsee Conference just a staff retreat? Were the Nuremberg trials a kangaroo court?

In this case, the assertion of two-sidedness is a victory for one side. Holocaust denialists crave academic validation above all else, hoping to gain legitimacy for pseudo-history. It is an effort that began during the event itself, with systematic attempts to destroy evidence and create historical doubts. It didn't quite work. When the Germans were forced to retreat from Birkenau, they burned 29 storehouses full of incrimination. In the six that remained, however, the Red Army found 836,255 dresses, 348,000 men's suits and 38,000 pairs of shoes.

The educational enterprise is not just a matter of teaching critical thinking - the cultivation of lawyers and Oxford debaters. It also involves the training of moral sentiments; teaching children to love what is lovely and disdain what is hateful. When school tours visit the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, children are not gaining information about a historical controversy. They are, hopefully, learning to recoil from brutality, bullying and the abuse of the weak. It may be their first glimpse at the reality of evil - lurking in average people, enabled by ideology on a massive scale. Instead of asking children what they make of the Holocaust, it is worth teaching eighth-graders what the Nazis made of children. Historian Martin Gilbert recounts that at Birkenau, boys aged 14 and 15 were harnessed to carts normally pulled by horses. They transported logs that were used in the crematoria ovens. They were also forced, as one child later recalled, to spread the ash of victims on camp pathways "so that people could walk on the road and not slip." Human ash for traction.

They wanted their stories known. A doctor named Aharon Beilin described meeting a boy working at Birkenau who had been castrated in a medical experiment. The child asked to be examined. "I said I could not help him," Beilin recalled, "but the boy said, 'No, I want you to see what they are doing.'"

About 1.4 million Holocaust victims were under the age of 14. It is one of the most solemn responsibilities of educators to make a new generation see what was done.

INDIANA'S GOV. PENCE TAKING THE OBAMACARE MONEY AND RUNNING WITH IT (WP)

By Dana Milbank

Washington Post, May 20, 2014

For the first time since Obamacare split the country in two, the conditions for a cease-fire have begun to appear.

An architect of this detente - although he denies any such intent - is Mike Pence, who as a conservative Republican congressman in 2010 fought bitterly against the law and who as governor of Indiana refused to implement it.

But Pence, after intensive negotiations with the Obama administration, just announced his intent to take the money Obamacare provides for Medicaid expansion and to use it on his own terms to broaden health-care coverage for the working poor.

For Pence, a happy warrior for conservatism and a possible 2016 presidential contender, the reason is pragmatic: If he could get money under an Obamacare waiver to enlarge a market-driven health-care program in his state, there would be no point in cutting off his nose to spite his face.

"When it comes to the issue of health care, I believe that people in my party need to be solutions

conservatives, offering real alternatives to the big-government answers," he lectured Monday at the American Enterprise Institute, a center-right think tank, on a visit to Washington. Conservatives, he said, "need to ensure that the safety net is well-designed and strong enough to provide a firm basis for those starting out on life's ladder."

That was an implicit rebuke of his former House colleagues who have a "repeal and replace" slogan but have not offered much of a substitute for Obamacare while at the same time attempting to cut food stamps and other parts of the safety net.

Pence, a former head of the conservative Republican Study Committee in the House, was a tea party Republican before there was a tea party. But running a state has given him an elevated perspective.

"Debates that happen in Washington, D.C., pretty easily get far afield of the real-world impacts on real people," he told me in an interview Monday afternoon. "It will not be enough for new Republican majorities in the Congress and a Republican president to cut government spending," he added, calling instead for money to be sent to the states so they can "solve the intractable problems."

Pence isn't about to admit it, but Obamacare does that.

He thinks he has a conservative alternative to the new law's expansion of Medicaid: He wants to broaden the "Healthy Indiana" plan started by his predecessor Mitch Daniels (R) by using financial incentives to get the working poor to contribute to their health coverage under a private alternative to Medicaid. The Obama administration appears likely to grant Indiana a waiver for the experiment - and if it works, other states will be free to follow the example.

Starting in 2017, states will be able to experiment further, securing exemptions from problematic provisions of the law such as the individual mandate, the employer mandate and the health-care exchanges. If Republican governors don't like Obamacare's requirements, all they have to do is come up with an alternative that provides comparable care and coverage.

Pence declined to speculate about whether he might seek a waiver exempting Indiana from Obamacare overall. He continues to support the law's repeal, and he spent a good chunk of his AEI speech bemoaning its flaws.

He has to do that if he wants to compete in Republican presidential primaries. Although not usually mentioned in the top tier, Pence is well positioned at a time when the party's strongest candidates are governors. He has a better record than New Jersey's Chris Christie, is smarter than Texas's Rick Perry, is not as divisive as Wisconsin's Scott Walker and is more conservative than former Florida governor Jeb Bush. He speaks the language of Christian conservatives - twice in his AEI speech he wove in biblical passages from Luke without citation - and his Medicaid experiment should earn him some moral authority.

While other GOP governors continue to refuse the Medicaid expansion money - a decision that inevitably means lost lives - Pence reminds them, and everyone, that "we're talking about real people, working people who deserve a better way." He made it his administration's job to help the "proud Hoosiers" - people "who find themselves essentially, for all intents and purposes, caught in that gap where their income simply doesn't give them the ability to purchase health insurance for themselves or for their families."

This, of course, is what Obamacare is all about. As more conservatives realize that the law they hate allows them to implement policies they like, they may have trouble recalling what all the fuss was about.

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL STORIES:

GOP DEMANDS CUTS AS DEL. TAX ESTIMATES FALL (WILNJ)

Wilmington (DE) News Journal, May 19, 2014

Republicans are demanding budget cuts, with lawmakers now eyeing a \$41 million gap between tax collections and Gov. Jack Markell's \$3.8 billion proposed spending plan.

One Republican leader in the General Assembly said Monday that members of his party were ready to withhold votes on the state's annual capital budget unless Markell and Democrats who control the General Assembly agreed to make cuts to the governor's budget proposal.

"We are serious about blocking some budgetary items unless we see a decrease in operating

expenses," said Senate Minority Leader Gary Simpson, who is calling for 2-percent spending cuts across all state agencies. "Two percent is not that much."

Delaware's budget picture is getting worse, not better, for lawmakers as they look to finalize a new spending plan by June 30.

Estimates of state tax collections fell \$33 million on Monday, on top of dips in previous months.

About \$14 million of that revenue comes in the current budget year. The projections will force state agency heads to trim spending even further in the current budget year and could prompt cuts to Markell's spending proposal.

Democrats need Republican support to pass the annual capital budget - which funds school construction, economic development and other projects - so Simpson's position could prove significant.

"That's not a threat," Simpson said, "but there have to be some serious efforts to negotiate."

The state is experiencing weakness across several tax areas. Personal income tax collections are weaker than expected in the current year and in the fiscal year beginning in July, the economic panel said Monday.

Corporate income tax collections are also off from previous months, as is revenue from abandoned property, the unredeemed gift cards and uncashed corporate checks that fund up to 15 percent of the state's budget.

Corporations continue to push back against state auditors seeking abandoned property revenue, leaving lawmakers with \$15 million less to work with, David Gregor, the deputy secretary of Finance, told panel members on Monday.

Lawmakers, who typically see an increase in tax collections as the year progresses, are starting to feel pressure to find savings in Markell's spending plan.

Sen. Harris McDowell, a Wilmington Democrat and co-chair of the budget-writing Joint Finance Committee, said the new round of revenue estimates puts the committee in a bind.

"We'll be able to produce a balanced budget, but certainly it won't be a perfect budget," he said.

Markell's proposed gas tax increase to pay for road improvements and a new property tax to fund waterway upgrades may also face even stiffer opposition with revenues falling. Lawmakers will have one more round of revenue estimates in June before closing next year's budget.

Monday's new tax estimates "will make an already challenging budget year more difficult," Ann Visalli, director of the Delaware Office of Management and Budget, said in a statement. Visalli did not attend the monthly meeting of the Delaware Economic and Financial Advisory Council, the public-private panel that produces revenue estimates that lawmakers must follow.

Visalli remained in Dover to work with administration officials and lawmakers on budget plans. The Markell administration continues to pressure agencies to cut spending in the current budget year to cover a shortfall in expected revenues.

Agency heads have responded, returning \$104 million to the general fund. With new estimates, agencies will have to find an additional \$13 million before June 30. That could present a challenge. Secretary of State Jeff Bullock said Monday he already has cut 1-2 percent of his budget this year, but some agencies are in a more difficult spot financially.

"Some departments are very, very tight," Bullock said. "In those departments, it's very difficult to come up with cuts."

Staff reporter Jon Offredo contributed to this story. Contact Jonathan Starkey at (302) 983-6756, on Twitter @jwstarkey or at jstarkey@delawareonline.com.

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EPA ISSUES NEW RULES FOR INDUSTRY COOLING WATER (WILNJ)

By Jeff Montgomery

Wilmington (DE) News Journal, May 19, 2014

"At first glance, it really looks like a very disappointing rule that has been softened and weakened by the politics of the day," said Maya van Rossum, who directs the multi-state Delaware Riverkeeper conservation group.

Van Rossum termed Salem Units 1 and 2 "the largest predators on the river." She pointed to PSEG's report in March on the rescue of an endangered, juvenile Atlantic sturgeon in a Salem intake as an example of the risk.

The EPA's move is expected to quickly heat up a long-simmering debate over the Delaware

refinery's antiquated cooling water intake system and its industrial wastewater treatment plant. The refinery's last regular wastewater permit expired in 2002. Critics have long called for refinery use of recycling systems that would cut river water needs by 90 percent or more.

A report completed by Delaware's Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control in 2011 and released under the Freedom of Information Act concluded that the present 300-million-gallon-per-day river water intake practice at Delaware City "directly kills many millions of organisms every year."

The design also "indirectly causes both air and water environmental impacts when cooling water intake interruptions result in operational upsets."

DNREC Secretary Collin P. O'Mara said late Monday that his agency is still reviewing the EPA's rules, but would act quickly.

"We plan to have a permit out in the next several months for public review," O'Mara said, adding:

"It's a fairly elaborate process. We'll have to follow the letter of the law."

PSEG's intakes for Salem have a 3.1-billion-gallon daily limit, with researchers estimating that the plant's pumps kill 3 billion organisms of all types each year. One study concluded that intakes at Salem and the Delaware refinery kill more than half the striped bass in the river, and claim 19 percent of the Delaware's bay anchovies, an important bottom-of-the-food-chain fish.

Joe Delmar Sr., a spokesman for PSEG Nuclear, released a statement late Monday that the company welcomed the EPA's "technology-based" approach, rather than "imposing a one-size-fits-all numeric standard."

"We are reviewing the rule and its detailed requirements as they pertain to each of our facilities," the PSEG statement noted. "We won't comment further until that review is completed."

Michael Karlovich, spokesman for Delaware City Refinery owner PBF Energy, said officials there want to examine the EPA's plan before commenting.

PSEG has estimated the cost of equipping its Salem site with cooling towers at about \$1 billion.

The company's nearby Hope Creek reactor already uses the approach.

The Nuclear Energy Institute warned in February that some nuclear plants around the country could be shut down under the threat of similar costs, a development that could "significantly" affect administration greenhouse gas control ambitions.

Federal officials described the rules as a "common sense framework, putting a premium on public input and flexibility for facilities to comply."

"EPA is making it clear that if you have cooling water intakes, you have to look at the impact on aquatic life in local waterways and take steps to minimize that impact," said Nancy Stoner, acting Assistant Administrator for Water at EPA.

The rule covers 521 factories 544 power plants around the country.

The Riverkeeper, Delaware Nature Society and other groups sued DNREC as recently as last year to compel action on PBF's water intakes after state officials judged cooling towers the best available solution. That case was sidelined after a Superior Court judge noted the pending EPA standards.

Dave Carter, conservation chair for Delaware Audubon, said that his group was encouraged by the release, despite the lack of specific requirements.

"Just because the EPA set a minimum for existing facilities that we do not believe is strong enough doesn't mean that the state can't do something stronger," Carter said. "We're still in a situation where DNREC has said that closed-cycle cooling is a cost-effective technology, that it's the best available technology, so their excuses not to act now are gone."

A coalition of New York environmental groups, however, said the EPA "abdicated the responsibility to state agencies that are simply not equipped to make these decisions alone."

"Unfortunately, EPA's rule will perpetuate the unacceptable status quo that has allowed antiquated plants to withdraw nearly 100 trillion gallons of fresh and sea water each year and indiscriminately kill fish and wildlife instead of recycling their cooling water or use dry cooling technology, as modern plants have done for the past three decades," said Reed Super, an attorney representing Waterkeeper Alliance.

2 DELAWARE ANIMAL SHELTERS EXPAND (WILNJ)

Wilmington (DE) News Journal, May 19, 2014

Faithful Friends Animal Society and the Delaware Humane Association are making strides toward

their long-term goals to provide better accommodations for their charges and a more welcoming atmosphere for potential adopters.

Faithful Friends, which recently opened an Affordable Veterinary Clinic, unveiled the new Gibney's Doggie Kingdom at the shelter on Germay Drive in Wilmington last week. Board members Jill Cantera, principal of Bellevue Contractors in Wilmington, and Dr. Sandra Gibney, an emergency room physician at St. Francis Hospital, played an integral part in the makeover of 3,000 square feet of the shelter.

Cantera, who spent months touring shelters and researching best designs and practices, directed the renovation project to better uses of space, including two new private meet-and-greet adoption rooms and a new dog-washing station. The area also has a new dropped ceiling and air filtration, PVC wall panels that reduce noise, durable easy-to-clean flooring and 48 state-of-the-art T-Kennels. Cantera also supervised the earlier renovation of the shelter's cat habitats.

The new dog kennels are brightly colored, have solid walls to prevent the dogs from sniffing each other and possibly transmitting viruses, and they are easy to clean. They also have slots that allow staff to feed and water the dogs without going into the kennel, a time-saving and sanitary step.

Last SlideNext Slide

"They are raised off the floor and have built-in covered drains at the rear so staff can hose them out and the water drains away," said Jane Pierantozzi, executive director. "The retractable power hoses are mounted on the walls, so no one has to step over them. The new kennels are brighter, larger and provide a healthier environment for the dogs who are waiting for homes."

The shelter adopts about 70 animals each month and 850 a year, numbers Pierantozzi and her board hope will rise with the improvements.

The renovations were funded by private grants, individual sponsors and a \$200,000 gift from Dr. Gibney. The new doggie haven is named in honor of Dr. Gibney's mother, Mary Rita Gibney. Many of the kennels are sponsored by individuals. One of the meet-and-greet rooms is named for a beloved Gibney family dog, Missy, and the other for Gibney's sister, Susie A. Comegys.

"My mother loved animals, and I've loved animals all my life," Dr. Gibney said. "We approached this thoughtfully to provide a better environment for the dogs and the people who want to adopt. We've even piped in music to help keep the dogs calm."

The next step is creation of indoor-outdoor kennels and renovation of the approximately 1,500-square-foot warehouse. Ultimately the goal is a new building.

"That's what we're working towards, but in the meantime we're continuing to raise money to bring improvements to this site," Pierantozzi said. "And, when we do move the new kennels will go with us because they are built to be moved."

At the Delaware Humane Association, things are moving smoothly toward the November opening of the Tatiana and Gerret Copeland Animal Care & Companion Center in Wilmington. There's only one hitch: Some people think the shelter is closed and moving to a new location.

"We have not and will not close at all," said Patrick Carroll, DHA executive director. "We made the decision from the beginning to build on our current location, and that's what we are doing. We felt it was our responsibility to stay in Wilmington."

The new facility will not significantly increase the shelter's footprint, which is about 7,000 square feet, but it's going to seem like it. The design utilizes the space to expand and improve animal housing and care facilities, not to mention a significant improvement in the aesthetics. The plans include a new community room to house events, meetings and educational programs.

The capital campaign to fund the new facility began more than three years ago with a goal of \$3.1 million. More than 1,000 donors helped meet the goal. The facility is named in honor of well-known local philanthropists and campaign chairs Tatiana and Gerret Copeland, who pledged to match every dollar donated by individuals up to \$750,000. They then pledged a further \$250,000, bringing their gift to \$1 million.

Increases in construction and labor costs since the 2010 estimate have caused the cost to rise by about 20 percent, with the final bill for the facility coming in at about \$4 million, but Carroll is counting on donors to help close the gap and avoid a mortgage.

Once the new building is open; the old one will be demolished. The shelter adopts out about 600 dogs and 600 cats a year. Carroll said the improved intake facilities, medical facilities and other improvements generated by the new facility should help increase the number of annual adoptions. Hard Hat tours are offered most Wednesday afternoons or by appointment. For a tour or more

information about giving, contact Greg Munson, (302) 571-8171, ext. 300.

Delaware Pets is written by animal-lover Deb Lucas. Send her your news, events and column ideas to dilucas@delawareonline.com or call her at (302) 324-2852.

Pet-related events

- Until May 31, qualified adopters at many area shelters, including the Delaware Humane Association, will be eligible to pay reduced adoption fees for all black or mostly black animals they adopt. Dogs 7 months and older can be adopted for \$50 and cats of any age can be adopted for \$20. dehumane.org/adoptus

- Anyone feeding roaming cats in the 19805 ZIP code can take a cat in for a free spay or neuter procedure at Faithful Friends near Elsmere in Wilmington, thanks to a PetSmart Foundation grant. If you cannot get the cat/s in a carrier, Faithful Friends will humanely trap, spay or neuter the cat/s and return them to you. (302) 427-8514, ext. 0; faithfulfriends.us

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TEST-MAKER CD DIAGNOSTICS SETTLES IN IN DELAWARE (WILNJ)

Wilmington (DE) News Journal, May 19, 2014

When it came time to decide where to locate his high-tech medical business, Richard Birkmeyer knew he wanted to be in Delaware.

CD Diagnostics, which creates diagnostic tests for joint disease, is his second business in this state.

Birkmeyer, CEO and president of the company, knows and likes the people of the First State.

Proximity to I-95 is another perk of being located in Claymont.

"There's a lot of local support for the company and a lot of familiarity for the state," Birkmeyer said.

The Pennsylvania startup has opened an office at the Brandywine Corporate Center, 650 Naamans Road. The move comes after CD Diagnostics signed a partnership to work with Zimmer, a large provider of joint replacement technologies, a decision that is helping to grow the business.

"All that research and all that manufacturing will be done here in Delaware," Birkmeyer said.

Birkmeyer has said he turned down an economic development grant from Pennsylvania, opting instead for Delaware for his new venture.

The company was awarded a \$500,000 incentive from the Delaware Economic Development Opportunity Office to locate here and create jobs.

Generally speaking, CD Diagnostics makes tests that are developed to provide doctors with fast and accurate diagnostics.

There are about 35 employees at the Claymont office now, and they expect to bring at least 170 jobs here. They will be seeking researchers with doctoral degrees to do research. Also, they plan to hire for high-tech manufacturing.

This month, two new people started working there in research and development.

Martin Gould, who has more than 40 years' experience and holds several patents, is an immunoassay development fellow. He has worked on projects that include creating tests to detect if there are pathogens, such as salmonella, in foods.

James W. Stave, joins the company as the vice president of corporate development and as an antibody research fellow. He has worked in development for more than 30 years testing products for the commercial sector.

This is the second company started by Birkmeyer in Delaware. He founded Strategic Diagnostics in 1990 after a career at DuPont. That company, which later went public, sold its life science assets to OriGene Technologies. The company was under control of CEO Francis M. DiNuzzo when that happened.

Birkmeyer said last year he hoped to replicate the success of that company with starting up CD Diagnostics.

And he wants to do it again in Delaware.

"Our goal is to improve patient outcomes," Birkmeyer said.

Contact Nichole Dobo at (302) 324-2281 or ndobo@delawareonline.com. On Twitter @NicholeDobo.

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ELLENDALE LEADERS CALL FOR CLEANER WATER (WILNJ)

Wilmington (DE) News Journal, May 19, 2014

ELLENDALE - Church and community leaders in Ellendale gathered Monday to express dissatisfaction with the health of their town's drinking water, which bears the scars of contamination from polluting commercial sites in decades past.

"We are not going to sit down and relax and let this thing go away," said Diaz J. Bonnaville of the Ellendale Community Civic Improvement Association.

Ellendale has sewer service through Sussex County, but there is no government-run drinking water infrastructure in town. All homes rely on private wells. A referendum to build a public water system failed in 2009.

Story: Group has setback in chicken plant fight

Since the 1990s, the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control has monitored groundwater underneath a property near Mount Zion AME Church that used to be a gas station and auto salvage yard. Water samples from the well that the church used until 2009 showed very high amounts of benzene, MTBE and naphthalene.

An environmental consultant's report filed to DNREC on May 15 noted those chemicals had diminished in the old well, but were still found in concerning amounts at a nearby mobile home's well. One chemical, benzene, hadn't been detected in three tests during 2013, but it showed up late last year in a fourth test - a sign a plume of groundwater pollution may be moving around the area. The report recommended more testing, and possibly installing more monitoring wells.

A. Iona Smith Nze, pastor of the Mount Zion, said the church members remain concerned about the water quality. A deeper well was dug in 2009 for the church's use, but Nze said the church still doesn't use it for drinking and serves parishioners bottled water.

"Our property continues to be contaminated," Nze said Monday evening. "These are concerns that could be cleaned up if the water was cleaned up."

Because there's no municipal water system, there isn't much public data on drinking water in Ellendale. A restaurant in town, Southern Grill, does have a well that's monitored by state regulators. Data from that well show MTBE levels rose as high as 3.69 parts per billion in May 2013. That's not high enough to trigger a public health response. In Delaware, MTBE levels at or above 10 parts per billion are considered a public health concern.

Now, a year later, MTBE levels are 0.6 parts per billion.

"It looks like it's gone down a bit," said Ed Hallock, program administrator in the Office of Drinking Water. The state, he said, checks the restaurant's water four times a year.

Shaleé Murray, 22, an Ellendale resident and mother, said the water that comes from her faucets is often clouded with particles. In another part of town, she said, water can be discolored, or smell odd.

"I've been living in Ellendale for 11 years, and it's gotten worse," Murray said, noting that she gives her young son bottled water. "Knowing what's in it, I'm not willing to give it over to him."

Nze and Bonnaville are concerned by the higher than normal incidence of cancer in a census tract a mile north of Ellendale.

Church leaders want Gov. Jack Markell's proposed Clean Water Initiative, if it becomes law, to help pay for any cleanup efforts.

"We'll see if they'll become partners with us," said Harold Truxon, president of the civic association. "And we are going to go back to County Council and ask for assistance."

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SPECIALISTERNE LINKS BUSINESSES, AUTISTIC WORKERS (WILNJ)

Wilmington (DE) News Journal, May 19, 2014

NEWARK - Mike MacAllister was among more than a dozen people working at Computer Aid Inc. on a recent day to carefully digitize paper files.

Elsewhere in the office, a robot made of Legos that can solve a Rubik's Cube sat on a table. The creation was built as part of a training program for employees like MacAllister, who have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The global IT service firm, commonly called CAI, is one of several companies coordinating with a nonprofit called Specialsterne, which helps link employers with potential employees living with

autism.

"It's a great job-creation model," said Ernest Dianastasis, managing director of CAI.

Specialisterne, which last year opened an office in Wilmington, helps firms identify, train and retain workers who have been diagnosed with ASD but have the ability to work if given some support.

Among them is SAP, a global leader in the technology sector, which is bringing five new employees who have autism into its Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, office. The company's leaders acknowledge it is not a large influx of new workers, but that's intentional: They want to build in supports around the new employees and learn how they can best adapt to be more inclusive.

By 2020, SAP said, it plans to have about 1 percent of the workforce represented by those who have autism. The company has more than 66,700 employees worldwide and serves customers in more than 180 countries.

The Centers for Disease Control defines ASD as "a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges."

What other people might see as a disability can also be a person's strength, advocates say. That's why Specialisterne has a dandelion in its imagery, said Thorkil Sonne, who founded the company. Where other people might see a weed, children see a flower to make into necklaces.

"It's all about the mindset," Sonne said.

He was speaking at an event hosted earlier this month to SAP employees and community partners in its office in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, about its efforts to increase the number of people with autism on its staff. They outlined how they plan to start small and scale up the program, bringing a group to each of its worldwide offices. SAP leaders say they don't see it just as a nice thing to do - it's also good for business.

"You are giving people a shot who were never given a shot before," Gov. Jack Markell said at the event.

About 15 new people are working at the CAI Innovation and Technology Center in Newark. The firm partnered with Specialisterne shortly after it came to Delaware last year.

Founded in 2004 in Denmark, Specialisterne brought an office to Delaware as part of its growth into the United States after Markell recruited them. The company helps people with autism find jobs by providing training, mentoring and other support functions.

A diverse workforce is better able to anticipate the needs of consumers if they bring to the table a wide swath of perspectives, several SAP leaders said during their May 1 presentations.

For instance, attention to detail, recognizing patterns and precision are all valuable skills for information technology and software creation, said Jose H. Velasco, the SAP autism and workplace coordinator.

A corporate office setting might screen out people who have trouble with eye contact or traditional communication skills. But they still have valuable assets they can contribute to the organization if given a chance, advocates say.

SAP intends to "think differently about how to evaluate talent," said Anka Wittenberg, SAP chief diversity and inclusion officer.

SAP is working with Specialisterne, local nonprofits and government agencies, so they are including outside organizations with expertise in autism spectrum disorder. This helps them identify potential employees, interview them and train them so they are set up for success, leaders said.

The model is built so there is a circle of supporters who can help the employee and the workplace adapt to be more inclusive to those who might not fit in to the traditional corporate model.

The training isn't just for new workers. Existing employees also are given information so they can learn how to help a new colleague. Some are serving as mentors.

SAP leaders said they needed four volunteer mentors in Newtown Square. More than twice as many said they wanted to do it.

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Read or Share this story: <http://delonline.us/1neex5j>

Wilmington City Council and the mayor have reached a budget deal that would increase property taxes at a lower rate than the administration previously proposed and also limit the increases on other services charged to city residents.

The agreement calls for a 5 percent increase in the city's property tax rate, about half the 9.9 percent hike initially proposed by Mayor Dennis P. Williams for the fiscal year starting July 1. Water, sewer and stormwater rates will climb by 5 percent under the compromise. The administration had sought to increase the water and sewer rate by 8 percent and the stormwater rate by 7 percent.

Council's Finance Committee sent the \$150 million proposed budget, along with property tax and utility changes, to the full Council for a vote on Thursday.

The owner of a home assessed at \$45,000, the city average, would have an annual property tax bill of \$832 under the compromise, up from \$793 now and less than the \$871 sought under the mayor's initial spending plan.

The water, sewer and stormwater rate increases of 5 percent would raise the average customer's monthly bill by \$2.39, city officials said. The mayor's proposal would have raised the rate to \$3.78 a month.

A top city official said the administration can't guarantee layoffs won't happen over the next few years, while leading Council members said they wished the administration had trimmed more vacant positions to save more money.

The administration had estimated its proposed tax increase would generate \$3.6 million, save nearly 100 jobs over the next four years and create a \$2.7 million budget surplus that would prevent any more tax increases until 2018. But the compromise will bring fewer dollars into city coffers, creating new challenges.

"We're hoping to not be looking at layoffs, but we're going to have to continue making hard decisions," said Cleon Cauley, the mayor's chief of staff. "For me to sit here and say this is something that will absolutely not happen, I couldn't do that."

"We're no longer asking for an increase that we really believe we needed to get us through the next four years. We're asking for something less in order to reach a compromise and pass a budget."

Among other things, the compromise includes \$794,000 in spending cuts and the elimination of four vacant jobs in the mayor's information technology office and the law, finance and public works departments.

About half of the cuts will be offset by an additional \$353,000 for a police academy class that will allow the department to fill about 15 vacant officer positions.

Council members and Cauley said the new crime prevention program, Cure Violence, and police won't be affected by the compromise. But the spending cuts will result in fewer demolitions of vacant homes and put a hold on some new police uniforms, among other things.

Councilman Bud Freel, the finance committee chairman, said the administration could have identified more cost-savings had it looked at cutting more of the city's roughly 80 vacant positions. Freel said the compromise came after Council members asked for \$2.5 million in cuts.

"They came back with a 5 percent tax increase and just under \$800,000 in cuts but added \$350,000 back in for the police class, which should have been in the original budget," he said. "We came back and said that was not acceptable. We wanted to see more in cuts, a minimum of \$1.25 million, and they said, 'We don't think we can cut anymore.'"

Freel said vacant jobs are among the best way to cut costs because more than half of the budget is tied to personnel. He said the city is cutting four vacant positions but is really adding the equivalent of one and a half positions when all the jobs are counted.

"It's disappointing when I hear the Wilmington Financial Advisory Council telling us we should be trying to reduce [vacant jobs] by five a year, and here we are still increasing them," Freel said. "I honestly believe there are other positions that we can be deleting and not impact city services, at all."

Council President Theo Gregory echoed Freel's thoughts on the vacant positions but said it was much too late in the year to look at those jobs. He said it would be tough now to pick out vacant jobs to cut.

"That's the reason I said these decisions have to be made before the budget," Gregory said. "The budget process is not the time to do a lot of heavy lifting in terms of transforming and reforming

city government. That needs to be done in September, October, November. Then when you start your budget process, you fold your budget back into the new framework you set up for city government."

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WILMINGTON JOURNAL NEWS EDITORIALS:

DID JEB MAGRUDER TELL ALL ABOUT WATERGATE SCANDAL? (WILNJ)

Wilmington (DE) News Journal, May 19, 2014

Jeb Magruder, who died May 11, was one of the central figures of the Watergate scandal. Magruder was key to the original Watergate operation because, as operational manager of Richard Nixon's re-election committee, he was the direct supervisor of G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, who organized the break-in and orchestrated campaign intelligence and dirty tricks.

COLUMN: Second-term tumbles and the lessons of history

Magruder, 79, was the last surviving attendee of the meeting where (according to Magruder) the "Gemstone" Liddy/Hunt operation was approved by campaign director and former Attorney General John Mitchell, though Mitchell never accepted responsibility. In a 2003 interview, Magruder also claimed he had heard Mitchell receiving orders from Nixon to go after Democratic National Committee Chairman Larry O'Brien's office in the Watergate. I'm skeptical there's very much to that story.

Magruder's role in the cover-up and its breakdown was second only to John Dean's. When the original cover story began to collapse in early 1973, Dean and Magruder raced to cut the best deal with prosecutors. Magruder lost, though both wound up in federal prison and both spilled the beans on important pieces of the puzzle.

Magruder takes with him some of the hope of solving some of the remaining Watergate mysteries, though I don't think he knew much about Nixon's personal involvement or knowledge before the arrests in June 1972. He certainly knew (at least within the limits of memory) what happened in the authorizing meeting that included himself, Mitchell and Frank LaRue, but we'll never know if he told the truth about it.

COLUMN: Should Delaware still have the death penalty?

Magruder also may have known more about the decision to target the Watergate. If Liddy told the truth, however - and on this there's no particular reason to think he hasn't - the burglars chose Democratic headquarters principally out of expediency. It was easier to get into than George McGovern's campaign offices.

However, other than the overheard phone call, there's no reason to believe that Magruder knew anything about Nixon. Our last opportunity to learn more from a first-person witness probably ended with the death of Chuck Colson two years ago. It is possible, but less likely, that Magruder may have had second-hand information he never told, such as a conversation with Mitchell or Bob Haldeman. The only remaining hope for learning more about Nixon's "pre-" role will be from physical evidence. Perhaps some day engineers will manage to recover more information from the tapes.

On the other hand, though we never did learn the whole story of Nixon's involvement, I don't think it's that big a deal. We know that he personally supervised the original cover-up, and that the cover-up of the cover-up was practically a one-man affair on his part. We know that he was aware of criminal activity before the Watergate break-ins even if we don't know whether he knew about that particular operation. We know that he ordered his staff to commit crimes, even if we don't know whether he ordered any of the crimes they actually committed (we know that his staff ignored some of his orders). And we know that he was personally responsible for the general atmosphere of illegality in the White House and in his campaign, and that he personally cultivated the obsession with obtaining political information that led directly to Watergate and other crimes. Magruder wasn't the worst of Nixon's men. As far as I know, his post-Nixon life as a minister was respectable and responsible. He was, like Dean, an ambitious guy in the wrong place, who then made the wrong decisions. He'll always be known as a criminal and an important figure in perhaps

the greatest political crime in U.S. history.

Jonathan Bernstein is a Bloomberg View columnist covering U.S. politics.

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OBAMACARE CRITIC SETS HIMSELF FOR A FALL IN COLUMN (WILNJ)

Wilmington (DE) News Journal, May 19, 2014

Kevin Wade, a 2012 Republican candidate for U.S. Senator, recently blasted the Affordable Care Act in a News Journal column headlined, "Obamacare will fail because it's not honest."

"In the end," Wade wrote, "Obamacare fails because its leaders, sponsors and cheerleaders refused to be honest with the people. You can't build health care or a nation on a lie, but you can destroy it. That's the truth and the lesson for an entire generation."

Wow. Biblical prophets of old rarely spoke with such authority. But he also set a high bar for his own truth-telling.

Let's see how he did.

Here's Wade on why people reject the Affordable Care Act: "They liked their original insurance.

The insurance that suited their needs. The insurance that was affordable. The insurance that was their best choice."

Not a lie, but a bit disingenuous.

Reading Wade's comments, you might think all Americans were completely satisfied with their health insurance options. If that were the case it wouldn't have been an issue in the first place.

The comment also ignores the millions of people who were unable to get any health insurance and those with substandard policies.

Wade goes on to say, "The majority of the public, in numerous opinion polls, never liked Obamacare."

You hear this argument a lot, but there's only one poll that really counts: Election Day. Running on a platform that included broader health insurance coverage, Obama won in 2008. After four years of unrelenting, even hysterical attacks against Obamacare, he won again in 2012.

It's nonsense to say the "majority of the public never liked Obamacare" after voters twice elected the man whose signature achievement is the Affordable Care Act.

Polls also show that some Obamacare features poll very well and that people favor fixing the Affordable Care Act as opposed to repealing it. They include:

- Ending insurance denials because of pre-existing conditions.
- Allowing children to be included on their parents' policies until age 26.
- Eliminating lifetime limits on insurance coverage.

The provision about pre-existing conditions is so popular that Republicans repeatedly claim their "plan" supports the measure.

Here's Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., presenting the Republican rebuttal to President Obama's 2014 State of the Union Address:

"Republicans believe health care choices should be yours, not the government's. And that whether you're a boy with Down syndrome or a woman with breast cancer, you can find coverage and a doctor who will treat you."

It's a good thing Rodgers's nose doesn't grow like that Pinocchio character in the Geico ad. Her nose would have burst through the TV screen.

The only reason people with pre-existing conditions can find health insurance now is because of Obamacare. The idea that a woman with breast cancer could find coverage under a Republican plan is preposterous. There is no Republican plan. Just listen to their leaders. They're running on repealing Obamacare. They're even not offering an alternative.

Here's a claim from Wade. Among the reasons he cited for people not liking Obamacare is the IRS "adding 16,000 new staffers." That figure is baloney.

According to U.S. News and World Report, the IRS had just under 118,000 employees in 1992.

"By 2012," the article said, "this had fallen 23 percent to 90,280. At the same time, the number of returns increased 27 percent, from 113.1 million to 143.4 million."

Sequestration has intensified that trend. At the end of fiscal year 2013, according to the IRS Data Book, the agency had 83,613 employees.

IRS staffing levels have been going down, not up - the opposite of what Wade said. But the real problem with the Republicans' stance on health care goes beyond such bogus arguments. Their

position is dishonest at its core.

If someone is injured, they will be treated at the hospital. That's the law.

Not all these people will be able to pay. Some will file for bankruptcy.

But eventually the bill has to be paid. One way is through higher health insurance costs for people who are already paying for their own coverage. That's the problem Republican Gov. Mitt Romney was trying to solve when he instituted his health care plan in Massachusetts.

He wanted to rid the system of what he called "free riders," people who chose to force their health insurance costs on others. Obamacare was modeled on the Massachusetts plan, which in turn was based on an idea by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank now headed by former Sen. Jim DeMint.

But now Republicans have chosen to abandon what was their own idea and pretend problems like "free riders" and medical bankruptcy don't exist.

Wade said you can't build health care and a nation on a lie. How about a political party?

Don Flood of Lewes is a columnist for the Cape Gazette.

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ATTORNEY GENERAL CITES TRUE THREAT TO CIVIL RIGHTS (WILNJ)

Wilmington (DE) News Journal, May 19, 2014

The thing to remember about the commencement address Attorney General Eric Holder gave Saturday is not that he wrote off the racist musing of people such as Donald Sterling and Robert Copeland. As deplorable as they were, he correctly said, they "are not the true markers of the struggle that still must be waged" against far greater threats to the civil rights of this nation's minorities.

Sterling is the owner of the Los Angeles Clippers basketball team who was caught on an audio recording speaking disparagingly of blacks. Copeland is the Wolfeboro, N.H., police commissioner who was overheard in a restaurant referring to President Obama as "that f-- n--." As bigots go, both men were forged from the same mold that produces the rank and file Klansman.

COLUMN: What the Brown decision should mean, 60 years later

But Holder didn't come to this city, the birthplace of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, to call out the foot soldiers of this nation's still deeply entrenched resistance to civil rights. He didn't have to travel up the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and take the stage of Morgan State University's commencement ceremony to do that, no matter how many news organizations put that tag on his speech.

Instead, Holder - the first black to hold the job as the nation's top law enforcement officer - courageously named Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts as a greater threat to the cause of civil rights than "misguided words that we can reject out of hand."

Coming from a sitting attorney general, Holder's sharp rebuke of Roberts - and the conservative majority that he leads - is unprecedented. But it is not unwarranted.

COLUMN: Should Delaware still have the death penalty?

He "has argued that the path to ending racial discrimination is to give less consideration to the issue of race altogether," Holder said of the chief justice. "This presupposes that racial discrimination is at a sufficiently low ebb that it doesn't need to be actively confronted."

Then Holder craftily - and maybe too subtly for some reviewers - invokes the words and judicial logic of one of the Supreme Court's liberal justices to counter Roberts' myopia.

As "Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote recently in an insightful dissent in the Michigan college admission case, we must not 'wish away, rather than confront, the racial inequality that exists in our society. ... The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to speak openly and candidly on the subject of race.' "

Indeed. Holder, of course, knows that. But by using the platform of a university commencement speech to focus attention on "policies that too easily escape" the strict scrutiny courts give to openly discriminatory laws "because they have the appearance of being race-neutral," Holder is calling out the conservatives on the court.

Can I get an "amen" here?

Such biting criticism will not endear the attorney general to the conservative legion that is the Praetorian Guard of Roberts' "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" school of racial justice. But there are times when a battle for that which is right must be fought in the court of public opinion.

Holder understands that the victory he seeks in the fight for racial justice needs the support of a broad cross section of Americans - not just the minorities who will be its most obvious beneficiaries. I suspect that is why he made this point: "In our criminal justice system, systemic and unwarranted racial disparities remain disturbingly common." Black men, he said, "have received sentences that are nearly 20 percent longer than those imposed on white males convicted of similar crimes," he told the members of Morgan's graduating class. Then, smartly, he left this emerging generation of leaders to make the connection between that harsh fact and Roberts' head-in-the-sand strategy for ending racial discrimination. It didn't take much of a stretch to do that. DeWayne Wickham, dean of Morgan State University's School of Global Journalism and Communication, writes on Tuesdays for USA TODAY. Read or Share this story: <http://delonline.us/1nfob7x>

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VICE PRESIDENTIAL *NEWS CLIPS*

PRODUCED FOR THE OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

TO: THE VICE PRESIDENT AND STAFF
DATE: TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2014 -- 6:15 AM EDT

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BIDEN IN THE NEWS

Biden Returns To Europe In Wake Of Ukraine Crisis

By Lesley Clark

[McClatchy](#), May 20, 2014

Vice President Joe **Biden** leaves tonight for Romania and Cyprus, his latest trip aimed at reassuring European countries rattled by Russian President's Vladimir Putin's incursion into Ukraine.

Biden, who will be accompanied by his wife, Jill, will discuss the international community's response to what the White House says is Russia's "illegal military intervention and destabilizing actions in Ukraine." He'll also talk about deepening economic ties, including through the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and steps to bolster Europe's energy security.

The trip comes as Putin has said he'll order troops on the Ukrainian border to return to their bases, but a White House official who briefed reporters on **Biden's** trip said the U.S. hasn't yet seen any evidence.

In Bucharest, **Biden** will meet with Romanian President Băsescu and Prime Minister Ponta. He will also deliver remarks to Romanian civil society and youth leaders, and will meet with American and Romanian troops conducting a joint capacity-building exercise.

In Cyprus, **Biden** will meet with political leaders from the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, civil society representatives, and faith leaders. The White House says he will "emphasize the United States' strong support for a comprehensive settlement to reunify the island as a bizonal, bicomunal federation with political equality."

Biden will be the highest ranking U.S. official to visit Cyprus since then-vice president Lyndon B. Johnson in 1962. While there he will mark the 40th anniversary of the shooting death of Rodger P. Davies, the U.S. ambassador to Cyprus who was killed by sniper fire during a demonstration against American policy by Greek Cypriots at the embassy in Nicosia on Aug. 19, 1974.

Davies' secretary, Antoinette Varnava, was also killed. Davies, a Berkeley, Calif. native, had been appointed ambassador to Cyprus only a month before his death. He had served as the director of the United States Department of State's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, and later the deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs.

Biden has been a "frequent flyer to Europe, as of late, flying across the Atlantic on a monthly basis since February," writes Heather Conley, a senior fellow and director of the Europe Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. She said **Biden** "has become the 'Reassure-er-in-Chief,' offering words of consolation and American solidarity for increasingly nervous governments in Central and

Southern Europe and the Baltics. These countries fully understand the deleterious effects of Russian aggression and European inaction which is why they actively seek American reassurance.”

Conley notes that **Biden's** trip on Cyprus comes amid a “glimmer of hope for fruitful negotiations between the Greek Cypriot community and the Turkish Cypriots who live in the internationally unrecognized North.”

“This is what brings an American Vice President to Cyprus after 52 years,” she said, “the promise of a diplomatic success—something that has eluded the Obama foreign policy agenda for quite some time.”

The Cyprus Mail notes his visit already is drawing mixed responses. And it's not without some controversy at home: the White House last week sought to downplay news that **Biden's** youngest son, Hunter, has been appointed head of legal affairs for Cyprus-based Burisma Holdings – Ukraine's largest private gas producer.

Though the U.S. has touted the need for Ukraine to boost its energy independence, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said the position was unrelated to any official government stance.

“Hunter **Biden** and other members of the **Biden** family are obviously private citizens and where they work does not reflect an endorsement by the administration or by the Vice President or President,” Carney said.

Biden's Cyprus Stop Will Honor Slain Ambassador

Killing in 1974 has parallels to Benghazi

By Dave Boyer

[Washington Times](#), May 20, 2014

Vice President Joseph R. **Biden** will travel to a Mediterranean country this week to pay his respects to a U.S. ambassador killed during an attack on the American diplomatic facility.

No, Mr. **Biden** won't be honoring Ambassador Christopher Stevens, who was killed with three other Americans in Benghazi, Libya, in September 2012. Instead the vice president will attend a brief ceremony to mark the 40th anniversary of the slaying of Ambassador Rodger Davies in Cyprus.

Mr. Davies was shot to death at the U.S. Embassy in Nicosia in 1974 by Greek Cypriot gunmen who were protesting Washington's failure to stop Turkish troops from taking control of part of the island. The ambassador was seeking shelter in a hallway when a bullet struck him in the chest. An embassy secretary, Antoinette Varnavas, also was killed.

An aide to Mr. **Biden** briefing reporters Monday didn't say whether the vice president plans to draw any comparisons with the death of Mr. Stevens, who was killed during a terrorist attack that the administration initially blamed on a protest over an anti-Islamic video. A special House committee has been appointed to investigate the slayings in Libya.

Time magazine said the Cyprus incident was “eerily similar” to the Benghazi attack, with initial media reports claiming that gunmen stormed the embassy in Nicosia under cover of demonstrators screaming “Kissinger! Kissinger!” (Henry Kissinger was U.S. Secretary of State at the time).

But the culprits were brought to justice in the 1974 killings, while no perpetrators have been located in the Benghazi attack. The Cyprus government charged six people. Two men charged with manslaughter received lengthy prison sentences, although the sentences were later reduced and they were freed after 18 months.

The anniversary of the Cyprus attack is actually Aug. 19, but a senior administration official said Mr. **Biden** will lay a wreath at the embassy on Thursday after meeting with civil and religious leaders on the still-divided island nation in the eastern Mediterranean.

In August, embassy staff in Nicosia will hold another ceremony in which the ambassador's residence will be renamed the Davies House, and a lounge in the embassy will be named after Ms. Varnavas.

Mr. **Biden**'s trip will start on Wednesday with a visit to Romania, where he will meet with the country's leaders to reassure them of the U.S. commitment to protect its NATO allies in light of Russia's "destabilizing" actions in Ukraine, a senior administration official said.

The vice president's wife, Dr. Jill **Biden**, will accompany him on the trip.

Biden To Reassure Romania, Cyprus Of U.S. Support In Ukraine Crisis

[Reuters](#), May 20, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Biden Heads To Romania, Cyprus With Moscow On His Mind

By Stephen Collinson

[AFP](#), May 20, 2014

Washington (AFP) – Vice President Joe **Biden** will underscore a firm US commitment to defend NATO partners and rally support for tougher potential sanctions against Russia on a trip to Romania and Cyprus this week.

Biden will arrive in Bucharest on Tuesday at what one senior official called a "complicated and challenging time in Europe" fostered by Russia's "destabilizing" actions in Ukraine.

Biden's primary mission in Romania is to reassure leaders of the former Warsaw Pact state, and now a member of NATO, that nobody should doubt Washington's commitment to Article Five of the alliance's charter, which states that an attack on one member is an attack on all.

US defense guarantees have taken on heightened importance in eastern Europe following Russia's annexation of Crimea and its massing of troops on Ukraine's borders and what Washington sees as Moscow's support for pro-Kremlin militia groups during unrest in eastern Ukraine.

While in Bucharest, **Biden** will meet President Traian Basescu and Prime Minister Victor Ponta and deliver a speech to young people on the importance of democracy and the rule of law.

"He will simply underscore that we couldn't ask for better allies," the senior US official said.

Emphasizing the US-Romania security relationship, **Biden** will meet US and Romanian aircrews taking part in joint maneuvers in an operation known as Carpathian Spring.

The vice president's trip will represent his latest foray into eastern Europe, a region on which he has particularly focused as vice president – an interest that has intensified since the start of the Ukrainian crisis.

In March, **Biden** visited Lithuania and Poland and traveled to Ukraine the following month.

President Barack Obama will also travel to Poland next month on a visit celebrating the 25th anniversary of the country's post-communist elections, which has taken on extra importance because of the worst East-West showdown since the end of the Cold War, over Ukraine.

The confrontation between Russia and the West will also be a key issue in Cyprus where **Biden** will arrive on Wednesday.

– Cyprus: exposed to Russian money –

The Cypriot government has warned of the devastating impact that any new sanctions directly targeting the Russian economy could have on its own fortunes, given that its finance industry is a key conduit of Russian investment and savings.

The senior US official noted that Cyprus, as a European Union member, was party to the bloc's decision making and actions in imposing sanctions on Russia over Ukraine.

"We are aware and understanding of the exposure of Cyprus to Russian economic activity and Russia economy pressure," the official said.

He added, however, that if further sanctions are needed against Russia – Washington has warned that if Moscow disrupts the Ukrainian election this week it could face new measures – a way to do so could be found without victimizing Cyprus.

Biden will meet President Nicos Anastasiades after he arrives on the divided island and efforts are also being made to discuss the quickening peace process with Turkish Cypriot leaders, officials said.

But the senior official insisted that **Biden** would not try to seek solutions or impose pressure on the two sides.

Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders have vowed to seek an end to the island's four-decade division as soon as possible, and relaunched peace talks on February 11 after a nearly two-year hiatus.

Biden Will Raise Campaign Funds At Tom Steyer's Home

[USA Today](#), May 19, 2014

Vice President Joe **Biden** will headline a fundraiser for Democrats later this month at the home of liberal billionaire Tom Steyer, who has pledged to make environmental protection and climate change a key issue in November's midterm elections.

Biden will head to San Francisco on May 28, according to a Democratic National Committee official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the event had not been formally announced. The event will benefit the DNC.

Steyer's action is the latest sign that he is reaffirming his ties to the Democratic Party. The retired hedge fund executive recently donated \$5 million to the Senate Majority PAC, a super PAC working to help Democrats retain their majority in the Senate, The New York Times reported over the weekend.

Steyer is a vocal foe of the Keystone XL pipeline, which would carry carbon-heavy oil from the tar sands of Alberta, Canada to Gulf Coast refineries. Earlier this year, Steyer had signaled that he might be willing to target those in his own party who back the pipeline, such as Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu — one of the most vulnerable Democrats up for re-election this fall.

Last month, the administration extended a decision on the controversial project, potentially delaying final action until after the election.

Steyer has pledged to raise \$100 million to influence this year's elections and to elevate climate-change issues.

Biden To Attend Fundraiser With Keystone XL Opponent Steyer

[Reuters](#), May 20, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Biden To Attend Fundraiser At Tom Steyer's Home

[Associated Press](#), May 20, 2014

WASHINGTON — Vice President Joe **Biden** is planning to headline a fundraiser for Democrats at the home of billionaire Tom Steyer.

That's according to a Democratic official who demanded anonymity because the event hasn't been officially announced.

Biden will travel to San Francisco for the May 28 event benefiting the Democratic National Committee. The committee is working its way out of millions in debt it racked up helping President Barack Obama get re-elected.

Steyer was a major donor to Obama's campaign and has increased his political activity in recent months. He's a prominent environmentalist and opponent of the Keystone XL pipeline.

Steyer hosted another Democratic fundraiser last year that Obama attended. He's vowed to spend \$100 million on the 2014 midterm elections.

Politico first reported the news of the **Biden** fundraiser.

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Biden To Headline Fundraiser At Billionaire Climate Activist Tom Steyer's Home

By Laura Barron-lopez

[The Hill](#), May 20, 2014

Vice President **Biden** plans to headline a Democratic fundraiser at climate activist Tom Steyer's home

Two sources close to the event planning, including one DNC official, told The Hill that Steyer would be hosting **Biden** for a Democratic National Committee fundraiser at his San Francisco home on May 28.

Steyer, a staunch advocate of climate policies and Keystone XL opponent, has raised his political profile in the past year, vowing to funnel a significant amount of money into 2014 races.

Republicans have pitted Steyer as the Democrats' version of the Koch brothers, and have blamed him for Democrats' insistence on what they consider dangerous climate policies.

The billionaire environmentalist has held fundraisers in the last year which both President Obama and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) attended. The latest fundraiser signals Steyer's increasing commitment to the Democratic party.

Tom Steyer To Host Joe Biden For May 28 DNC Fundraiser

By Andrew Restuccia

[Politico](#), May 19, 2014

Liberal billionaire Tom Steyer will host Vice President Joe **Biden** at his San Francisco home May 28 for a Democratic National Committee fundraiser, according to a source familiar with the event's planning.

It's the latest indication that Steyer, a vocal opponent of the proposed Keystone XL oil pipeline and an outspoken advocate for tackling climate change, is building strong ties to Democrats in Washington.

President Barack Obama and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid have both made appearances at Steyer-hosted fundraisers in the past year.

News of the event comes as Steyer, a former hedge fund manager, is laying plans to make climate change a major issue in the midterm elections. Steyer has said his super PAC, NextGen Climate Action, could spend more than \$100 million — half from his personal fortune and half from green-minded donors — this year. NextGen is slated to detail its midterm strategy at a briefing in Washington, D.C., this week, a source familiar with the issue said.

Steyer spent millions last year on the Massachusetts Senate and Virginia governor's races. While the totality of his 2014 plans remains unclear, Steyer has said he hopes to spend money in the Florida governor's race and the Iowa Senate race.

Republicans have criticized Steyer's growing involvement in politics. They've also bashed Reid and other Democrats for attending his fundraisers at the same time that railing against the Koch brothers has become a prominent liberal theme.

A DNC spokesman confirmed the news of the fundraiser.

Obama's Day: Commanders And Donors

By David Jackson, Usa Today

[USA Today](#), May 20, 2014

President Obama spends Monday with military commanders and Democratic campaign donors.

Obama and Vice President **Biden** have lunch with Combatant Commanders, who lead U.S. troops across the globe.

In the evening, Obama headlines a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee fundraiser in suburban Maryland.

Iowa Activists Provide Early Perceptions Of A Potential Hillary Clinton Presidential Bid

By Dan Balz And Philip Rucker

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa — Eleven Iowa Democratic activists had been talking about the state of the country, the politics of 2016 and a prospective presidential campaign by Hillary Rodham Clinton one recent night when they were asked two questions.

The first was whom they would invite to a dinner party if they could choose from among four prominent Democrats. Six picked President Obama. Two each named Vice President **Biden** and former president Bill Clinton. A lone woman said she would invite Hillary Clinton.

Next they were asked whom among that same group they would call first if they faced a family emergency. The response was overwhelming: Seven of the 11 wanted Clinton at their side.

Their answers crystallized nearly two hours of conversation and captured the range of Democratic sentiment about Clinton, whose possible candidacy is eagerly anticipated by people in her party. But a separate conversation with a smaller group of Republican activists highlighted the degree to which she remains a polarizing figure — though they acknowledged that she would be a more formidable candidate than last time.

During her 2008 campaign, no state frustrated Clinton more than Iowa, which launched Obama, then a senator from Illinois, and dealt her a demoralizing third-place finish.

Back then many Iowans thought Clinton and her national campaign team came across as aloof and presumptuous.

"They just left a bad taste in a lot of people's mouth," said Dale Todd, 57, a Democrat and developer of affordable housing. "The BlackBerry was more important than the contact with [people]. We would be sitting right here, and they would be working their BlackBerry, and you just felt like you weren't getting through."

"They were just going through the motions," added Kay Hale, 62, a school-bus driver.

"It was like, 'We're here, and we can't wait until we get out of here,'" Todd said.

Today, Iowa activists see Clinton through a new lens. Democrats, including those who backed Obama in 2008, are offering strong encouragement.

When Clinton ran the first time, Hale worried that she couldn't "bring the country together" and backed then-Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (Conn.). Now she says of Clinton: "I think we're ready for her. . . . I think she's proved herself. She's earned it."

At the same time, these Democratic activists offered warnings, saying that Clinton must run a different kind of campaign and show a warmer side of her personality if she hopes to be successful.

"I think she's going to have trouble with the middle class," said Charles Crawley, 60, a technical writer. "She went to Wellesley College, Yale Law School, and from that point on she's been in the upper class. She may have middle-class parents, but that was a long time ago."

'Time heals lots of wounds'

The observations in this article come from two sessions with Iowa activists. The first included 11 Democrats from Linn County, around Cedar Rapids. The second session was with six mostly establishment Republicans in suburban West Des Moines, part of Dallas County.

Their opinions and observations are their own, and are not meant to be a representation of the broader electorate or a scientific sample. But because these are among the most politically engaged Iowans, their views provide an early look at perceptions of Clinton in a state that brought her disappointment in 2008.

Of the 11 Democrats, two supported her then, while six backed Obama. But ask them today for a brief description of Clinton, and the responses are all positive: "Seasoned." "Capable." "Smart." "Strong." "Competent." "Amazing." "Intelligent." "Experienced." "Decisive." "Tested."

When Clinton ran in 2008, she had two big liabilities in Iowa. One was her 2002 vote authorizing President George W. Bush to go to war in Iraq, a vote she never truly recanted. The vote alienated the state's liberal activists and put her at odds with Obama.

Among the Linn County Democrats, the Iraq issue has faded in importance. "I think some Democrats in Iowa may have put her in the penalty box eight years ago because of Iraq," said Nate Willems, 34, a labor lawyer. "We've moved past that. . . . Time heals lots of wounds."

On policy issues, these Democrats offered little to suggest that they fear that Clinton would be too hawkish for their tastes or that her economic ideas would be too centrist. Many expressed deep concerns about the growing divide between rich and poor in the country but said they believed she would share that concern, even if she did not use the type of fiery rhetoric associated with Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and others.

The other problem was a perception that Clinton and her campaign entourage were aloof, distant and lacking a common touch. "Bad manners," said Libby Slappey, 62, a fundraiser. That still concerned many of those around the table.

One after another expressed disgruntlement with the way Clinton and her team conducted themselves in 2007 and 2008. "People felt like her campaign thought they had a sense of entitlement because they were the Clintons," said Gretchen Lawyer, 41, a teacher and Obama volunteer.

The consensus among this group was that the Obama campaign outhustled Clinton in Iowa. "She was left in the dust by the organization of the Obama campaign, and I truly believe it emanated from the top," Slappey said. "I truly believe that Barack Obama said to the next level, 'This is how I want my campaign to run,' and that level said it to the next level. And it was a beautiful Amway kind of thing."

Mike Robinson, 51, a registered nurse and former Linn County Democratic chairman, defended Clinton. "I found her to be very genial. I met her on a few different occasions. I was very depressed, disappointed, when she was portrayed otherwise. She's very kind."

'Come here more than once'

These Democrats may eagerly await Clinton's candidacy, but all had advice for her about how to run a different campaign in 2016 than she ran in 2008.

"Come shake our hands," said Kathy Robinson, 51, a property manager who was a Clinton supporter in 2008 when she lived in Illinois. "Talk to us. Ask us our feelings, and ask our opinions. But come here more than once. Don't ignore Iowa."

Lawyer urged Clinton to "get in touch with regular people." She noted that when Obama started out in Iowa, he and Michelle Obama were still paying off their student loans. "How long has it been since she [Clinton] was a normal person outside of public life?" she said, adding: "When was the last time she drove a car? I see that as a liability she needs to think about."

Bret Nilles, 55, the current Linn County Democratic chairman and a finance manager, said Obama's campaign was more open. "Hillary's campaign was more controlled," said Nilles, who backed her that year. "There was a sense that they were going to win it, so all they had to do was make the rounds."

Laura Bell, 54, an accounts manager who supported then-Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich (Ohio) in 2008, said, "I would want to encourage her to remember that there are people in this party [whose] opinions are closer to Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, and do not forget about us."

Todd said that Clinton should "leave the consultants at home." He recalled her first campaign: "When she would walk in the room and the entourage was larger than the group you're meeting with, that didn't go over well. But the reality is, these are the Clintons, and it's going to be tough to do what we are sort of used to."

Roy Porterfield, 63, an automotive service manager, defended Clinton against the perception that she holds herself above others. "She came from perfectly ordinary beginnings," he said. "She didn't grow up a Bush or a Rockefeller or whatever. I don't think she's lacking a common touch. . . . I see her as a perfectly good, solid, honest, ordinary citizen who just happens to have a brilliant mind and vast, useful political experience."

'There's a trust issue'

The Republicans from Dallas County see Clinton as the inevitable Democratic nominee and as a worthy opponent who has bolstered her résumé since her first campaign for the White House. But when they were asked to offer a word to describe her, their answers reflected a sharply negative view of the former secretary of state, senator and first lady: "Political." "Politician." "Schemer." "Tactical." "Manipulative." Only one offered a positive description: "Strong."

Those in the group questioned Clinton's honesty and said they do not trust her. They also see her as vulnerable on issues including Benghazi and health care, citing her role in shaping her husband's failed effort to reform the health-care system when he was president.

"She's tenacious, but she's manipulative," said Lisa Schneider, 41, who works at the governor's residence in Des Moines as a communications and events coordinator. "I don't think she would do right by the country. She has her own agenda, and she's going to do whatever she wants to get there."

Christina Taylor, 43, a physician, said: "I think there's a trust issue with her. I think it's a truthfulness or candor issue. We all say she's very politically astute, politically savvy, she's tactical. I think people have an undertow of wondering, not only with Benghazi but even in her previous past — everything is to get the win, and so can you trust that she is being honest? I think people will continually question, 'Is she telling me the truth?' And you won't know."

"I think she would be polarizing, as polarizing as Obama has been," added Charles Schneider, a state senator and Lisa Schneider's husband.

But Taylor acknowledged the potency of a Clinton candidacy. "I think women want a strong woman," she said. "They're willing to be a Hillary supporter because she's the only one they've got to grab onto. Which is kind of sad, but I think that's true."

These Republicans applauded House Republicans for their decision to launch another investigation of what happened in Benghazi, Libya, in September 2012 and said the issue will not recede if Clinton is a candidate.

"She was in charge of the State Department, and I think it's not necessarily politics. I think the American people deserve to know the truth," said Chad Airhart, 37, the Dallas County recorder.

Among the Democrats, Clinton engendered respect and admiration, but not the kind of excitement that surrounded Obama in his first campaign. When they were asked to name the most exciting person in their party, the activists mentioned nine people, but no one said Clinton. "I'm borderline enthusiastic already," Porterfield said. "But do I think she's exciting? No, not really."

There was little appetite for a **Biden** campaign in 2016, though he is well liked in the state. On the question of whether a primary contest would be good for Clinton, there was division.

Todd said he hopes that the Democrats can avoid a serious nomination contest in order to be better prepared for what he said will be "nuclear war" in the general election. "You need a powerhouse like a Clinton to be able to stand up to these forces, the Koch brothers, the way politics has changed from 2008."

But Crawley said that even if Clinton faces no serious competition for the nomination, "she needs to consider herself the underdog. . . . If she comes in prom queen, this is a cakewalk to the presidency, the thing I'm worried about . . . is we've got a candidate over here who's not being tested in some way. I think that can work against her in a general election."

Joe Biden, The Thinking Woman's Sex Symbol

[Washington Post](#), May 19, 2014

Vice President Joe **Biden** kisses his wife, Jill **Biden**, after a 2012 debate with vice presidential nominee Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) at Centre College in Danville, Ky. (David Goldman/Associated Press)

During his tenure as vice president, the Onion has had a field day with Joe **Biden**. The satirical publication's fictionalized version of the second-most powerful man in America is the kind of guy who washes his Trans Am shirtless, gets banned from Dave and Buster's, and flees to Mexico.

But at the same time, another pop cultural narrative has emerged more quietly: Joe **Biden** as smart-girl sex symbol.

On "Parks and Recreation," eager Indiana public servant Leslie Knope (Amy Poehler) has harbored a long-standing crush on the man from Delaware, whom she considers the sexiest man in America. Leslie is so devoted to **Biden** that she went completely to pieces when she met him during a trip to Washington. "You don't let anything happen to him, do you understand me?" Leslie lectured his Secret Service detail. "He is precious cargo!"

More recently, it turns out that **Biden** became part of the current fad high school students have for asking famous people to prom on a lark. In most cases, the people doing the asking are young men hoping that gorgeous adult women will help them make a splash. Sometimes, female celebrities actually bow to the opportunity to cement their status as fantasy objects and say yes when the requests are made to them publicly.

Talia Maselli, a Connecticut high school senior, took a different approach. She wrote to Vice President **Biden** privately, and with no real expectation that anything would come of it, to ask him to be her date. Rather than implying that **Biden** would look mean or superior if he turned her down, she offered a puckish alternative — asking House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) as a backup.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote, according to the Hartford Courant. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Biden, of course, could not make it. But rather than leaving the letter, which Maselli sent last fall, unanswered, **Biden** arranged to have a corsage delivered to her and is setting up a visit to Washington for her and her family. The gesture was perfectly appropriate, given **Biden's** age and station: He made Maselli feel special and encouraged her interest in politics and public service without making himself the center of attention or taking anything away from other prom attendees. He did the same on "Parks and Recreation" for Leslie, who is rising in the bureaucracy, by telling her how great her work is.

Biden's response is charming, and it explains why a 71-year-old with a somewhat strange job and an intense passion for Amtrak as one of his defining features has become an unlikely sex symbol. What is funny about the Onion's version of **Biden** is that it is so incongruous and plays to the idea of the vice presidency as a somewhat do-nothing job, where eccentrics can thrive. But when he has control of his own image in both fictional and real scenarios, **Biden** — without taking himself too seriously — is showing himself to be someone who is interested in women's minds.

There is a lesson here for all of those teenage boys trying to get the Kate Uptons of the world to go to prom with them. Fellows, listen up: You may make your reputation with other boys by convincing an attractive girl (or woman) to grace your arm for an evening. But being the object of kindness and admiration is not actually the same thing as being liked.

By contrast, if you are looking to make a long-term connection, Joe **Biden** is a pretty good role model for how to find and build a relationship with that special someone. His interest in smart women is not just a put-on. His wife, Jill **Biden**, did not quit her career when **Biden's** job took him to One Observatory Circle, choosing instead to keep teaching at a community college and using her platform to advocate for community college students. In both his own life, and in his role as a public figure, Joe **Biden** sends the message that if you want someone to genuinely like and be interested in you, you have to start by doing the same for her.

How Biden Became Diamond Joe Six-Pack

[Bloomberg View](#), May 19, 2014

Josh Marshall at TPM wants to know: Where did the legend of Joe **Biden** come from? And by that I mean, the current wildly popular **Biden** alter-ego or maybe the real guy – not sure – the sixty-something, aviator-glass wearing, Camaro-driving bad-ass who has become a staple of DC and political junkie culture over the last half dozen years. There are variants. The Mustang driving geezer stocking up on Schlitz, Viagra, Camels and ammo for a mad weekend.

The first thing I'd say is that this Joe **Biden** is popular only among Democrats. There is another Joe **Biden** who is ... well, I'm not sure I understand the conservative vision of the vice president, but I'm sure it involves impressive levels of incompetence and stupidity.

My second thought is that although the immediate source of the **Biden** image seems to be The Onion, it's obvious that it ultimately derives from the vice presidency itself. All veeps become ridiculous; the only question is how. That applied to poor hapless Dan Quayle, who was a perfectly respectable senator until George H.W. Bush selected him, and it applied to Hubert Humphrey, who was one of the greatest politicians of the 20th century until Lyndon Johnson elevated him, if that's how to describe it. When Bush occupied the post under Ronald Reagan, "Doonesbury" said he had "placed his manhood in a blind trust."

What matters is that once the Onion came up with the image, it seemed to fit really well. I think we can thank **Biden** for that. But we can also thank Richard Ben Cramer's classic description of the Delaware senator as over-the-top, impulsive, and filled with awesomeness (at least if you're sympathetic) that wasn't quite under control. See Chapter 17, "The Night of the Bronco."

As I've said, all of that makes **Biden** ideal for the vice-presidency. He comes ready-made for late-night comics, but he also (notwithstanding his conservative avatar) is about as ready for the presidency in an emergency as anyone could be, even though his past presidential campaigns make it clear that no one really wants him in that role. Which is why my advice, mostly tongue-in-cheek, is that whoever the Democrats nominate for president in 2016 should keep him on – and that the Republican nominee should give serious thought to asking him to stick around, too. He really is the Practically Perfect Veep.

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Biden Sends Corsage To Prom Inviter

By David Jackson, Usa Today

[USA Today](#), May 20, 2014

A Connecticut high school student didn't get Joe **Biden** as a prom date, but did receive a note and a vice presidential corsage.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," **Biden** said in the note to Newington High School student Talia Maselli, reports The Hartford Courant.

"But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine," **Biden** added.

Maselli told the Courant that she sent a prom invitation to the vice president seven months ago for a very simple reason.

"Joe **Biden** makes me laugh," she said. "He just cracks me up."

In her note, Maselli wrote: "I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it. I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Last week, on the eve of the prom, Maselli received the note and corsage from **Biden**, who also invited Maselli to the White House.

Reports The Hartford Courant:

"Maselli's first thought was that someone was playing an elaborate practical joke on her. She even called her mother to ask if she was in on it.

"She had no idea what I was talking about," Maselli said.

"Then she called a number for **Biden**'s assistant that was on a separate card. The assistant immediately recognized Maselli's name, and Maselli realized the corsage and the note were real.

"A day later, Maselli and her family were still in shock.

She didn't go to the prom.

"But," she said, "If he had said yes, I would have gone."

Connecticut Teen Asks Joe Biden To The Prom; VP Sends Her A Corsage

By Christopher Hoffman

[McClatchy](#), May 20, 2014

NEWINGTON, Conn. — When Talia Maselli envisioned her perfect prom date, one man immediately sprang to mind: Vice President Joe **Biden**.

"Joe **Biden** makes me laugh," the Maselli said. "He just cracks me up."

So she mailed **Biden** a handwritten note last fall asking him to escort her to the Newington High School prom.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in her letter. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

If **Biden** turned her down, Maselli warned that she might ask Speaker of the House John Boehner, R-Ohio, in his place.

"And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Maselli, who says she's interested in politics, considered the invitation a lark and never expected to hear back. A staff member would glance at the note and toss it, she figured.

At about 10 a.m. Thursday, on the eve of the prom, Maselli got a shock. Her doorbell rang, and a deliveryman handed her a wrist corsage. Inside was a handwritten note from **Biden**.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the vice president said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Biden goes on to invite Maselli to visit him at the White House.

Maselli's first thought was that someone was playing an elaborate practical joke on her. She even called her mother to ask if she was in on it.

"She had no idea what I was talking about," Maselli said.

Then she called a number for **Biden**'s assistant that was on a separate card. The assistant immediately recognized Maselli's name, and Maselli realized the corsage and the note were real.

A day later, Maselli and her family were still in shock.

"It's just been crazy," she said. "I definitely didn't expect him to answer seven months after the letter."

A spokeswoman at **Biden**'s press office said that the vice president read Maselli's invitation and was touched by it. He personally picked the corsage of white roses, baby's breath and red, white and blue ribbons, she said.

"He wanted her to feel special at her prom, even though he wasn't able to come," she said.

Unfortunately, Maselli, now 18, didn't end up going to prom.

"But If he had said yes, I would have gone," she said.

That's OK with Maselli, who will study theater sets and lighting at Central Connecticut State University starting in the fall. She's more excited about going with her family to the White House and meeting **Biden**, a visit the vice president's office is arranging for July.

"I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli said. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington, D.C."

Maselli will hold on to the bracelet and is keeping the corsage in the refrigerator. She is unsure what to do when the flowers wilt, although her grandmother has a suggestion.

"She said I should press them in a book," Maselli said.

Joe Biden Got Asked To Prom And Sent A Corsage In His Absence

[Washington Post](#), May 19, 2014

A Connecticut teen asked Vice President **Biden** to her high school prom never expecting to get a response. But the day before prom, a note and corsage showed up on the 17-year-old's doorstep.

Talia Maselli, a senior at Newington High School, wrote to the vice president last fall. “I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America,” said Maselli in the note, reports the Hartford Courant.

Months later, **Biden** responded, saying his schedule would prevent him from making it. “I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine,” the vice president wrote to Maselli and tweeted earlier today.

The teen told **Biden** in her note that she may have to ask House Speaker John Boehner if her request was turned down.

“And we can’t have that now can we,” she wrote. The corsage must have smoothed things over because there are no signs that Boehner went instead.

More from the Reliable Source:

Patrick Stewart dines at Oyamel before a stop at the Smithsonian

Will Jill Abramson remove her New York Times tattoo?

This Obama-**Biden** photo is asking for a caption

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Biden Can’t Go To High School Prom But Sends Corsage With Note

[Associated Press](#), May 20, 2014

HARTFORD, Conn. — What happens when you invite Vice President Joe **Biden** to your prom? Chances are he won’t show. But he doesn’t ignore it, either.

Talia Maselli invited **Biden** to her high school prom in Newington, Conn. She reached out last fall, knowing **Biden**’s dance card likely would fill up.

Biden couldn’t make it, but he sent a handwritten card and a corsage — baby’s breath, white roses and red, white and blue ribbons. **Biden**’s office says he was touched by the invitation and personally picked out the corsage so Maselli would feel special.

When the vice president’s package arrived at the Masellis’ home last Thursday, a day before the prom, the family thought it was a prank.

“But then we called the number that came with it, and it was his personal secretary,” said Maselli, 18. “I was just shocked.”

Maselli said the invitation to **Biden** began as a joke between her and her friends and she thought it would get lost in all the other mail he gets. She said she always thought the vice president was funny and she didn’t invite President Barack Obama because she thought he would be too busy.

“You know how people have a celebrity crush?” she said. “Well, I don’t, but I thought he would be fun to hang out with.”

Maselli said in her letter to **Biden** in September that she was inviting him so far in advance because she had to beat other teenage girls to the punch. She didn’t go to her prom Friday, as planned.

“I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in all of America — Joe **Biden**,” she wrote. “I fear if you turn me down, I may have to invite Speaker John Boehner, and we can’t have that now can we.”

Biden said in his reply that he was flattered by the invitation but his schedule wouldn’t let him attend. **Biden**’s office is arranging for Maselli to meet him at the White House in July.

Dawn Maselli said her daughter, who plans to study theater at Central Connecticut State University in the fall, has been downplaying getting a response from the vice president, saying it's no big deal. That's not how mom sees it, though.

"It's wild. It's fun," Dawn Maselli said. "I told her to just enjoy it."

Lederman reported from Washington.

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Joe Biden Sends Corsage To Teen Who Asked Him To Prom

By Jessica Chasmar

[Washington Times](#), May 20, 2014

Vice President Joseph R. **Biden** sent a corsage Thursday to 18-year-old Talia Maselli and invited her to the White House after she asked him to be her prom date, a Connecticut newspaper reported.

"Joe **Biden** makes me laugh," she told the Hartford Courant. "He just cracks me up."

The teen sent Mr. **Biden** a handwritten invitation last year asking him to prom.

"I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America," Talia said in her invite.

A delivery man reportedly showed up at her Newington home at about 10 a.m. Thursday — the eve of the prom — and handed her a wrist corsage.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," Mr. **Biden** said in an accompanying note, the newspaper reported. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Mr. **Biden**'s office said he was touched by the invitation and personally picked out the corsage of baby's breath and white roses so that the teen would feel special for her big night.

The vice president also invited her to visit the White House in July.

"It's just been crazy," she told the Hartford Courant. "I definitely didn't expect him to answer seven months after the letter."

The teen unfortunately never made it to her prom, "but if he had said yes, I would have gone," she told the paper.

Teen Invites Biden To Prom

By Justin Sink

[The Hill](#), May 20, 2014

Connecticut teenager Talia Maselli said she could only envision going to her high school senior prom "escorted by the most delightful man in America" — Vice President **Biden**.

So the 17-year-old student mailed the vice president a handwritten note last fall, asking **Biden** if he might accompany her to the dance.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in the letter, according to a report in the Hartford Courant.

In an appeal to Washington sensibilities, the teenager offered both a carrot and a stick — warning **Biden** that she would ask Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) if he turned her down.

"And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Biden couldn't make the dance, but the vice president still responded, sending Maselli a corsage and a handwritten note inviting her to the White House.

"He wanted her to feel special at her prom, even though he wasn't able to come," a representative for the vice president told the *Courant*.

In the note, **Biden** says he's flattered, but his schedule would not permit him to be in Connecticut.

"But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine," the vice president said.

Maselli and her family are planning to visit the vice president in Washington later this summer.

Joe Biden Says 'No' To Prom Invite

By Jonathan Topaz

[Politico](#), May 20, 2014

High school student Talia Maselli's top choice for prom date turned her down. But he invited her to visit him at the White House instead.

Vice President Joe **Biden** wrote a handwritten note to Maselli to tell the Connecticut high school student he would be unable to accept her request to join her at prom, according a story from the *Hartford Courant* published Monday, but the vice president included a corsage and an invitation to meet him at the White House.

Maselli wrote the vice president's office last fall asking **Biden** to her prom, but said she never expected any kind of response.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in the letter. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

She warned that if he turned her down, she might have to invite a second choice — Republican House Speaker John Boehner.

Last Thursday, the night before her prom, Maselli received a handwritten note from the vice president. The letter included a red, white and blue corsage that his office said he picked out personally.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," **Biden** wrote. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Maselli, who said that receiving the letter was "crazy," didn't end up going to prom. But she certainly doesn't intend on missing out on her trip to meet the vice president, which will likely be scheduled for July.

"I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli said. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington D.C."

A Connecticut Teenager Asked Joe Biden To Prom. He Said No.

[National Journal](#), May 20, 2014

High school kids have a tendency to ask famous people to their prom. Their dream dates are usually actors, singers, or supermodels. But for one Connecticut teenager, it was the vice president of the United States.

Last fall, Talia Maselli, a student at Newington High School, mailed Joe **Biden** a handwritten note asking him to be her prom date, the *Hartford Courant* reports.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

She also warned the vice president that if he turned her down, she would ask Speaker John Boehner to be her date instead. “And we can’t have that now can we,” she wrote.

Maselli, now 18, did not hear back from the White House until last week, when a delivery man showed up at her home in Connecticut with a wrist corsage and a note from **Biden**.

“I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening,” the vice president wrote. “But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine.” He also invited her and her family to visit the White House.

A **Biden** spokeswoman told the Courant that the vice president was touched by Maselli’s invitation, and personally picked out the corsage of white roses, baby’s breath and red, white, and blue ribbons.

Maselli didn’t attend her prom, but she and her family took up **Biden**’s invitation and are heading to Washington in July. “I was never really looking forward to going to prom,” Maselli said. “I’m looking forward to going to Washington, D.C.”

Deeply Confused Teen Asks Joe Biden — ‘The Most Delightful Man In America’ — To Prom

By Brendan Bordelon

[Daily Caller](#), May 20, 2014

Connecticut teenager Talia Maselli dodged a bullet last week, after Joe **Biden** regretfully informed her that he would not be able to attend the high school prom she asked the vice president to seven months ago.

The clearly mixed-up Newington high schooler sent **Biden** an invitation to her prom last fall. “I am inviting you so far in advance because I’m sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it,” she wrote, according to newspaper The Hartford Courant. “I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America.”

“Joe **Biden** makes me laugh,” she explained. “He just cracks me up.”

She also warned that should he refuse, she would ask Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner as a back-up date. “And we can’t have that now can we,” she wrote.

Maselli wrote the letter back in October and never expected to receive a reply. So she was shocked (and a little skeptical) when she opened a handwritten letter containing a red, white and blue corsage last Thursday.

“I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening,” **Biden** wrote. “But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine.” The vice president went on to invite the girl to visit the White House this summer.

Maselli — clearly too cool to tolerate “a high school dance” — didn’t make it to her prom last Friday. But she’s keeping the corsage fresh in her refrigerator and is gleefully awaiting her July visit with Uncle Joe.

“I was never really looking forward to going to prom,” Maselli said. “I’m looking forward to going to Washington D.C.”

Follow Brendan on Twitter

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Joe Biden: Prom Date?

[CBS News](#), May 20, 2014

Connecticut teen Talia Maselli really wanted Joe **Biden** to be her prom date, so she sent a handwritten note to the vice president seven months ago, certain there would be plenty of demands on his time.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote, according to the Hartford Courant. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Maselli, who attends Newington High School, also warned **Biden** that if he wasn't available, she might ask House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, instead. "We can't have that now can we," she wrote.

She did not immediately hear back from **Biden's** office, but received a delivery the day before the prom with a corsage and a note written by the vice president himself.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," he wrote, according to the Courant. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

A spokeswoman for **Biden's** press office confirmed to the Courant that the vice president read the invitation and picked out the corsage – of white roses, baby's breath, and red, white and blue ribbons – himself.

The kicker? Maselli didn't even end up going to the prom. But she said that if **Biden** had been able to attend, she would have. She plans to save the corsage.

She is looking forward to paying him a visit this summer in the White House, per **Biden's** invitation in the note.

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Joe Biden Gets Invited To Prom By 17-Year-Old Girl

[ABC News](#), May 20, 2014

Ask a teenage girl who her dream date to prom would be, and you would expect to get an answer such as Justin Bieber or Harry Styles. But for one Connecticut teen, that dream date was 71-year-old Joe **Biden**.

At the age of 17, Talia Maselli of Newington, Conn., invited the vice president to attend her high school prom, calling him "the most delightful man in America," The Courant reported today.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in her letter to the the vice president.

Biden turned down the invitation, but he did have a surprise for her, according to an account in The Courant:

At about 10 a.m. Thursday, on the eve of the prom, Maselli got a shock. Her doorbell rang, and a deliveryman handed her a wrist corsage. Inside was a handwritten note from **Biden**.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the vice president said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Maselli, now 18, ended up not attending her prom. SHOWS: Good Morning America

Biden Turns Down Prom Invite With A Corsage

[MSNBC](#), May 20, 2014

Months ahead of her high school prom, one Connecticut teen knew exactly who would be her dream date: Vice President Joe **Biden**.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Talia Maselli wrote in a letter to the veep. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

She warned that if the vice president didn't accept her invitation, she'd be forced to ask out House Speaker John Boehner instead, The Hartford Courant reported.

"And we can't have that now can we," she teased in the letter.

But instead of her date showing up at her front door, Maselli received a delivery of a corsage of roses and a note handwritten by the vice president himself.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," **Biden** said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

As it turns out, Maselli, now 18, did not attend her prom. But had 71-year-old **Biden** agreed to escort her, she said she would have gone.

If Joe Biden Can't Come To Your Prom, He'll Still Send A Corsage

[The Wire](#), May 20, 2014

Vice President Joe **Biden** leaves a trail of heartbreak wherever he goes. But he always sends flowers. And so it went for young Talia Maselli of Newington, Conn., who wrote a letter last fall to invite the 2016 not-so-hopeful to the prom.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in her letter. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

First of all, say whaaaaaat? As an added safeguard, perhaps a page right out of our promposal handbook, Maselli threatened to bring House Speaker John Boehner if the Veep declined.

Would Joe break her heart? Unfortunately, yes.

Would he at least try to salvage of the pieces? A million times yes. On the Thursday morning before prom, Maselli received a little package of Joe-mentum, which included a note and a red, white, and blue corsage. Hartford Courant

The note read:

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening. But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

There's a lot to unpack here. The severity of **Biden's** tone. Also, the mention of how much **Biden** enjoyed his prom. Moreover, she wasn't joking around about not being able to tolerate prom without **Biden**. In the end, Maselli ultimately decided *not* to go to prom.

Maselli's apparently not the only girl dreaming of **Biden**-laden prom.

Teenage Girl Who Asked VP Joe Biden To Prom Invited To White House

[UPI](#), May 20, 2014

WASHINGTON, May 19 (UPI) --WASHINGTON, May 19 (UPI) --A teenage girl in Connecticut who sent a letter to Vice President Joe **Biden** asking him to her senior prom is going to the White House to meet her political crush in person.

17-year-old Talia Maselli was not planning to attend her senior prom, but last fall sent a letter to the Vice President's office saying she would if the popular politico would be her date.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Months later, she was shocked to receive a handwritten note and corsage from Vice President **Biden**.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," **Biden's** note read. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Biden went on to invite Maselli to the White House, a trip that will probably occur July.

"I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli told the Hartford Courant. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington D.C."

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Joe Biden Turns Down Conn. Prom Invite, Sends Corsage Night Before

Boston.com, May 19, 2014

If nothing else, Vice President Joe **Biden** is a charming man with a handsome set of teeth. There's no doubt he is the type of person who can let loose and have a good time, no matter the setting.

That's what one Newington, Connecticut girl seemed to be thinking when she invited the Vice President to her high school prom.

The Wire reported that Talia Maselli was so eager to bring Mr. **Biden** that she asked him last fall. But even with more than half a year's notice, **Biden** is a busy man who cannot make promises when it comes to proms. His dance card fills up quickly, so to speak.

So when prom season rolled around, and all the other high schoolers were asking annoying celebrities to come to their dance, Maselli was not so lucky. She received a rejection letter in the mail. But it's not all gloom and doom for the 17-year-old. **Biden's** letter was touching and considerate, and it came with a corsage for her to wear to the prom.

Sadly, the special night was not to be without Joe. The Wire report said Maselli was working with a "**Biden** or Bust" platform and decided not to attend the dance without the Veep. You can reach me at douglas.saffir@globe.com. Follow me @dougaffir

Newington Teen Asks Joe Biden To The Prom; VP Sends Her A Corsage

[Hartford \(CT\) Courant](http://Hartford(CT)Courant), May 16, 2014

NEWINGTON — When Talia Maselli envisioned her perfect prom date, one man immediately sprang to mind: Vice President Joe **Biden**.

"Joe **Biden** makes me laugh," Maselli said. "He just cracks me up."

So she mailed **Biden** a handwritten note last fall asking him to escort her to the Newington High School prom.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in her letter. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

If **Biden** turned her down, Maselli warned that she might ask Speaker of the House John Boehner in his place.

"And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Maselli, who says she's interested in politics, considered the invitation a lark and never expected to hear back. A staff member would glance at the note and toss it, she figured.

At about 10 a.m. Thursday, on the eve of the prom, Maselli got a shock. Her doorbell rang, and a deliveryman handed her a wrist corsage. Inside was a handwritten note from **Biden**.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the vice president said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Biden goes on to invite Maselli to visit him at the White House.

Maselli's first thought was that someone was playing an elaborate practical joke on her. She even called her mother to ask if she was in on it.

"She had no idea what I was talking about," Maselli said.

Then she called a number for **Biden's** assistant that was on a separate card. The assistant immediately recognized Maselli's name, and Maselli realized the corsage and the note were real.

A day later, Maselli and her family were still in shock.

"It's just been crazy," she said. "I definitely didn't expect him to answer seven months after the letter."

A spokeswoman at **Biden's** press office said Friday that the vice president read Maselli's invitation and was touched by it. He personally picked the corsage of white roses, baby's breath and red, white and blue ribbons, she said.

"He wanted her to feel special at her prom, even though he wasn't able to come," she said.

Unfortunately, Maselli, now 18, didn't end up going to prom.

"But if he had said yes, I would have gone," she said.

That's OK with Maselli, who will study theater sets and lighting at Central Connecticut State University starting in the fall. She's more excited about going with her family to the White House and meeting **Biden**, a visit the vice president's office is arranging for July.

"I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli said. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington D.C."

Maselli will hold on to the bracelet and is keeping the corsage in the refrigerator. She is unsure what to do when the flowers wilt, although her grandmother has a suggestion.

"She said I should press them in a book," Maselli said.

Joe Biden Declines Invite To Prom, But Sends Student Corsage And Note

[New York Daily News](#), May 20, 2014

The captain of the football team has nothing on the Vice President of the United States.

An eager Connecticut teen asked Joe **Biden** to her Senior Prom, but when the Vice President was unable to attend, he sent the politics-minded student a beautiful corsage in his stead.

Talia Maselli, a senior at Newington High School, in central Connecticut, mailed **Biden** a handwritten note last fall asking him to escort her to her prom.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote, according to the Hartford Courant. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

She says she never expected a response.

But last Thursday, the night before the dance, she received a surprising delivery — a beautiful hand corsage and a handwritten note from **Biden** himself.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," he wrote. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Biden also invited Maselli and her family for a trip to the White House.

A **Biden** spokesman told the Courant that he was so touched by the letter that he not only personally responded to it but hand-picked the corsage — of white roses, baby's breath and red, white and blue ribbons — himself.

The entire incident floored Maselli.

"It's just been crazy," she said. "I definitely didn't expect him to answer seven months after the letter."

Unfortunately, Maselli, who will attend Central Connecticut State University in the fall, only had eyes for **Biden** and didn't end up going to her prom.

"If he had said yes, I would have gone," she said.

Connecticut Teen Receives Corsage From Biden After Asking Him To Prom « CBS New York

[WCBS-TV New York](#), May 19, 2014

NEWINGTON, Conn. (CBSNewYork) — A Newington, Conn., teen received flowers from Vice President Joe **Biden** last week, after she invited him to her high school prom.

Talia Maselli, 18, wrote to **Biden** and invited her to prom seven months ago, CBS Connecticut reported.

Quoted by the Hartford Courant, Maselli wrote in part: "I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Maselli wrote that if **Biden** turned her down, she might have to ask U.S. House Speaker John Boehner instead, "and we can't have that now, can we," the Courant reported.

This past Thursday, on the eve of the prom at Newington High School prom, Maselli received a red, white, and blue corsage with a handwritten letter from the vice president, CBS Connecticut reported.

Biden said his schedule would not permit him to be in Connecticut for the prom and he could not attend, but that he hoped she had a great time, the newspaper reported. He also invited her to visit the White House.

Newington said while other girls her age have celebrity crushes, she prefers politics – and chose **Biden** because he "cracks her up," CBS Connecticut reported.

She plans to take him up on the offer and visit the White House this summer. You May Also Be Interested In These Stories

Girl Asks Biden To Prom, He Sends Corsage

By Ashley Killough

[CNN](#), May 20, 2014

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I am sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, & I had to beat them to it. I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be accompanied by the most delightful man in all of America—Joe **Biden**," she wrote.

In the letter, Maselli said she'd ask House Speaker John Boehner if **Biden** turned her down. "And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Maselli assumed her letter would get brushed aside by an aide. But much to her surprise, she received a delivery last Thursday, the day before prom. The florist said it was from the Secret Service.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the vice president said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

At first, Maselli told CNN, she thought it was a prank from her mom. After realizing it wasn't a prank, her mom called the number on the card accompanying the corsage. Expecting the florist, Maselli said her mom was connected to a secretary in the vice president's office.

Maselli said she was "shocked" not only that **Biden** responded but that he invited her to the White House.

Maselli, however, didn't end up going to prom.

"I'd rather go to the White House anyway!" she said.

And what will she do with the flowers?

Right now, the red, white and blue corsage is in the refrigerator. There are three bracelets attached to the flowers, which Maselli said she'll definitely be holding onto.

CNN's Dana Davidsen contributed to this report.

VP Biden Turns Down CT Prom Invite, But Sends Corsage

[WFSB-TV New Haven \(CT\)](#), May 20, 2014

NEWINGTON, CT (WFSB) –

Vice President Joe **Biden** has been asked to do many things in his career, including run for office, fundraise and even fill in for the president at meetings. But Talia Maselli, 17, of Newington, CT, had a different request for him this week.

Maselli said she didn't have a date for the Newington High School prom and thought maybe the Vice President of the United States might be available.

"Most girls invite their celebrity crushes and stuff and I don't have a celebrity crush," Maselli said. "But Joe **Biden** cracks me up so I thought he'd be a good person to ask."

She crafted an official invitation.

"Dear Mr. Vice President, man of many chuckles, I'd like to formally invite you to my senior prom," Maselli said.

She even joked that if the VP rejected her request, "I have to invite (House) Speaker John Boehner and we can't have that now can we?"

Last September, she mailed the letter and waited.

"When I sent it, I thought there's no way it's going to get through to him," Maselli said. "No one is going to show this to him."

It turns out that **Biden** did get the letter. Eight months later, he ordered a special surprise from Kim's Flower Shop in Wethersfield for the occasion.

Kim Notaro, who is the owner of Kim's Flower Shop said he ordered "white roses and a red, white and blue ribbon."

Biden tweeted "I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine," and also included a handwritten note with the corsage.

"Dear Talia. Thank you for your lovely invitation to be your escort for your prom. I'm flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the letter read.

But **Biden** had a request of his own.

"I would now like for you to be my guest to the West Wing as soon as you are available, if you're willing," Maselli said.

It didn't take her long to say yes to the man of many chuckles.

Talia said she plans to visit the West Wing in July, Right before she starts as a technical theatre major at Central Connecticut State University.

Sadly, Talia said she opted to skip the prom.

Obama-Biden Photo Caption Winner | The Reliable Source

[Washington Post](#), May 19, 2014

President Obama and Vice President **Biden** meet with local workers at the Dupont Circle location of Shake Shack in Washington, D.C. (Alex Wong/ European Pressphoto Agency)

We asked our Source readers (Sourcers?) to come up with a caption for this photo of Obama and **Biden** lunching at Shake Shack in Dupont Circle on Friday. After much deliberation over some really clever responses, we have a winner:

Chris Hannas @cjhannas

@jmckellogg @reliablesource "Oh I double-dip chips left and right at the White House. YOLO! Isn't that what the kids say, Mr. President?"

Thanks to all who kept us entertained with your captions.

The Most Memorable Lines From 2014 Commencement Speeches

By Dylan Stableford

[Yahoo!](#), May 20, 2014

Secretary of State John Kerry returned to his alma mater of Yale University on Sunday to take a swipe at disgraced Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling.

"You are graduating today as the most diverse class in Yale's long history," Kerry said. "Or, as it's called in the NBA, Donald Sterling's worst nightmare." According to the Associated Press, the comment drew laughs from the crowd, which included graduates from 61 countries.

Kerry's zinger was one many memorable moments from the 2014 crop of commencement speeches.

At Howard University earlier this month, music mogul Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs quoted the late rapper Biggie Smalls in his speech to graduates.

"It was all a dream," Combs said in his speech on May 10. "I used to read Word Up magazine."

Combs, who left Howard before earning his bachelor's degree, recalled his time at the historically black college.

"My mind was blown when I saw so many beautiful shades of brown," Combs said. "I never heard so many accents, never seen so many beautiful women — and we all know Howard has the most beautiful, intelligent women in the world."

On Friday, first lady Michelle Obama gave an impassioned speech on diversity to high school graduates in Topeka, Kansas, where the landmark Brown v. Board of Education case started.

"You all are the living, breathing legacy of this case," Obama said. "Many districts in this country have pulled back on efforts to integrate their schools. Many communities have become less diverse."

Obama also delivered the commencement address to graduates of Dillard University in New Orleans.

"No dream is too big, no vision is too bold," she said on May 10. "As long as we stay hungry for education and let that hunger be our North Star, there is nothing, graduates, nothing, that we cannot achieve."

At the University of Massachusetts Lowell on Sunday, Bill Nye had a similar message for graduates: "Change the world."

"I'm not kidding. Change the world in new, exciting and big ways," Nye, better known as "The Science Guy," said. "Keep reaching. Keep seeking. Keep using your abilities to bring out the best in those around you, and let them bring out the best in you."

Nye also railed against climate-change deniers. "Conspiracy theories are for lazy people," he said. "People that don't want to get down to the business at hand. ... Instead of just doing less, we have to find ways of doing more with less. That's the key to the future." Also, he added, "if you smell fresh paint, don't walk under the ladder."

Attorney General Eric Holder also brought up the Sterling scandal in a speech to graduates at Morgan State University in Baltimore on Saturday, saying "subtle racism" still exists in the United States.

"Over the last few weeks and months, we've seen occasional, jarring reminders of the discrimination and the isolated, repugnant, racist views," Holder said. "These outbursts of bigotry, while deplorable, are not the true markers of the struggle that still must be waged. ... The greatest threats do not announce themselves in screaming headlines. They are more subtle. They cut deeper."

On May 3, Vice President Joe **Biden** delivered the commencement speech at Miami Dade College in Florida, the nation's largest community college.

"My name is Joe **Biden**, I am Jill **Biden**'s husband," **Biden** joked. "On every community college campus, that's how I'm known." (In her own commencement speech at Villanova, Jill **Biden** told the graduating class, "Show your heart to the world.")

The vice president then urged Congress to act on immigration reform. "It's time to get done what an overwhelming number of Americans want to do," **Biden** said. "Act now and take these people out of the shadows."

Jill Abramson, who was fired as executive editor of the New York Times last week, honored her commitment to speak at Wake Forest's graduation on Monday.

"What's next for me? I don't know," Abramson said. "So I'm in the same boat as many of you!"

Puff Daddy was among several unconventional choices for commencement speakers.

On May 10, Tiger Woods's ex-wife, Elin Nordegren, received a roar of applause from Rollins College graduates when she mentioned her divorce.

"When I entered my student adviser's office in the fall of 2005, I was 25 years old. I had just recently moved to America. I was married without children," Nordegren said, according to ABC News. "Today, nine years later, I'm a proud American, and I have two beautiful children — but I'm no longer married."

"It was right after I had taken Communication and the Media" class, she said, "I was unexpectedly thrust into the media limelight. And I probably should have taken more notes in that class."

At the University of Colorado Boulder, the May 9 commencement speech was delivered by Eric Stough, animation director for Comedy Central's "South Park" and a CU grad.

"Good morning, class of 2014," Stough, better known as the voice of several characters on the show, said. "As Mr. Hankey, the Christmas poo, would say, 'Howdy ho!'"

Stough, the voice of "Butters," also had a serious message for graduates about to enter the real world: "We need you. Your diploma is an inanimate object, so be the animator, and bring it to life."

Del. Court Overturns Conviction And Death Sentence

By Randall Chase

[Associated Press](#), May 20, 2014

DOVER, Del. (AP) – The state Supreme Court on Monday overturned the conviction and death sentence of a man who has spent more than two decades on Delaware's death row.

The justices ruled unanimously that Jermaine Wright, 41, is entitled to a new trial because prosecutors repeatedly withheld potentially exculpatory evidence in his 1992 murder trial.

Wright was convicted of killing Phillip Seifert, 65, a clerk at a liquor store and bar outside Wilmington.

Monday's ruling came after the Supreme Court last year reversed a lower court ruling overturning Wright's conviction and death sentence. Wright's attorneys then raised issues they said were not settled when the Supreme Court reinstated Wright's conviction and death sentence.

Before his conviction was thrown out in 2012, Wright had spent more time on death row than any other Delaware inmate currently facing execution.

"Wright is not entitled to a perfect trial, but he is entitled to a fair one where material exculpatory and impeachment evidence is disclosed and not suppressed," Justice Henry duPont Ridgely wrote in Monday's ruling.

Herb Mondros, an attorney for Wright, said he was gratified by the ruling but that it would be "unconscionable" for prosecutors to retry the case.

"It's time for this to end," Mondros said. "I think they should drop the prosecution."

Joe Rogalsky, a spokesman for Attorney General Beau **Biden**, said prosecutors respect the court's ruling.

"We will in short order assess the feasibility of retrying a case that's 20 years old," Rogalsky said.

In overturning Wright's conviction and death sentence in 2012, Superior Court Judge John Parkins Jr. noted that Wright was under the influence of heroin and not properly advised of his rights during a lengthy police interrogation that resulted in a confession. Parkins also said Wright's trial attorneys were never given potentially exculpatory information suggesting that Seifert may have been killed by two men who tried to rob another liquor store earlier that night.

The Supreme Court overturned Parkins, saying arguments about the confession were procedurally barred, and that evidence about the earlier robbery attempt would not have led to a different result.

Defense attorneys subsequently argued that prosecutors failed to disclose that Gerald Samuels, a jailhouse informant who testified against Wright, had obtained a plea deal for testifying against a co-defendant in an earlier drug case, and that Samuels expected similar leniency for testifying against Wright.

Wright's attorneys also argued that prosecutors failed to divulge information about another witness, who they argued had committed the liquor store killing with a cousin. Wright's attorneys said prosecutors knew but failed to divulge that Kevin Jamison, who had been called as a witness by defense attorneys, committed perjury in testifying against Wright.

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NEW YORK TIMES AND WASHINGTON POST OP-EDS

What AT&T's Satellite Deal Might Mean

By The Editorial Board

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

In the telecommunications industry, the big only seem to get bigger. Three months after the nation's top two cable companies, Comcast and Time Warner Cable, announced they were merging, the nation's largest telephone company, AT&T, said on Sunday it would buy the biggest satellite-TV business, DirecTV, for \$48.5 billion.

Megamergers always raise lots of questions. And that's particularly true of the telecommunications industry with its high barriers to entry and limited competition. AT&T says that its purchase of DirecTV will be good for consumers, and it is promising several goodies like a pledge to bring high-speed Internet service to rural America to get regulators to look favorably upon the deal. But the company has not yet made a convincing case. As with the Comcast-Time Warner Cable deal, regulators should carefully analyze this acquisition for its impact on the market for paid TV service.

AT&T executives say that their acquisition is not driven by Comcast's purchase of Time Warner Cable, but that's hard to believe. AT&T is no longer just a phone company. It has long been in the wireless business, and, in recent years, it has established a big presence in the TV business, which it hopes to expand substantially with this purchase. Buying DirecTV with its more than 20 million American subscribers (it has 18 million customers in Latin America, too), would give AT&T the national reach in paid television that it needs to compete with a bulked-up Comcast for subscribers and for the opportunity to buy the rights to TV shows, sports and movies.

AT&T wants to sell to its customers multiple services like wireless, broadband and satellite TV, which it already does in parts of the country where it has a wired network, but not where it has no such network. DirecTV has the advantage of reaching all parts of the country; it has deals with other telecom companies to provide high-speed Internet and telephone service to its customers. Companies now feel that they have to offer combination packages because customers are less likely to switch providers if they have signed up for several services.

The biggest potential losers of this deal are consumers in 22 states, including California, Texas and Illinois, where AT&T already provides its own TV service through its U-Verse network. A merger with DirecTV would be bad for these customers because it would reduce choices in markets where AT&T currently competes with cable companies as well as the two national satellite-TV firms, DirecTV and Dish Network. At the end of March, AT&T had 5.7 million TV subscribers; by comparison, Comcast had 22.6 million video customers and Verizon had 5.3 million TV customers. (AT&T is in the process of selling its wireline network in Connecticut to Frontier Communications.)

Elsewhere in the country, where AT&T does not have customers, its acquisition of DirecTV might allow it to compete more aggressively with Comcast and other cable companies. But given the rich price AT&T is paying to get into the satellite business, there might be limits to how much money the company is willing to spend on discounts to get customers to switch to DirecTV.

AT&T has said it is willing to commit to offering satellite-TV plans, which are not bundled with its other services, at prices that are the same for all customers regardless of where they live for at least three years. That is nice, but it is a limited and temporary promise. And so is the company's pledge that it will not block or interfere with the delivery of Internet content on its network for three years. The Federal Communications Commission had issued such Internet rules in 2010, but a federal court struck them down in January.

This much is clear about AT&T's move to buy DirecTV, along with the Comcast-Time Warner Cable deal: These mergers will encourage other telecom companies like Dish Network, Verizon, Charter, Sprint and T-Mobile to contemplate deals of their own. Officials at the F.C.C. and the Justice Department, who have to review mergers for antitrust concerns, need to make sure consumers are not left worse off by these deals.

Primary Day On The Far Side

By The Editorial Board

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

Wearing a black leather vest that barely covered the cigar tucked into his pocket, a man named Harley Brown was allowed to join the debate among candidates for governor of Idaho last week, holding forth on discrimination against bikers and the presidential seal tattooed on his shoulder after God told him he would one day occupy the White House. Another candidate, Walt Bayes, railed against “a bunch of eastern idiots” pushing the country toward Sodom and Gomorrah. If you thought that this was nothing but a stunt designed by Gov. Butch Otter to distract attention from his real opponent, you’d be right. But you’d also be missing the larger point: Republican primaries around the country have largely degenerated into self-parodies. They may lack the flowing beards of Mr. Brown and Mr. Bayes, but many of the other candidates in the party’s primaries — a large number of which will take place on Tuesday — are running on ideas only slightly less extreme.

One of the candidates with a serious shot at making the primary runoff in the House race for Georgia’s 10th district is Jody Hice, a pastor and talk-show host who says homosexuals have the right to be married, just not to each other. (In 2010, he ran billboards linking President Obama with the hammer and sickle.) Another is Mike Collins, a trucking executive who demonstrated the perils of the Affordable Care Act by running a video that showed him riding between two trucks, stuntman style.

The congressman that both are hoping to replace is Paul Broun, a Tea Party adherent who is running for the nomination for an open Georgia Senate seat against six others in a field that has moved ludicrously far to the right. Mr. Broun, best known for calling evolution “lies straight from the pit of hell,” gave up his House seat to run, as did Phil Gingrey, who thinks there’s some truth to the idea that after a “legitimate rape,” women’s bodies can shut down conception.

A leading candidate in the race, Karen Handel, formerly secretary of state of Georgia, used to work for the Susan G. Komen breast cancer group and led the fight to stop paying Planned Parenthood for mammograms because it performs abortions. She wants to repeal the constitutional amendment allowing an income tax. David Perdue, a businessman considered the front-runner in the race, committed a Republican heresy last week by saying the government may need more revenue to reach a balance. To quell the immediate furor, he quickly made it clear he would never consider any tax increases.

In Kentucky’s Senate primary, the Tea Party candidate, Matt Bevin, has accused the Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell — one of two men most responsible for immobilizing Congress and preventing the passage of job-creating legislation — of being insufficiently conservative. In Pennsylvania, Travis Schooley, a conservative challenger to Representative Bill Shuster, pounced on the Republican incumbent for voting to continue the food-stamp program. “If we had jobs and work ethic and didn’t have these programs lying in wait,” Mr. Schooley said at a recent debate, “safety nets, charities and faith-based organizations would be doing these things.”

The list goes on and on. No Republican has a shot in this year’s party primaries without paying homage to extremist ideas. Whether the Tea Party is still a political force is a moot point; the radicalism of 2010 and 2012 is very much alive in 2014.

South Korea Searches For Answers

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

The April 16 ferry disaster in South Korea that left 304 people dead or missing did more than cause immediate outrage. It also forced ordinary Koreans to examine themselves and their country, and what

they saw was a society and a national government that were not nearly as well put together as they and the rest of the world had believed.

Now President Park Geun-hye has declared war against the country's entrenched culture of collusive ties between businesses and government regulators, which has encouraged acceptance of poor safety standards throughout the society. She promised to break those collusive links by revising laws to tighten the screening of officials looking for private-sector jobs after retirement, and she vowed to disband the Coast Guard, which she said failed to do enough to save the passengers, most of them high school students.

Other recent accidents have added to the national soul-searching. On May 2, for instance, a signal failure caused a subway train to run into the back of another train stopped at a station in Seoul, injuring nearly 200 people. South Koreans have begun to see such incidents not as isolated accidents but as consequences of a broken regulatory system. More broadly, there is a mounting sense that these accidents represent, in some way, the dark side of South Korea's success as a global economic power — that in its rush for wealth the country has not only neglected safety but also turned a blind eye to other ills. During the past two decades, as the country joined the ranks of developed countries, its suicide rate more than tripled. Nearly half of its citizens over age 65 live below the poverty line.

"The sinking of the Sewol will stay as a hard-to-erase scar in our history," President Park said. "If we cannot reform ourselves in a situation like this, we will become a nation that will never be able to achieve reform." The ferry disaster was a terrible thing. But there will be some consolation if it yields, from the top of the government on down, an examination of the society's shortcomings.

A Cancer Treatment In Your Medicine Cabinet?

By Michelle Holmes And Wendy Chen

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

WE believe that it might be possible to treat breast cancer — the leading cause of female cancer death — with a drug that can already be found in nearly every medicine cabinet in the world: Aspirin.

In 2010, we published an observational study in *The Journal of Clinical Oncology* showing that women with breast cancer who took aspirin at least once a week for various reasons were 50 percent less likely to die of breast cancer. In 2012, British researchers, by combining results from clinical trials that looked at using aspirin to prevent heart disease, found that aspirin was also associated with a significantly lower risk of breast cancer death.

And yet, until now, there have been no randomized trials (the gold standard of research) of aspirin use among women with breast cancer.

It's not hard to see why: Clinical trials are typically conducted on drugs developed by labs seeking huge profits. No one stands to make money off aspirin, which has been a generic drug since the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, and which costs less than \$6 for a year's supply.

Thankfully, the first randomized clinical trial is now going on in Britain, made possible by funding from a nonprofit group, Cancer Research UK. But the British study is looking at four cancers, and won't be done until 2025. If we in the United States had funding to do a similar trial, we could combine our data and get answers much faster. If the United States is to maintain its role as the global leader in biomedical research, it must fund its own trial of aspirin in breast cancer.

Aspirin was originally derived from willow bark, which has been used as a painkiller since the time of Hippocrates. We don't know exactly why it appears to work in fighting cancer. Aspirin reduces inflammation, and that may play a role in inhibiting the growth of tumors — perhaps by slowing the

development of new blood vessels that nourish them, or by fighting old cells that keep growing when they should be dying off. It may also inhibit estrogen production, and we know that estrogen fuels the growth of most (but not all) breast cancers.

If we could prove that aspirin was an effective treatment in a clinical trial, it would have major implications, especially for low-income patients. Modern hormonal treatments, used after surgery to try to prevent cancer from recurring, last a standard five years and can cost between \$1,200 and \$2,300 a year. But not everyone who needs them is actually taking them. Higher co-pays reduce the number of women who fill their prescriptions, according to a 2011 study.

And that is just in the United States. Africa, Asia and Central and South America already account for more than 60 percent of the world's cancer cases and about 70 percent of cancer deaths, according to the World Health Organization. The majority of the impact of the disease will be felt in those areas in the coming decades. Aspirin's minimal cost would make it available in every country on earth, and for millions of women it could mean the difference between some treatment and none.

It may also offer an alternative treatment to women who cannot tolerate widely used cancer drugs because of debilitating side effects. For example, Columbia University researchers found that half of breast cancer patients taking hormonal treatments (specifically, tamoxifen and aromatase inhibitors) were unable to take the drugs for the recommended five years. A survey by the advocacy group Breast Cancer Action found that the predominant reason was joint pain. The most serious possible side effects of taking aspirin are gastrointestinal bleeding and stroke, but they are rare.

If aspirin truly works, we estimate that we could save 10,000 lives per year in the United States, and 75,000 in the developing world.

It won't take much to find out. A randomized study of approximately 3,000 women with Stage 2 and 3 breast cancer, lasting five years, would cost around \$10 million. (We wouldn't study women with Stage 1 disease because they have such a high survival rate already, nor women with Stage 4 cancer, because there is not enough evidence that aspirin would help when the disease has advanced that far.)

Although \$10 million is a relatively small amount for a large pharmaceutical company, it is too big for most federal grant mechanisms and nonprofit foundations. Our repeated attempts since 2010 to seek funding through federal grant mechanisms have been rejected.

Yet even as government funding for research is slashed, the government is still willing to test new cancer drugs pushed by pharmaceutical companies, despite very high failure rates for those drugs. Federal grant review panels have no direct financial interest in the studies they approve for funding, but inevitably they are seduced by the more novel treatments — the scientific equivalent of the latest smartphone. And generic drugs, particularly ones as old and familiar as aspirin, just aren't sexy.

There's a saying attributed to Hippocrates that extreme remedies are appropriate for extreme diseases. But in the case of breast cancer, the most simple of drugs may be the next great weapon.

Michelle Holmes and Wendy Chen are physicians and faculty members at Harvard Medical School.

Hillary's Obstacle Course

By Frank Bruni

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

Reince Priebus made a joke on Sunday.

I don't know that he meant to — comedy isn't his forte — but the only way to hear one of his comments on "Meet the Press" was as a put-on. He said that Hillary Clinton wouldn't run for the presidency if "she has another month like she just had," with questions about Monica, about Benghazi, about Boko Haram, about her brain.

I almost fell down. For one thing, she's had countless months like that. For another, they're the only kind on the horizon: Hillary as the fodder for the morning talk shows (on Sunday's panels, she came up 98 times, according to a Washington Post tally) and Hillary as a piñata for late-night comedians; strenuously marketed Hillary scandals with a modicum of merit and strenuously marketed Hillary scandals with none.

If Republicans believed in global warming, they'd surely divine her hand in it. Speaking of body parts, I suspect we'll move from Hillary's brain to her heart, probably her liver, possibly her pancreas and maybe even her pinkie toe. What Hillary goes through in the public arena isn't an examination. It's a vivisection.

That she endures it is admirable. That she's so willing to is scary. With all politicians, you worry about the intensity of the hunger that enables them to suffer the snows of Iowa and the slings and arrows of outrageous pundits. With Hillary and Bill, you worry that it's rapaciousness beyond bounds.

You also grow weary. The Clintons are exhausting. And that's just one of many drawbacks worth discussing as Hillary plays Hamlet, mulling what to do.

She's without doubt the contender to bet on. But she's a contender with baggage and obstacles that get woefully short shrift in all the nonstop chatter about her inevitability.

For starters, Americans have been in a pessimistic mood for an unusually sustained period, their faith in the political system at rock bottom. How does someone who's been front and center in that system for more than two decades — who's a symbol of intense partisan warfare — become the voice of change? There's no "Don't Stop (Thinking About Tomorrow)" for Hillary. Tomorrow was yesterday.

Remarks she made in Washington on Friday illustrated that point. At a conference titled "Big Ideas for a New America," she mused about what "the 1990s taught us," looking into the future by traveling into the past, which isn't the terrain on which presidential elections are typically won.

Bill traveled there just two and a half weeks earlier, in a speech of his own at Georgetown University. "Speech" is too paltry a word; this was one of those ego extravaganzas, like his aria at the Democratic National Convention, that went on and on and reaffirmed his talent for making everything, including the current income-inequality debate, about him. In this case he was singing the praises of his own presidency's economic record.

He was also serving notice that despite his screw-ups during Hillary's 2008 campaign, it may be impossible to muzzle him in 2016. Just last week, on yet another stage, he again joined the fray, proclaiming Hillary blameless for Benghazi and vouching that her concussion was merely that. There's a thin line between chivalry and butting in. Can he stay on the right side of it? If not, he could hurt her candidacy, overshadowing her and undercutting her feminist story line.

She has additional challenges. If Obama's approval rating doesn't rise, his would-be successors will be best served by breaking with him. For Hillary that's hard. Given her history on health insurance, she can't run against the Affordable Care Act. Given her role in his administration, she can't run against his foreign policy.

How does she simultaneously defend and defy him? It's a balancing act that Al Gore never perfected in regard to her husband.

The last month has indeed been instructive, demonstrating how practiced Republicans are at attacking her — and how exuberant they are about it. I think they want her to run. She's the devil they know. She's the dragon worth slaying.

She's considered inevitable in part because she's political royalty, awash in money and celebrity endorsements, but is royalty what an economically frustrated, embittered electorate wants? With fame of her duration and magnitude, how does she find a common touch?

And how does she show us anything that she hasn't shown us before, introducing or even reintroducing herself?

Maybe any sense of staleness will be expunged by the prospect of a first female president, but she lacks an opportunity that many successful presidential candidates enjoyed: that period of the rollout when a more detailed biography emerges, a personality is defined and voters get a chance to swoon.

We can't fall in love that way with Hillary, not at this point. We're too far past the roses and Champagne.

The Big Debate

By David Brooks

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

It's now clear that the end of the Soviet Union heralded an era of democratic complacency. Without a rival system to test them, democratic governments have decayed across the globe. In the U.S., Washington is polarized, stagnant and dysfunctional; a pathetic 26 percent of Americans trust their government to do the right thing. In Europe, elected officials have grown remote from voters, responding poorly to the euro crisis and contributing to massive unemployment.

According to measures by Freedom House, freedom has been in retreat around the world for the past eight years. New democracies like South Africa are decaying; the number of nations that the Bertelsmann Foundation now classifies as "defective democracies" (rigged elections and so on) has risen to 52. As John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge write in their book, "The Fourth Revolution," "so far, the 21st century has been a rotten one for the Western model."

The events of the past several years have exposed democracy's structural flaws. Democracies tend to have a tough time with long-range planning. Voters tend to want more government services than they are willing to pay for. The system of checks and balances can slide into paralysis, as more interest groups acquire veto power over legislation.

Across the Western world, people are disgusted with their governments. There is a widening gap between the pace of social and economic change, and the pace of government change. In Britain, for example, productivity in the private service sector increased by 14 percent between 1999 and 2013, while productivity in the government sector fell by 1 percent between 1999 and 2010.

These trends have sparked a sprawling debate in the small policy journals: Is democracy in long-run decline?

A new charismatic rival is gaining strength: the Guardian State. In their book, Micklethwait and Wooldridge do an outstanding job of describing Asia's modernizing autocracies. In some ways, these governments look more progressive than the Western model; in some ways, more conservative.

In places like Singapore and China, the best students are ruthlessly culled for government service. The technocratic elites play a bigger role in designing economic life. The safety net is smaller and less forgiving. In Singapore, 90 percent of what you get out of the key pension is what you put in. Work is rewarded. People are expected to look after their own.

These Guardian States have some disadvantages compared with Western democracies. They are more corrupt. Because the systems are top-down, local government tends to be worse. But they have advantages. They are better at long-range thinking and can move fast because they limit democratic feedback and don't face NIMBY-style impediments.

Most important, they are more innovative than Western democracies right now. If you wanted to find a model for your national schools, would you go to South Korea or America? If you wanted a model for your pension system, would you go to Singapore or the U.S.? “These are not hard questions to answer,” Micklethwait and Wooldridge write, “and they do not reflect well on the West.”

So how should Western democracies respond to this competition? What’s needed is not so much a vision of the proper role for the state as a strategy to make democracy dynamic again.

The answer is to use Lee Kuan Yew means to achieve Jeffersonian ends — to become less democratic at the national level in order to become more democratic at the local level. At the national level, American politics has become neurotically democratic. Politicians are campaigning all the time and can scarcely think beyond the news cycle. Legislators are terrified of offending this or that industry lobby, activist group or donor faction. Unrepresentative groups have disproportionate power in primary elections.

The quickest way around all this is to use elite Simpson-Bowles-type commissions to push populist reforms.

The process of change would be unapologetically elitist. Gather small groups of the great and the good together to hammer out bipartisan reforms — on immigration, entitlement reform, a social mobility agenda, etc. — and then rally establishment opinion to browbeat the plans through. But the substance would be anything but elitist. Democracy’s great advantage over autocratic states is that information and change flow more freely from the bottom up. Those with local knowledge have more responsibility.

If the Guardian State’s big advantage is speed at the top, democracy’s is speed at the bottom. So, obviously, the elite commissions should push proposals that magnify that advantage: which push control over poverty programs to local charities; which push educational diversity through charter schools; which introduce more market mechanisms into public provision of, say, health care, to spread power to consumers.

Democracy is always messy, but, historically, it’s thrived because it has been more flexible than its rivals. In 1787, democracy’s champions innovated faster. Is that still true?

China’s Pollution Challenge

By Benjamin Van Rooij And Alex Wang

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

China’s national legislature has adopted sweeping changes to the country’s Environmental Protection Law, revisions that have been hailed as major steps toward saving China’s environment from rampant degradation.

The authorities will now have stronger enforcement powers, including the right to detain persistent violators for up to 15 days and to fine polluters more heavily than before. Some legally registered civil-society organizations will now be able to initiate public-interest litigation as well.

The law, approved late last month, solidifies the use of environmental targets to assess bureaucrats, who for too long have been measured primarily on economic performance. It also increases transparency by requiring major violators to disclose pollution data and local governments to release information on environmental quality and enforcement.

These changes offer hope to the hundreds of millions of people exposed to the extraordinary risks of China’s severe air, water and soil pollution. We believe the new Environmental Protection Law is a signal from the government that it is taking the issue seriously. Moreover, it is a victory for the countless people in China who have worked for years for environmental change. Even a decade ago, most of the amendments to the law would have been unthinkable.

And yet the new law alone may end up doing little to end the impunity that polluters regularly enjoy. Only deep and fundamental changes in the organization of the party-state can bring down the extreme levels of pollution in China.

Environmental law enforcement has failed across the country largely because the regulatory agencies face conflicts of interest that limit their ability to do their jobs. Local governments provide most of the budgets for local environmental bureaus, but also maintain strong economic and political ties to the companies that pollute. Moreover, a significant part of local environmental regulatory budgets comes from pollution-discharge fees. Because these fees are based on the amount of pollution, this leads to the perverse result that reduced pollution can mean the loss of crucial environmental enforcement funds.

If systemic problems like these are not resolved, it is unlikely that the environmental authorities will avail themselves of the stronger enforcement powers granted to them by the new law. The introduction of more stringent environmental targets for local leaders is a step in the right direction, but it does not fully resolve the core conflict between environmental regulation and polluting industries.

These problems are well known in China, as are potential solutions, such as a recentralization of enforcement authority away from local governments, further decoupling of relations between the state and the companies it controls, and full payment of the regulatory budget out of sources unrelated to pollution enforcement. Such reforms go far beyond the reach of mere environmental law, however, and will require a basic rethinking of central-local relations and the operations of state capitalism.

Experience in both developed and emerging economies shows that citizens and civic organizations are necessary to oversee polluting companies as well as regulators. In this vein, China's new law promotes "societal supervision" of polluters and regulators through greater transparency, public participation and the right to sue polluters.

The nation's leaders nevertheless remain fearful of citizen unrest breaking out over pollution violations, and preventing social unrest remains the top priority. The government continues to restrict citizens from exercising their legal rights to help control pollution. Other laws limit the registration of civic organizations, making it nearly impossible for national or regional environmental organizations to develop.

At present, petitioners and advocates for the environment run the risk of harassment and arrest. Courts often refuse to even accept difficult or sensitive cases. The Supreme People's Court has adopted rules for breaking up class-action lawsuits and relegating individual suits to co-opted lower-level courts. Citizens are therefore often unable to use the law against polluters, especially ones with strong ties to the government. As a result, citizen supervision has been blunted and pollution only grows. The new law may empower citizens, but it still fails to correct systemic barriers that restrict citizen action in practice.

China's half-hearted effort at legal reform is a major risk for the party-state. It raises public expectations for a better environment, but fails to lay sufficient groundwork for improvements in environmental performance. The resulting growth in under-regulated pollution will lead to more public grievances. While many citizens may not be willing to risk aggressive action, an increasing number will conclude that only disruptive activism can force the government's hand. Ever-increasing environmental protests throughout the nation have already highlighted the costs of this approach to the party-state.

In the end, protecting China's beleaguered environment will require the government to reach beyond its comfort zone and confront the limits of its economic and political model. It will require the courage of the central leadership to face down vested interests in the state and industry that oppose the creation of impartial administrative and judicial institutions to regulate pollution. It will also require the good sense to allow society the genuine freedom to act as environmental watchdog without fear of repercussion.

These suggestions would touch the heart of the current power structure — but so does the country's immense environmental crisis. China's new leadership has shown the courage to confront corruption at the highest levels of power. Surely, it can now demonstrate the same commitment toward saving the nation's environment.

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Bankrupt Housing Policy

By Joe Nocera

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

The publication of Timothy Geithner's memoir, "Stress Test," has caused all the old arguments that were fought during the financial crisis to come rushing to the surface again.

Did the government make a mistake in allowing Lehman Brothers to file for bankruptcy? Was it right to bail out the too-big-to-fail banks despite all the harm they had done to the economy? As Sheila Bair, the former chairwoman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, put it in her review of "Stress Test": "Tim's book has reinvigorated a much-needed debate about whether our financial system should be based on a paradigm of bailouts or on one of accountability."

And one other thing: It has re-raised the question of why the government wasn't willing to do more for struggling homeowners, who bore the burden of the Great Recession. In his book, Geithner, the former Treasury secretary, devotes a handful of pages to the Obama administration's mortgage relief efforts, though the writing comes across as halfhearted, not unlike Geithner's efforts while he was running the Treasury Department.

But, in the course of perusing another new book about the financial crisis, "Other People's Houses," by Jennifer Taub, an associate professor at Vermont Law School, I was reminded of an effort that took place in the spring of 2009 that could have made an enormous difference to homeowners, one that would have required no taxpayer money and might well have become law with a little energetic lobbying from the likes of, well, Tim Geithner. That was an attempt, led by Dick Durbin, the Illinois senator, to change the bankruptcy code so that homeowners who were underwater could modify their mortgages during the bankruptcy process. The moment has been largely forgotten; Taub has done us a favor by putting it back on the table.

As she notes, thanks to a 1993 Supreme Court decision, homeowners saddled with mortgage debt on their primary residences have not been able to take refuge in the bankruptcy courts. The unanimous ruling by the court found that when Congress rewrote the bankruptcy code in 1978, it specifically gave "favorable treatment" to mortgage lenders "to encourage the flow of capital into the home-lending market," as Justice John Paul Stevens wrote in a concurring opinion. Durbin was trying to get rid of that favorable treatment.

Why? Because, as Bair told me in an email, "It would have been a powerful bargaining chip for borrowers." Without the ability to file for bankruptcy, underwater homeowners unable to pay their mortgages were helpless to prevent foreclosures. With it, however, servicers and banks were far more likely to negotiate the debt load. And if they weren't, a bankruptcy judge would rule on the appropriate debt to be repaid. For all the talk about the need for principal reduction, this change would have been the easiest way to get it.

Indeed, although the financial services industry had pushed hard for their bankruptcy carve-out, they would have been helped, too. Knowing that a borrower can avail himself of bankruptcy court would undoubtedly have a sobering effect on lenders, making them more cautious about underwriting standards.

As the financial crisis heated up during his first presidential run, then-candidate Obama said that he favored changing the bankruptcy laws “to make it easier for families to stay in their homes.” But he became convinced that the Democrats should not push for it as part of the controversial bailout legislation, so he backed off, promising to push it once he was in the White House.

Once he was president, however, Obama was rarely heard from on the subject. In late April 2009, with a bankruptcy bill having already passed the House, Durbin offered his amendment on the Senate side. The financial services industry pulled out all the stops, arguing that a right of bankruptcy for a homeowner would increase the cost of home loans, undermine the sanctity of contracts and promote (of course!) moral hazard.

Adam J. Levitin, a professor at Georgetown Law School, believes that nothing untoward would have happened if Durbin’s amendment had passed. He and another researcher looked at interest rate and loan size data from 1978 to 1993 when some jurisdictions did allow homeowner bankruptcies. “The effect on interest rates was small,” he told me. “The sky didn’t fall.”

He added, “This should have been a no-brainer.”

As it turns out, there is one other person who was opposed to the bankruptcy option. That was Tim Geithner. He writes in his book that he didn’t think it was “a particularly wise or effective strategy.” Although Geithner says the votes weren’t there for Durbin’s amendment, it did get 45 votes. How many more might it have gotten if the Treasury Department and the White House had come out strongly in support?

Which leads to one other unanswered question about the financial crisis. Why is it that the fear of moral hazard only applies to homeowners, and not to the banks?

Myanmar’s Buddhist Bigots

By Kenan Malik

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

LONDON — There is perhaps no religion that Western liberals find more appealing than Buddhism. Politicians fawn over the Dalai Lama, celebrities seek out Buddhist meditation, and scientists and philosophers insist that Buddhism has much to teach us about human nature and psychology.

Even some of the so-called New Atheists have fallen for Buddhism’s allure. For most of its Western sympathizers, Buddhism is a deeply humanist outlook, less a religion than a philosophy, a way of life to create peace and harmony.

The Rohingya people of Myanmar take a very different view of Buddhism. The Rohingya are Muslims who live mostly in Rakhine, in western Myanmar, bordering Bangladesh. Early Muslim settlements there date from the seventh century. Today, in a nation that is 90 percent Buddhist, there are some eight million Muslims, of whom about one in six is Rohingya.

For the Myanmar government, however, the Rohingya simply do not exist. The government is conducting a national census; 135 ethnic categories are listed on the form. One ethnicity is conspicuously absent: the Rohingya, who the government insists must define themselves as “Bengalis” (that is, as foreigners). “If we ask a family about their ethnicity and they say Rohingya, we will not accept it,” a presidential spokesman, Ye Htut, said recently.

The problems faced by the Rohingya are far graver than a refusal by the state to acknowledge their identity. Their very existence is under threat.

Since 2012, there has been a vicious series of pogroms against the Rohingya. Villages, schools and mosques have been attacked and burned by Buddhist mobs, often aided by security forces. Hundreds of Rohingya have been killed, and as many as 140,000 people — more than one in 10 of the Rohingya population— have been made homeless. A report last September from the independent Sentinel Project for Genocide Prevention suggested that “recent violence has moved beyond mere pogroms” and toward “the ethnic cleansing of entire regions.”

The anti-Muslim campaign has been led by Buddhist monks, who say their actions are in keeping with the demands of their faith. The principal anti-Rohingya organization, the 969 movement, takes its name from the nine attributes of Buddha, the six qualities of his teachings and the nine attributes of the monks. Its leader, a monk named Wirathu, has reportedly called himself the “Burmese Bin Laden.” Muslims, he told an interviewer, “breed quickly and they are very violent.” Because “the Burmese people and the Buddhists are devoured every day,” he argued, “the national religion needs to be protected.”

The extremist monk has proposed a “national race protection law” under which a non-Buddhist man wishing to marry a Buddhist woman would have to convert to Buddhism and obtain permission from the state. The proposal has won support from Myanmar’s president, Thein Sein, and may become law by the end of June.

How do we reconcile the perception of Buddhism as a philosophy of peace with this ugly reality of Buddhist-led pogroms in Myanmar?

Few would suggest that there is anything inherent in Buddhism that has led to the persecution. Instead, most would recognize that the anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar has its roots in the nation’s political struggles.

The military junta that came to power in 1962 has frequently sought to build popular support by fomenting hatred against minority groups. It has stripped the Rohingya people of citizenship, and placed restrictions on their travel, education and land ownership. It has even imposed a “two-child policy” on Rohingya families, to limit their population.

Paradoxically, the recent successes of Myanmar’s democracy movement have only worsened the problems of the Rohingya. In an effort to bolster its position, the government has sharpened its rhetoric of hate, while opponents of the regime have refused to support the Rohingya for fear of alienating the Buddhist majority.

The leader of the democracy movement, the Nobel Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has been shamefully silent, willing only to condemn violence in general. Members of her National League for Democracy are openly involved in extremist anti-Rohingya organizations. It is not that tenets of the Buddhist faith are responsible for the pogroms, but that those bent on confrontation have donned the garb of religion as a way of gaining a constituency and justifying their actions. What is true of Myanmar applies to many other conflicts involving religious groups — from Pakistan to Nigeria, from Indonesia to the Central African Republic. The spawning of such violence has led many to see religion itself, and Islam in particular, as the root of conflict.

Religion does, of course, play a role in these confrontations, but it would be wrong to see them as purely religious. When groups vying for political power exploit religion, its role is often to establish the chauvinist identities by which other groups are demonized and the actions of one’s own are justified.

The anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar may make us doubt our preconceptions about Buddhism. It should certainly make us question the stance of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, generally seen in the West as a fearless warrior for liberty.

While many Western observers acknowledge the political roots of Myanmar's sectarian violence, it is notable that few are willing to be as nuanced about other conflicts involving Islam. Perhaps the plight of the Rohingya will prompt us also to think again about global confrontations where religion plays a role, and will push us to adopt a less black-and-white view.

Kenan Malik is a writer, lecturer and broadcaster, and the author of "From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and Its Aftermath."

Gettysburg On The Maidan

By Roger Cohen

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

KIEV, Ukraine — Ukrainians are reluctant to dismantle the symbols of their revolution on streets that have become the hallowed ground of democracy and a nation-constituting struggle. On Independence Square, known as the Maidan, and in the surrounding area, makeshift barricades of tires and timber, impromptu shrines to the more than 100 dead, and Ukrainian flags flanked by that of the European Union constitute a stage set of defiance against Russian aggression.

This unusual urban landscape, at once stirring and vulnerable, surrounds the office of Arseniy P. Yatsenyuk, the acting prime minister and a man now forged, like many young Ukrainians, in the bloodshed of defiance.

"Putin is caught in the cell of his own propaganda," Yatsenyuk said of the Russian president. "We can offer him an off-ramp. It is called 'Get out of Crimea.' I spoke to his envoy and I told him that even the Roman emperors disappeared, and one day we will have Crimea back."

His words may appear quixotic, given Russian might and Ukrainian weakness, but Yatsenyuk's determination reflects a clear choice that has emerged from the success of the Maidan uprising and the ousting of the former president and corrupt Putin toady, Viktor F. Yanukovych: in favor of European pluralism and against a Eurasian imperium.

Ukraine is today the pivot of a struggle between individual freedom and imprisoning empire. There is no halfway house in this confrontation and no escaping the imperative of moral clarity in picking sides. Vladimir V. Putin's unleashed nationalism and Crimean land grab represent a return to Europe's darkest days. Americans and Europeans need to stand together to resist this threat.

"I don't know what's in Putin's head or what his final destination is," Yatsenyuk said. "Luhansk? Lviv? Lisbon? Ask our Polish friends. They are afraid of Russian troops. A permanent member of the United Nations Security Council has decided to grab the land of an independent country."

The prime minister was speaking to a small group of American, Canadian and European visitors, including the Polish author and former dissident, Adam Michnik; the former French foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner; the literary editor of *The New Republic*, Leon Wieseltier; and the Yale historian, Timothy Snyder.

Snyder has recently written in *The New Republic*: "We easily forget how fascism works: as a bright and shining alternative to the mundane duties of everyday life, as a celebration of the obviously and totally irrational against good sense and experience."

The fact that Putin has chosen the label "fascists" for the likes of Yatsenyuk in Kiev (even as the Kremlin maintains excellent relations with extreme-right parties in Western Europe) only underscores the

Orwellian mind games of his resurgent nationalism. It is typical of fascism to twist history into a narrative of national humiliation justifying the apotheosis of an avenging leader bent on righting these supposed wrongs — be they in the Sudetenland or Ukraine.

During an hourlong conversation, Yatsenyuk said Russia would do its best to “disrupt and undermine” Ukraine’s May 25 election, suggesting there were now up to 20,000 armed people in the eastern part of the country orchestrated by several hundred well-trained Russian agents. Nevertheless, he said, a credible election across most of Ukrainian territory is possible. “We need a legitimate president,” he said.

He rejected the federalization of Ukraine — “Buy every governor; that is the Russian planning behind so-called federalization” — but spoke strongly in favor of the devolution of power and the rights of Russian speakers. “My wife speaks Russian and she does not need any protection from President Putin,” he declared.

Putin must recognize that Ukraine is a “European state” that will go ahead with its contested association agreement with the European Union and recognize the results of the election, Yatsenyuk said. He said Ukraine is ready to pay its debts to Gazprom, the Russian energy company, on condition that Russia adopts “a market-based not a politically-based approach” — cutting off trade when it suits Putin to punish Kiev.

Asked about American policy toward Ukraine, the prime minister sighed deeply. He said he recognizes that every nation has its limits and constraints. But he continued: “The United States is the leader of the free world. You have to lead. If someone crosses a red line, he is to be prosecuted for this in all ways.” As for American military support, he said, “I never ask in case I don’t get it,” adding that he would of course be “happy to have Patriot missiles on Ukrainian soil.”

There is no question that Putin has exploited a perception of American weakness that began in Syria with President Obama’s retreat there from his “red line” against the use of chemical weapons — a retreat that at once underwrote President Bashar al-Assad, strengthened Putin and undermined American credibility. Ukrainians have now died fighting for American and European values of liberty and pluralism. After its Gettysburg on the Maidan, a free and independent Ukraine is a critical U.S. interest and test.

D.C. Officials Need A Hand From The Hill On Budget Autonomy

By Editorial Board

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

THE D.C. Council will appeal Monday’s decision by a federal judge invalidating the District’s budget autonomy law. We hope the appeals court finds the council more persuasive than did U.S. District Judge Emmet G. Sullivan. If not, Congress should finally take it upon itself to bestow upon the District a right enjoyed by every other local jurisdiction in the country.

Judge Sullivan struck down the city’s efforts, through a ballot referendum voters approved last year, to gain more spending freedom. The argument that voters could amend the city’s charter to provide for local control over local spending “simply cannot withstand judicial scrutiny,” the judge wrote.

In affirming that only Congress could make this change, Judge Sullivan sided with Mayor Vincent C. Gray (D) and Chief Financial Officer Jeffrey S. Dewitt against the council. But neither side in this lawsuit disagreed on the justice of budget autonomy — only on the means of attaining it. Even the judge seemed to go out of his way to stress the “extraordinarily powerful” policy arguments in support of budget autonomy.

No doubt there are complex legal issues — including statutory interpretations not addressed in Judge Sullivan’s 47-page opinion — that are worthy of further review by an appeals panel. Most intriguing is the argument by council attorneys that Congress spelled out areas it wanted exempted from local charter amendment, and it did not include local budget issues.

Nonetheless, the city shouldn’t place all its hopes for winning budget autonomy with the courts. The referendum was always seen as part of a “two-track approach.” Judge Sullivan’s decision — eloquently making the case for budget autonomy and making clear there is no question of Congress’s power to grant it — should prod the city’s political leaders to redouble their efforts on Capitol Hill. This isn’t about federal funds: The District is asking only for the right to spend money that the District raises from local taxpayers.

Russia’s Interference In Ukraine’s National Election Must Carry Consequences

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

THE ENCOURAGING news from Ukraine is that a crucial presidential election planned for Sunday is likely to go forward in much of the country, and to be free and fair. “The legal framework, administrative capacity and political will in place suggest that a democratic process will be feasible in the vast majority of polling places,” said a report Monday by the National Democratic Institute, which has deployed an observer team. “Candidates have been able to campaign with minimal interference, the media [are] pluralistic and there have been few formal complaints about election law violations or pressure on voters.”

At the same time, it is already clear that in two eastern provinces, where 14 percent of the electorate lives, balloting will be next to impossible, thanks to forcible disruption by Russian-backed militants. The United States and its European allies have said they will impose additional sanctions on Russia if it disrupts the election or fails “to use its influence to prevent those efforts,” as White House spokesman Jay Carney put it last week. Six days before the election, that failure is blatantly evident.

“There is intimidation,” a senior U.N. official told the Reuters news agency in describing the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Ivan Simonovic, the assistant U.N. secretary general for human rights, said that a number of presidents and vice presidents of local elections commissions had been abducted or otherwise mistreated. Reuters reported that the last election commission attempting to operate in the city of Donetsk shut down Monday, leaving no voting operation in an urban area of 1 million people. Concluded the interior minister of Ukraine’s interim government: “It will be impossible to hold normal elections over the huge territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin seems to think that he can avoid responsibility for the disruption with rhetoric that suggests the opposite of Moscow’s actual behavior. For the third time, Mr. Putin announced Monday that the 40,000 Russian troops deployed on Ukraine’s border were withdrawing; for the third time, NATO’s secretary general and the White House said they had detected no such movement.

The empty announcements may at least mean that Mr. Putin has set aside the option of an overt military invasion of eastern Ukraine for the time being. But dozens of operatives of Russia’s military intelligence service have been spotted in eastern Ukraine, where they have directed takeovers of government buildings. Mr. Putin could use those forces to clear the way for Sunday’s voting, or at least withdraw them and their sophisticated weapons so that the Ukrainian army could clear the remaining rebels. He has made no move to do so.

In the coming days, the focus of U.S. and other Western officials will be, appropriately, on supporting the staging of the elections. Negotiations between the interim government and representatives of the

eastern regions are also worth encouraging, though they appear unlikely to produce results in the short term. But President Obama, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other E.U. leaders must also confront the reality that the latest “red line” they drew for Mr. Putin has been ignored. That must lead to the consequences they have promised: meaningful sanctions on the pillars that prop up the Russian economy.

Commencement Protests Make A Mockery Of Academic Freedom

By Editorial Board

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

ON MONDAY, reporters scrutinized the commencement ceremony at Wake Forest University, where Jill Abramson, the recently ousted New York Times executive editor, delivered a modest address. But to our minds, the bigger news this graduation season has been the large number of colleges and universities that have been impoverished by intolerance as student and faculty activists chased away public figures.

Former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice pulled out of speaking at Rutgers University following objections to her involvement in the Iraq war. International Monetary Fund Managing Director Christine Lagarde withdrew from offering an address at Smith College after a student petition protested the IMF’s “strengthening of imperialist and patriarchal systems that oppress and abuse women worldwide.” Students and alumni at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education demanded that the school rescind its invitation to Colorado state Sen. Michael Johnston (D), because he “embraces a vision of education reform that relies heavily on test-based accountability.” Haverford College lost the opportunity to hear from a leader in higher education when students and staff dissuaded Robert J. Birgeneau, former chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley, from addressing its graduates.

Activists at the Pennsylvania school objected to Mr. Birgeneau’s role in the forceful dispersion of a 2011 Occupy protest at Berkeley, and they sought to condition his appearance on his compliance with a series of “restorative” measures that included “a full accounting of one’s violation,” an open letter about “what you learned” and a “pledge to become a leader in how universities ensure that protesters’ rights are respected.” Instead of submitting a Soviet-style forced confession, Mr. Birgeneau declined to appear.

Haverford’s commencement ceremonies went on with a pinch-orator, former Princeton president William G. Bowen. Rather than shy from the controversy, Mr. Bowen on Sunday admirably defended the principles that some in attendance had renounced: the essential value of open debate and orderly disagreement.

“I am disappointed that those who wanted to criticize Birgeneau’s handling of events at Berkeley chose to send him such an intemperate list of ‘demands,’ “ Mr. Bowen said, according to the Philadelphia Inquirer. “In my view, they should have encouraged him to come and engage in a genuine discussion, not to come, tail between his legs, to respond to an indictment that a self-chosen jury had reached without hearing counter-arguments.”

Responding to a student’s comment that keeping Mr. Birgeneau off campus was a “minor victory,” Mr. Bowen said, “I regard this outcome as a defeat, pure and simple, for Haverford — no victory for anyone who believes, as I think most of us do, in both openness to many points of view and mutual respect.”

Mr. Bowen also faulted Mr. Birgeneau for allowing himself to be cowed, failing “to make proper allowance for the immature and, yes, arrogant inclinations of some protesters. Aggravated as he had every right to be, I think he should be with us today.”

The Haverford mess is not the only or even the most upsetting example. Should we be encouraged that Harvard is turning out future educational leaders who take pride in blocking speech with which they might disagree? Commencement addresses should not be limited to quotations from Dr. Seuss and unremarkable advice to which no one could possibly object. Good for Mr. Bowen, who declined to insult the intelligence of supposedly educated women and men by letting the loudest voices in the audience win.

Love And 'The Normal Heart'

By Richard Cohen

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

Eddie called himself a private detective, although all he really did was repossess cars. He would show up around 4 p.m. at the cafe where I worked after school, have his usual cup of coffee and tell me a thing or two about what we used to call "real life." One day he told me how he used to load his coat pockets with brass doorknobs, which he used to "put out the lights" of homosexuals. I was 16 and getting an education of sorts.

That was long time ago. America then was steeped in bigotry of all kinds, but homophobia was not even on the radar. We knew of racism and anti-Semitism and, in a dim way, sexism. Yet gays were supposedly in a different category, which is to say no category at all. Whoever they were — and wherever they were — they deserved what they were getting. Besides, who even knew any?

Well, I did, but I was not aware of that at the time. Now I have male friends who have married other male friends and female friends who have done the same. I still have momentary vertigo figuring out who the husband is and who the wife is, but I exult in a social revolution that has shattered all sorts of arbitrary categories and recognizes the power and universality of love.

This revolution has been so long in coming — and yet so quick in arriving. HBO on May 25 will air Larry Kramer's "The Normal Heart," a movie version of his play. It is semi-autobiographical and about the onset of the HIV-AIDS epidemic and the adamant refusal of some political leaders, most prominently President Ronald Reagan and New York Mayor Ed Koch, to even acknowledge what was happening. An epidemic was sweeping the gay community, men were dying hideously and often at a very young age — and no one much gave a damn.

The HBO movie is rough on Reagan and Koch. They earned it. Reagan had gay friends and associates and was in no way a bigot. But he was clearly afraid of alienating his conservative base. The Moral Majority's Jerry Falwell characteristically said later that "AIDS is the wrath of a just God against homosexuals." Reagan did not even mention the word AIDS until the disease was impossible to ignore and his friend Rock Hudson had died from it.

As for Koch, mayor of a city hugely impacted by the epidemic, the movie flat-out declares him to have been a closeted homosexual — afraid to acknowledge the reality of AIDS lest his own secret be revealed. Koch always put his private life off-limits. He was entitled to this — but not at the price of ignoring a public health menace that needed immediate attention. The tendency then and somewhat still today was to blame gay men for their plight. The proposed remedy was to deprive them of their sex life — a remedy some felt was worse than the disease.

"The Normal Heart" is heavy on politics but heavier still on love. There's plenty of male-male sex in it and some nudity. But by far its message is about the love the Kramer character shares with his partner who dies from the very disease they're both fighting. AIDS mocks the poet. It's a messy death.

This love of men for men and women for women is no different and no less powerful than the love of men for women and women for men. It can drive any of us mad, turn us into operatic clichés, cause us to endanger careers — take long walks on the Appalachian Trails of our choice. It's the stuff of songs. It's the stuff of life.

It is this love that is at the heart of the same-sex marriage movement. It was an appreciation of this love that got the politically odd couple of uberlawyers David Boies and Ted Olson to defend same-sex marriage. They are both, at heart, admirably romantic.

HBO's "The Normal Heart" has concussive power. It is a gripping drama — some of it downright shocking — but it is, for all of that, just another love story. That it can be seen this way testifies to how far America has come since Eddie the private eye told me it was good sport to beat up gays. See "The Normal Heart." If you are the least bit homophobic, it will change yours.

Women Falling Off The Glass Cliff: When Leaning In Is Not Enough

By Amanda Bennett

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

Amanda Bennett, a journalist and author, is a former editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer.

On June 2, 2003, I was named editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer and became — as Jill Abramson did later at the New York Times — the first female editor in a storied institution's hundred-year-plus history. In November 2006, I achieved another distinction that Abramson last week came to share: I was fired after a tenure of only about three years.

The difference in the public reaction to those events tells me something both wonderful and terrible about what has changed in the world that working women inhabit.

Terrible because, whatever the facts of Abramson's departure, it exposed in a raw way the reservoirs of resentment, hurt and mistrust that women feel at work.

Wonderful, because it is clear that something fundamental has changed in just those seven short years. Women now feel not only resentful but also, finally, entitled: Entitled to lead. Entitled to be paid equally. Entitled to be flawed. Entitled to be fired, yes, but also entitled to point out the fact that to us seems so obvious: Men with even more spectacular and difficult flaws than ours get not only longer tenures but also much softer and more dignified landings.

I know Abramson, her successor, Dean Baquet, and Arthur Sulzberger, the publisher. I like and admire all three. I know absolutely nothing about what went on among them. This is not about them. It's about me and other women like me and why this event hit like a lightning strike to dry tinder.

What experiences can I contribute? The first is what it is like to be fired in an unnecessarily unpleasant and hurtful way.

To be clear: I was never going to remain editor of the Inquirer after Knight Ridder, a legendary newspaper chain, sold the paper to a local business group headed by a PR guy. He told me quickly I would be replaced, but if I kept things running smoothly till he found a successor, he would make the transition easy.

A few weeks later, he informed me that my successor had been chosen and that, in two hours, it would be announced that I was being reassigned as a suburban columnist, an egregiously demeaning demotion. If I fought back, his chief lieutenant said, his boss would play hardball.

Is it any wonder that the narrative that sprang up after Abramson's firing seemed so familiar to me? My path out was paved not with the face-saving transition that one saw for men removed from similar jobs at the Wall Street Journal or The Washington Post but rather with the marshaling of evidence that I

had caused this demotion myself — that I had lost the support of my peers and of the newsroom reporting to me. The same hints that I was difficult to work with. Remote. Aloof. Disconnected. Did I have those flaws? I guess. Were they worse than the flaws of the men who preceded and succeeded me? I doubt it.

I did what most self-respecting female leaders do: I blamed myself. I did negotiate, but barely (I didn't become a suburban columnist; I did get a modest severance) and backed out quietly with gentle words about my successor. The stories didn't use the word "fired." The support I got from other women was muted and behind the scenes.

The second thing I know from experience is why the charge of unequal pay — that Abramson reportedly alleged and Sulzberger vigorously disputed — landed with such force. I have managed at five organizations over nearly 20 years. At each of them I saw women paid less than men in what I thought were identical positions.

Was everyone lying who said they were committed to equal pay? I came to believe not. It was worse than that. It became clear that we saw things differently. I saw two people who, I believed, were doing the same work but being paid unequally. Those above me saw a story and a history, something that they thought caused the man to deserve higher pay: This one had just stepped down from a senior position and taken his higher pay with him. That one had been hired from a higher-paying organization. Yet another had been offered a job with a competitor. How many women in the past decade have been promoted past their peers, only to see in the spreadsheets the sad evidence that their own stories were apparently not as persuasive?

So what caused the dam of silence to break? Why are women so openly furious about something that we barely noticed in the past? For one thing, there is now a growing body of women who — like Sheryl Sandberg, chief operating officer of Facebook and author of "Lean In" — are undeniably successful and not afraid to talk about their experiences as women. For another, there is the equally growing body of women like me, with whom stories like Abramson's resonate because of our own experiences.

Whatever else happens as a result of Abramson's firing, it has already begun the more difficult conversation about what we do when we lean in and it doesn't work. This transparency will beget yet more transparency, which in turn will make it easier and less scary to look at the still difficult reality of female life at the top.

The writer, a journalist and author, is a former editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer

Read more about this issue: Ruth Marcus: Democrats' revolting equal-pay demagoguery Dana Milbank: Republicans can kiss votes from women goodbye Catherine Rampell: Hiring women can boost the bottom line Jena McGregor: Why pay equality and work-life balance aren't just women's issues Kathleen Parker: Tweaking real life

Sanctions On Venezuela Would Be Counterproductive

By David Smilde

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

David Smilde is the Charles A. and Leo M. Favrot Professor of Human Relations at Tulane University and a senior fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America.

Over the past three months, Venezuela has seen significant street protests against the government of Nicolás Maduro and its failures to address crime, inflation and food scarcities. The government's use of force against protesters has added fuel to the fire, sparking a wave of mobilizations that has not

subsided. At least 41 people have died. Congress is considering legislation to impose sanctions on Venezuelan government officials responsible for human rights abuses.

There is no doubt that the government's response has been excessive and that the international community has a role to play in ensuring that human rights are respected. But lawmakers would be wise to vote against sanctions, which will only be counterproductive.

In a recent Senate hearing, Assistant Secretary of State Roberta Jacobson — no fan of the Venezuelan government — argued that sanctions at this time would be unhelpful. Even targeted “intelligent” sanctions would short-circuit dialogues in recent weeks between the Venezuelan government and the opposition.

The dialogues have not been easy. Nonetheless, they represent the most significant negotiation between the two sides in 10 years and have substantial support among the Venezuelan population and important regional actors.

Critics are right to suggest that it is not clear that the Maduro government is committed to these dialogues. Indeed, the opposition coalition recently put its participation on hold to protest a lack of progress. But keeping the dialogue process going is critical to resolving the ongoing political crisis in Venezuela.

This dialogue process is the product of a high-level delegation from the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) at the end of March. In their visit, the foreign ministers of UNASUR countries spoke with the Maduro government, opposition leaders and human rights groups. They managed to get the two sides to agree to terms and sit down face to face in mid-April. After a first, nationally televised debate between the government and opposition leaders, working groups were formed and three more meetings have been held.

This was certainly not the response the Maduro government had in mind from UNASUR. Maduro clearly would have preferred an unqualified letter of support. But UNASUR's independence should be no surprise. While UNASUR includes clear Venezuelan allies such as Bolivia and Ecuador, it also includes U.S. allies such as Chile, Peru and Colombia. Indeed, nobody has worked harder to make this dialogue happen than Colombian foreign minister María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar. Also involved in the dialogue is Vatican Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, who was the Vatican nuncio, or diplomatic representative, to Venezuela for five years before being elevated to his new position by Argentine Pope Francis. They both maintain a significant interest in Venezuela.

Supporters of sanctions have argued that they would provide motivation for the Maduro government to take the dialogues seriously. That seems unlikely in this case. It is true that sometimes sanctions work: In the 1980s, sanctions against South Africa clearly contributed to the demise of apartheid. In that case, the South African government considered itself an outpost of the West in Africa. To have other Western countries boycotting it was an affront difficult to digest and difficult to explain to the population.

But just as often, sanctions fail. It is clear that more than 50 years of various U.S. sanctions have done little to change the Cuban government. Indeed the evidence suggests that sanctions have contributed significantly to the Castros' permanence in power.

The same would happen in Venezuela. Like Cuba, the Venezuelan government is based on a Marxist ideology that portrays the United States as an imperialist power conspiring to undermine its revolutionary government. In this view, the United States wants to undermine Venezuela not only to control its oil, but also because it feels threatened by the success of its socialist alternative.

U.S. sanctions would allow the Maduro government to back away from the dialogues, saying it cannot negotiate while it is being sabotaged by the United States. Any kind of sanctions would effectively

be used to turn what should be a conflict between the Venezuelan government and its opposition into a conflict between the Venezuelan government and the United States. That would allow the Maduro government to distract attention from its own shortcomings and deflect the legitimate grievances that have driven the protests. Perhaps worse, it would disarm UNASUR's ability to keep the Maduro government at the negotiating table.

In this case, U.S. unilateral sanctions would undermine UNASUR's regional approach to problem-solving, will harden the Maduro government and could result in an end to dialogue between Maduro and the opposition. This is probably not what members of Congress want, but if they don't think twice about this sanctions vote, it is likely to be what they get.

David Smilde is the Charles A. and Leo M. Favrot Professor of Human Relations at Tulane University and a senior fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America.

The Bluster Imbalance

By Catherine Rampell

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

Maybe women are not sufficiently full of themselves. But let's not coach them to be full of something else, either.

Read the rash of corporate self-help books and articles lately unleashed upon the world's white-collar women — such as “The Confidence Code” and “Lean In” — and you'll learn that there is a yawning “confidence gap” between the sexes.

Among the alarming symptoms and evidence: We women, even the most successful of us, are riddled with self-doubt. We second-guess our next moves constantly and “ruminate” over past failures. We withhold our opinions in big meetings, while less-informed men freely bluster and bloviate, one-upping and interrupting each other. Even in anonymous political opinion polls, women are more likely than men to say “I don't know” when pressed for a view on something about which we actually know quite a bit.

When we do express opinions, we too often apologize for or prematurely disclaim them (“I'm not sure about this, but . . .”) or intonate them as questions rather than statements. We don't throw our bonnets into the ring for promotions and raises for which we're surely qualified, whereas men toss in their cowboy hats even when their own credentials appear comically deficient.

The self-assurance deficit reinforces the glass ceiling because confidence seems to help people perform better on certain tasks — and, perhaps more important, swagger leads others to perceive us as more competent. One study that asked business school students about imaginary historical people and events (like a “Queen Shaddock” and a “Galileo Lovano”) found that those who feigned familiarity with the fictional figures also achieved the highest social status among their peers.

These are familiar, broad-brush gender stereotypes, of course, often underpinned by tiny lab experiments conducted on callow university students or by corporate surveys administered with little outside scrutiny. But many of them ring true to me — both as a young woman with brilliant and accomplished but perpetually self-doubting girlfriends and as an opinion journalist. (Op-ed pages are often criticized for their dearth of female voices, but the gender imbalance is because men are much more likely to submit unsolicited guest columns and to accept direct invitations to write.)

So sure, whether because of biology or socialization, women are underselling themselves, and could stand to be a little more self-promotional.

Still, it's not clear to me why this so-called “confidence gap” has been framed exclusively as a women's problem or why the optimal solution is for women to ape the men with whom they compete.

Those very same studies that show women to be underconfident often show men to be overconfident. “The Confidence Code” cites one Columbia Business School study documenting that men typically rate their performance 30 percent better than it actually is. Likewise, a survey released last week by YouGov found that, when asked to compare their own intelligence to that of the “average American,” about a quarter of men declared themselves “much more intelligent,” vs. just 15 percent of women. Lake Wobegon, it seems, is brimming with testosterone.

In short, men seem much more willing to be blowhards than women are — during dinner parties, at the office, on anonymous phone surveys and in the nation’s fine op-ed pages. And as long as both employers and peers continue to conflate bluster with aptitude and to reward bombast with respect and job promotions, the only way women can successfully compete with men is to be not just more confident but overconfident in everything they do, too.

Like thrift, bluffing may be a good strategy for individuals who want to get ahead but destructive to society at large. An arms race in B.S.ing seems unlikely to lead to better-run companies, at least, and it certainly isn’t creating more informed political discourse. (Ever watch cable news shows or presidential debates? You’ll notice the words “I don’t know” are generally frowned upon.) I realize it’s easier to teach women to increase their swagger than to tell grown men to temper theirs. So maybe the solution involves trying to change Americans’ perceptions of bluster rather than their skillfulness at wielding it. Rather than advocating that an entire class of people start faking it ‘til they make it, maybe we should be coaching voters, students, bosses and viewers at home how to be a bit more skeptical of the loudest guy (or gal) in the room.

Read more about this issue: Amanda Bennett: Recovering from a fall off the glass cliff Ruth Marcus: Democrats’ revolting equal-pay demagoguery Dana Milbank: Republicans can kiss votes from women goodbye Catherine Rampell: Hiring women can boost the bottom line Jena McGregor: Why pay equality and work-life balance aren’t just women’s issues Kathleen Parker: Tweaking real life

Heads Need To Roll At The VA

By Eugene Robinson

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

Finally, an authentic scandal: incompetence and deception at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Given what we know so far, more heads need to roll — and a criminal investigation should be launched.

Republicans have accused the Obama administration of so many faux scandals that it’s hard to recognize the real thing. Yes, the Internal Revenue Service seems to have given extra scrutiny to conservative organizations, but it gave extra scrutiny to liberal groups, too. Yes, Operation “Fast and Furious” was a mistake, but it wasn’t some kind of sinister plot. No, it doesn’t matter whether the evil people who took four American lives in Benghazi, Libya, are called terrorists, militants or simply killers.

The VA situation, however, looks more serious day by day. If VA hospitals really are falsifying records to disguise lengthy waiting times — and if veterans are dying as a consequence — then President Obama needs to bring in new management to fix the problems and fast.

White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, speaking Sunday on CBS’s “Face the Nation,” described Obama as “madder than hell” about the VA scandal. By now, we should all be used to the fact that Obama is never what you would call demonstrative with his anger, at least publicly. No frothing, no foaming, no gnashing of teeth. I take McDonough at his word that the president is royally steamed.

We also should be used to the fact that Obama is extremely loyal to the members of his team. Despite the disastrous launch of the HealthCare.gov Web site, the president declined to dismiss Kathleen

Sebelius as head of the Department of Health and Human Services, allowing her eventually to leave on her own terms.

I don't see how he can take a similar path, however, with Gen. Eric K. Shinseki at the VA. Sebelius at least made it clear that she understood the magnitude of the problem her department faced. Shinseki thus far has failed to telegraph comprehension, much less inspire confidence.

"Any allegation, any adverse incident like this makes me mad as hell," Shinseki told the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee last week. I doubt there has ever been a four-star general who didn't know how to get angry, but Shinseki's ire had to be drawn out of him. If he was seething inside, he hid it well.

Perhaps that's unfair; perhaps he should be evaluated only on his performance at work, not on whether he emotes before the television cameras. "This is not a job," he said at the hearing. "I'm here to accomplish a mission I think [veterans] critically deserve and need, and I can tell you over the past five years we've done a lot to make things better."

The all-too-obvious rejoinder is: Not enough.

The allegation that VA officials in Phoenix cooked the books to cover up the fact that veterans had to suffer unacceptably long waiting times before they received care — and that 40 veterans died while enduring such delays — is shocking in isolation. But if reports are true that there may have been similar practices in Albuquerque and perhaps in other cities, the problems begin to look systemic.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) said there is "solid evidence" of "a pattern, apparently, of manipulating lists, gaming the system . . . which is not just an impropriety or misconduct, it is potentially a criminal act."

The VA's Office of Inspector General is on the case, Shinseki told senators. But I agree with Blumenthal's assessment that it's time to bring in some outside help, such as the FBI, and that the investigation needs to ascertain not just whether rules were broken but whether crimes were committed.

Shinseki inherited an agency ill-equipped to cope with the tsunamis that were about to overwhelm it: the return of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and the rapidly growing medical needs of Vietnam veterans now entering their later years.

It is important to keep the VA scandal in context. Conservatives who crow that this shows government cannot competently provide health care are wrong. VA hospitals see more than 200,000 veterans a day and rank among the highest in the nation in customer satisfaction, according to surveys.

At issue is how long veterans have to wait before they can receive that care — and whether employees are lying about those waiting times, with the result that people are dying.

The solemn promises we make to our veterans cannot be broken. There's no need for histrionics from President Obama. But he does need to clean house.

The Holocaust Is Not A He-Said, She-Said Debate

By Michael Gerson

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

Several years ago, I attended the bar mitzvah of a friend's son. Uniquely in my experience — and, I'd bet, most people's experience — all of the boy's four grandparents were Holocaust survivors. In the middle of the ceremony, one grandfather interrupted: "I have something to say." He recalled holding his grandson for the first time 13 years earlier and exclaiming aloud, "Hitler, you bastard, I beat you!"

Most Holocaust survivors did not have the option of direct vengeance against their oppressors. They counted their victories in survival, in descendants, and in the transmission of memories. But nearly 70 years after the end of World War II, the stock of living memories is dwindling. Not many remain who can still address the Fuhrer in the first person: "I beat you."

According to a recent global survey by the Anti-Defamation League, two-thirds of respondents either had never heard of the Holocaust or believed historical accounts were exaggerated. And the ignorance is concentrated among the young. This school year, in California's Rialto Unified School District, eighth-grade students were asked to write an essay on whether they believed the Holocaust "was an actual event in history, or merely a political scheme created to influence public emotion and gain wealth."

Note "scheme" and "wealth" — words that Jews have heard before. School officials were forced to cancel the assignment. Which National Review's Charles C.W. Cooke described as a "damn shame" — the cancelation, not the assignment. Cooke complained that academic discussion is too often "conducted between narrow and sternly policed rails." The purpose of education is to cultivate critical thinking, not "to indoctrinate our children with the values of the state."

The application of ideology in this case — an all-purpose conservative critique of political correctness — is intellectually lazy. But the assumption of two-sidedness when considering the Holocaust is positively dangerous.

The argument requires a morally offensive false equivalence. Academics, for example, vigorously debate the causes of grievances that lead to international terrorism. Crackpots claim that the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks were plotted by the Jews. Any teacher who confuses these two types of argument cultivates ignorance and bigotry. The same is true for an eighth-grade teacher who poses the questions: Was Anne Frank's diary a forgery? Was the Wannsee Conference just a staff retreat? Were the Nuremberg trials a kangaroo court?

In this case, the assertion of two-sidedness is a victory for one side. Holocaust denialists crave academic validation above all else, hoping to gain legitimacy for pseudo-history. It is an effort that began during the event itself, with systematic attempts to destroy evidence and create historical doubts. It didn't quite work. When the Germans were forced to retreat from Birkenau, they burned 29 storehouses full of incrimination. In the six that remained, however, the Red Army found 836,255 dresses, 348,000 men's suits and 38,000 pairs of shoes.

The educational enterprise is not just a matter of teaching critical thinking — the cultivation of lawyers and Oxford debaters. It also involves the training of moral sentiments; teaching children to love what is lovely and disdain what is hateful. When school tours visit the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, children are not gaining information about a historical controversy. They are, hopefully, learning to recoil from brutality, bullying and the abuse of the weak. It may be their first glimpse at the reality of evil — lurking in average people, enabled by ideology on a massive scale.

Instead of asking children what they make of the Holocaust, it is worth teaching eighth-graders what the Nazis made of children. Historian Martin Gilbert recounts that at Birkenau, boys aged 14 and 15 were harnessed to carts normally pulled by horses. They transported logs that were used in the crematoria ovens. They were also forced, as one child later recalled, to spread the ash of victims on camp pathways "so that people could walk on the road and not slip." Human ash for traction.

They wanted their stories known. A doctor named Aharon Beilin described meeting a boy working at Birkenau who had been castrated in a medical experiment. The child asked to be examined. "I said I could not help him," Beilin recalled, "but the boy said, 'No, I want you to see what they are doing.'"

About 1.4 million Holocaust victims were under the age of 14. It is one of the most solemn responsibilities of educators to make a new generation see what was done.

Indiana's Gov. Pence Taking The Obamacare Money And Running With It

By Dana Milbank

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

For the first time since Obamacare split the country in two, the conditions for a cease-fire have begun to appear.

An architect of this detente — although he denies any such intent — is Mike Pence, who as a conservative Republican congressman in 2010 fought bitterly against the law and who as governor of Indiana refused to implement it.

But Pence, after intensive negotiations with the Obama administration, just announced his intent to take the money Obamacare provides for Medicaid expansion and to use it on his own terms to broaden health-care coverage for the working poor.

For Pence, a happy warrior for conservatism and a possible 2016 presidential contender, the reason is pragmatic: If he could get money under an Obamacare waiver to enlarge a market-driven health-care program in his state, there would be no point in cutting off his nose to spite his face.

“When it comes to the issue of health care, I believe that people in my party need to be solutions conservatives, offering real alternatives to the big-government answers,” he lectured Monday at the American Enterprise Institute, a center-right think tank, on a visit to Washington. Conservatives, he said, “need to ensure that the safety net is well-designed and strong enough to provide a firm basis for those starting out on life’s ladder.”

That was an implicit rebuke of his former House colleagues who have a “repeal and replace” slogan but have not offered much of a substitute for Obamacare while at the same time attempting to cut food stamps and other parts of the safety net.

Pence, a former head of the conservative Republican Study Committee in the House, was a tea party Republican before there was a tea party. But running a state has given him an elevated perspective.

“Debates that happen in Washington, D.C., pretty easily get far afield of the real-world impacts on real people,” he told me in an interview Monday afternoon. “It will not be enough for new Republican majorities in the Congress and a Republican president to cut government spending,” he added, calling instead for money to be sent to the states so they can “solve the intractable problems.”

Pence isn’t about to admit it, but Obamacare does that.

He thinks he has a conservative alternative to the new law’s expansion of Medicaid: He wants to broaden the “Healthy Indiana” plan started by his predecessor Mitch Daniels (R) by using financial incentives to get the working poor to contribute to their health coverage under a private alternative to Medicaid. The Obama administration appears likely to grant Indiana a waiver for the experiment — and if it works, other states will be free to follow the example.

Starting in 2017, states will be able to experiment further, securing exemptions from problematic provisions of the law such as the individual mandate, the employer mandate and the health-care exchanges. If Republican governors don’t like Obamacare’s requirements, all they have to do is come up with an alternative that provides comparable care and coverage.

Pence declined to speculate about whether he might seek a waiver exempting Indiana from Obamacare overall. He continues to support the law’s repeal, and he spent a good chunk of his AEI speech bemoaning its flaws.

He has to do that if he wants to compete in Republican presidential primaries. Although not usually mentioned in the top tier, Pence is well positioned at a time when the party’s strongest candidates are

governors. He has a better record than New Jersey's Chris Christie, is smarter than Texas's Rick Perry, is not as divisive as Wisconsin's Scott Walker and is more conservative than former Florida governor Jeb Bush. He speaks the language of Christian conservatives — twice in his AEI speech he wove in biblical passages from Luke without citation — and his Medicaid experiment should earn him some moral authority.

While other GOP governors continue to refuse the Medicaid expansion money — a decision that inevitably means lost lives — Pence reminds them, and everyone, that “we’re talking about real people, working people who deserve a better way.” He made it his administration’s job to help the “proud Hoosiers” — people “who find themselves essentially, for all intents and purposes, caught in that gap where their income simply doesn’t give them the ability to purchase health insurance for themselves or for their families.”

This, of course, is what Obamacare is all about. As more conservatives realize that the law they hate allows them to implement policies they like, they may have trouble recalling what all the fuss was about.

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL STORIES

GOP Demands Cuts As Del. Tax Estimates Fall

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

Republicans are demanding budget cuts, with lawmakers now eyeing a \$41 million gap between tax collections and Gov. Jack Markell’s \$3.8 billion proposed spending plan.

One Republican leader in the General Assembly said Monday that members of his party were ready to withhold votes on the state’s annual capital budget unless Markell and Democrats who control the General Assembly agreed to make cuts to the governor’s budget proposal.

“We are serious about blocking some budgetary items unless we see a decrease in operating expenses,” said Senate Minority Leader Gary Simpson, who is calling for 2-percent spending cuts across all state agencies. “Two percent is not that much.”

Delaware’s budget picture is getting worse, not better, for lawmakers as they look to finalize a new spending plan by June 30.

Estimates of state tax collections fell \$33 million on Monday, on top of dips in previous months. About \$14 million of that revenue comes in the current budget year. The projections will force state agency heads to trim spending even further in the current budget year and could prompt cuts to Markell’s spending proposal.

Democrats need Republican support to pass the annual capital budget – which funds school construction, economic development and other projects – so Simpson’s position could prove significant.

“That’s not a threat,” Simpson said, “but there have to be some serious efforts to negotiate.”

The state is experiencing weakness across several tax areas. Personal income tax collections are weaker than expected in the current year and in the fiscal year beginning in July, the economic panel said Monday.

Corporate income tax collections are also off from previous months, as is revenue from abandoned property, the unredeemed gift cards and uncashed corporate checks that fund up to 15 percent of the state’s budget.

Corporations continue to push back against state auditors seeking abandoned property revenue, leaving lawmakers with \$15 million less to work with, David Gregor, the deputy secretary of Finance, told panel members on Monday.

Lawmakers, who typically see an increase in tax collections as the year progresses, are starting to feel pressure to find savings in Markell's spending plan.

Sen. Harris McDowell, a Wilmington Democrat and co-chair of the budget-writing Joint Finance Committee, said the new round of revenue estimates puts the committee in a bind.

"We'll be able to produce a balanced budget, but certainly it won't be a perfect budget," he said.

Markell's proposed gas tax increase to pay for road improvements and a new property tax to fund waterway upgrades may also face even stiffer opposition with revenues falling. Lawmakers will have one more round of revenue estimates in June before closing next year's budget.

Monday's new tax estimates "will make an already challenging budget year more difficult," Ann Visalli, director of the Delaware Office of Management and Budget, said in a statement. Visalli did not attend the monthly meeting of the Delaware Economic and Financial Advisory Council, the public-private panel that produces revenue estimates that lawmakers must follow.

Visalli remained in Dover to work with administration officials and lawmakers on budget plans. The Markell administration continues to pressure agencies to cut spending in the current budget year to cover a shortfall in expected revenues.

Agency heads have responded, returning \$104 million to the general fund. With new estimates, agencies will have to find an additional \$13 million before June 30. That could present a challenge.

Secretary of State Jeff Bullock said Monday he already has cut 1-2 percent of his budget this year, but some agencies are in a more difficult spot financially.

"Some departments are very, very tight," Bullock said. "In those departments, it's very difficult to come up with cuts."

Staff reporter Jon Offredo contributed to this story. Contact Jonathan Starkey at (302) 983-6756, on Twitter @jwstarkey or at jstarkey@delawareonline.com.

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EPA Issues New Rules For Industry Cooling Water

By Jeff Montgomery

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

"At first glance, it really looks like a very disappointing rule that has been softened and weakened by the politics of the day," said Maya van Rossum, who directs the multi-state Delaware Riverkeeper conservation group.

Van Rossum termed Salem Units 1 and 2 "the largest predators on the river." She pointed to PSEG's report in March on the rescue of an endangered, juvenile Atlantic sturgeon in a Salem intake as an example of the risk.

The EPA's move is expected to quickly heat up a long-simmering debate over the Delaware refinery's antiquated cooling water intake system and its industrial wastewater treatment plant. The refinery's last regular wastewater permit expired in 2002. Critics have long called for refinery use of recycling systems that would cut river water needs by 90 percent or more.

A report completed by Delaware's Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control in 2011 and released under the Freedom of Information Act concluded that the present 300-million-gallon-per-day river water intake practice at Delaware City "directly kills many millions of organisms every year."

The design also "indirectly causes both air and water environmental impacts when cooling water intake interruptions result in operational upsets."

DNREC Secretary Collin P. O'Mara said late Monday that his agency is still reviewing the EPA's rules, but would act quickly.

"We plan to have a permit out in the next several months for public review," O'Mara said, adding: "It's a fairly elaborate process. We'll have to follow the letter of the law."

PSEG's intakes for Salem have a 3.1-billion-gallon daily limit, with researchers estimating that the plant's pumps kill 3 billion organisms of all types each year. One study concluded that intakes at Salem and the Delaware refinery kill more than half the striped bass in the river, and claim 19 percent of the Delaware's bay anchovies, an important bottom-of-the-food-chain fish.

Joe Delmar Sr., a spokesman for PSEG Nuclear, released a statement late Monday that the company welcomed the EPA's "technology-based" approach, rather than "imposing a one-size-fits-all numeric standard."

"We are reviewing the rule and its detailed requirements as they pertain to each of our facilities," the PSEG statement noted. "We won't comment further until that review is completed."

Michael Karlovich, spokesman for Delaware City Refinery owner PBF Energy, said officials there want to examine the EPA's plan before commenting.

PSEG has estimated the cost of equipping its Salem site with cooling towers at about \$1 billion. The company's nearby Hope Creek reactor already uses the approach.

The Nuclear Energy Institute warned in February that some nuclear plants around the country could be shut down under the threat of similar costs. a development that could "significantly" affect administration greenhouse gas control ambitions.

Federal officials described the rules as a "common sense framework, putting a premium on public input and flexibility for facilities to comply."

"EPA is making it clear that if you have cooling water intakes, you have to look at the impact on aquatic life in local waterways and take steps to minimize that impact," said Nancy Stoner, acting Assistant Administrator for Water at EPA.

The rule covers 521 factories 544 power plants around the country.

The Riverkeeper, Delaware Nature Society and other groups sued DNREC as recently as last year to compel action on PBF's water intakes after state officials judged cooling towers the best available solution. That case was sidelined after a Superior Court judge noted the pending EPA standards.

Dave Carter, conservation chair for Delaware Audubon, said that his group was encouraged by the release, despite the lack of specific requirements.

"Just because the EPA set a minimum for existing facilities that we do not believe is strong enough doesn't mean that the state can't do something stronger," Carter said. "We're still in a situation where DNREC has said that closed-cycle cooling is a cost-effective technology, that it's the best available technology, so their excuses not to act now are gone."

A coalition of New York environmental groups, however, said the EPA "abdicated the responsibility to state agencies that are simply not equipped to make these decisions alone."

"Unfortunately, EPA's rule will perpetuate the unacceptable status quo that has allowed antiquated plants to withdraw nearly 100 trillion gallons of fresh and sea water each year and indiscriminately kill fish and wildlife instead of recycling their cooling water or use dry cooling technology, as modern plants have done for the past three decades.," said Reed Super, an attorney representing Waterkeeper Alliance.

2 Delaware Animal Shelters Expand

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

Faithful Friends Animal Society and the Delaware Humane Association are making strides toward their long-term goals to provide better accommodations for their charges and a more welcoming atmosphere for potential adopters.

Faithful Friends, which recently opened an Affordable Veterinary Clinic, unveiled the new Gibney's Doggie Kingdom at the shelter on Germay Drive in Wilmington last week. Board members Jill Cantera, principal of Bellevue Contractors in Wilmington, and Dr. Sandra Gibney, an emergency room physician at St. Francis Hospital, played an integral part in the makeover of 3,000 square feet of the shelter.

Cantera, who spent months touring shelters and researching best designs and practices, directed the renovation project to better uses of space, including two new private meet-and-greet adoption rooms and a new dog-washing station. The area also has a new dropped ceiling and air filtration, PVC wall panels that reduce noise, durable easy-to-clean flooring and 48 state-of-the-art T-Kennels. Cantera also supervised the earlier renovation of the shelter's cat habitats.

The new dog kennels are brightly colored, have solid walls to prevent the dogs from sniffing each other and possibly transmitting viruses, and they are easy to clean. They also have slots that allow staff to feed and water the dogs without going into the kennel, a time-saving and sanitary step.

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"They are raised off the floor and have built-in covered drains at the rear so staff can hose them out and the water drains away," said Jane Pierantozzi, executive director. "The retractable power hoses are mounted on the walls, so no one has to step over them. The new kennels are brighter, larger and provide a healthier environment for the dogs who are waiting for homes."

The shelter adopts about 70 animals each month and 850 a year, numbers Pierantozzi and her board hope will rise with the improvements.

The renovations were funded by private grants, individual sponsors and a \$200,000 gift from Dr. Gibney. The new doggie haven is named in honor of Dr. Gibney's mother, Mary Rita Gibney. Many of the kennels are sponsored by individuals. One of the meet-and-greet rooms is named for a beloved Gibney family dog, Missy, and the other for Gibney's sister, Susie A. Comegys.

"My mother loved animals, and I've loved animals all my life," Dr. Gibney said. "We approached this thoughtfully to provide a better environment for the dogs and the people who want to adopt. We've even piped in music to help keep the dogs calm."

The next step is creation of indoor-outdoor kennels and renovation of the approximately 1,500-square-foot warehouse. Ultimately the goal is a new building.

"That's what we're working towards, but in the meantime we're continuing to raise money to bring improvements to this site," Pierantozzi said. "And, when we do move the new kennels will go with us because they are built to be moved."

At the Delaware Humane Association, things are moving smoothly toward the November opening of the Tatiana and Gerret Copeland Animal Care & Companion Center in Wilmington. There's only one hitch: Some people think the shelter is closed and moving to a new location.

"We have not and will not close at all," said Patrick Carroll, DHA executive director. "We made the decision from the beginning to build on our current location, and that's what we are doing. We felt it was our responsibility to stay in Wilmington."

The new facility will not significantly increase the shelter's footprint, which is about 7,000 square feet, but it's going to seem like it. The design utilizes the space to expand and improve animal housing and care facilities, not to mention a significant improvement in the aesthetics. The plans include a new community room to house events, meetings and educational programs.

The capital campaign to fund the new facility began more than three years ago with a goal of \$3.1 million. More than 1,000 donors helped meet the goal. The facility is named in honor of well-known local philanthropists and campaign chairs Tatiana and Gerret Copeland, who pledged to match every dollar

donated by individuals up to \$750,000. They then pledged a further \$250,000, bringing their gift to \$1 million.

Increases in construction and labor costs since the 2010 estimate have caused the cost to rise by about 20 percent, with the final bill for the facility coming in at about \$4 million, but Carroll is counting on donors to help close the gap and avoid a mortgage.

Once the new building is open; the old one will be demolished. The shelter adopts out about 600 dogs and 600 cats a year. Carroll said the improved intake facilities, medical facilities and other improvements generated by the new facility should help increase the number of annual adoptions.

Hard Hat tours are offered most Wednesday afternoons or by appointment. For a tour or more information about giving, contact Greg Munson, (302) 571-8171, ext. 300.

Delaware Pets is written by animal-lover Deb Lucas. Send her your news, events and column ideas to dllucas@delawareonline.com or call her at (302) 324-2852.

Pet-related events

- Until May 31, qualified adopters at many area shelters, including the Delaware Humane Association, will be eligible to pay reduced adoption fees for all black or mostly black animals they adopt. Dogs 7 months and older can be adopted for \$50 and cats of any age can be adopted for \$20. dehumane.org/adoptus

- Anyone feeding roaming cats in the 19805 ZIP code can take a cat in for a free spay or neuter procedure at Faithful Friends near Elsmere in Wilmington, thanks to a PetSmart Foundation grant. If you cannot get the cat/s in a carrier, Faithful Friends will humanely trap, spay or neuter the cat/s and return them to you. (302) 427-8514, ext. 0; faithfulfriends.us

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Test-maker CD Diagnostics Settles In In Delaware

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

When it came time to decide where to locate his high-tech medical business, Richard Birkmeyer knew he wanted to be in Delaware.

CD Diagnostics, which creates diagnostic tests for joint disease, is his second business in this state.

Birkmeyer, CEO and president of the company, knows and likes the people of the First State. Proximity to I-95 is another perk of being located in Claymont.

"There's a lot of local support for the company and a lot of familiarity for the state," Birkmeyer said.

The Pennsylvania startup has opened an office at the Brandywine Corporate Center, 650 Naamans Road. The move comes after CD Diagnostics signed a partnership to work with Zimmer, a large provider of joint replacement technologies, a decision that is helping to grow the business.

"All that research and all that manufacturing will be done here in Delaware," Birkmeyer said.

Birkmeyer has said he turned down an economic development grant from Pennsylvania, opting instead for Delaware for his new venture.

The company was awarded a \$500,000 incentive from the Delaware Economic Development Opportunity Office to locate here and create jobs.

Generally speaking, CD Diagnostics makes tests that are developed to provide doctors with fast and accurate diagnostics.

There are about 35 employees at the Claymont office now, and they expect to bring at least 170 jobs here. They will be seeking researchers with doctoral degrees to do research. Also, they plan to hire for high-tech manufacturing.

This month, two new people started working there in research and development.

Martin Gould, who has more than 40 years' experience and holds several patents, is an immunoassay development fellow. He has worked on projects that include creating tests to detect if there are pathogens, such as salmonella, in foods.

James W. Stave, joins the company as the vice president of corporate development and as an antibody research fellow. He has worked in development for more than 30 years testing products for the commercial sector.

This is the second company started by Birkmeyer in Delaware. He founded Strategic Diagnostics in 1990 after a career at DuPont. That company, which later went public, sold its life science assets to OriGene Technologies. The company was under control of CEO Francis M. DiNuzzo when that happened.

Birkmeyer said last year he hoped to replicate the success of that company with starting up CD Diagnostics.

And he wants to do it again in Delaware.

"Our goal is to improve patient outcomes," Birkmeyer said.

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Ellendale Leaders Call For Cleaner Water

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

ELLENDALE – Church and community leaders in Ellendale gathered Monday to express dissatisfaction with the health of their town's drinking water, which bears the scars of contamination from polluting commercial sites in decades past.

"We are not going to sit down and relax and let this thing go away," said Diaz J. Bonville of the Ellendale Community Civic Improvement Association.

Ellendale has sewer service through Sussex County, but there is no government-run drinking water infrastructure in town. All homes rely on private wells. A referendum to build a public water system failed in 2009.

Story: Group has setback in chicken plant fight

Since the 1990s, the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control has monitored groundwater underneath a property near Mount Zion AME Church that used to be a gas station and auto salvage yard. Water samples from the well that the church used until 2009 showed very high amounts of benzene, MTBE and naphthalene.

An environmental consultant's report filed to DNREC on May 15 noted those chemicals had diminished in the old well, but were still found in concerning amounts at a nearby mobile home's well. One chemical, benzene, hadn't been detected in three tests during 2013, but it showed up late last year in a fourth test – a sign a plume of groundwater pollution may be moving around the area. The report recommended more testing, and possibly installing more monitoring wells.

A. Iona Smith Nze, pastor of the Mount Zion, said the church members remain concerned about the water quality. A deeper well was dug in 2009 for the church's use, but Nze said the church still doesn't use it for drinking and serves parishioners bottled water.

"Our property continues to be contaminated," Nze said Monday evening. "These are concerns that could be cleaned up if the water was cleaned up."

Because there's no municipal water system, there isn't much public data on drinking water in Ellendale. A restaurant in town, Southern Grill, does have a well that's monitored by state regulators. Data from that well show MTBE levels rose as high as 3.69 parts per billion in May 2013. That's not high enough to trigger a public health response. In Delaware, MTBE levels at or above 10 parts per billion are considered a public health concern.

Now, a year later, MTBE levels are 0.6 parts per billion.

"It looks like it's gone down a bit," said Ed Hallock, program administrator in the Office of Drinking Water. The state, he said, checks the restaurant's water four times a year.

Shaleé Murray, 22, an Ellendale resident and mother, said the water that comes from her faucets is often clouded with particles. In another part of town, she said, water can be discolored, or smell odd.

"I've been living in Ellendale for 11 years, and it's gotten worse," Murray said, noting that she gives her young son bottled water. "Knowing what's in it, I'm not willing to give it over to him."

Nze and Bonnaville are concerned by the higher than normal incidence of cancer in a census tract a mile north of Ellendale.

Church leaders want Gov. Jack Markell's proposed Clean Water Initiative, if it becomes law, to help pay for any cleanup efforts.

"We'll see if they'll become partners with us," said Harold Truxon, president of the civic association. "And we are going to go back to County Council and ask for assistance."

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Specialisterne Links Businesses, Autistic Workers

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

NEWARK – Mike MacAllister was among more than a dozen people working at Computer Aid Inc. on a recent day to carefully digitize paper files.

Elsewhere in the office, a robot made of Legos that can solve a Rubik's Cube sat on a table. The creation was built as part of a training program for employees like MacAllister, who have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The global IT service firm, commonly called CAI, is one of several companies coordinating with a nonprofit called Specialisterne, which helps link employers with potential employees living with autism.

"It's a great job-creation model," said Ernest Dianastasis, managing director of CAI.

Specialisterne, which last year opened an office in Wilmington, helps firms identify, train and retain workers who have been diagnosed with ASD but have the ability to work if given some support.

Among them is SAP, a global leader in the technology sector, which is bringing five new employees who have autism into its Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, office. The company's leaders acknowledge it is not a large influx of new workers, but that's intentional: They want to build in supports around the new employees and learn how they can best adapt to be more inclusive.

By 2020, SAP said, it plans to have about 1 percent of the workforce represented by those who have autism. The company has more than 66,700 employees worldwide and serves customers in more than 180 countries.

The Centers for Disease Control defines ASD as "a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges."

What other people might see as a disability can also be a person's strength, advocates say. That's why Specialisterne has a dandelion in its imagery, said Thorkil Sonne, who founded the company. Where other people might see a weed, children see a flower to make into necklaces.

"It's all about the mindset," Sonne said.

He was speaking at an event hosted earlier this month to SAP employees and community partners in its office in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, about its efforts to increase the number of people with autism on its staff. They outlined how they plan to start small and scale up the program, bringing a group to each of its worldwide offices. SAP leaders say they don't see it just as a nice thing to do – it's also good for business.

"You are giving people a shot who were never given a shot before," Gov. Jack Markell said at the event.

About 15 new people are working at the CAI Innovation and Technology Center in Newark. The firm partnered with Specialisterne shortly after it came to Delaware last year.

Founded in 2004 in Denmark, Specialisterne brought an office to Delaware as part of its growth into the United States after Markell recruited them. The company helps people with autism find jobs by providing training, mentoring and other support functions.

A diverse workforce is better able to anticipate the needs of consumers if they bring to the table a wide swath of perspectives, several SAP leaders said during their May 1 presentations.

For instance, attention to detail, recognizing patterns and precision are all valuable skills for information technology and software creation, said Jose H. Velasco, the SAP autism and workplace coordinator.

A corporate office setting might screen out people who have trouble with eye contact or traditional communication skills. But they still have valuable assets they can contribute to the organization if given a chance, advocates say.

SAP intends to "think differently about how to evaluate talent," said Anka Wittenberg, SAP chief diversity and inclusion officer.

SAP is working with Specialisterne, local nonprofits and government agencies, so they are including outside organizations with expertise in autism spectrum disorder. This helps them identify potential employees, interview them and train them so they are set up for success, leaders said.

The model is built so there is a circle of supporters who can help the employee and the workplace adapt to be more inclusive to those who might not fit in to the traditional corporate model.

The training isn't just for new workers. Existing employees also are given information so they can learn how to help a new colleague. Some are serving as mentors.

SAP leaders said they needed four volunteer mentors in Newtown Square. More than twice as many said they wanted to do it.

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Wilmington Council, Mayor Reach Budget Deal

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

Wilmington City Council and the mayor have reached a budget deal that would increase property taxes at a lower rate than the administration previously proposed and also limit the increases on other services charged to city residents.

The agreement calls for a 5 percent increase in the city's property tax rate, about half the 9.9 percent hike initially proposed by Mayor Dennis P. Williams for the fiscal year starting July 1.

Water, sewer and stormwater rates will climb by 5 percent under the compromise. The administration had sought to increase the water and sewer rate by 8 percent and the stormwater rate by 7 percent.

Council's Finance Committee sent the \$150 million proposed budget, along with property tax and utility changes, to the full Council for a vote on Thursday.

The owner of a home assessed at \$45,000, the city average, would have an annual property tax bill of \$832 under the compromise, up from \$793 now and less than the \$871 sought under the mayor's initial spending plan.

The water, sewer and stormwater rate increases of 5 percent would raise the average customer's monthly bill by \$2.39, city officials said. The mayor's proposal would have raised the rate to \$3.78 a month.

A top city official said the administration can't guarantee layoffs won't happen over the next few years, while leading Council members said they wished the administration had trimmed more vacant positions to save more money.

The administration had estimated its proposed tax increase would generate \$3.6 million, save nearly 100 jobs over the next four years and create a \$2.7 million budget surplus that would prevent any more tax increases until 2018. But the compromise will bring fewer dollars into city coffers, creating new challenges.

"We're hoping to not be looking at layoffs, but we're going to have to continue making hard decisions," said Cleon Cauley, the mayor's chief of staff. "For me to sit here and say this is something that will absolutely not happen, I couldn't do that.

"We're no longer asking for an increase that we really believe we needed to get us through the next four years. We're asking for something less in order to reach a compromise and pass a budget."

Among other things, the compromise includes \$794,000 in spending cuts and the elimination of four vacant jobs in the mayor's information technology office and the law, finance and public works departments.

About half of the cuts will be offset by an additional \$353,000 for a police academy class that will allow the department to fill about 15 vacant officer positions.

Council members and Cauley said the new crime prevention program, Cure Violence, and police won't be affected by the compromise. But the spending cuts will result in fewer demolitions of vacant homes and put a hold on some new police uniforms, among other things.

Councilman Bud Freel, the finance committee chairman, said the administration could have identified more cost-savings had it looked at cutting more of the city's roughly 80 vacant positions. Freel said the compromise came after Council members asked for \$2.5 million in cuts.

"They came back with a 5 percent tax increase and just under \$800,000 in cuts but added \$350,000 back in for the police class, which should have been in the original budget," he said. "We came back and said that was not acceptable. We wanted to see more in cuts, a minimum of \$1.25 million, and they said, 'We don't think we can cut anymore.' "

Freel said vacant jobs are among the best way to cut costs because more than half of the budget is tied to personnel. He said the city is cutting four vacant positions but is really adding the equivalent of one and a half positions when all the jobs are counted.

"It's disappointing when I hear the Wilmington Financial Advisory Council telling us we should be trying to reduce [vacant jobs] by five a year, and here we are still increasing them," Freel said. "I honestly believe there are other positions that we can be deleting and not impact city services, at all."

Council President Theo Gregory echoed Freel's thoughts on the vacant positions but said it was much too late in the year to look at those jobs. He said it would be tough now to pick out vacant jobs to cut.

"That's the reason I said these decisions have to be made before the budget," Gregory said. "The budget process is not the time to do a lot of heavy lifting in terms of transforming and reforming city government. That needs to be done in September, October, November. Then when you start your budget process, you fold your budget back into the new framework you set up for city government."

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WILMINGTON JOURNAL NEWS EDITORIALS

Did Jeb Magruder Tell All About Watergate Scandal?

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

Jeb Magruder, who died May 11, was one of the central figures of the Watergate scandal.

Magruder was key to the original Watergate operation because, as operational manager of Richard Nixon's re-election committee, he was the direct supervisor of G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, who organized the break-in and orchestrated campaign intelligence and dirty tricks.

COLUMN: Second-term tumbles and the lessons of history

Magruder, 79, was the last surviving attendee of the meeting where (according to Magruder) the "Gemstone" Liddy/Hunt operation was approved by campaign director and former Attorney General John Mitchell, though Mitchell never accepted responsibility. In a 2003 interview, Magruder also claimed he had heard Mitchell receiving orders from Nixon to go after Democratic National Committee Chairman Larry O'Brien's office in the Watergate. I'm skeptical there's very much to that story.

Magruder's role in the cover-up and its breakdown was second only to John Dean's. When the original cover story began to collapse in early 1973, Dean and Magruder raced to cut the best deal with prosecutors. Magruder lost, though both wound up in federal prison and both spilled the beans on important pieces of the puzzle.

Magruder takes with him some of the hope of solving some of the remaining Watergate mysteries, though I don't think he knew much about Nixon's personal involvement or knowledge before the arrests in June 1972. He certainly knew (at least within the limits of memory) what happened in the authorizing meeting that included himself, Mitchell and Frank LaRue, but we'll never know if he told the truth about it.

COLUMN: Should Delaware still have the death penalty?

Magruder also may have known more about the decision to target the Watergate. If Liddy told the truth, however – and on this there's no particular reason to think he hasn't – the burglars chose Democratic headquarters principally out of expediency. It was easier to get into than George McGovern's campaign offices.

However, other than the overheard phone call, there's no reason to believe that Magruder knew anything about Nixon. Our last opportunity to learn more from a first-person witness probably ended with the death of Chuck Colson two years ago. It is possible, but less likely, that Magruder may have had

second-hand information he never told, such as a conversation with Mitchell or Bob Haldeman. The only remaining hope for learning more about Nixon's "pre-" role will be from physical evidence. Perhaps some day engineers will manage to recover more information from the tapes.

On the other hand, though we never did learn the whole story of Nixon's involvement, I don't think it's that big a deal. We know that he personally supervised the original cover-up, and that the cover-up of the cover-up was practically a one-man affair on his part. We know that he was aware of criminal activity before the Watergate break-ins even if we don't know whether he knew about that particular operation. We know that he ordered his staff to commit crimes, even if we don't know whether he ordered any of the crimes they actually committed (we know that his staff ignored some of his orders). And we know that he was personally responsible for the general atmosphere of illegality in the White House and in his campaign, and that he personally cultivated the obsession with obtaining political information that led directly to Watergate and other crimes.

Magruder wasn't the worst of Nixon's men. As far as I know, his post-Nixon life as a minister was respectable and responsible. He was, like Dean, an ambitious guy in the wrong place, who then made the wrong decisions. He'll always be known as a criminal and an important figure in perhaps the greatest political crime in U.S. history.

Jonathan Bernstein is a Bloomberg View columnist covering U.S. politics.

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Obamacare Critic Sets Himself For A Fall In Column

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

Kevin Wade, a 2012 Republican candidate for U.S. Senator, recently blasted the Affordable Care Act in a News Journal column headlined, "Obamacare will fail because it's not honest."

"In the end," Wade wrote, "Obamacare fails because its leaders, sponsors and cheerleaders refused to be honest with the people. You can't build health care or a nation on a lie, but you can destroy it. That's the truth and the lesson for an entire generation."

Wow. Biblical prophets of old rarely spoke with such authority. But he also set a high bar for his own truth-telling.

Let's see how he did.

Here's Wade on why people reject the Affordable Care Act: "They liked their original insurance. The insurance that suited their needs. The insurance that was affordable. The insurance that was their best choice."

Not a lie, but a bit disingenuous.

Reading Wade's comments, you might think all Americans were completely satisfied with their health insurance options. If that were the case it wouldn't have been an issue in the first place.

The comment also ignores the millions of people who were unable to get any health insurance and those with substandard policies.

Wade goes on to say, "The majority of the public, in numerous opinion polls, never liked Obamacare."

You hear this argument a lot, but there's only one poll that really counts: Election Day. Running on a platform that included broader health insurance coverage, Obama won in 2008. After four years of unrelenting, even hysterical attacks against Obamacare, he won again in 2012.

It's nonsense to say the "majority of the public never liked Obamacare" after voters twice elected the man whose signature achievement is the Affordable Care Act.

Polls also show that some Obamacare features poll very well and that people favor fixing the Affordable Care Act as opposed to repealing it. They include:

- Ending insurance denials because of pre-existing conditions.
- Allowing children to be included on their parents' policies until age 26.
- Eliminating lifetime limits on insurance coverage.

The provision about pre-existing conditions is so popular that Republicans repeatedly claim their "plan" supports the measure.

Here's Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., presenting the Republican rebuttal to President Obama's 2014 State of the Union Address:

"Republicans believe health care choices should be yours, not the government's. And that whether you're a boy with Down syndrome or a woman with breast cancer, you can find coverage and a doctor who will treat you."

It's a good thing Rodgers's nose doesn't grow like that Pinocchio character in the Geico ad. Her nose would have burst through the TV screen.

The only reason people with pre-existing conditions can find health insurance now is because of Obamacare. The idea that a woman with breast cancer could find coverage under a Republican plan is preposterous. There is no Republican plan. Just listen to their leaders. They're running on repealing Obamacare. They're even not offering an alternative.

Here's a claim from Wade. Among the reasons he cited for people not liking Obamacare is the IRS "adding 16,000 new staffers." That figure is baloney.

According to U.S. News and World Report, the IRS had just under 118,000 employees in 1992. "By 2012," the article said, "this had fallen 23 percent to 90,280. At the same time, the number of returns increased 27 percent, from 113.1 million to 143.4 million."

Sequestration has intensified that trend. At the end of fiscal year 2013, according to the IRS Data Book, the agency had 83,613 employees.

IRS staffing levels have been going down, not up – the opposite of what Wade said. But the real problem with the Republicans' stance on health care goes beyond such bogus arguments. Their position is dishonest at its core.

If someone is injured, they will be treated at the hospital. That's the law.

Not all these people will be able to pay. Some will file for bankruptcy.

But eventually the bill has to be paid. One way is through higher health insurance costs for people who are already paying for their own coverage. That's the problem Republican Gov. Mitt Romney was trying to solve when he instituted his health care plan in Massachusetts.

He wanted to rid the system of what he called "free riders," people who chose to force their health insurance costs on others. Obamacare was modeled on the Massachusetts plan, which in turn was based on an idea by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank now headed by former Sen. Jim DeMint.

But now Republicans have chosen to abandon what was their own idea and pretend problems like "free riders" and medical bankruptcy don't exist.

Wade said you can't build health care and a nation on a lie. How about a political party?

Don Flood of Lewes is a columnist for the Cape Gazette.

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Attorney General Cites True Threat To Civil Rights

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

The thing to remember about the commencement address Attorney General Eric Holder gave Saturday is not that he wrote off the racist musing of people such as Donald Sterling and Robert Copeland. As deplorable as they were, he correctly said, they “are not the true markers of the struggle that still must be waged” against far greater threats to the civil rights of this nation’s minorities.

Sterling is the owner of the Los Angeles Clippers basketball team who was caught on an audio recording speaking disparagingly of blacks. Copeland is the Wolfeboro, N.H., police commissioner who was overheard in a restaurant referring to President Obama as “that f— n—.” As bigots go, both men were forged from the same mold that produces the rank and file Klansman.

COLUMN: What the Brown decision should mean, 60 years later

But Holder didn’t come to this city, the birthplace of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, to call out the foot soldiers of this nation’s still deeply entrenched resistance to civil rights. He didn’t have to travel up the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and take the stage of Morgan State University’s commencement ceremony to do that, no matter how many news organizations put that tag on his speech.

Instead, Holder – the first black to hold the job as the nation’s top law enforcement officer – courageously named Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts as a greater threat to the cause of civil rights than “misguided words that we can reject out of hand.”

Coming from a sitting attorney general, Holder’s sharp rebuke of Roberts – and the conservative majority that he leads – is unprecedented. But it is not unwarranted.

COLUMN: Should Delaware still have the death penalty?

He “has argued that the path to ending racial discrimination is to give less consideration to the issue of race altogether,” Holder said of the chief justice. “This presupposes that racial discrimination is at a sufficiently low ebb that it doesn’t need to be actively confronted.”

Then Holder craftily – and maybe too subtly for some reviewers – invokes the words and judicial logic of one of the Supreme Court’s liberal justices to counter Roberts’ myopia.

As “Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote recently in an insightful dissent in the Michigan college admission case, we must not ‘wish away, rather than confront, the racial inequality that exists in our society. ... The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to speak openly and candidly on the subject of race.’ “

Indeed. Holder, of course, knows that. But by using the platform of a university commencement speech to focus attention on “policies that too easily escape” the strict scrutiny courts give to openly discriminatory laws “because they have the appearance of being race-neutral,” Holder is calling out the conservatives on the court.

Can I get an “amen” here?

Such biting criticism will not endear the attorney general to the conservative legion that is the Praetorian Guard of Roberts’ “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” school of racial justice. But there are times when a battle for that which is right must be fought in the court of public opinion.

Holder understands that the victory he seeks in the fight for racial justice needs the support of a broad cross section of Americans – not just the minorities who will be its most obvious beneficiaries. I suspect that is why he made this point: “In our criminal justice system, systemic and unwarranted racial disparities remain disturbingly common.” Black men, he said, “have received sentences that are nearly

20 percent longer than those imposed on white males convicted of similar crimes,” he told the members of Morgan’s graduating class.

Then, smartly, he left this emerging generation of leaders to make the connection between that harsh fact and Roberts’ head-in-the-sand strategy for ending racial discrimination.

It didn’t take much of a stretch to do that.

DeWayne Wickham, dean of Morgan State University’s School of Global Journalism and Communication, writes on Tuesdays for USA TODAY.

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VICE PRESIDENTIAL *NEWS CLIPS*

PRODUCED FOR THE OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

TO: THE VICE PRESIDENT AND STAFF
DATE: TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2014 -- 6:15 AM EDT

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BIDEN IN THE NEWS

Biden Returns To Europe In Wake Of Ukraine Crisis

By Lesley Clark

[McClatchy](#), May 20, 2014

Vice President Joe **Biden** leaves tonight for Romania and Cyprus, his latest trip aimed at reassuring European countries rattled by Russian President's Vladimir Putin's incursion into Ukraine.

Biden, who will be accompanied by his wife, Jill, will discuss the international community's response to what the White House says is Russia's "illegal military intervention and destabilizing actions in Ukraine." He'll also talk about deepening economic ties, including through the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and steps to bolster Europe's energy security.

The trip comes as Putin has said he'll order troops on the Ukrainian border to return to their bases, but a White House official who briefed reporters on **Biden's** trip said the U.S. hasn't yet seen any evidence.

In Bucharest, **Biden** will meet with Romanian President Băsescu and Prime Minister Ponta. He will also deliver remarks to Romanian civil society and youth leaders, and will meet with American and Romanian troops conducting a joint capacity-building exercise.

In Cyprus, **Biden** will meet with political leaders from the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, civil society representatives, and faith leaders. The White House says he will "emphasize the United States' strong support for a comprehensive settlement to reunify the island as a bizonal, bicomunal federation with political equality."

Biden will be the highest ranking U.S. official to visit Cyprus since then-vice president Lyndon B. Johnson in 1962. While there he will mark the 40th anniversary of the shooting death of Rodger P. Davies, the U.S. ambassador to Cyprus who was killed by sniper fire during a demonstration against American policy by Greek Cypriots at the embassy in Nicosia on Aug. 19, 1974.

Davies' secretary, Antoinette Varnava, was also killed. Davies, a Berkeley, Calif. native, had been appointed ambassador to Cyprus only a month before his death. He had served as the director of the United States Department of State's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, and later the deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs.

Biden has been a "frequent flyer to Europe, as of late, flying across the Atlantic on a monthly basis since February," writes Heather Conley, a senior fellow and director of the Europe Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. She said **Biden** "has become the 'Reassure-er-in-Chief,' offering words of consolation and American solidarity for increasingly nervous governments in Central and

Southern Europe and the Baltics. These countries fully understand the deleterious effects of Russian aggression and European inaction which is why they actively seek American reassurance.”

Conley notes that **Biden’s** trip on Cyprus comes amid a “glimmer of hope for fruitful negotiations between the Greek Cypriot community and the Turkish Cypriots who live in the internationally unrecognized North.”

“This is what brings an American Vice President to Cyprus after 52 years,” she said, “the promise of a diplomatic success—something that has eluded the Obama foreign policy agenda for quite some time.”

The Cyprus Mail notes his visit already is drawing mixed responses. And it’s not without some controversy at home: the White House last week sought to downplay news that **Biden’s** youngest son, Hunter, has been appointed head of legal affairs for Cyprus-based Burisma Holdings – Ukraine’s largest private gas producer.

Though the U.S. has touted the need for Ukraine to boost its energy independence, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said the position was unrelated to any official government stance.

“Hunter **Biden** and other members of the **Biden** family are obviously private citizens and where they work does not reflect an endorsement by the administration or by the Vice President or President,” Carney said.

Biden’s Cyprus Stop Will Honor Slain Ambassador

Killing in 1974 has parallels to Benghazi

By Dave Boyer

[Washington Times](#), May 20, 2014

Vice President Joseph R. **Biden** will travel to a Mediterranean country this week to pay his respects to a U.S. ambassador killed during an attack on the American diplomatic facility.

No, Mr. **Biden** won’t be honoring Ambassador Christopher Stevens, who was killed with three other Americans in Benghazi, Libya, in September 2012. Instead the vice president will attend a brief ceremony to mark the 40th anniversary of the slaying of Ambassador Rodger Davies in Cyprus.

Mr. Davies was shot to death at the U.S. Embassy in Nicosia in 1974 by Greek Cypriot gunmen who were protesting Washington’s failure to stop Turkish troops from taking control of part of the island. The ambassador was seeking shelter in a hallway when a bullet struck him in the chest. An embassy secretary, Antoinette Varnavas, also was killed.

An aide to Mr. **Biden** briefing reporters Monday didn’t say whether the vice president plans to draw any comparisons with the death of Mr. Stevens, who was killed during a terrorist attack that the administration initially blamed on a protest over an anti-Islamic video. A special House committee has been appointed to investigate the slayings in Libya.

Time magazine said the Cyprus incident was “eerily similar” to the Benghazi attack, with initial media reports claiming that gunmen stormed the embassy in Nicosia under cover of demonstrators screaming “Kissinger! Kissinger!” (Henry Kissinger was U.S. Secretary of State at the time).

But the culprits were brought to justice in the 1974 killings, while no perpetrators have been located in the Benghazi attack. The Cyprus government charged six people. Two men charged with manslaughter received lengthy prison sentences, although the sentences were later reduced and they were freed after 18 months.

The anniversary of the Cyprus attack is actually Aug. 19, but a senior administration official said Mr. **Biden** will lay a wreath at the embassy on Thursday after meeting with civil and religious leaders on the still-divided island nation in the eastern Mediterranean.

In August, embassy staff in Nicosia will hold another ceremony in which the ambassador's residence will be renamed the Davies House, and a lounge in the embassy will be named after Ms. Varnavas.

Mr. **Biden**'s trip will start on Wednesday with a visit to Romania, where he will meet with the country's leaders to reassure them of the U.S. commitment to protect its NATO allies in light of Russia's "destabilizing" actions in Ukraine, a senior administration official said.

The vice president's wife, Dr. Jill **Biden**, will accompany him on the trip.

Biden To Reassure Romania, Cyprus Of U.S. Support In Ukraine Crisis

[Reuters](#), May 20, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Biden Heads To Romania, Cyprus With Moscow On His Mind

By Stephen Collinson

[AFP](#), May 20, 2014

Washington (AFP) – Vice President Joe **Biden** will underscore a firm US commitment to defend NATO partners and rally support for tougher potential sanctions against Russia on a trip to Romania and Cyprus this week.

Biden will arrive in Bucharest on Tuesday at what one senior official called a "complicated and challenging time in Europe" fostered by Russia's "destabilizing" actions in Ukraine.

Biden's primary mission in Romania is to reassure leaders of the former Warsaw Pact state, and now a member of NATO, that nobody should doubt Washington's commitment to Article Five of the alliance's charter, which states that an attack on one member is an attack on all.

US defense guarantees have taken on heightened importance in eastern Europe following Russia's annexation of Crimea and its massing of troops on Ukraine's borders and what Washington sees as Moscow's support for pro-Kremlin militia groups during unrest in eastern Ukraine.

While in Bucharest, **Biden** will meet President Traian Basescu and Prime Minister Victor Ponta and deliver a speech to young people on the importance of democracy and the rule of law.

"He will simply underscore that we couldn't ask for better allies," the senior US official said.

Emphasizing the US-Romania security relationship, **Biden** will meet US and Romanian aircrews taking part in joint maneuvers in an operation known as Carpathian Spring.

The vice president's trip will represent his latest foray into eastern Europe, a region on which he has particularly focused as vice president – an interest that has intensified since the start of the Ukrainian crisis.

In March, **Biden** visited Lithuania and Poland and traveled to Ukraine the following month.

President Barack Obama will also travel to Poland next month on a visit celebrating the 25th anniversary of the country's post-communist elections, which has taken on extra importance because of the worst East-West showdown since the end of the Cold War, over Ukraine.

The confrontation between Russia and the West will also be a key issue in Cyprus where **Biden** will arrive on Wednesday.

– Cyprus: exposed to Russian money –

The Cypriot government has warned of the devastating impact that any new sanctions directly targeting the Russian economy could have on its own fortunes, given that its finance industry is a key conduit of Russian investment and savings.

The senior US official noted that Cyprus, as a European Union member, was party to the bloc's decision making and actions in imposing sanctions on Russia over Ukraine.

"We are aware and understanding of the exposure of Cyprus to Russian economic activity and Russia economy pressure," the official said.

He added, however, that if further sanctions are needed against Russia – Washington has warned that if Moscow disrupts the Ukrainian election this week it could face new measures – a way to do so could be found without victimizing Cyprus.

Biden will meet President Nicos Anastasiades after he arrives on the divided island and efforts are also being made to discuss the quickening peace process with Turkish Cypriot leaders, officials said.

But the senior official insisted that **Biden** would not try to seek solutions or impose pressure on the two sides.

Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders have vowed to seek an end to the island's four-decade division as soon as possible, and relaunched peace talks on February 11 after a nearly two-year hiatus.

Biden Will Raise Campaign Funds At Tom Steyer's Home

[USA Today](#), May 19, 2014

Vice President Joe **Biden** will headline a fundraiser for Democrats later this month at the home of liberal billionaire Tom Steyer, who has pledged to make environmental protection and climate change a key issue in November's midterm elections.

Biden will head to San Francisco on May 28, according to a Democratic National Committee official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the event had not been formally announced. The event will benefit the DNC.

Steyer's action is the latest sign that he is reaffirming his ties to the Democratic Party. The retired hedge fund executive recently donated \$5 million to the Senate Majority PAC, a super PAC working to help Democrats retain their majority in the Senate, The New York Times reported over the weekend.

Steyer is a vocal foe of the Keystone XL pipeline, which would carry carbon-heavy oil from the tar sands of Alberta, Canada to Gulf Coast refineries. Earlier this year, Steyer had signaled that he might be willing to target those in his own party who back the pipeline, such as Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu — one of the most vulnerable Democrats up for re-election this fall.

Last month, the administration extended a decision on the controversial project, potentially delaying final action until after the election.

Steyer has pledged to raise \$100 million to influence this year's elections and to elevate climate-change issues.

Biden To Attend Fundraiser With Keystone XL Opponent Steyer

[Reuters](#), May 20, 2014

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Biden To Attend Fundraiser At Tom Steyer's Home

[Associated Press](#), May 20, 2014

WASHINGTON — Vice President Joe **Biden** is planning to headline a fundraiser for Democrats at the home of billionaire Tom Steyer.

That's according to a Democratic official who demanded anonymity because the event hasn't been officially announced.

Biden will travel to San Francisco for the May 28 event benefiting the Democratic National Committee. The committee is working its way out of millions in debt it racked up helping President Barack Obama get re-elected.

Steyer was a major donor to Obama's campaign and has increased his political activity in recent months. He's a prominent environmentalist and opponent of the Keystone XL pipeline.

Steyer hosted another Democratic fundraiser last year that Obama attended. He's vowed to spend \$100 million on the 2014 midterm elections.

Politico first reported the news of the **Biden** fundraiser.

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Biden To Headline Fundraiser At Billionaire Climate Activist Tom Steyer's Home

By Laura Barron-lopez

[The Hill](#), May 20, 2014

Vice President **Biden** plans to headline a Democratic fundraiser at climate activist Tom Steyer's home

Two sources close to the event planning, including one DNC official, told The Hill that Steyer would be hosting **Biden** for a Democratic National Committee fundraiser at his San Francisco home on May 28.

Steyer, a staunch advocate of climate policies and Keystone XL opponent, has raised his political profile in the past year, vowing to funnel a significant amount of money into 2014 races.

Republicans have pitted Steyer as the Democrats' version of the Koch brothers, and have blamed him for Democrats' insistence on what they consider dangerous climate policies.

The billionaire environmentalist has held fundraisers in the last year which both President Obama and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) attended. The latest fundraiser signals Steyer's increasing commitment to the Democratic party.

Tom Steyer To Host Joe Biden For May 28 DNC Fundraiser

By Andrew Restuccia

[Politico](#), May 19, 2014

Liberal billionaire Tom Steyer will host Vice President Joe **Biden** at his San Francisco home May 28 for a Democratic National Committee fundraiser, according to a source familiar with the event's planning.

It's the latest indication that Steyer, a vocal opponent of the proposed Keystone XL oil pipeline and an outspoken advocate for tackling climate change, is building strong ties to Democrats in Washington.

President Barack Obama and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid have both made appearances at Steyer-hosted fundraisers in the past year.

News of the event comes as Steyer, a former hedge fund manager, is laying plans to make climate change a major issue in the midterm elections. Steyer has said his super PAC, NextGen Climate Action, could spend more than \$100 million — half from his personal fortune and half from green-minded donors — this year. NextGen is slated to detail its midterm strategy at a briefing in Washington, D.C., this week, a source familiar with the issue said.

Steyer spent millions last year on the Massachusetts Senate and Virginia governor's races. While the totality of his 2014 plans remains unclear, Steyer has said he hopes to spend money in the Florida governor's race and the Iowa Senate race.

Republicans have criticized Steyer's growing involvement in politics. They've also bashed Reid and other Democrats for attending his fundraisers at the same time that railing against the Koch brothers has become a prominent liberal theme.

A DNC spokesman confirmed the news of the fundraiser.

Obama's Day: Commanders And Donors

By David Jackson, Usa Today

[USA Today](#), May 20, 2014

President Obama spends Monday with military commanders and Democratic campaign donors.

Obama and Vice President **Biden** have lunch with Combatant Commanders, who lead U.S. troops across the globe.

In the evening, Obama headlines a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee fundraiser in suburban Maryland.

Iowa Activists Provide Early Perceptions Of A Potential Hillary Clinton Presidential Bid

By Dan Balz And Philip Rucker

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa — Eleven Iowa Democratic activists had been talking about the state of the country, the politics of 2016 and a prospective presidential campaign by Hillary Rodham Clinton one recent night when they were asked two questions.

The first was whom they would invite to a dinner party if they could choose from among four prominent Democrats. Six picked President Obama. Two each named Vice President **Biden** and former president Bill Clinton. A lone woman said she would invite Hillary Clinton.

Next they were asked whom among that same group they would call first if they faced a family emergency. The response was overwhelming: Seven of the 11 wanted Clinton at their side.

Their answers crystallized nearly two hours of conversation and captured the range of Democratic sentiment about Clinton, whose possible candidacy is eagerly anticipated by people in her party. But a separate conversation with a smaller group of Republican activists highlighted the degree to which she remains a polarizing figure — though they acknowledged that she would be a more formidable candidate than last time.

During her 2008 campaign, no state frustrated Clinton more than Iowa, which launched Obama, then a senator from Illinois, and dealt her a demoralizing third-place finish.

Back then many Iowans thought Clinton and her national campaign team came across as aloof and presumptuous.

"They just left a bad taste in a lot of people's mouth," said Dale Todd, 57, a Democrat and developer of affordable housing. "The BlackBerry was more important than the contact with [people]. We would be sitting right here, and they would be working their BlackBerry, and you just felt like you weren't getting through."

"They were just going through the motions," added Kay Hale, 62, a school-bus driver.

"It was like, 'We're here, and we can't wait until we get out of here,'" Todd said.

Today, Iowa activists see Clinton through a new lens. Democrats, including those who backed Obama in 2008, are offering strong encouragement.

When Clinton ran the first time, Hale worried that she couldn't "bring the country together" and backed then-Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (Conn.). Now she says of Clinton: "I think we're ready for her. . . . I think she's proved herself. She's earned it."

At the same time, these Democratic activists offered warnings, saying that Clinton must run a different kind of campaign and show a warmer side of her personality if she hopes to be successful.

"I think she's going to have trouble with the middle class," said Charles Crawley, 60, a technical writer. "She went to Wellesley College, Yale Law School, and from that point on she's been in the upper class. She may have middle-class parents, but that was a long time ago."

'Time heals lots of wounds'

The observations in this article come from two sessions with Iowa activists. The first included 11 Democrats from Linn County, around Cedar Rapids. The second session was with six mostly establishment Republicans in suburban West Des Moines, part of Dallas County.

Their opinions and observations are their own, and are not meant to be a representation of the broader electorate or a scientific sample. But because these are among the most politically engaged Iowans, their views provide an early look at perceptions of Clinton in a state that brought her disappointment in 2008.

Of the 11 Democrats, two supported her then, while six backed Obama. But ask them today for a brief description of Clinton, and the responses are all positive: "Seasoned." "Capable." "Smart." "Strong." "Competent." "Amazing." "Intelligent." "Experienced." "Decisive." "Tested."

When Clinton ran in 2008, she had two big liabilities in Iowa. One was her 2002 vote authorizing President George W. Bush to go to war in Iraq, a vote she never truly recanted. The vote alienated the state's liberal activists and put her at odds with Obama.

Among the Linn County Democrats, the Iraq issue has faded in importance. "I think some Democrats in Iowa may have put her in the penalty box eight years ago because of Iraq," said Nate Willems, 34, a labor lawyer. "We've moved past that. . . . Time heals lots of wounds."

On policy issues, these Democrats offered little to suggest that they fear that Clinton would be too hawkish for their tastes or that her economic ideas would be too centrist. Many expressed deep concerns about the growing divide between rich and poor in the country but said they believed she would share that concern, even if she did not use the type of fiery rhetoric associated with Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and others.

The other problem was a perception that Clinton and her campaign entourage were aloof, distant and lacking a common touch. "Bad manners," said Libby Slappey, 62, a fundraiser. That still concerned many of those around the table.

One after another expressed disgruntlement with the way Clinton and her team conducted themselves in 2007 and 2008. "People felt like her campaign thought they had a sense of entitlement because they were the Clintons," said Gretchen Lawyer, 41, a teacher and Obama volunteer.

The consensus among this group was that the Obama campaign outthrust Clinton in Iowa. "She was left in the dust by the organization of the Obama campaign, and I truly believe it emanated from the top," Slappey said. "I truly believe that Barack Obama said to the next level, 'This is how I want my campaign to run,' and that level said it to the next level. And it was a beautiful Amway kind of thing."

Mike Robinson, 51, a registered nurse and former Linn County Democratic chairman, defended Clinton. "I found her to be very genial. I met her on a few different occasions. I was very depressed, disappointed, when she was portrayed otherwise. She's very kind."

'Come here more than once'

These Democrats may eagerly await Clinton's candidacy, but all had advice for her about how to run a different campaign in 2016 than she ran in 2008.

"Come shake our hands," said Kathy Robinson, 51, a property manager who was a Clinton supporter in 2008 when she lived in Illinois. "Talk to us. Ask us our feelings, and ask our opinions. But come here more than once. Don't ignore Iowa."

Lawyer urged Clinton to "get in touch with regular people." She noted that when Obama started out in Iowa, he and Michelle Obama were still paying off their student loans. "How long has it been since she [Clinton] was a normal person outside of public life?" she said, adding: "When was the last time she drove a car? I see that as a liability she needs to think about."

Bret Nilles, 55, the current Linn County Democratic chairman and a finance manager, said Obama's campaign was more open. "Hillary's campaign was more controlled," said Nilles, who backed her that year. "There was a sense that they were going to win it, so all they had to do was make the rounds."

Laura Bell, 54, an accounts manager who supported then-Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich (Ohio) in 2008, said, "I would want to encourage her to remember that there are people in this party [whose] opinions are closer to Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, and do not forget about us."

Todd said that Clinton should "leave the consultants at home." He recalled her first campaign: "When she would walk in the room and the entourage was larger than the group you're meeting with, that didn't go over well. But the reality is, these are the Clintons, and it's going to be tough to do what we are sort of used to."

Roy Porterfield, 63, an automotive service manager, defended Clinton against the perception that she holds herself above others. "She came from perfectly ordinary beginnings," he said. "She didn't grow up a Bush or a Rockefeller or whatever. I don't think she's lacking a common touch. . . . I see her as a perfectly good, solid, honest, ordinary citizen who just happens to have a brilliant mind and vast, useful political experience."

'There's a trust issue'

The Republicans from Dallas County see Clinton as the inevitable Democratic nominee and as a worthy opponent who has bolstered her résumé since her first campaign for the White House. But when they were asked to offer a word to describe her, their answers reflected a sharply negative view of the former secretary of state, senator and first lady: "Political." "Politician." "Schemer." "Tactical." "Manipulative." Only one offered a positive description: "Strong."

Those in the group questioned Clinton's honesty and said they do not trust her. They also see her as vulnerable on issues including Benghazi and health care, citing her role in shaping her husband's failed effort to reform the health-care system when he was president.

"She's tenacious, but she's manipulative," said Lisa Schneider, 41, who works at the governor's residence in Des Moines as a communications and events coordinator. "I don't think she would do right by the country. She has her own agenda, and she's going to do whatever she wants to get there."

Christina Taylor, 43, a physician, said: "I think there's a trust issue with her. I think it's a truthfulness or candor issue. We all say she's very politically astute, politically savvy, she's tactical. I think people have an undertow of wondering, not only with Benghazi but even in her previous past — everything is to get the win, and so can you trust that she is being honest? I think people will continually question, 'Is she telling me the truth?' And you won't know."

"I think she would be polarizing, as polarizing as Obama has been," added Charles Schneider, a state senator and Lisa Schneider's husband.

But Taylor acknowledged the potency of a Clinton candidacy. "I think women want a strong woman," she said. "They're willing to be a Hillary supporter because she's the only one they've got to grab onto. Which is kind of sad, but I think that's true."

These Republicans applauded House Republicans for their decision to launch another investigation of what happened in Benghazi, Libya, in September 2012 and said the issue will not recede if Clinton is a candidate.

"She was in charge of the State Department, and I think it's not necessarily politics. I think the American people deserve to know the truth," said Chad Airhart, 37, the Dallas County recorder.

Among the Democrats, Clinton engendered respect and admiration, but not the kind of excitement that surrounded Obama in his first campaign. When they were asked to name the most exciting person in their party, the activists mentioned nine people, but no one said Clinton. "I'm borderline enthusiastic already," Porterfield said. "But do I think she's exciting? No, not really."

There was little appetite for a **Biden** campaign in 2016, though he is well liked in the state. On the question of whether a primary contest would be good for Clinton, there was division.

Todd said he hopes that the Democrats can avoid a serious nomination contest in order to be better prepared for what he said will be "nuclear war" in the general election. "You need a powerhouse like a Clinton to be able to stand up to these forces, the Koch brothers, the way politics has changed from 2008."

But Crawley said that even if Clinton faces no serious competition for the nomination, "she needs to consider herself the underdog. . . . If she comes in prom queen, this is a cakewalk to the presidency, the thing I'm worried about . . . is we've got a candidate over here who's not being tested in some way. I think that can work against her in a general election."

Joe Biden, The Thinking Woman's Sex Symbol

[Washington Post](#), May 19, 2014

Vice President Joe **Biden** kisses his wife, Jill **Biden**, after a 2012 debate with vice presidential nominee Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) at Centre College in Danville, Ky. (David Goldman/Associated Press)

During his tenure as vice president, the Onion has had a field day with Joe **Biden**. The satirical publication's fictionalized version of the second-most powerful man in America is the kind of guy who washes his Trans Am shirtless, gets banned from Dave and Buster's, and flees to Mexico.

But at the same time, another pop cultural narrative has emerged more quietly: Joe **Biden** as smart-girl sex symbol.

On "Parks and Recreation," eager Indiana public servant Leslie Knope (Amy Poehler) has harbored a long-standing crush on the man from Delaware, whom she considers the sexiest man in America. Leslie is so devoted to **Biden** that she went completely to pieces when she met him during a trip to Washington. "You don't let anything happen to him, do you understand me?" Leslie lectured his Secret Service detail. "He is precious cargo!"

More recently, it turns out that **Biden** became part of the current fad high school students have for asking famous people to prom on a lark. In most cases, the people doing the asking are young men hoping that gorgeous adult women will help them make a splash. Sometimes, female celebrities actually bow to the opportunity to cement their status as fantasy objects and say yes when the requests are made to them publicly.

Talia Maselli, a Connecticut high school senior, took a different approach. She wrote to Vice President **Biden** privately, and with no real expectation that anything would come of it, to ask him to be her date. Rather than implying that **Biden** would look mean or superior if he turned her down, she offered a puckish alternative — asking House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) as a backup.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote, according to the Hartford Courant. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Biden, of course, could not make it. But rather than leaving the letter, which Maselli sent last fall, unanswered, **Biden** arranged to have a corsage delivered to her and is setting up a visit to Washington for her and her family. The gesture was perfectly appropriate, given **Biden's** age and station: He made Maselli feel special and encouraged her interest in politics and public service without making himself the center of attention or taking anything away from other prom attendees. He did the same on "Parks and Recreation" for Leslie, who is rising in the bureaucracy, by telling her how great her work is.

Biden's response is charming, and it explains why a 71-year-old with a somewhat strange job and an intense passion for Amtrak as one of his defining features has become an unlikely sex symbol. What is funny about the Onion's version of **Biden** is that it is so incongruous and plays to the idea of the vice presidency as a somewhat do-nothing job, where eccentrics can thrive. But when he has control of his own image in both fictional and real scenarios, **Biden** — without taking himself too seriously — is showing himself to be someone who is interested in women's minds.

There is a lesson here for all of those teenage boys trying to get the Kate Uptons of the world to go to prom with them. Fellows, listen up: You may make your reputation with other boys by convincing an attractive girl (or woman) to grace your arm for an evening. But being the object of kindness and admiration is not actually the same thing as being liked.

By contrast, if you are looking to make a long-term connection, Joe **Biden** is a pretty good role model for how to find and build a relationship with that special someone. His interest in smart women is not just a put-on. His wife, Jill **Biden**, did not quit her career when **Biden's** job took him to One Observatory Circle, choosing instead to keep teaching at a community college and using her platform to advocate for community college students. In both his own life, and in his role as a public figure, Joe **Biden** sends the message that if you want someone to genuinely like and be interested in you, you have to start by doing the same for her.

How Biden Became Diamond Joe Six-Pack

[Bloomberg View](#), May 19, 2014

Josh Marshall at TPM wants to know: Where did the legend of Joe **Biden** come from? And by that I mean, the current wildly popular **Biden** alter-ego or maybe the real guy – not sure – the sixty-something, aviator-glass wearing, Camaro-driving bad-ass who has become a staple of DC and political junkie culture over the last half dozen years. There are variants. The Mustang driving geezer stocking up on Schlitz, Viagra, Camels and ammo for a mad weekend.

The first thing I'd say is that this Joe **Biden** is popular only among Democrats. There is another Joe **Biden** who is ... well, I'm not sure I understand the conservative vision of the vice president, but I'm sure it involves impressive levels of incompetence and stupidity.

My second thought is that although the immediate source of the **Biden** image seems to be The Onion, it's obvious that it ultimately derives from the vice presidency itself. All veeps become ridiculous; the only question is how. That applied to poor hapless Dan Quayle, who was a perfectly respectable senator until George H.W. Bush selected him, and it applied to Hubert Humphrey, who was one of the greatest politicians of the 20th century until Lyndon Johnson elevated him, if that's how to describe it. When Bush occupied the post under Ronald Reagan, "Doonesbury" said he had "placed his manhood in a blind trust."

What matters is that once the Onion came up with the image, it seemed to fit really well. I think we can thank **Biden** for that. But we can also thank Richard Ben Cramer's classic description of the Delaware senator as over-the-top, impulsive, and filled with awesomeness (at least if you're sympathetic) that wasn't quite under control. See Chapter 17, "The Night of the Bronco."

As I've said, all of that makes **Biden** ideal for the vice-presidency. He comes ready-made for late-night comics, but he also (notwithstanding his conservative avatar) is about as ready for the presidency in an emergency as anyone could be, even though his past presidential campaigns make it clear that no one really wants him in that role. Which is why my advice, mostly tongue-in-cheek, is that whoever the Democrats nominate for president in 2016 should keep him on – and that the Republican nominee should give serious thought to asking him to stick around, too. He really is the Practically Perfect Veep.

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Biden Sends Corsage To Prom Inviter

By David Jackson, Usa Today

[USA Today](#), May 20, 2014

A Connecticut high school student didn't get Joe **Biden** as a prom date, but did receive a note and a vice presidential corsage.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," **Biden** said in the note to Newington High School student Talia Maselli, reports The Hartford Courant.

"But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine," **Biden** added.

Maselli told the Courant that she sent a prom invitation to the vice president seven months ago for a very simple reason.

"Joe **Biden** makes me laugh," she said. "He just cracks me up."

In her note, Maselli wrote: "I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it. I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Last week, on the eve of the prom, Maselli received the note and corsage from **Biden**, who also invited Maselli to the White House.

Reports The Hartford Courant:

"Maselli's first thought was that someone was playing an elaborate practical joke on her. She even called her mother to ask if she was in on it.

"She had no idea what I was talking about," Maselli said.

"Then she called a number for **Biden**'s assistant that was on a separate card. The assistant immediately recognized Maselli's name, and Maselli realized the corsage and the note were real.

"A day later, Maselli and her family were still in shock.

She didn't go to the prom.

"But," she said, "If he had said yes, I would have gone."

Connecticut Teen Asks Joe Biden To The Prom; VP Sends Her A Corsage

By Christopher Hoffman

[McClatchy](#), May 20, 2014

NEWINGTON, Conn. — When Talia Maselli envisioned her perfect prom date, one man immediately sprang to mind: Vice President Joe **Biden**.

"Joe **Biden** makes me laugh," the Maselli said. "He just cracks me up."

So she mailed **Biden** a handwritten note last fall asking him to escort her to the Newington High School prom.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in her letter. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

If **Biden** turned her down, Maselli warned that she might ask Speaker of the House John Boehner, R-Ohio, in his place.

"And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Maselli, who says she's interested in politics, considered the invitation a lark and never expected to hear back. A staff member would glance at the note and toss it, she figured.

At about 10 a.m. Thursday, on the eve of the prom, Maselli got a shock. Her doorbell rang, and a deliveryman handed her a wrist corsage. Inside was a handwritten note from **Biden**.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the vice president said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Biden goes on to invite Maselli to visit him at the White House.

Maselli's first thought was that someone was playing an elaborate practical joke on her. She even called her mother to ask if she was in on it.

"She had no idea what I was talking about," Maselli said.

Then she called a number for **Biden**'s assistant that was on a separate card. The assistant immediately recognized Maselli's name, and Maselli realized the corsage and the note were real.

A day later, Maselli and her family were still in shock.

"It's just been crazy," she said. "I definitely didn't expect him to answer seven months after the letter."

A spokeswoman at **Biden**'s press office said that the vice president read Maselli's invitation and was touched by it. He personally picked the corsage of white roses, baby's breath and red, white and blue ribbons, she said.

"He wanted her to feel special at her prom, even though he wasn't able to come," she said.

Unfortunately, Maselli, now 18, didn't end up going to prom.

"But If he had said yes, I would have gone," she said.

That's OK with Maselli, who will study theater sets and lighting at Central Connecticut State University starting in the fall. She's more excited about going with her family to the White House and meeting **Biden**, a visit the vice president's office is arranging for July.

"I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli said. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington, D.C."

Maselli will hold on to the bracelet and is keeping the corsage in the refrigerator. She is unsure what to do when the flowers wilt, although her grandmother has a suggestion.

"She said I should press them in a book," Maselli said.

Joe Biden Got Asked To Prom And Sent A Corsage In His Absence

[Washington Post](#), May 19, 2014

A Connecticut teen asked Vice President **Biden** to her high school prom never expecting to get a response. But the day before prom, a note and corsage showed up on the 17-year-old's doorstep.

Talia Maselli, a senior at Newington High School, wrote to the vice president last fall. “I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America,” said Maselli in the note, reports the Hartford Courant.

Months later, **Biden** responded, saying his schedule would prevent him from making it. “I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine,” the vice president wrote to Maselli and tweeted earlier today.

The teen told **Biden** in her note that she may have to ask House Speaker John Boehner if her request was turned down.

“And we can’t have that now can we,” she wrote. The corsage must have smoothed things over because there are no signs that Boehner went instead.

More from the Reliable Source:

Patrick Stewart dines at Oyamel before a stop at the Smithsonian

Will Jill Abramson remove her New York Times tattoo?

This Obama-**Biden** photo is asking for a caption

More Hey, isn’t that . . . Had a sighting? Share it at reliablesource@washpost.com. Want even more surreal estate, BOLO and Love, etc: Sign up for The Reliable Source newsletter. And follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Biden Can’t Go To High School Prom But Sends Corsage With Note

[Associated Press](#), May 20, 2014

HARTFORD, Conn. — What happens when you invite Vice President Joe **Biden** to your prom? Chances are he won’t show. But he doesn’t ignore it, either.

Talia Maselli invited **Biden** to her high school prom in Newington, Conn. She reached out last fall, knowing **Biden**’s dance card likely would fill up.

Biden couldn’t make it, but he sent a handwritten card and a corsage — baby’s breath, white roses and red, white and blue ribbons. **Biden**’s office says he was touched by the invitation and personally picked out the corsage so Maselli would feel special.

When the vice president’s package arrived at the Masellis’ home last Thursday, a day before the prom, the family thought it was a prank.

“But then we called the number that came with it, and it was his personal secretary,” said Maselli, 18. “I was just shocked.”

Maselli said the invitation to **Biden** began as a joke between her and her friends and she thought it would get lost in all the other mail he gets. She said she always thought the vice president was funny and she didn’t invite President Barack Obama because she thought he would be too busy.

“You know how people have a celebrity crush?” she said. “Well, I don’t, but I thought he would be fun to hang out with.”

Maselli said in her letter to **Biden** in September that she was inviting him so far in advance because she had to beat other teenage girls to the punch. She didn’t go to her prom Friday, as planned.

“I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in all of America — Joe **Biden**,” she wrote. “I fear if you turn me down, I may have to invite Speaker John Boehner, and we can’t have that now can we.”

Biden said in his reply that he was flattered by the invitation but his schedule wouldn’t let him attend. **Biden**’s office is arranging for Maselli to meet him at the White House in July.

Dawn Maselli said her daughter, who plans to study theater at Central Connecticut State University in the fall, has been downplaying getting a response from the vice president, saying it's no big deal. That's not how mom sees it, though.

"It's wild. It's fun," Dawn Maselli said. "I told her to just enjoy it."

Lederman reported from Washington.

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Joe Biden Sends Corsage To Teen Who Asked Him To Prom

By Jessica Chasmar

[Washington Times](#), May 20, 2014

Vice President Joseph R. **Biden** sent a corsage Thursday to 18-year-old Talia Maselli and invited her to the White House after she asked him to be her prom date, a Connecticut newspaper reported.

"Joe **Biden** makes me laugh," she told the Hartford Courant. "He just cracks me up."

The teen sent Mr. **Biden** a handwritten invitation last year asking him to prom.

"I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America," Talia said in her invite.

A delivery man reportedly showed up at her Newington home at about 10 a.m. Thursday — the eve of the prom — and handed her a wrist corsage.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," Mr. **Biden** said in an accompanying note, the newspaper reported. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Mr. **Biden**'s office said he was touched by the invitation and personally picked out the corsage of baby's breath and white roses so that the teen would feel special for her big night.

The vice president also invited her to visit the White House in July.

"It's just been crazy," she told the Hartford Courant. "I definitely didn't expect him to answer seven months after the letter."

The teen unfortunately never made it to her prom, "but if he had said yes, I would have gone," she told the paper.

Teen Invites Biden To Prom

By Justin Sink

[The Hill](#), May 20, 2014

Connecticut teenager Talia Maselli said she could only envision going to her high school senior prom "escorted by the most delightful man in America" — Vice President **Biden**.

So the 17-year-old student mailed the vice president a handwritten note last fall, asking **Biden** if he might accompany her to the dance.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in the letter, according to a report in the Hartford Courant.

In an appeal to Washington sensibilities, the teenager offered both a carrot and a stick — warning **Biden** that she would ask Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) if he turned her down.

"And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Biden couldn't make the dance, but the vice president still responded, sending Maselli a corsage and a handwritten note inviting her to the White House.

"He wanted her to feel special at her prom, even though he wasn't able to come," a representative for the vice president told the *Courant*.

In the note, **Biden** says he's flattered, but his schedule would not permit him to be in Connecticut.

"But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine," the vice president said.

Maselli and her family are planning to visit the vice president in Washington later this summer.

Joe Biden Says 'No' To Prom Invite

By Jonathan Topaz

[Politico](#), May 20, 2014

High school student Talia Maselli's top choice for prom date turned her down. But he invited her to visit him at the White House instead.

Vice President Joe **Biden** wrote a handwritten note to Maselli to tell the Connecticut high school student he would be unable to accept her request to join her at prom, according a story from the *Hartford Courant* published Monday, but the vice president included a corsage and an invitation to meet him at the White House.

Maselli wrote the vice president's office last fall asking **Biden** to her prom, but said she never expected any kind of response.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in the letter. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

She warned that if he turned her down, she might have to invite a second choice — Republican House Speaker John Boehner.

Last Thursday, the night before her prom, Maselli received a handwritten note from the vice president. The letter included a red, white and blue corsage that his office said he picked out personally.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," **Biden** wrote. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Maselli, who said that receiving the letter was "crazy," didn't end up going to prom. But she certainly doesn't intend on missing out on her trip to meet the vice president, which will likely be scheduled for July.

"I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli said. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington D.C."

A Connecticut Teenager Asked Joe Biden To Prom. He Said No.

[National Journal](#), May 20, 2014

High school kids have a tendency to ask famous people to their prom. Their dream dates are usually actors, singers, or supermodels. But for one Connecticut teenager, it was the vice president of the United States.

Last fall, Talia Maselli, a student at Newington High School, mailed Joe **Biden** a handwritten note asking him to be her prom date, the *Hartford Courant* reports.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

She also warned the vice president that if he turned her down, she would ask Speaker John Boehner to be her date instead. “And we can’t have that now can we,” she wrote.

Maselli, now 18, did not hear back from the White House until last week, when a delivery man showed up at her home in Connecticut with a wrist corsage and a note from **Biden**.

“I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening,” the vice president wrote. “But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine.” He also invited her and her family to visit the White House.

A **Biden** spokeswoman told the Courant that the vice president was touched by Maselli’s invitation, and personally picked out the corsage of white roses, baby’s breath and red, white, and blue ribbons.

Maselli didn’t attend her prom, but she and her family took up **Biden**’s invitation and are heading to Washington in July. “I was never really looking forward to going to prom,” Maselli said. “I’m looking forward to going to Washington, D.C.”

Deeply Confused Teen Asks Joe Biden — ‘The Most Delightful Man In America’ — To Prom

By Brendan Bordelon

[Daily Caller](#), May 20, 2014

Connecticut teenager Talia Maselli dodged a bullet last week, after Joe **Biden** regretfully informed her that he would not be able to attend the high school prom she asked the vice president to seven months ago.

The clearly mixed-up Newington high schooler sent **Biden** an invitation to her prom last fall. “I am inviting you so far in advance because I’m sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it,” she wrote, according to newspaper The Hartford Courant. “I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America.”

“Joe **Biden** makes me laugh,” she explained. “He just cracks me up.”

She also warned that should he refuse, she would ask Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner as a back-up date. “And we can’t have that now can we,” she wrote.

Maselli wrote the letter back in October and never expected to receive a reply. So she was shocked (and a little skeptical) when she opened a handwritten letter containing a red, white and blue corsage last Thursday.

“I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening,” **Biden** wrote. “But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine.” The vice president went on to invite the girl to visit the White House this summer.

Maselli — clearly too cool to tolerate “a high school dance” — didn’t make it to her prom last Friday. But she’s keeping the corsage fresh in her refrigerator and is gleefully awaiting her July visit with Uncle Joe.

“I was never really looking forward to going to prom,” Maselli said. “I’m looking forward to going to Washington D.C.”

Follow Brendan on Twitter

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Joe Biden: Prom Date?

[CBS News](#), May 20, 2014

Connecticut teen Talia Maselli really wanted Joe **Biden** to be her prom date, so she sent a handwritten note to the vice president seven months ago, certain there would be plenty of demands on his time.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote, according to the Hartford Courant. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Maselli, who attends Newington High School, also warned **Biden** that if he wasn't available, she might ask House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, instead. "We can't have that now can we," she wrote.

She did not immediately hear back from **Biden's** office, but received a delivery the day before the prom with a corsage and a note written by the vice president himself.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," he wrote, according to the Courant. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

A spokeswoman for **Biden's** press office confirmed to the Courant that the vice president read the invitation and picked out the corsage – of white roses, baby's breath, and red, white and blue ribbons – himself.

The kicker? Maselli didn't even end up going to the prom. But she said that if **Biden** had been able to attend, she would have. She plans to save the corsage.

She is looking forward to paying him a visit this summer in the White House, per **Biden's** invitation in the note.

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Joe Biden Gets Invited To Prom By 17-Year-Old Girl

[ABC News](#), May 20, 2014

Ask a teenage girl who her dream date to prom would be, and you would expect to get an answer such as Justin Bieber or Harry Styles. But for one Connecticut teen, that dream date was 71-year-old Joe **Biden**.

At the age of 17, Talia Maselli of Newington, Conn., invited the vice president to attend her high school prom, calling him "the most delightful man in America," The Courant reported today.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in her letter to the the vice president.

Biden turned down the invitation, but he did have a surprise for her, according to an account in The Courant:

At about 10 a.m. Thursday, on the eve of the prom, Maselli got a shock. Her doorbell rang, and a deliveryman handed her a wrist corsage. Inside was a handwritten note from **Biden**.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the vice president said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Maselli, now 18, ended up not attending her prom. SHOWS: Good Morning America

Biden Turns Down Prom Invite With A Corsage

[MSNBC](#), May 20, 2014

Months ahead of her high school prom, one Connecticut teen knew exactly who would be her dream date: Vice President Joe **Biden**.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Talia Maselli wrote in a letter to the veep. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

She warned that if the vice president didn't accept her invitation, she'd be forced to ask out House Speaker John Boehner instead, The Hartford Courant reported.

"And we can't have that now can we," she teased in the letter.

But instead of her date showing up at her front door, Maselli received a delivery of a corsage of roses and a note handwritten by the vice president himself.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," **Biden** said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

As it turns out, Maselli, now 18, did not attend her prom. But had 71-year-old **Biden** agreed to escort her, she said she would have gone.

If Joe Biden Can't Come To Your Prom, He'll Still Send A Corsage

[The Wire](#), May 20, 2014

Vice President Joe **Biden** leaves a trail of heartbreak wherever he goes. But he always sends flowers. And so it went for young Talia Maselli of Newington, Conn., who wrote a letter last fall to invite the 2016 not-so-hopeful to the prom.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in her letter. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

First of all, say whaaaaaat? As an added safeguard, perhaps a page right out of our promposal handbook, Maselli threatened to bring House Speaker John Boehner if the Veep declined.

Would Joe break her heart? Unfortunately, yes.

Would he at least try to salvage some of the pieces? A million times yes. On the Thursday morning before prom, Maselli received a little package of Joe-mentum, which included a note and a red, white, and blue corsage. Hartford Courant

The note read:

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening. But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

There's a lot to unpack here. The severity of **Biden's** tone. Also, the mention of how much **Biden** enjoyed his prom. Moreover, she wasn't joking around about not being able to tolerate prom without **Biden**. In the end, Maselli ultimately decided *not* to go to prom.

Maselli's apparently not the only girl dreaming of **Biden**-laden prom.

Teenage Girl Who Asked VP Joe Biden To Prom Invited To White House

[UPI](#), May 20, 2014

WASHINGTON, May 19 (UPI) --WASHINGTON, May 19 (UPI) --A teenage girl in Connecticut who sent a letter to Vice President Joe **Biden** asking him to her senior prom is going to the White House to meet her political crush in person.

17-year-old Talia Maselli was not planning to attend her senior prom, but last fall sent a letter to the Vice President's office saying she would if the popular politico would be her date.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Months later, she was shocked to receive a handwritten note and corsage from Vice President **Biden**.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," **Biden's** note read. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Biden went on to invite Maselli to the White House, a trip that will probably occur July.

"I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli told the Hartford Courant. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington D.C."

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Joe Biden Turns Down Conn. Prom Invite, Sends Corsage Night Before

Boston.com, May 19, 2014

If nothing else, Vice President Joe **Biden** is a charming man with a handsome set of teeth. There's no doubt he is the type of person who can let loose and have a good time, no matter the setting.

That's what one Newington, Connecticut girl seemed to be thinking when she invited the Vice President to her high school prom.

The Wire reported that Talia Maselli was so eager to bring Mr. **Biden** that she asked him last fall. But even with more than half a year's notice, **Biden** is a busy man who cannot make promises when it comes to proms. His dance card fills up quickly, so to speak.

So when prom season rolled around, and all the other high schoolers were asking annoying celebrities to come to their dance, Maselli was not so lucky. She received a rejection letter in the mail. But it's not all gloom and doom for the 17-year-old. **Biden's** letter was touching and considerate, and it came with a corsage for her to wear to the prom.

Sadly, the special night was not to be without Joe. The Wire report said Maselli was working with a "**Biden** or Bust" platform and decided not to attend the dance without the Veep. You can reach me at douglas.saffir@globe.com. Follow me @dougaffir

Newington Teen Asks Joe Biden To The Prom; VP Sends Her A Corsage

[Hartford \(CT\) Courant](http://Hartford(CT)Courant), May 16, 2014

NEWINGTON — When Talia Maselli envisioned her perfect prom date, one man immediately sprang to mind: Vice President Joe **Biden**.

"Joe **Biden** makes me laugh," Maselli said. "He just cracks me up."

So she mailed **Biden** a handwritten note last fall asking him to escort her to the Newington High School prom.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli said in her letter. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

If **Biden** turned her down, Maselli warned that she might ask Speaker of the House John Boehner in his place.

"And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Maselli, who says she's interested in politics, considered the invitation a lark and never expected to hear back. A staff member would glance at the note and toss it, she figured.

At about 10 a.m. Thursday, on the eve of the prom, Maselli got a shock. Her doorbell rang, and a deliveryman handed her a wrist corsage. Inside was a handwritten note from **Biden**.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the vice president said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Biden goes on to invite Maselli to visit him at the White House.

Maselli's first thought was that someone was playing an elaborate practical joke on her. She even called her mother to ask if she was in on it.

"She had no idea what I was talking about," Maselli said.

Then she called a number for **Biden's** assistant that was on a separate card. The assistant immediately recognized Maselli's name, and Maselli realized the corsage and the note were real.

A day later, Maselli and her family were still in shock.

"It's just been crazy," she said. "I definitely didn't expect him to answer seven months after the letter."

A spokeswoman at **Biden's** press office said Friday that the vice president read Maselli's invitation and was touched by it. He personally picked the corsage of white roses, baby's breath and red, white and blue ribbons, she said.

"He wanted her to feel special at her prom, even though he wasn't able to come," she said.

Unfortunately, Maselli, now 18, didn't end up going to prom.

"But if he had said yes, I would have gone," she said.

That's OK with Maselli, who will study theater sets and lighting at Central Connecticut State University starting in the fall. She's more excited about going with her family to the White House and meeting **Biden**, a visit the vice president's office is arranging for July.

"I was never really looking forward to going to prom," Maselli said. "I'm looking forward to going to Washington D.C."

Maselli will hold on to the bracelet and is keeping the corsage in the refrigerator. She is unsure what to do when the flowers wilt, although her grandmother has a suggestion.

"She said I should press them in a book," Maselli said.

Joe Biden Declines Invite To Prom, But Sends Student Corsage And Note

[New York Daily News](#), May 20, 2014

The captain of the football team has nothing on the Vice President of the United States.

An eager Connecticut teen asked Joe **Biden** to her Senior Prom, but when the Vice President was unable to attend, he sent the politics-minded student a beautiful corsage in his stead.

Talia Maselli, a senior at Newington High School, in central Connecticut, mailed **Biden** a handwritten note last fall asking him to escort her to her prom.

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it," Maselli wrote, according to the Hartford Courant. "I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

She says she never expected a response.

But last Thursday, the night before the dance, she received a surprising delivery — a beautiful hand corsage and a handwritten note from **Biden** himself.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," he wrote. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

Biden also invited Maselli and her family for a trip to the White House.

A **Biden** spokesman told the Courant that he was so touched by the letter that he not only personally responded to it but hand-picked the corsage — of white roses, baby's breath and red, white and blue ribbons — himself.

The entire incident floored Maselli.

"It's just been crazy," she said. "I definitely didn't expect him to answer seven months after the letter."

Unfortunately, Maselli, who will attend Central Connecticut State University in the fall, only had eyes for **Biden** and didn't end up going to her prom.

"If he had said yes, I would have gone," she said.

Connecticut Teen Receives Corsage From Biden After Asking Him To Prom « CBS New York

[WCBS-TV New York](#), May 19, 2014

NEWINGTON, Conn. (CBSNewYork) — A Newington, Conn., teen received flowers from Vice President Joe **Biden** last week, after she invited him to her high school prom.

Talia Maselli, 18, wrote to **Biden** and invited her to prom seven months ago, CBS Connecticut reported.

Quoted by the Hartford Courant, Maselli wrote in part: "I am inviting you so far in advance because I'm sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, and I had to beat them to it I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be escorted by the most delightful man in America."

Maselli wrote that if **Biden** turned her down, she might have to ask U.S. House Speaker John Boehner instead, "and we can't have that now, can we," the Courant reported.

This past Thursday, on the eve of the prom at Newington High School prom, Maselli received a red, white, and blue corsage with a handwritten letter from the vice president, CBS Connecticut reported.

Biden said his schedule would not permit him to be in Connecticut for the prom and he could not attend, but that he hoped she had a great time, the newspaper reported. He also invited her to visit the White House.

Newington said while other girls her age have celebrity crushes, she prefers politics — and chose **Biden** because he "cracks her up," CBS Connecticut reported.

She plans to take him up on the offer and visit the White House this summer. You May Also Be Interested In These Stories

Girl Asks Biden To Prom, He Sends Corsage

By Ashley Killough

[CNN](#), May 20, 2014

"I am inviting you so far in advance because I am sure many 17-year-old girls send you prom invitations, & I had to beat them to it. I could only tolerate a high school dance if I was to be accompanied by the most delightful man in all of America—Joe **Biden**," she wrote.

In the letter, Maselli said she'd ask House Speaker John Boehner if **Biden** turned her down. "And we can't have that now can we," she wrote.

Maselli assumed her letter would get brushed aside by an aide. But much to her surprise, she received a delivery last Thursday, the day before prom. The florist said it was from the Secret Service.

"I am flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the vice president said in the note. "But I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine."

At first, Maselli told CNN, she thought it was a prank from her mom. After realizing it wasn't a prank, her mom called the number on the card accompanying the corsage. Expecting the florist, Maselli said her mom was connected to a secretary in the vice president's office.

Maselli said she was "shocked" not only that **Biden** responded but that he invited her to the White House.

Maselli, however, didn't end up going to prom.

"I'd rather go to the White House anyway!" she said.

And what will she do with the flowers?

Right now, the red, white and blue corsage is in the refrigerator. There are three bracelets attached to the flowers, which Maselli said she'll definitely be holding onto.

CNN's Dana Davidsen contributed to this report.

VP Biden Turns Down CT Prom Invite, But Sends Corsage

[WFSB-TV New Haven \(CT\)](#), May 20, 2014

NEWINGTON, CT (WFSB) –

Vice President Joe **Biden** has been asked to do many things in his career, including run for office, fundraise and even fill in for the president at meetings. But Talia Maselli, 17, of Newington, CT, had a different request for him this week.

Maselli said she didn't have a date for the Newington High School prom and thought maybe the Vice President of the United States might be available.

"Most girls invite their celebrity crushes and stuff and I don't have a celebrity crush," Maselli said. "But Joe **Biden** cracks me up so I thought he'd be a good person to ask."

She crafted an official invitation.

"Dear Mr. Vice President, man of many chuckles, I'd like to formally invite you to my senior prom," Maselli said.

She even joked that if the VP rejected her request, "I have to invite (House) Speaker John Boehner and we can't have that now can we?"

Last September, she mailed the letter and waited.

"When I sent it, I thought there's no way it's going to get through to him," Maselli said. "No one is going to show this to him."

It turns out that **Biden** did get the letter. Eight months later, he ordered a special surprise from Kim's Flower Shop in Wethersfield for the occasion.

Kim Notaro, who is the owner of Kim's Flower Shop said he ordered "white roses and a red, white and blue ribbon."

Biden tweeted "I hope you will accept this corsage and enjoy your prom as much as I did mine," and also included a handwritten note with the corsage.

"Dear Talia. Thank you for your lovely invitation to be your escort for your prom. I'm flattered, but my schedule will not permit me to be in Connecticut on Friday evening," the letter read.

But **Biden** had a request of his own.

"I would now like for you to be my guest to the West Wing as soon as you are available, if you're willing," Maselli said.

It didn't take her long to say yes to the man of many chuckles.

Talia said she plans to visit the West Wing in July, Right before she starts as a technical theatre major at Central Connecticut State University.

Sadly, Talia said she opted to skip the prom.

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Obama-Biden Photo Caption Winner | The Reliable Source

[Washington Post](#), May 19, 2014

President Obama and Vice President **Biden** meet with local workers at the Dupont Circle location of Shake Shack in Washington, D.C. (Alex Wong/ European Pressphoto Agency)

We asked our Source readers (Sourcers?) to come up with a caption for this photo of Obama and **Biden** lunching at Shake Shack in Dupont Circle on Friday. After much deliberation over some really clever responses, we have a winner:

Chris Hannas @cjhannas

@jmckellogg @reliablesource "Oh I double-dip chips left and right at the White House. YOLO! Isn't that what the kids say, Mr. President?"

Thanks to all who kept us entertained with your captions.

The Most Memorable Lines From 2014 Commencement Speeches

By Dylan Stableford

[Yahoo!](#), May 20, 2014

Secretary of State John Kerry returned to his alma mater of Yale University on Sunday to take a swipe at disgraced Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling.

"You are graduating today as the most diverse class in Yale's long history," Kerry said. "Or, as it's called in the NBA, Donald Sterling's worst nightmare." According to the Associated Press, the comment drew laughs from the crowd, which included graduates from 61 countries.

Kerry's zinger was one many memorable moments from the 2014 crop of commencement speeches.

At Howard University earlier this month, music mogul Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs quoted the late rapper Biggie Smalls in his speech to graduates.

"It was all a dream," Combs said in his speech on May 10. "I used to read Word Up magazine."

Combs, who left Howard before earning his bachelor's degree, recalled his time at the historically black college.

"My mind was blown when I saw so many beautiful shades of brown," Combs said. "I never heard so many accents, never seen so many beautiful women — and we all know Howard has the most beautiful, intelligent women in the world."

On Friday, first lady Michelle Obama gave an impassioned speech on diversity to high school graduates in Topeka, Kansas, where the landmark Brown v. Board of Education case started.

"You all are the living, breathing legacy of this case," Obama said. "Many districts in this country have pulled back on efforts to integrate their schools. Many communities have become less diverse."

Obama also delivered the commencement address to graduates of Dillard University in New Orleans.

"No dream is too big, no vision is too bold," she said on May 10. "As long as we stay hungry for education and let that hunger be our North Star, there is nothing, graduates, nothing, that we cannot achieve."

At the University of Massachusetts Lowell on Sunday, Bill Nye had a similar message for graduates: “Change the world.”

“I’m not kidding. Change the world in new, exciting and big ways,” Nye, better known as “The Science Guy,” said. “Keep reaching. Keep seeking. Keep using your abilities to bring out the best in those around you, and let them bring out the best in you.”

Nye also railed against climate-change deniers. “Conspiracy theories are for lazy people,” he said. “People that don’t want to get down to the business at hand. ... Instead of just doing less, we have to find ways of doing more with less. That’s the key to the future.” Also, he added, “if you smell fresh paint, don’t walk under the ladder.”

Attorney General Eric Holder also brought up the Sterling scandal in a speech to graduates at Morgan State University in Baltimore on Saturday, saying “subtle racism” still exists in the United States.

“Over the last few weeks and months, we’ve seen occasional, jarring reminders of the discrimination and the isolated, repugnant, racist views,” Holder said. “These outbursts of bigotry, while deplorable, are not the true markers of the struggle that still must be waged. ... The greatest threats do not announce themselves in screaming headlines. They are more subtle. They cut deeper.”

On May 3, Vice President Joe **Biden** delivered the commencement speech at Miami Dade College in Florida, the nation’s largest community college.

“My name is Joe **Biden**, I am Jill **Biden**’s husband,” **Biden** joked. “On every community college campus, that’s how I’m known.” (In her own commencement speech at Villanova, Jill **Biden** told the graduating class, “Show your heart to the world.”)

The vice president then urged Congress to act on immigration reform. “It’s time to get done what an overwhelming number of Americans want to do,” **Biden** said. “Act now and take these people out of the shadows.”

Jill Abramson, who was fired as executive editor of the New York Times last week, honored her commitment to speak at Wake Forest’s graduation on Monday.

“What’s next for me? I don’t know,” Abramson said. “So I’m in the same boat as many of you!”

Puff Daddy was among several unconventional choices for commencement speakers.

On May 10, Tiger Woods’s ex-wife, Elin Nordegren, received a roar of applause from Rollins College graduates when she mentioned her divorce.

“When I entered my student adviser’s office in the fall of 2005, I was 25 years old. I had just recently moved to America. I was married without children,” Nordegren said, according to ABC News. “Today, nine years later, I’m a proud American, and I have two beautiful children — but I’m no longer married.

“It was right after I had taken Communication and the Media” class, she said, “I was unexpectedly thrust into the media limelight. And I probably should have taken more notes in that class.”

At the University of Colorado Boulder, the May 9 commencement speech was delivered by Eric Stough, animation director for Comedy Central’s “South Park” and a CU grad.

“Good morning, class of 2014,” Stough, better known as the voice of several characters on the show, said. “As Mr. Hankey, the Christmas poo, would say, ‘Howdy ho!’”

Stough, the voice of “Butters,” also had a serious message for graduates about to enter the real world: “We need you. Your diploma is an inanimate object, so be the animator, and bring it to life.”

Del. Court Overturns Conviction And Death Sentence

By Randall Chase

[Associated Press](#), May 20, 2014

DOVER, Del. (AP) – The state Supreme Court on Monday overturned the conviction and death sentence of a man who has spent more than two decades on Delaware's death row.

The justices ruled unanimously that Jermaine Wright, 41, is entitled to a new trial because prosecutors repeatedly withheld potentially exculpatory evidence in his 1992 murder trial.

Wright was convicted of killing Phillip Seifert, 65, a clerk at a liquor store and bar outside Wilmington.

Monday's ruling came after the Supreme Court last year reversed a lower court ruling overturning Wright's conviction and death sentence. Wright's attorneys then raised issues they said were not settled when the Supreme Court reinstated Wright's conviction and death sentence.

Before his conviction was thrown out in 2012, Wright had spent more time on death row than any other Delaware inmate currently facing execution.

"Wright is not entitled to a perfect trial, but he is entitled to a fair one where material exculpatory and impeachment evidence is disclosed and not suppressed," Justice Henry duPont Ridgely wrote in Monday's ruling.

Herb Mondros, an attorney for Wright, said he was gratified by the ruling but that it would be "unconscionable" for prosecutors to retry the case.

"It's time for this to end," Mondros said. "I think they should drop the prosecution."

Joe Rogalsky, a spokesman for Attorney General Beau **Biden**, said prosecutors respect the court's ruling.

"We will in short order assess the feasibility of retrying a case that's 20 years old," Rogalsky said.

In overturning Wright's conviction and death sentence in 2012, Superior Court Judge John Parkins Jr. noted that Wright was under the influence of heroin and not properly advised of his rights during a lengthy police interrogation that resulted in a confession. Parkins also said Wright's trial attorneys were never given potentially exculpatory information suggesting that Seifert may have been killed by two men who tried to rob another liquor store earlier that night.

The Supreme Court overturned Parkins, saying arguments about the confession were procedurally barred, and that evidence about the earlier robbery attempt would not have led to a different result.

Defense attorneys subsequently argued that prosecutors failed to disclose that Gerald Samuels, a jailhouse informant who testified against Wright, had obtained a plea deal for testifying against a co-defendant in an earlier drug case, and that Samuels expected similar leniency for testifying against Wright.

Wright's attorneys also argued that prosecutors failed to divulge information about another witness, who they argued had committed the liquor store killing with a cousin. Wright's attorneys said prosecutors knew but failed to divulge that Kevin Jamison, who had been called as a witness by defense attorneys, committed perjury in testifying against Wright.

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NEW YORK TIMES AND WASHINGTON POST OP-EDS

What AT&T's Satellite Deal Might Mean

By The Editorial Board

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

In the telecommunications industry, the big ones seem to get bigger. Three months after the nation's top two cable companies, Comcast and Time Warner Cable, announced they were merging, the nation's largest telephone company, AT&T, said on Sunday it would buy the biggest satellite-TV business, DirecTV, for \$48.5 billion.

Megamergers always raise lots of questions. And that's particularly true of the telecommunications industry with its high barriers to entry and limited competition. AT&T says that its purchase of DirecTV will be good for consumers, and it is promising several goodies like a pledge to bring high-speed Internet service to rural America to get regulators to look favorably upon the deal. But the company has not yet made a convincing case. As with the Comcast-Time Warner Cable deal, regulators should carefully analyze this acquisition for its impact on the market for paid TV service.

AT&T executives say that their acquisition is not driven by Comcast's purchase of Time Warner Cable, but that's hard to believe. AT&T is no longer just a phone company. It has long been in the wireless business, and, in recent years, it has established a big presence in the TV business, which it hopes to expand substantially with this purchase. Buying DirecTV with its more than 20 million American subscribers (it has 18 million customers in Latin America, too), would give AT&T the national reach in paid television that it needs to compete with a bulked-up Comcast for subscribers and for the opportunity to buy the rights to TV shows, sports and movies.

AT&T wants to sell to its customers multiple services like wireless, broadband and satellite TV, which it already does in parts of the country where it has a wired network, but not where it has no such network. DirecTV has the advantage of reaching all parts of the country; it has deals with other telecom companies to provide high-speed Internet and telephone service to its customers. Companies now feel that they have to offer combination packages because customers are less likely to switch providers if they have signed up for several services.

The biggest potential losers of this deal are consumers in 22 states, including California, Texas and Illinois, where AT&T already provides its own TV service through its U-Verse network. A merger with DirecTV would be bad for these customers because it would reduce choices in markets where AT&T currently competes with cable companies as well as the two national satellite-TV firms, DirecTV and Dish Network. At the end of March, AT&T had 5.7 million TV subscribers; by comparison, Comcast had 22.6 million video customers and Verizon had 5.3 million TV customers. (AT&T is in the process of selling its wireline network in Connecticut to Frontier Communications.)

Elsewhere in the country, where AT&T does not have customers, its acquisition of DirecTV might allow it to compete more aggressively with Comcast and other cable companies. But given the rich price AT&T is paying to get into the satellite business, there might be limits to how much money the company is willing to spend on discounts to get customers to switch to DirecTV.

AT&T has said it is willing to commit to offering satellite-TV plans, which are not bundled with its other services, at prices that are the same for all customers regardless of where they live for at least three years. That is nice, but it is a limited and temporary promise. And so is the company's pledge that it will not block or interfere with the delivery of Internet content on its network for three years. The Federal

Communications Commission had issued such Internet rules in 2010, but a federal court struck them down in January.

This much is clear about AT&T's move to buy DirecTV, along with the Comcast-Time Warner Cable deal: These mergers will encourage other telecom companies like Dish Network, Verizon, Charter, Sprint and T-Mobile to contemplate deals of their own. Officials at the F.C.C. and the Justice Department, who have to review mergers for antitrust concerns, need to make sure consumers are not left worse off by these deals.

Primary Day On The Far Side

By The Editorial Board

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

Wearing a black leather vest that barely covered the cigar tucked into his pocket, a man named Harley Brown was allowed to join the debate among candidates for governor of Idaho last week, holding forth on discrimination against bikers and the presidential seal tattooed on his shoulder after God told him he would one day occupy the White House. Another candidate, Walt Bayes, railed against "a bunch of eastern idiots" pushing the country toward Sodom and Gomorrah. If you thought that this was nothing but a stunt designed by Gov. Butch Otter to distract attention from his real opponent, you'd be right. But you'd also be missing the larger point: Republican primaries around the country have largely degenerated into self-parodies. They may lack the flowing beards of Mr. Brown and Mr. Bayes, but many of the other candidates in the party's primaries — a large number of which will take place on Tuesday — are running on ideas only slightly less extreme.

One of the candidates with a serious shot at making the primary runoff in the House race for Georgia's 10th district is Jody Hice, a pastor and talk-show host who says homosexuals have the right to be married, just not to each other. (In 2010, he ran billboards linking President Obama with the hammer and sickle.) Another is Mike Collins, a trucking executive who demonstrated the perils of the Affordable Care Act by running a video that showed him riding between two trucks, stuntman style.

The congressman that both are hoping to replace is Paul Broun, a Tea Party adherent who is running for the nomination for an open Georgia Senate seat against six others in a field that has moved ludicrously far to the right. Mr. Broun, best known for calling evolution "lies straight from the pit of hell," gave up his House seat to run, as did Phil Gingrey, who thinks there's some truth to the idea that after a "legitimate rape," women's bodies can shut down conception.

A leading candidate in the race, Karen Handel, formerly secretary of state of Georgia, used to work for the Susan G. Komen breast cancer group and led the fight to stop paying Planned Parenthood for mammograms because it performs abortions. She wants to repeal the constitutional amendment allowing an income tax. David Perdue, a businessman considered the front-runner in the race, committed a Republican heresy last week by saying the government may need more revenue to reach a balance. To quell the immediate furor, he quickly made it clear he would never consider any tax increases.

In Kentucky's Senate primary, the Tea Party candidate, Matt Bevin, has accused the Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell — one of two men most responsible for immobilizing Congress and preventing the passage of job-creating legislation — of being insufficiently conservative. In Pennsylvania, Travis Schooley, a conservative challenger to Representative Bill Shuster, pounced on the Republican incumbent for voting to continue the food-stamp program. "If we had jobs and work ethic and didn't have these programs lying in wait," Mr. Schooley said at a recent debate, "safety nets, charities and faith-based organizations would be doing these things."

The list goes on and on. No Republican has a shot in this year's party primaries without paying homage to extremist ideas. Whether the Tea Party is still a political force is a moot point; the radicalism of 2010 and 2012 is very much alive in 2014.

South Korea Searches For Answers

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

The April 16 ferry disaster in South Korea that left 304 people dead or missing did more than cause immediate outrage. It also forced ordinary Koreans to examine themselves and their country, and what they saw was a society and a national government that were not nearly as well put together as they and the rest of the world had believed.

Now President Park Geun-hye has declared war against the country's entrenched culture of collusive ties between businesses and government regulators, which has encouraged acceptance of poor safety standards throughout the society. She promised to break those collusive links by revising laws to tighten the screening of officials looking for private-sector jobs after retirement, and she vowed to disband the Coast Guard, which she said failed to do enough to save the passengers, most of them high school students.

Other recent accidents have added to the national soul-searching. On May 2, for instance, a signal failure caused a subway train to run into the back of another train stopped at a station in Seoul, injuring nearly 200 people. South Koreans have begun to see such incidents not as isolated accidents but as consequences of a broken regulatory system. More broadly, there is a mounting sense that these accidents represent, in some way, the dark side of South Korea's success as a global economic power — that in its rush for wealth the country has not only neglected safety but also turned a blind eye to other ills. During the past two decades, as the country joined the ranks of developed countries, its suicide rate more than tripled. Nearly half of its citizens over age 65 live below the poverty line.

"The sinking of the Sewol will stay as a hard-to-erase scar in our history," President Park said. "If we cannot reform ourselves in a situation like this, we will become a nation that will never be able to achieve reform." The ferry disaster was a terrible thing. But there will be some consolation if it yields, from the top of the government on down, an examination of the society's shortcomings.

A Cancer Treatment In Your Medicine Cabinet?

By Michelle Holmes And Wendy Chen

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

WE believe that it might be possible to treat breast cancer — the leading cause of female cancer death — with a drug that can already be found in nearly every medicine cabinet in the world: Aspirin.

In 2010, we published an observational study in *The Journal of Clinical Oncology* showing that women with breast cancer who took aspirin at least once a week for various reasons were 50 percent less likely to die of breast cancer. In 2012, British researchers, by combining results from clinical trials that looked at using aspirin to prevent heart disease, found that aspirin was also associated with a significantly lower risk of breast cancer death.

And yet, until now, there have been no randomized trials (the gold standard of research) of aspirin use among women with breast cancer.

It's not hard to see why: Clinical trials are typically conducted on drugs developed by labs seeking huge profits. No one stands to make money off aspirin, which has been a generic drug since the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, and which costs less than \$6 for a year's supply.

Thankfully, the first randomized clinical trial is now going on in Britain, made possible by funding from a nonprofit group, Cancer Research UK. But the British study is looking at four cancers, and won't be done until 2025. If we in the United States had funding to do a similar trial, we could combine our data and get answers much faster. If the United States is to maintain its role as the global leader in biomedical research, it must fund its own trial of aspirin in breast cancer.

Aspirin was originally derived from willow bark, which has been used as a painkiller since the time of Hippocrates. We don't know exactly why it appears to work in fighting cancer. Aspirin reduces inflammation, and that may play a role in inhibiting the growth of tumors — perhaps by slowing the development of new blood vessels that nourish them, or by fighting old cells that keep growing when they should be dying off. It may also inhibit estrogen production, and we know that estrogen fuels the growth of most (but not all) breast cancers.

If we could prove that aspirin was an effective treatment in a clinical trial, it would have major implications, especially for low-income patients. Modern hormonal treatments, used after surgery to try to prevent cancer from recurring, last a standard five years and can cost between \$1,200 and \$2,300 a year. But not everyone who needs them is actually taking them. Higher co-pays reduce the number of women who fill their prescriptions, according to a 2011 study.

And that is just in the United States. Africa, Asia and Central and South America already account for more than 60 percent of the world's cancer cases and about 70 percent of cancer deaths, according to the World Health Organization. The majority of the impact of the disease will be felt in those areas in the coming decades. Aspirin's minimal cost would make it available in every country on earth, and for millions of women it could mean the difference between some treatment and none.

It may also offer an alternative treatment to women who cannot tolerate widely used cancer drugs because of debilitating side effects. For example, Columbia University researchers found that half of breast cancer patients taking hormonal treatments (specifically, tamoxifen and aromatase inhibitors) were unable to take the drugs for the recommended five years. A survey by the advocacy group Breast Cancer Action found that the predominant reason was joint pain. The most serious possible side effects of taking aspirin are gastrointestinal bleeding and stroke, but they are rare.

If aspirin truly works, we estimate that we could save 10,000 lives per year in the United States, and 75,000 in the developing world.

It won't take much to find out. A randomized study of approximately 3,000 women with Stage 2 and 3 breast cancer, lasting five years, would cost around \$10 million. (We wouldn't study women with Stage 1 disease because they have such a high survival rate already, nor women with Stage 4 cancer, because there is not enough evidence that aspirin would help when the disease has advanced that far.)

Although \$10 million is a relatively small amount for a large pharmaceutical company, it is too big for most federal grant mechanisms and nonprofit foundations. Our repeated attempts since 2010 to seek funding through federal grant mechanisms have been rejected.

Yet even as government funding for research is slashed, the government is still willing to test new cancer drugs pushed by pharmaceutical companies, despite very high failure rates for those drugs. Federal grant review panels have no direct financial interest in the studies they approve for funding, but inevitably they are seduced by the more novel treatments — the scientific equivalent of the latest smartphone. And generic drugs, particularly ones as old and familiar as aspirin, just aren't sexy.

There's a saying attributed to Hippocrates that extreme remedies are appropriate for extreme diseases. But in the case of breast cancer, the most simple of drugs may be the next great weapon.

Michelle Holmes and Wendy Chen are physicians and faculty members at Harvard Medical School.

Hillary's Obstacle Course

By Frank Bruni

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

Reince Priebus made a joke on Sunday.

I don't know that he meant to — comedy isn't his forte — but the only way to hear one of his comments on "Meet the Press" was as a put-on. He said that Hillary Clinton wouldn't run for the presidency if "she has another month like she just had," with questions about Monica, about Benghazi, about Boko Haram, about her brain.

I almost fell down. For one thing, she's had countless months like that. For another, they're the only kind on the horizon: Hillary as the fodder for the morning talk shows (on Sunday's panels, she came up 98 times, according to a Washington Post tally) and Hillary as a piñata for late-night comedians; strenuously marketed Hillary scandals with a modicum of merit and strenuously marketed Hillary scandals with none.

If Republicans believed in global warming, they'd surely divine her hand in it. Speaking of body parts, I suspect we'll move from Hillary's brain to her heart, probably her liver, possibly her pancreas and maybe even her pinkie toe. What Hillary goes through in the public arena isn't an examination. It's a vivisection.

That she endures it is admirable. That she's so willing to is scary. With all politicians, you worry about the intensity of the hunger that enables them to suffer the snows of Iowa and the slings and arrows of outrageous pundits. With Hillary and Bill, you worry that it's rapaciousness beyond bounds.

You also grow weary. The Clintons are exhausting. And that's just one of many drawbacks worth discussing as Hillary plays Hamlet, mulling what to do.

She's without doubt the contender to bet on. But she's a contender with baggage and obstacles that get woefully short shrift in all the nonstop chatter about her inevitability.

For starters, Americans have been in a pessimistic mood for an unusually sustained period, their faith in the political system at rock bottom. How does someone who's been front and center in that system for more than two decades — who's a symbol of intense partisan warfare — become the voice of change? There's no "Don't Stop (Thinking About Tomorrow)" for Hillary. Tomorrow was yesterday.

Remarks she made in Washington on Friday illustrated that point. At a conference titled "Big Ideas for a New America," she mused about what "the 1990s taught us," looking into the future by traveling into the past, which isn't the terrain on which presidential elections are typically won.

Bill traveled there just two and a half weeks earlier, in a speech of his own at Georgetown University. "Speech" is too paltry a word; this was one of those ego extravaganzas, like his aria at the Democratic National Convention, that went on and on and reaffirmed his talent for making everything, including the current income-inequality debate, about him. In this case he was singing the praises of his own presidency's economic record.

He was also serving notice that despite his screw-ups during Hillary's 2008 campaign, it may be impossible to muzzle him in 2016. Just last week, on yet another stage, he again joined the fray, proclaiming Hillary blameless for Benghazi and vouching that her concussion was merely that. There's a thin line between chivalry and butting in. Can he stay on the right side of it? If not, he could hurt her candidacy, overshadowing her and undercutting her feminist story line.

She has additional challenges. If Obama's approval rating doesn't rise, his would-be successors will be best served by breaking with him. For Hillary that's hard. Given her history on health insurance, she can't run against the Affordable Care Act. Given her role in his administration, she can't run against his foreign policy.

How does she simultaneously defend and defy him? It's a balancing act that Al Gore never perfected in regard to her husband.

The last month has indeed been instructive, demonstrating how practiced Republicans are at attacking her — and how exuberant they are about it. I think they want her to run. She's the devil they know. She's the dragon worth slaying.

She's considered inevitable in part because she's political royalty, awash in money and celebrity endorsements, but is royalty what an economically frustrated, embittered electorate wants? With fame of her duration and magnitude, how does she find a common touch?

And how does she show us anything that she hasn't shown us before, introducing or even reintroducing herself?

Maybe any sense of staleness will be expunged by the prospect of a first female president, but she lacks an opportunity that many successful presidential candidates enjoyed: that period of the rollout when a more detailed biography emerges, a personality is defined and voters get a chance to swoon.

We can't fall in love that way with Hillary, not at this point. We're too far past the roses and Champagne.

The Big Debate

By David Brooks

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

It's now clear that the end of the Soviet Union heralded an era of democratic complacency. Without a rival system to test them, democratic governments have decayed across the globe. In the U.S., Washington is polarized, stagnant and dysfunctional; a pathetic 26 percent of Americans trust their government to do the right thing. In Europe, elected officials have grown remote from voters, responding poorly to the euro crisis and contributing to massive unemployment.

According to measures by Freedom House, freedom has been in retreat around the world for the past eight years. New democracies like South Africa are decaying; the number of nations that the Bertelsmann Foundation now classifies as "defective democracies" (rigged elections and so on) has risen to 52. As John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge write in their book, "The Fourth Revolution," "so far, the 21st century has been a rotten one for the Western model."

The events of the past several years have exposed democracy's structural flaws. Democracies tend to have a tough time with long-range planning. Voters tend to want more government services than they are willing to pay for. The system of checks and balances can slide into paralysis, as more interest groups acquire veto power over legislation.

Across the Western world, people are disgusted with their governments. There is a widening gap between the pace of social and economic change, and the pace of government change. In Britain, for example, productivity in the private service sector increased by 14 percent between 1999 and 2013, while productivity in the government sector fell by 1 percent between 1999 and 2010.

These trends have sparked a sprawling debate in the small policy journals: Is democracy in long-run decline?

A new charismatic rival is gaining strength: the Guardian State. In their book, Micklethwait and Wooldridge do an outstanding job of describing Asia's modernizing autocracies. In some ways, these governments look more progressive than the Western model; in some ways, more conservative.

In places like Singapore and China, the best students are ruthlessly culled for government service. The technocratic elites play a bigger role in designing economic life. The safety net is smaller and less

forgiving. In Singapore, 90 percent of what you get out of the key pension is what you put in. Work is rewarded. People are expected to look after their own.

These Guardian States have some disadvantages compared with Western democracies. They are more corrupt. Because the systems are top-down, local government tends to be worse. But they have advantages. They are better at long-range thinking and can move fast because they limit democratic feedback and don't face NIMBY-style impediments.

Most important, they are more innovative than Western democracies right now. If you wanted to find a model for your national schools, would you go to South Korea or America? If you wanted a model for your pension system, would you go to Singapore or the U.S.? "These are not hard questions to answer," Micklethwait and Wooldridge write, "and they do not reflect well on the West."

So how should Western democracies respond to this competition? What's needed is not so much a vision of the proper role for the state as a strategy to make democracy dynamic again.

The answer is to use Lee Kuan Yew means to achieve Jeffersonian ends — to become less democratic at the national level in order to become more democratic at the local level. At the national level, American politics has become neurotically democratic. Politicians are campaigning all the time and can scarcely think beyond the news cycle. Legislators are terrified of offending this or that industry lobby, activist group or donor faction. Unrepresentative groups have disproportionate power in primary elections.

The quickest way around all this is to use elite Simpson-Bowles-type commissions to push populist reforms.

The process of change would be unapologetically elitist. Gather small groups of the great and the good together to hammer out bipartisan reforms — on immigration, entitlement reform, a social mobility agenda, etc. — and then rally establishment opinion to browbeat the plans through. But the substance would be anything but elitist. Democracy's great advantage over autocratic states is that information and change flow more freely from the bottom up. Those with local knowledge have more responsibility.

If the Guardian State's big advantage is speed at the top, democracy's is speed at the bottom. So, obviously, the elite commissions should push proposals that magnify that advantage: which push control over poverty programs to local charities; which push educational diversity through charter schools; which introduce more market mechanisms into public provision of, say, health care, to spread power to consumers.

Democracy is always messy, but, historically, it's thrived because it has been more flexible than its rivals. In 1787, democracy's champions innovated faster. Is that still true?

China's Pollution Challenge

By Benjamin Van Rooij And Alex Wang

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

China's national legislature has adopted sweeping changes to the country's Environmental Protection Law, revisions that have been hailed as major steps toward saving China's environment from rampant degradation.

The authorities will now have stronger enforcement powers, including the right to detain persistent violators for up to 15 days and to fine polluters more heavily than before. Some legally registered civil-society organizations will now be able to initiate public-interest litigation as well.

The law, approved late last month, solidifies the use of environmental targets to assess bureaucrats, who for too long have been measured primarily on economic performance. It also increases transparency

by requiring major violators to disclose pollution data and local governments to release information on environmental quality and enforcement.

These changes offer hope to the hundreds of millions of people exposed to the extraordinary risks of China's severe air, water and soil pollution. We believe the new Environmental Protection Law is a signal from the government that it is taking the issue seriously. Moreover, it is a victory for the countless people in China who have worked for years for environmental change. Even a decade ago, most of the amendments to the law would have been unthinkable.

And yet the new law alone may end up doing little to end the impunity that polluters regularly enjoy. Only deep and fundamental changes in the organization of the party-state can bring down the extreme levels of pollution in China.

Environmental law enforcement has failed across the country largely because the regulatory agencies face conflicts of interest that limit their ability to do their jobs. Local governments provide most of the budgets for local environmental bureaus, but also maintain strong economic and political ties to the companies that pollute. Moreover, a significant part of local environmental regulatory budgets comes from pollution-discharge fees. Because these fees are based on the amount of pollution, this leads to the perverse result that reduced pollution can mean the loss of crucial environmental enforcement funds.

If systemic problems like these are not resolved, it is unlikely that the environmental authorities will avail themselves of the stronger enforcement powers granted to them by the new law. The introduction of more stringent environmental targets for local leaders is a step in the right direction, but it does not fully resolve the core conflict between environmental regulation and polluting industries.

These problems are well known in China, as are potential solutions, such as a recentralization of enforcement authority away from local governments, further decoupling of relations between the state and the companies it controls, and full payment of the regulatory budget out of sources unrelated to pollution enforcement. Such reforms go far beyond the reach of mere environmental law, however, and will require a basic rethinking of central-local relations and the operations of state capitalism.

Experience in both developed and emerging economies shows that citizens and civic organizations are necessary to oversee polluting companies as well as regulators. In this vein, China's new law promotes "societal supervision" of polluters and regulators through greater transparency, public participation and the right to sue polluters.

The nation's leaders nevertheless remain fearful of citizen unrest breaking out over pollution violations, and preventing social unrest remains the top priority. The government continues to restrict citizens from exercising their legal rights to help control pollution. Other laws limit the registration of civic organizations, making it nearly impossible for national or regional environmental organizations to develop.

At present, petitioners and advocates for the environment run the risk of harassment and arrest. Courts often refuse to even accept difficult or sensitive cases. The Supreme People's Court has adopted rules for breaking up class-action lawsuits and relegating individual suits to co-opted lower-level courts. Citizens are therefore often unable to use the law against polluters, especially ones with strong ties to the government. As a result, citizen supervision has been blunted and pollution only grows. The new law may empower citizens, but it still fails to correct systemic barriers that restrict citizen action in practice.

China's half-hearted effort at legal reform is a major risk for the party-state. It raises public expectations for a better environment, but fails to lay sufficient groundwork for improvements in environmental performance. The resulting growth in under-regulated pollution will lead to more public grievances. While many citizens may not be willing to risk aggressive action, an increasing number will

conclude that only disruptive activism can force the government's hand. Ever-increasing environmental protests throughout the nation have already highlighted the costs of this approach to the party-state.

In the end, protecting China's beleaguered environment will require the government to reach beyond its comfort zone and confront the limits of its economic and political model. It will require the courage of the central leadership to face down vested interests in the state and industry that oppose the creation of impartial administrative and judicial institutions to regulate pollution. It will also require the good sense to allow society the genuine freedom to act as environmental watchdog without fear of repercussion.

These suggestions would touch the heart of the current power structure — but so does the country's immense environmental crisis. China's new leadership has shown the courage to confront corruption at the highest levels of power. Surely, it can now demonstrate the same commitment toward saving the nation's environment.

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Bankrupt Housing Policy

By Joe Nocera

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

The publication of Timothy Geithner's memoir, "Stress Test," has caused all the old arguments that were fought during the financial crisis to come rushing to the surface again.

Did the government make a mistake in allowing Lehman Brothers to file for bankruptcy? Was it right to bail out the too-big-to-fail banks despite all the harm they had done to the economy? As Sheila Bair, the former chairwoman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, put it in her review of "Stress Test": "Tim's book has reinvigorated a much-needed debate about whether our financial system should be based on a paradigm of bailouts or on one of accountability."

And one other thing: It has re-raised the question of why the government wasn't willing to do more for struggling homeowners, who bore the burden of the Great Recession. In his book, Geithner, the former Treasury secretary, devotes a handful of pages to the Obama administration's mortgage relief efforts, though the writing comes across as halfhearted, not unlike Geithner's efforts while he was running the Treasury Department.

But, in the course of perusing another new book about the financial crisis, "Other People's Houses," by Jennifer Taub, an associate professor at Vermont Law School, I was reminded of an effort that took place in the spring of 2009 that could have made an enormous difference to homeowners, one that would have required no taxpayer money and might well have become law with a little energetic lobbying from the likes of, well, Tim Geithner. That was an attempt, led by Dick Durbin, the Illinois senator, to change the bankruptcy code so that homeowners who were underwater could modify their mortgages during the bankruptcy process. The moment has been largely forgotten; Taub has done us a favor by putting it back on the table.

As she notes, thanks to a 1993 Supreme Court decision, homeowners saddled with mortgage debt on their primary residences have not been able to take refuge in the bankruptcy courts. The unanimous ruling by the court found that when Congress rewrote the bankruptcy code in 1978, it specifically gave "favorable treatment" to mortgage lenders "to encourage the flow of capital into the home-lending

market,” as Justice John Paul Stevens wrote in a concurring opinion. Durbin was trying to get rid of that favorable treatment.

Why? Because, as Bair told me in an email, “It would have been a powerful bargaining chip for borrowers.” Without the ability to file for bankruptcy, underwater homeowners unable to pay their mortgages were helpless to prevent foreclosures. With it, however, servicers and banks were far more likely to negotiate the debt load. And if they weren’t, a bankruptcy judge would rule on the appropriate debt to be repaid. For all the talk about the need for principal reduction, this change would have been the easiest way to get it.

Indeed, although the financial services industry had pushed hard for their bankruptcy carve-out, they would have been helped, too. Knowing that a borrower can avail himself of bankruptcy court would undoubtedly have a sobering effect on lenders, making them more cautious about underwriting standards.

As the financial crisis heated up during his first presidential run, then-candidate Obama said that he favored changing the bankruptcy laws “to make it easier for families to stay in their homes.” But he became convinced that the Democrats should not push for it as part of the controversial bailout legislation, so he backed off, promising to push it once he was in the White House.

Once he was president, however, Obama was rarely heard from on the subject. In late April 2009, with a bankruptcy bill having already passed the House, Durbin offered his amendment on the Senate side. The financial services industry pulled out all the stops, arguing that a right of bankruptcy for a homeowner would increase the cost of home loans, undermine the sanctity of contracts and promote (of course!) moral hazard.

Adam J. Levitin, a professor at Georgetown Law School, believes that nothing untoward would have happened if Durbin’s amendment had passed. He and another researcher looked at interest rate and loan size data from 1978 to 1993 when some jurisdictions did allow homeowner bankruptcies. “The effect on interest rates was small,” he told me. “The sky didn’t fall.”

He added, “This should have been a no-brainer.”

As it turns out, there is one other person who was opposed to the bankruptcy option. That was Tim Geithner. He writes in his book that he didn’t think it was “a particularly wise or effective strategy.” Although Geithner says the votes weren’t there for Durbin’s amendment, it did get 45 votes. How many more might it have gotten if the Treasury Department and the White House had come out strongly in support?

Which leads to one other unanswered question about the financial crisis. Why is it that the fear of moral hazard only applies to homeowners, and not to the banks?

Myanmar’s Buddhist Bigots

By Kenan Malik

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

LONDON — There is perhaps no religion that Western liberals find more appealing than Buddhism. Politicians fawn over the Dalai Lama, celebrities seek out Buddhist meditation, and scientists and philosophers insist that Buddhism has much to teach us about human nature and psychology.

Even some of the so-called New Atheists have fallen for Buddhism’s allure. For most of its Western sympathizers, Buddhism is a deeply humanist outlook, less a religion than a philosophy, a way of life to create peace and harmony.

The Rohingya people of Myanmar take a very different view of Buddhism. The Rohingya are Muslims who live mostly in Rakhine, in western Myanmar, bordering Bangladesh. Early Muslim settlements there date from the seventh century. Today, in a nation that is 90 percent Buddhist, there are some eight million Muslims, of whom about one in six is Rohingya.

For the Myanmar government, however, the Rohingya simply do not exist. The government is conducting a national census; 135 ethnic categories are listed on the form. One ethnicity is conspicuously absent: the Rohingya, who the government insists must define themselves as “Bengalis” (that is, as foreigners). “If we ask a family about their ethnicity and they say Rohingya, we will not accept it,” a presidential spokesman, Ye Htut, said recently.

The problems faced by the Rohingya are far graver than a refusal by the state to acknowledge their identity. Their very existence is under threat.

Since 2012, there has been a vicious series of pogroms against the Rohingya. Villages, schools and mosques have been attacked and burned by Buddhist mobs, often aided by security forces. Hundreds of Rohingya have been killed, and as many as 140,000 people — more than one in 10 of the Rohingya population— have been made homeless. A report last September from the independent Sentinel Project for Genocide Prevention suggested that “recent violence has moved beyond mere pogroms” and toward “the ethnic cleansing of entire regions.”

The anti-Muslim campaign has been led by Buddhist monks, who say their actions are in keeping with the demands of their faith. The principal anti-Rohingya organization, the 969 movement, takes its name from the nine attributes of Buddha, the six qualities of his teachings and the nine attributes of the monks. Its leader, a monk named Wirathu, has reportedly called himself the “Burmese Bin Laden.” Muslims, he told an interviewer, “breed quickly and they are very violent.” Because “the Burmese people and the Buddhists are devoured every day,” he argued, “the national religion needs to be protected.”

The extremist monk has proposed a “national race protection law” under which a non-Buddhist man wishing to marry a Buddhist woman would have to convert to Buddhism and obtain permission from the state. The proposal has won support from Myanmar’s president, Thein Sein, and may become law by the end of June.

How do we reconcile the perception of Buddhism as a philosophy of peace with this ugly reality of Buddhist-led pogroms in Myanmar?

Few would suggest that there is anything inherent in Buddhism that has led to the persecution. Instead, most would recognize that the anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar has its roots in the nation’s political struggles.

The military junta that came to power in 1962 has frequently sought to build popular support by fomenting hatred against minority groups. It has stripped the Rohingya people of citizenship, and placed restrictions on their travel, education and land ownership. It has even imposed a “two-child policy” on Rohingya families, to limit their population.

Paradoxically, the recent successes of Myanmar’s democracy movement have only worsened the problems of the Rohingya. In an effort to bolster its position, the government has sharpened its rhetoric of hate, while opponents of the regime have refused to support the Rohingya for fear of alienating the Buddhist majority.

The leader of the democracy movement, the Nobel Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has been shamefully silent, willing only to condemn violence in general. Members of her National League for Democracy are openly involved in extremist anti-Rohingya organizations. It is not that tenets of the Buddhist faith are responsible for the pogroms, but that those bent on confrontation have donned the

garb of religion as a way of gaining a constituency and justifying their actions. What is true of Myanmar applies to many other conflicts involving religious groups — from Pakistan to Nigeria, from Indonesia to the Central African Republic. The spawning of such violence has led many to see religion itself, and Islam in particular, as the root of conflict.

Religion does, of course, play a role in these confrontations, but it would be wrong to see them as purely religious. When groups vying for political power exploit religion, its role is often to establish the chauvinist identities by which other groups are demonized and the actions of one's own are justified.

The anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar may make us doubt our preconceptions about Buddhism. It should certainly make us question the stance of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, generally seen in the West as a fearless warrior for liberty.

While many Western observers acknowledge the political roots of Myanmar's sectarian violence, it is notable that few are willing to be as nuanced about other conflicts involving Islam. Perhaps the plight of the Rohingya will prompt us also to think again about global confrontations where religion plays a role, and will push us to adopt a less black-and-white view.

Kenan Malik is a writer, lecturer and broadcaster, and the author of "From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and Its Aftermath."

Gettysburg On The Maidan

By Roger Cohen

[New York Times](#), May 20, 2014

KIEV, Ukraine — Ukrainians are reluctant to dismantle the symbols of their revolution on streets that have become the hallowed ground of democracy and a nation-constituting struggle. On Independence Square, known as the Maidan, and in the surrounding area, makeshift barricades of tires and timber, impromptu shrines to the more than 100 dead, and Ukrainian flags flanked by that of the European Union constitute a stage set of defiance against Russian aggression.

This unusual urban landscape, at once stirring and vulnerable, surrounds the office of Arseniy P. Yatsenyuk, the acting prime minister and a man now forged, like many young Ukrainians, in the bloodshed of defiance.

"Putin is caught in the cell of his own propaganda," Yatsenyuk said of the Russian president. "We can offer him an off-ramp. It is called 'Get out of Crimea.' I spoke to his envoy and I told him that even the Roman emperors disappeared, and one day we will have Crimea back."

His words may appear quixotic, given Russian might and Ukrainian weakness, but Yatsenyuk's determination reflects a clear choice that has emerged from the success of the Maidan uprising and the ousting of the former president and corrupt Putin toady, Viktor F. Yanukovych: in favor of European pluralism and against a Eurasian imperium.

Ukraine is today the pivot of a struggle between individual freedom and imprisoning empire. There is no halfway house in this confrontation and no escaping the imperative of moral clarity in picking sides. Vladimir V. Putin's unleashed nationalism and Crimean land grab represent a return to Europe's darkest days. Americans and Europeans need to stand together to resist this threat.

"I don't know what's in Putin's head or what his final destination is," Yatsenyuk said. "Luhansk? Lviv? Lisbon? Ask our Polish friends. They are afraid of Russian troops. A permanent member of the United Nations Security Council has decided to grab the land of an independent country."

The prime minister was speaking to a small group of American, Canadian and European visitors, including the Polish author and former dissident, Adam Michnik; the former French foreign minister,

Bernard Kouchner; the literary editor of The New Republic, Leon Wieseltier; and the Yale historian, Timothy Snyder.

Snyder has recently written in The New Republic: “We easily forget how fascism works: as a bright and shining alternative to the mundane duties of everyday life, as a celebration of the obviously and totally irrational against good sense and experience.”

The fact that Putin has chosen the label “fascists” for the likes of Yatsenyuk in Kiev (even as the Kremlin maintains excellent relations with extreme-right parties in Western Europe) only underscores the Orwellian mind games of his resurgent nationalism. It is typical of fascism to twist history into a narrative of national humiliation justifying the apotheosis of an avenging leader bent on righting these supposed wrongs — be they in the Sudetenland or Ukraine.

During an hourlong conversation, Yatsenyuk said Russia would do its best to “disrupt and undermine” Ukraine’s May 25 election, suggesting there were now up to 20,000 armed people in the eastern part of the country orchestrated by several hundred well-trained Russian agents. Nevertheless, he said, a credible election across most of Ukrainian territory is possible. “We need a legitimate president,” he said.

He rejected the federalization of Ukraine — “Buy every governor; that is the Russian planning behind so-called federalization” — but spoke strongly in favor of the devolution of power and the rights of Russian speakers. “My wife speaks Russian and she does not need any protection from President Putin,” he declared.

Putin must recognize that Ukraine is a “European state” that will go ahead with its contested association agreement with the European Union and recognize the results of the election, Yatsenyuk said. He said Ukraine is ready to pay its debts to Gazprom, the Russian energy company, on condition that Russia adopts “a market-based not a politically-based approach” — cutting off trade when it suits Putin to punish Kiev.

Asked about American policy toward Ukraine, the prime minister sighed deeply. He said he recognizes that every nation has its limits and constraints. But he continued: “The United States is the leader of the free world. You have to lead. If someone crosses a red line, he is to be prosecuted for this in all ways.” As for American military support, he said, “I never ask in case I don’t get it,” adding that he would of course be “happy to have Patriot missiles on Ukrainian soil.”

There is no question that Putin has exploited a perception of American weakness that began in Syria with President Obama’s retreat there from his “red line” against the use of chemical weapons — a retreat that at once underwrote President Bashar al-Assad, strengthened Putin and undermined American credibility. Ukrainians have now died fighting for American and European values of liberty and pluralism. After its Gettysburg on the Maidan, a free and independent Ukraine is a critical U.S. interest and test.

D.C. Officials Need A Hand From The Hill On Budget Autonomy

By Editorial Board

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

THE D.C. Council will appeal Monday’s decision by a federal judge invalidating the District’s budget autonomy law. We hope the appeals court finds the council more persuasive than did U.S. District Judge Emmet G. Sullivan. If not, Congress should finally take it upon itself to bestow upon the District a right enjoyed by every other local jurisdiction in the country.

Judge Sullivan struck down the city's efforts, through a ballot referendum voters approved last year, to gain more spending freedom. The argument that voters could amend the city's charter to provide for local control over local spending "simply cannot withstand judicial scrutiny," the judge wrote.

In affirming that only Congress could make this change, Judge Sullivan sided with Mayor Vincent C. Gray (D) and Chief Financial Officer Jeffrey S. Dewitt against the council. But neither side in this lawsuit disagreed on the justice of budget autonomy — only on the means of attaining it. Even the judge seemed to go out of his way to stress the "extraordinarily powerful" policy arguments in support of budget autonomy.

No doubt there are complex legal issues — including statutory interpretations not addressed in Judge Sullivan's 47-page opinion — that are worthy of further review by an appeals panel. Most intriguing is the argument by council attorneys that Congress spelled out areas it wanted exempted from local charter amendment, and it did not include local budget issues.

Nonetheless, the city shouldn't place all its hopes for winning budget autonomy with the courts. The referendum was always seen as part of a "two-track approach." Judge Sullivan's decision — eloquently making the case for budget autonomy and making clear there is no question of Congress's power to grant it — should prod the city's political leaders to redouble their efforts on Capitol Hill. This isn't about federal funds: The District is asking only for the right to spend money that the District raises from local taxpayers.

Russia's Interference In Ukraine's National Election Must Carry Consequences

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

THE ENCOURAGING news from Ukraine is that a crucial presidential election planned for Sunday is likely to go forward in much of the country, and to be free and fair. "The legal framework, administrative capacity and political will in place suggest that a democratic process will be feasible in the vast majority of polling places," said a report Monday by the National Democratic Institute, which has deployed an observer team. "Candidates have been able to campaign with minimal interference, the media [are] pluralistic and there have been few formal complaints about election law violations or pressure on voters."

At the same time, it is already clear that in two eastern provinces, where 14 percent of the electorate lives, balloting will be next to impossible, thanks to forcible disruption by Russian-backed militants. The United States and its European allies have said they will impose additional sanctions on Russia if it disrupts the election or fails "to use its influence to prevent those efforts," as White House spokesman Jay Carney put it last week. Six days before the election, that failure is blatantly evident.

"There is intimidation," a senior U.N. official told the Reuters news agency in describing the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Ivan Simonovic, the assistant U.N. secretary general for human rights, said that a number of presidents and vice presidents of local elections commissions had been abducted or otherwise mistreated. Reuters reported that the last election commission attempting to operate in the city of Donetsk shut down Monday, leaving no voting operation in an urban area of 1 million people. Concluded the interior minister of Ukraine's interim government: "It will be impossible to hold normal elections over the huge territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions."

Russian President Vladimir Putin seems to think that he can avoid responsibility for the disruption with rhetoric that suggests the opposite of Moscow's actual behavior. For the third time, Mr. Putin announced Monday that the 40,000 Russian troops deployed on Ukraine's border were withdrawing; for the third time, NATO's secretary general and the White House said they had detected no such movement.

The empty announcements may at least mean that Mr. Putin has set aside the option of an overt military invasion of eastern Ukraine for the time being. But dozens of operatives of Russia's military intelligence service have been spotted in eastern Ukraine, where they have directed takeovers of government buildings. Mr. Putin could use those forces to clear the way for Sunday's voting, or at least withdraw them and their sophisticated weapons so that the Ukrainian army could clear the remaining rebels. He has made no move to do so.

In the coming days, the focus of U.S. and other Western officials will be, appropriately, on supporting the staging of the elections. Negotiations between the interim government and representatives of the eastern regions are also worth encouraging, though they appear unlikely to produce results in the short term. But President Obama, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other E.U. leaders must also confront the reality that the latest "red line" they drew for Mr. Putin has been ignored. That must lead to the consequences they have promised: meaningful sanctions on the pillars that prop up the Russian economy.

Commencement Protests Make A Mockery Of Academic Freedom

By Editorial Board

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

ON MONDAY, reporters scrutinized the commencement ceremony at Wake Forest University, where Jill Abramson, the recently ousted New York Times executive editor, delivered a modest address. But to our minds, the bigger news this graduation season has been the large number of colleges and universities that have been impoverished by intolerance as student and faculty activists chased away public figures.

Former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice pulled out of speaking at Rutgers University following objections to her involvement in the Iraq war. International Monetary Fund Managing Director Christine Lagarde withdrew from offering an address at Smith College after a student petition protested the IMF's "strengthening of imperialist and patriarchal systems that oppress and abuse women worldwide." Students and alumni at Harvard's Graduate School of Education demanded that the school rescind its invitation to Colorado state Sen. Michael Johnston (D), because he "embraces a vision of education reform that relies heavily on test-based accountability." Haverford College lost the opportunity to hear from a leader in higher education when students and staff dissuaded Robert J. Birgeneau, former chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley, from addressing its graduates.

Activists at the Pennsylvania school objected to Mr. Birgeneau's role in the forceful dispersion of a 2011 Occupy protest at Berkeley, and they sought to condition his appearance on his compliance with a series of "restorative" measures that included "a full accounting of one's violation," an open letter about "what you learned" and a "pledge to become a leader in how universities ensure that protesters' rights are respected." Instead of submitting a Soviet-style forced confession, Mr. Birgeneau declined to appear.

Haverford's commencement ceremonies went on with a pinch-orator, former Princeton president William G. Bowen. Rather than shy from the controversy, Mr. Bowen on Sunday admirably defended the principles that some in attendance had renounced: the essential value of open debate and orderly disagreement.

"I am disappointed that those who wanted to criticize Birgeneau's handling of events at Berkeley chose to send him such an intemperate list of 'demands,'" Mr. Bowen said, according to the Philadelphia Inquirer. "In my view, they should have encouraged him to come and engage in a genuine discussion, not

to come, tail between his legs, to respond to an indictment that a self-chosen jury had reached without hearing counter-arguments.”

Responding to a student’s comment that keeping Mr. Birgeneau off campus was a “minor victory,” Mr. Bowen said, “I regard this outcome as a defeat, pure and simple, for Haverford — no victory for anyone who believes, as I think most of us do, in both openness to many points of view and mutual respect.”

Mr. Bowen also faulted Mr. Birgeneau for allowing himself to be cowed, failing “to make proper allowance for the immature and, yes, arrogant inclinations of some protesters. Aggravated as he had every right to be, I think he should be with us today.”

The Haverford mess is not the only or even the most upsetting example. Should we be encouraged that Harvard is turning out future educational leaders who take pride in blocking speech with which they might disagree? Commencement addresses should not be limited to quotations from Dr. Seuss and unremarkable advice to which no one could possibly object. Good for Mr. Bowen, who declined to insult the intelligence of supposedly educated women and men by letting the loudest voices in the audience win.

Love And ‘The Normal Heart’

By Richard Cohen

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

Eddie called himself a private detective, although all he really did was repossess cars. He would show up around 4 p.m. at the cafe where I worked after school, have his usual cup of coffee and tell me a thing or two about what we used to call “real life.” One day he told me how he used to load his coat pockets with brass doorknobs, which he used to “put out the lights” of homosexuals. I was 16 and getting an education of sorts.

That was long time ago. America then was steeped in bigotry of all kinds, but homophobia was not even on the radar. We knew of racism and anti-Semitism and, in a dim way, sexism. Yet gays were supposedly in a different category, which is to say no category at all. Whoever they were — and wherever they were — they deserved what they were getting. Besides, who even knew any?

Well, I did, but I was not aware of that at the time. Now I have male friends who have married other male friends and female friends who have done the same. I still have momentary vertigo figuring out who the husband is and who the wife is, but I exult in a social revolution that has shattered all sorts of arbitrary categories and recognizes the power and universality of love.

This revolution has been so long in coming — and yet so quick in arriving. HBO on May 25 will air Larry Kramer’s “The Normal Heart,” a movie version of his play. It is semi-autobiographical and about the onset of the HIV-AIDS epidemic and the adamant refusal of some political leaders, most prominently President Ronald Reagan and New York Mayor Ed Koch, to even acknowledge what was happening. An epidemic was sweeping the gay community, men were dying hideously and often at a very young age — and no one much gave a damn.

The HBO movie is rough on Reagan and Koch. They earned it. Reagan had gay friends and associates and was in no way a bigot. But he was clearly afraid of alienating his conservative base. The Moral Majority’s Jerry Falwell characteristically said later that “AIDS is the wrath of a just God against homosexuals.” Reagan did not even mention the word AIDS until the disease was impossible to ignore and his friend Rock Hudson had died from it.

As for Koch, mayor of a city hugely impacted by the epidemic, the movie flat-out declares him to have been a closeted homosexual — afraid to acknowledge the reality of AIDS lest his own secret be revealed. Koch always put his private life off-limits. He was entitled to this — but not at the price of ignoring a public health menace that needed immediate attention. The tendency then and somewhat still today was to blame gay men for their plight. The proposed remedy was to deprive them of their sex life — a remedy some felt was worse than the disease.

“The Normal Heart” is heavy on politics but heavier still on love. There’s plenty of male-male sex in it and some nudity. But by far its message is about the love the Kramer character shares with his partner who dies from the very disease they’re both fighting. AIDS mocks the poet. It’s a messy death.

This love of men for men and women for women is no different and no less powerful than the love of men for women and women for men. It can drive any of us mad, turn us into operatic clichés, cause us to endanger careers — take long walks on the Appalachian Trails of our choice. It’s the stuff of songs. It’s the stuff of life.

It is this love that is at the heart of the same-sex marriage movement. It was an appreciation of this love that got the politically odd couple of uberlawyers David Boies and Ted Olson to defend same-sex marriage. They are both, at heart, admirably romantic.

HBO’s “The Normal Heart” has concussive power. It is a gripping drama — some of it downright shocking — but it is, for all of that, just another love story. That it can be seen this way testifies to how far America has come since Eddie the private eye told me it was good sport to beat up gays. See “The Normal Heart.” If you are the least bit homophobic, it will change yours.

Women Falling Off The Glass Cliff: When Leaning In Is Not Enough

By Amanda Bennett

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

Amanda Bennett, a journalist and author, is a former editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer.

On June 2, 2003, I was named editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer and became — as Jill Abramson did later at the New York Times — the first female editor in a storied institution’s hundred-year-plus history. In November 2006, I achieved another distinction that Abramson last week came to share: I was fired after a tenure of only about three years.

The difference in the public reaction to those events tells me something both wonderful and terrible about what has changed in the world that working women inhabit.

Terrible because, whatever the facts of Abramson’s departure, it exposed in a raw way the reservoirs of resentment, hurt and mistrust that women feel at work.

Wonderful, because it is clear that something fundamental has changed in just those seven short years. Women now feel not only resentful but also, finally, entitled: Entitled to lead. Entitled to be paid equally. Entitled to be flawed. Entitled to be fired, yes, but also entitled to point out the fact that to us seems so obvious: Men with even more spectacular and difficult flaws than ours get not only longer tenures but also much softer and more dignified landings.

I know Abramson, her successor, Dean Baquet, and Arthur Sulzberger, the publisher. I like and admire all three. I know absolutely nothing about what went on among them. This is not about them. It’s about me and other women like me and why this event hit like a lightning strike to dry tinder.

What experiences can I contribute? The first is what it is like to be fired in an unnecessarily unpleasant and hurtful way.

To be clear: I was never going to remain editor of the Inquirer after Knight Ridder, a legendary newspaper chain, sold the paper to a local business group headed by a PR guy. He told me quickly I would be replaced, but if I kept things running smoothly till he found a successor, he would make the transition easy.

A few weeks later, he informed me that my successor had been chosen and that, in two hours, it would be announced that I was being reassigned as a suburban columnist, an egregiously demeaning demotion. If I fought back, his chief lieutenant said, his boss would play hardball.

Is it any wonder that the narrative that sprang up after Abramson's firing seemed so familiar to me? My path out was paved not with the face-saving transition that one saw for men removed from similar jobs at the Wall Street Journal or The Washington Post but rather with the marshaling of evidence that I had caused this demotion myself — that I had lost the support of my peers and of the newsroom reporting to me. The same hints that I was difficult to work with. Remote. Aloof. Disconnected. Did I have those flaws? I guess. Were they worse than the flaws of the men who preceded and succeeded me? I doubt it.

I did what most self-respecting female leaders do: I blamed myself. I did negotiate, but barely (I didn't become a suburban columnist; I did get a modest severance) and backed out quietly with gentle words about my successor. The stories didn't use the word "fired." The support I got from other women was muted and behind the scenes.

The second thing I know from experience is why the charge of unequal pay — that Abramson reportedly alleged and Sulzberger vigorously disputed — landed with such force. I have managed at five organizations over nearly 20 years. At each of them I saw women paid less than men in what I thought were identical positions.

Was everyone lying who said they were committed to equal pay? I came to believe not. It was worse than that. It became clear that we saw things differently. I saw two people who, I believed, were doing the same work but being paid unequally. Those above me saw a story and a history, something that they thought caused the man to deserve higher pay: This one had just stepped down from a senior position and taken his higher pay with him. That one had been hired from a higher-paying organization. Yet another had been offered a job with a competitor. How many women in the past decade have been promoted past their peers, only to see in the spreadsheets the sad evidence that their own stories were apparently not as persuasive?

So what caused the dam of silence to break? Why are women so openly furious about something that we barely noticed in the past? For one thing, there is now a growing body of women who — like Sheryl Sandberg, chief operating officer of Facebook and author of "Lean In" — are undeniably successful and not afraid to talk about their experiences as women. For another, there is the equally growing body of women like me, with whom stories like Abramson's resonate because of our own experiences.

Whatever else happens as a result of Abramson's firing, it has already begun the more difficult conversation about what we do when we lean in and it doesn't work. This transparency will beget yet more transparency, which in turn will make it easier and less scary to look at the still difficult reality of female life at the top.

The writer, a journalist and author, is a former editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer

Read more about this issue: Ruth Marcus: Democrats' revolting equal-pay demagoguery Dana Milbank: Republicans can kiss votes from women goodbye Catherine Rampell: Hiring women can boost

the bottom line Jena McGregor: Why pay equality and work-life balance aren't just women's issues
Kathleen Parker: Tweaking real life

Sanctions On Venezuela Would Be Counterproductive

By David Smilde

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

David Smilde is the Charles A. and Leo M. Favrot Professor of Human Relations at Tulane University and a senior fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America.

Over the past three months, Venezuela has seen significant street protests against the government of Nicolás Maduro and its failures to address crime, inflation and food scarcities. The government's use of force against protesters has added fuel to the fire, sparking a wave of mobilizations that has not subsided. At least 41 people have died. Congress is considering legislation to impose sanctions on Venezuelan government officials responsible for human rights abuses.

There is no doubt that the government's response has been excessive and that the international community has a role to play in ensuring that human rights are respected. But lawmakers would be wise to vote against sanctions, which will only be counterproductive.

In a recent Senate hearing, Assistant Secretary of State Roberta Jacobson — no fan of the Venezuelan government — argued that sanctions at this time would be unhelpful. Even targeted “intelligent” sanctions would short-circuit dialogues in recent weeks between the Venezuelan government and the opposition.

The dialogues have not been easy. Nonetheless, they represent the most significant negotiation between the two sides in 10 years and have substantial support among the Venezuelan population and important regional actors.

Critics are right to suggest that it is not clear that the Maduro government is committed to these dialogues. Indeed, the opposition coalition recently put its participation on hold to protest a lack of progress. But keeping the dialogue process going is critical to resolving the ongoing political crisis in Venezuela.

This dialogue process is the product of a high-level delegation from the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) at the end of March. In their visit, the foreign ministers of UNASUR countries spoke with the Maduro government, opposition leaders and human rights groups. They managed to get the two sides to agree to terms and sit down face to face in mid-April. After a first, nationally televised debate between the government and opposition leaders, working groups were formed and three more meetings have been held.

This was certainly not the response the Maduro government had in mind from UNASUR. Maduro clearly would have preferred an unqualified letter of support. But UNASUR's independence should be no surprise. While UNASUR includes clear Venezuelan allies such as Bolivia and Ecuador, it also includes U.S. allies such as Chile, Peru and Colombia. Indeed, nobody has worked harder to make this dialogue happen than Colombian foreign minister María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar. Also involved in the dialogue is Vatican Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, who was the Vatican nuncio, or diplomatic representative, to Venezuela for five years before being elevated to his new position by Argentine Pope Francis. They both maintain a significant interest in Venezuela.

Supporters of sanctions have argued that they would provide motivation for the Maduro government to take the dialogues seriously. That seems unlikely in this case. It is true that sometimes sanctions work: In the 1980s, sanctions against South Africa clearly contributed to the demise of apartheid. In that case,

the South African government considered itself an outpost of the West in Africa. To have other Western countries boycotting it was an affront difficult to digest and difficult to explain to the population.

But just as often, sanctions fail. It is clear that more than 50 years of various U.S. sanctions have done little to change the Cuban government. Indeed the evidence suggests that sanctions have contributed significantly to the Castros' permanence in power.

The same would happen in Venezuela. Like Cuba, the Venezuelan government is based on a Marxist ideology that portrays the United States as an imperialist power conspiring to undermine its revolutionary government. In this view, the United States wants to undermine Venezuela not only to control its oil, but also because it feels threatened by the success of its socialist alternative.

U.S. sanctions would allow the Maduro government to back away from the dialogues, saying it cannot negotiate while it is being sabotaged by the United States. Any kind of sanctions would effectively be used to turn what should be a conflict between the Venezuelan government and its opposition into a conflict between the Venezuelan government and the United States. That would allow the Maduro government to distract attention from its own shortcomings and deflect the legitimate grievances that have driven the protests. Perhaps worse, it would disarm UNASUR's ability to keep the Maduro government at the negotiating table.

In this case, U.S. unilateral sanctions would undermine UNASUR's regional approach to problem-solving, will harden the Maduro government and could result in an end to dialogue between Maduro and the opposition. This is probably not what members of Congress want, but if they don't think twice about this sanctions vote, it is likely to be what they get.

David Smilde is the Charles A. and Leo M. Favrot Professor of Human Relations at Tulane University and a senior fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America.

The Bluster Imbalance

By Catherine Rampell

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

Maybe women are not sufficiently full of themselves. But let's not coach them to be full of something else, either.

Read the rash of corporate self-help books and articles lately unleashed upon the world's white-collar women — such as “The Confidence Code” and “Lean In” — and you'll learn that there is a yawning “confidence gap” between the sexes.

Among the alarming symptoms and evidence: We women, even the most successful of us, are riddled with self-doubt. We second-guess our next moves constantly and “ruminate” over past failures. We withhold our opinions in big meetings, while less-informed men freely bluster and bloviate, one-upping and interrupting each other. Even in anonymous political opinion polls, women are more likely than men to say “I don't know” when pressed for a view on something about which we actually know quite a bit.

When we do express opinions, we too often apologize for or prematurely disclaim them (“I'm not sure about this, but . . .”) or intonate them as questions rather than statements. We don't throw our bonnets into the ring for promotions and raises for which we're surely qualified, whereas men toss in their cowboy hats even when their own credentials appear comically deficient.

The self-assurance deficit reinforces the glass ceiling because confidence seems to help people perform better on certain tasks — and, perhaps more important, swagger leads others to perceive us as more competent. One study that asked business school students about imaginary historical people and

events (like a “Queen Shaddock” and a “Galileo Lovano”) found that those who feigned familiarity with the fictional figures also achieved the highest social status among their peers.

These are familiar, broad-brush gender stereotypes, of course, often underpinned by tiny lab experiments conducted on callow university students or by corporate surveys administered with little outside scrutiny. But many of them ring true to me — both as a young woman with brilliant and accomplished but perpetually self-doubting girlfriends and as an opinion journalist. (Op-ed pages are often criticized for their dearth of female voices, but the gender imbalance is because men are much more likely to submit unsolicited guest columns and to accept direct invitations to write.)

So sure, whether because of biology or socialization, women are underselling themselves, and could stand to be a little more self-promotional.

Still, it's not clear to me why this so-called “confidence gap” has been framed exclusively as a women's problem or why the optimal solution is for women to ape the men with whom they compete.

Those very same studies that show women to be underconfident often show men to be overconfident. “The Confidence Code” cites one Columbia Business School study documenting that men typically rate their performance 30 percent better than it actually is. Likewise, a survey released last week by YouGov found that, when asked to compare their own intelligence to that of the “average American,” about a quarter of men declared themselves “much more intelligent,” vs. just 15 percent of women. Lake Wobegon, it seems, is brimming with testosterone.

In short, men seem much more willing to be blowhards than women are — during dinner parties, at the office, on anonymous phone surveys and in the nation's fine op-ed pages. And as long as both employers and peers continue to conflate bluster with aptitude and to reward bombast with respect and job promotions, the only way women can successfully compete with men is to be not just more confident but overconfident in everything they do, too.

Like thrift, bluffing may be a good strategy for individuals who want to get ahead but destructive to society at large. An arms race in B.S.ing seems unlikely to lead to better-run companies, at least, and it certainly isn't creating more informed political discourse. (Ever watch cable news shows or presidential debates? You'll notice the words “I don't know” are generally frowned upon.) I realize it's easier to teach women to increase their swagger than to tell grown men to temper theirs. So maybe the solution involves trying to change Americans' perceptions of bluster rather than their skillfulness at wielding it. Rather than advocating that an entire class of people start faking it 'til they make it, maybe we should be coaching voters, students, bosses and viewers at home how to be a bit more skeptical of the loudest guy (or gal) in the room.

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Heads Need To Roll At The VA

By Eugene Robinson

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

Finally, an authentic scandal: incompetence and deception at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Given what we know so far, more heads need to roll — and a criminal investigation should be launched.

Republicans have accused the Obama administration of so many faux scandals that it's hard to recognize the real thing. Yes, the Internal Revenue Service seems to have given extra scrutiny to

conservative organizations, but it gave extra scrutiny to liberal groups, too. Yes, Operation “Fast and Furious” was a mistake, but it wasn’t some kind of sinister plot. No, it doesn’t matter whether the evil people who took four American lives in Benghazi, Libya, are called terrorists, militants or simply killers.

The VA situation, however, looks more serious day by day. If VA hospitals really are falsifying records to disguise lengthy waiting times — and if veterans are dying as a consequence — then President Obama needs to bring in new management to fix the problems and fast.

White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, speaking Sunday on CBS’s “Face the Nation,” described Obama as “madder than hell” about the VA scandal. By now, we should all be used to the fact that Obama is never what you would call demonstrative with his anger, at least publicly. No frothing, no foaming, no gnashing of teeth. I take McDonough at his word that the president is royally steamed.

We also should be used to the fact that Obama is extremely loyal to the members of his team. Despite the disastrous launch of the HealthCare.gov Web site, the president declined to dismiss Kathleen Sebelius as head of the Department of Health and Human Services, allowing her eventually to leave on her own terms.

I don’t see how he can take a similar path, however, with Gen. Eric K. Shinseki at the VA. Sebelius at least made it clear that she understood the magnitude of the problem her department faced. Shinseki thus far has failed to telegraph comprehension, much less inspire confidence.

“Any allegation, any adverse incident like this makes me mad as hell,” Shinseki told the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee last week. I doubt there has ever been a four-star general who didn’t know how to get angry, but Shinseki’s ire had to be drawn out of him. If he was seething inside, he hid it well.

Perhaps that’s unfair; perhaps he should be evaluated only on his performance at work, not on whether he emotes before the television cameras. “This is not a job,” he said at the hearing. “I’m here to accomplish a mission I think [veterans] critically deserve and need, and I can tell you over the past five years we’ve done a lot to make things better.”

The all-too-obvious rejoinder is: Not enough.

The allegation that VA officials in Phoenix cooked the books to cover up the fact that veterans had to suffer unacceptably long waiting times before they received care — and that 40 veterans died while enduring such delays — is shocking in isolation. But if reports are true that there may have been similar practices in Albuquerque and perhaps in other cities, the problems begin to look systemic.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) said there is “solid evidence” of “a pattern, apparently, of manipulating lists, gaming the system . . . which is not just an impropriety or misconduct, it is potentially a criminal act.”

The VA’s Office of Inspector General is on the case, Shinseki told senators. But I agree with Blumenthal’s assessment that it’s time to bring in some outside help, such as the FBI, and that the investigation needs to ascertain not just whether rules were broken but whether crimes were committed.

Shinseki inherited an agency ill-equipped to cope with the tsunamis that were about to overwhelm it: the return of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and the rapidly growing medical needs of Vietnam veterans now entering their later years.

It is important to keep the VA scandal in context. Conservatives who crow that this shows government cannot competently provide health care are wrong. VA hospitals see more than 200,000 veterans a day and rank among the highest in the nation in customer satisfaction, according to surveys.

At issue is how long veterans have to wait before they can receive that care — and whether employees are lying about those waiting times, with the result that people are dying.

The solemn promises we make to our veterans cannot be broken. There's no need for histrionics from President Obama. But he does need to clean house.

The Holocaust Is Not A He-Said, She-Said Debate

By Michael Gerson

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

Several years ago, I attended the bar mitzvah of a friend's son. Uniquely in my experience — and, I'd bet, most people's experience — all of the boy's four grandparents were Holocaust survivors. In the middle of the ceremony, one grandfather interrupted: "I have something to say." He recalled holding his grandson for the first time 13 years earlier and exclaiming aloud, "Hitler, you bastard, I beat you!"

Most Holocaust survivors did not have the option of direct vengeance against their oppressors. They counted their victories in survival, in descendants, and in the transmission of memories. But nearly 70 years after the end of World War II, the stock of living memories is dwindling. Not many remain who can still address the Fuhrer in the first person: "I beat you."

According to a recent global survey by the Anti-Defamation League, two-thirds of respondents either had never heard of the Holocaust or believed historical accounts were exaggerated. And the ignorance is concentrated among the young. This school year, in California's Rialto Unified School District, eighth-grade students were asked to write an essay on whether they believed the Holocaust "was an actual event in history, or merely a political scheme created to influence public emotion and gain wealth."

Note "scheme" and "wealth" — words that Jews have heard before. School officials were forced to cancel the assignment. Which National Review's Charles C.W. Cooke described as a "damn shame" — the cancelation, not the assignment. Cooke complained that academic discussion is too often "conducted between narrow and sternly policed rails." The purpose of education is to cultivate critical thinking, not "to indoctrinate our children with the values of the state."

The application of ideology in this case — an all-purpose conservative critique of political correctness — is intellectually lazy. But the assumption of two-sidedness when considering the Holocaust is positively dangerous.

The argument requires a morally offensive false equivalence. Academics, for example, vigorously debate the causes of grievances that lead to international terrorism. Crackpots claim that the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks were plotted by the Jews. Any teacher who confuses these two types of argument cultivates ignorance and bigotry. The same is true for an eighth-grade teacher who poses the questions: Was Anne Frank's diary a forgery? Was the Wannsee Conference just a staff retreat? Were the Nuremberg trials a kangaroo court?

In this case, the assertion of two-sidedness is a victory for one side. Holocaust denialists crave academic validation above all else, hoping to gain legitimacy for pseudo-history. It is an effort that began during the event itself, with systematic attempts to destroy evidence and create historical doubts. It didn't quite work. When the Germans were forced to retreat from Birkenau, they burned 29 storehouses full of incrimination. In the six that remained, however, the Red Army found 836,255 dresses, 348,000 men's suits and 38,000 pairs of shoes.

The educational enterprise is not just a matter of teaching critical thinking — the cultivation of lawyers and Oxford debaters. It also involves the training of moral sentiments; teaching children to love what is lovely and disdain what is hateful. When school tours visit the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, children are not gaining information about a historical controversy. They are, hopefully, learning to recoil

from brutality, bullying and the abuse of the weak. It may be their first glimpse at the reality of evil — lurking in average people, enabled by ideology on a massive scale.

Instead of asking children what they make of the Holocaust, it is worth teaching eighth-graders what the Nazis made of children. Historian Martin Gilbert recounts that at Birkenau, boys aged 14 and 15 were harnessed to carts normally pulled by horses. They transported logs that were used in the crematoria ovens. They were also forced, as one child later recalled, to spread the ash of victims on camp pathways “so that people could walk on the road and not slip.” Human ash for traction.

They wanted their stories known. A doctor named Aharon Beilin described meeting a boy working at Birkenau who had been castrated in a medical experiment. The child asked to be examined. “I said I could not help him,” Beilin recalled, “but the boy said, ‘No, I want you to see what they are doing.’”

About 1.4 million Holocaust victims were under the age of 14. It is one of the most solemn responsibilities of educators to make a new generation see what was done.

Indiana’s Gov. Pence Taking The Obamacare Money And Running With It

By Dana Milbank

[Washington Post](#), May 20, 2014

For the first time since Obamacare split the country in two, the conditions for a cease-fire have begun to appear.

An architect of this detente — although he denies any such intent — is Mike Pence, who as a conservative Republican congressman in 2010 fought bitterly against the law and who as governor of Indiana refused to implement it.

But Pence, after intensive negotiations with the Obama administration, just announced his intent to take the money Obamacare provides for Medicaid expansion and to use it on his own terms to broaden health-care coverage for the working poor.

For Pence, a happy warrior for conservatism and a possible 2016 presidential contender, the reason is pragmatic: If he could get money under an Obamacare waiver to enlarge a market-driven health-care program in his state, there would be no point in cutting off his nose to spite his face.

“When it comes to the issue of health care, I believe that people in my party need to be solutions conservatives, offering real alternatives to the big-government answers,” he lectured Monday at the American Enterprise Institute, a center-right think tank, on a visit to Washington. Conservatives, he said, “need to ensure that the safety net is well-designed and strong enough to provide a firm basis for those starting out on life’s ladder.”

That was an implicit rebuke of his former House colleagues who have a “repeal and replace” slogan but have not offered much of a substitute for Obamacare while at the same time attempting to cut food stamps and other parts of the safety net.

Pence, a former head of the conservative Republican Study Committee in the House, was a tea party Republican before there was a tea party. But running a state has given him an elevated perspective.

“Debates that happen in Washington, D.C., pretty easily get far afield of the real-world impacts on real people,” he told me in an interview Monday afternoon. “It will not be enough for new Republican majorities in the Congress and a Republican president to cut government spending,” he added, calling instead for money to be sent to the states so they can “solve the intractable problems.”

Pence isn’t about to admit it, but Obamacare does that.

He thinks he has a conservative alternative to the new law's expansion of Medicaid: He wants to broaden the "Healthy Indiana" plan started by his predecessor Mitch Daniels (R) by using financial incentives to get the working poor to contribute to their health coverage under a private alternative to Medicaid. The Obama administration appears likely to grant Indiana a waiver for the experiment — and if it works, other states will be free to follow the example.

Starting in 2017, states will be able to experiment further, securing exemptions from problematic provisions of the law such as the individual mandate, the employer mandate and the health-care exchanges. If Republican governors don't like Obamacare's requirements, all they have to do is come up with an alternative that provides comparable care and coverage.

Pence declined to speculate about whether he might seek a waiver exempting Indiana from Obamacare overall. He continues to support the law's repeal, and he spent a good chunk of his AEI speech bemoaning its flaws.

He has to do that if he wants to compete in Republican presidential primaries. Although not usually mentioned in the top tier, Pence is well positioned at a time when the party's strongest candidates are governors. He has a better record than New Jersey's Chris Christie, is smarter than Texas's Rick Perry, is not as divisive as Wisconsin's Scott Walker and is more conservative than former Florida governor Jeb Bush. He speaks the language of Christian conservatives — twice in his AEI speech he wove in biblical passages from Luke without citation — and his Medicaid experiment should earn him some moral authority.

While other GOP governors continue to refuse the Medicaid expansion money — a decision that inevitably means lost lives — Pence reminds them, and everyone, that "we're talking about real people, working people who deserve a better way." He made it his administration's job to help the "proud Hoosiers" — people "who find themselves essentially, for all intents and purposes, caught in that gap where their income simply doesn't give them the ability to purchase health insurance for themselves or for their families."

This, of course, is what Obamacare is all about. As more conservatives realize that the law they hate allows them to implement policies they like, they may have trouble recalling what all the fuss was about.

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL STORIES

GOP Demands Cuts As Del. Tax Estimates Fall

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

Republicans are demanding budget cuts, with lawmakers now eyeing a \$41 million gap between tax collections and Gov. Jack Markell's \$3.8 billion proposed spending plan.

One Republican leader in the General Assembly said Monday that members of his party were ready to withhold votes on the state's annual capital budget unless Markell and Democrats who control the General Assembly agreed to make cuts to the governor's budget proposal.

"We are serious about blocking some budgetary items unless we see a decrease in operating expenses," said Senate Minority Leader Gary Simpson, who is calling for 2-percent spending cuts across all state agencies. "Two percent is not that much."

Delaware's budget picture is getting worse, not better, for lawmakers as they look to finalize a new spending plan by June 30.

Estimates of state tax collections fell \$33 million on Monday, on top of dips in previous months. About \$14 million of that revenue comes in the current budget year. The projections will force state

agency heads to trim spending even further in the current budget year and could prompt cuts to Markell's spending proposal.

Democrats need Republican support to pass the annual capital budget – which funds school construction, economic development and other projects – so Simpson's position could prove significant.

"That's not a threat," Simpson said, "but there have to be some serious efforts to negotiate."

The state is experiencing weakness across several tax areas. Personal income tax collections are weaker than expected in the current year and in the fiscal year beginning in July, the economic panel said Monday.

Corporate income tax collections are also off from previous months, as is revenue from abandoned property, the unredeemed gift cards and uncashed corporate checks that fund up to 15 percent of the state's budget.

Corporations continue to push back against state auditors seeking abandoned property revenue, leaving lawmakers with \$15 million less to work with, David Gregor, the deputy secretary of Finance, told panel members on Monday.

Lawmakers, who typically see an increase in tax collections as the year progresses, are starting to feel pressure to find savings in Markell's spending plan.

Sen. Harris McDowell, a Wilmington Democrat and co-chair of the budget-writing Joint Finance Committee, said the new round of revenue estimates puts the committee in a bind.

"We'll be able to produce a balanced budget, but certainly it won't be a perfect budget," he said.

Markell's proposed gas tax increase to pay for road improvements and a new property tax to fund waterway upgrades may also face even stiffer opposition with revenues falling. Lawmakers will have one more round of revenue estimates in June before closing next year's budget.

Monday's new tax estimates "will make an already challenging budget year more difficult," Ann Visalli, director of the Delaware Office of Management and Budget, said in a statement. Visalli did not attend the monthly meeting of the Delaware Economic and Financial Advisory Council, the public-private panel that produces revenue estimates that lawmakers must follow.

Visalli remained in Dover to work with administration officials and lawmakers on budget plans. The Markell administration continues to pressure agencies to cut spending in the current budget year to cover a shortfall in expected revenues.

Agency heads have responded, returning \$104 million to the general fund. With new estimates, agencies will have to find an additional \$13 million before June 30. That could present a challenge.

Secretary of State Jeff Bullock said Monday he already has cut 1-2 percent of his budget this year, but some agencies are in a more difficult spot financially.

"Some departments are very, very tight," Bullock said. "In those departments, it's very difficult to come up with cuts."

Staff reporter Jon Offredo contributed to this story. Contact Jonathan Starkey at (302) 983-6756, on Twitter @jwstarkey or at jstarkey@delawareonline.com.

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EPA Issues New Rules For Industry Cooling Water

By Jeff Montgomery

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

"At first glance, it really looks like a very disappointing rule that has been softened and weakened by the politics of the day," said Maya van Rossum, who directs the multi-state Delaware Riverkeeper conservation group.

Van Rossum termed Salem Units 1 and 2 "the largest predators on the river." She pointed to PSEG's report in March on the rescue of an endangered, juvenile Atlantic sturgeon in a Salem intake as an example of the risk.

The EPA's move is expected to quickly heat up a long-simmering debate over the Delaware refinery's antiquated cooling water intake system and its industrial wastewater treatment plant. The refinery's last regular wastewater permit expired in 2002. Critics have long called for refinery use of recycling systems that would cut river water needs by 90 percent or more.

A report completed by Delaware's Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control in 2011 and released under the Freedom of Information Act concluded that the present 300-million-gallon-per-day river water intake practice at Delaware City "directly kills many millions of organisms every year."

The design also "indirectly causes both air and water environmental impacts when cooling water intake interruptions result in operational upsets."

DNREC Secretary Collin P. O'Mara said late Monday that his agency is still reviewing the EPA's rules, but would act quickly.

"We plan to have a permit out in the next several months for public review," O'Mara said, adding: "It's a fairly elaborate process. We'll have to follow the letter of the law."

PSEG's intakes for Salem have a 3.1-billion-gallon daily limit, with researchers estimating that the plant's pumps kill 3 billion organisms of all types each year. One study concluded that intakes at Salem and the Delaware refinery kill more than half the striped bass in the river, and claim 19 percent of the Delaware's bay anchovies, an important bottom-of-the-food-chain fish.

Joe Delmar Sr., a spokesman for PSEG Nuclear, released a statement late Monday that the company welcomed the EPA's "technology-based" approach, rather than "imposing a one-size-fits-all numeric standard."

"We are reviewing the rule and its detailed requirements as they pertain to each of our facilities," the PSEG statement noted. "We won't comment further until that review is completed."

Michael Karlovich, spokesman for Delaware City Refinery owner PBF Energy, said officials there want to examine the EPA's plan before commenting.

PSEG has estimated the cost of equipping its Salem site with cooling towers at about \$1 billion. The company's nearby Hope Creek reactor already uses the approach.

The Nuclear Energy Institute warned in February that some nuclear plants around the country could be shut down under the threat of similar costs. a development that could "significantly" affect administration greenhouse gas control ambitions.

Federal officials described the rules as a "common sense framework, putting a premium on public input and flexibility for facilities to comply."

"EPA is making it clear that if you have cooling water intakes, you have to look at the impact on aquatic life in local waterways and take steps to minimize that impact," said Nancy Stoner, acting Assistant Administrator for Water at EPA.

The rule covers 521 factories 544 power plants around the country.

The Riverkeeper, Delaware Nature Society and other groups sued DNREC as recently as last year to compel action on PBF's water intakes after state officials judged cooling towers the best available solution. That case was sidelined after a Superior Court judge noted the pending EPA standards.

Dave Carter, conservation chair for Delaware Audubon, said that his group was encouraged by the release, despite the lack of specific requirements.

"Just because the EPA set a minimum for existing facilities that we do not believe is strong enough doesn't mean that the state can't do something stronger," Carter said. "We're still in a situation where DNREC has said that closed-cycle cooling is a cost-effective technology, that it's the best available technology, so their excuses not to act now are gone."

A coalition of New York environmental groups, however, said the EPA "abdicated the responsibility to state agencies that are simply not equipped to make these decisions alone."

"Unfortunately, EPA's rule will perpetuate the unacceptable status quo that has allowed antiquated plants to withdraw nearly 100 trillion gallons of fresh and sea water each year and indiscriminately kill fish and wildlife instead of recycling their cooling water or use dry cooling technology, as modern plants have done for the past three decades," said Reed Super, an attorney representing Waterkeeper Alliance.

2 Delaware Animal Shelters Expand

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

Faithful Friends Animal Society and the Delaware Humane Association are making strides toward their long-term goals to provide better accommodations for their charges and a more welcoming atmosphere for potential adopters.

Faithful Friends, which recently opened an Affordable Veterinary Clinic, unveiled the new Gibney's Doggie Kingdom at the shelter on Germay Drive in Wilmington last week. Board members Jill Cantera, principal of Bellevue Contractors in Wilmington, and Dr. Sandra Gibney, an emergency room physician at St. Francis Hospital, played an integral part in the makeover of 3,000 square feet of the shelter.

Cantera, who spent months touring shelters and researching best designs and practices, directed the renovation project to better uses of space, including two new private meet-and-greet adoption rooms and a new dog-washing station. The area also has a new dropped ceiling and air filtration, PVC wall panels that reduce noise, durable easy-to-clean flooring and 48 state-of-the-art T-Kennels. Cantera also supervised the earlier renovation of the shelter's cat habitats.

The new dog kennels are brightly colored, have solid walls to prevent the dogs from sniffing each other and possibly transmitting viruses, and they are easy to clean. They also have slots that allow staff to feed and water the dogs without going into the kennel, a time-saving and sanitary step.

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"They are raised off the floor and have built-in covered drains at the rear so staff can hose them out and the water drains away," said Jane Pierantozzi, executive director. "The retractable power hoses are mounted on the walls, so no one has to step over them. The new kennels are brighter, larger and provide a healthier environment for the dogs who are waiting for homes."

The shelter adopts about 70 animals each month and 850 a year, numbers Pierantozzi and her board hope will rise with the improvements.

The renovations were funded by private grants, individual sponsors and a \$200,000 gift from Dr. Gibney. The new doggie haven is named in honor of Dr. Gibney's mother, Mary Rita Gibney. Many of the kennels are sponsored by individuals. One of the meet-and-greet rooms is named for a beloved Gibney family dog, Missy, and the other for Gibney's sister, Susie A. Comegys.

"My mother loved animals, and I've loved animals all my life," Dr. Gibney said. "We approached this thoughtfully to provide a better environment for the dogs and the people who want to adopt. We've even piped in music to help keep the dogs calm."

The next step is creation of indoor-outdoor kennels and renovation of the approximately 1,500-square-foot warehouse. Ultimately the goal is a new building.

"That's what we're working towards, but in the meantime we're continuing to raise money to bring improvements to this site," Pierantozzi said. "And, when we do move the new kennels will go with us because they are built to be moved."

At the Delaware Humane Association, things are moving smoothly toward the November opening of the Tatiana and Gerret Copeland Animal Care & Companion Center in Wilmington. There's only one hitch: Some people think the shelter is closed and moving to a new location.

"We have not and will not close at all," said Patrick Carroll, DHA executive director. "We made the decision from the beginning to build on our current location, and that's what we are doing. We felt it was our responsibility to stay in Wilmington."

The new facility will not significantly increase the shelter's footprint, which is about 7,000 square feet, but it's going to seem like it. The design utilizes the space to expand and improve animal housing and care facilities, not to mention a significant improvement in the aesthetics. The plans include a new community room to house events, meetings and educational programs.

The capital campaign to fund the new facility began more than three years ago with a goal of \$3.1 million. More than 1,000 donors helped meet the goal. The facility is named in honor of well-known local philanthropists and campaign chairs Tatiana and Gerret Copeland, who pledged to match every dollar donated by individuals up to \$750,000. They then pledged a further \$250,000, bringing their gift to \$1 million.

Increases in construction and labor costs since the 2010 estimate have caused the cost to rise by about 20 percent, with the final bill for the facility coming in at about \$4 million, but Carroll is counting on donors to help close the gap and avoid a mortgage.

Once the new building is open, the old one will be demolished. The shelter adopts out about 600 dogs and 600 cats a year. Carroll said the improved intake facilities, medical facilities and other improvements generated by the new facility should help increase the number of annual adoptions.

Hard Hat tours are offered most Wednesday afternoons or by appointment. For a tour or more information about giving, contact Greg Munson, (302) 571-8171, ext. 300.

Delaware Pets is written by animal-lover Deb Lucas. Send her your news, events and column ideas to dllucas@delawareonline.com or call her at (302) 324-2852.

Pet-related events

- Until May 31, qualified adopters at many area shelters, including the Delaware Humane Association, will be eligible to pay reduced adoption fees for all black or mostly black animals they adopt. Dogs 7 months and older can be adopted for \$50 and cats of any age can be adopted for \$20. dehumane.org/adoptus

- Anyone feeding roaming cats in the 19805 ZIP code can take a cat in for a free spay or neuter procedure at Faithful Friends near Elsmere in Wilmington, thanks to a PetSmart Foundation grant. If you cannot get the cat/s in a carrier, Faithful Friends will humanely trap, spay or neuter the cat/s and return them to you. (302) 427-8514, ext. 0; faithfulfriends.us

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Test-maker CD Diagnostics Settles In In Delaware

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

When it came time to decide where to locate his high-tech medical business, Richard Birkmeyer knew he wanted to be in Delaware.

CD Diagnostics, which creates diagnostic tests for joint disease, is his second business in this state.

Birkmeyer, CEO and president of the company, knows and likes the people of the First State. Proximity to I-95 is another perk of being located in Claymont.

"There's a lot of local support for the company and a lot of familiarity for the state," Birkmeyer said.

The Pennsylvania startup has opened an office at the Brandywine Corporate Center, 650 Naamans Road. The move comes after CD Diagnostics signed a partnership to work with Zimmer, a large provider of joint replacement technologies, a decision that is helping to grow the business.

"All that research and all that manufacturing will be done here in Delaware," Birkmeyer said.

Birkmeyer has said he turned down an economic development grant from Pennsylvania, opting instead for Delaware for his new venture.

The company was awarded a \$500,000 incentive from the Delaware Economic Development Opportunity Office to locate here and create jobs.

Generally speaking, CD Diagnostics makes tests that are developed to provide doctors with fast and accurate diagnostics.

There are about 35 employees at the Claymont office now, and they expect to bring at least 170 jobs here. They will be seeking researchers with doctoral degrees to do research. Also, they plan to hire for high-tech manufacturing.

This month, two new people started working there in research and development.

Martin Gould, who has more than 40 years' experience and holds several patents, is an immunoassay development fellow. He has worked on projects that include creating tests to detect if there are pathogens, such as salmonella, in foods.

James W. Stave, joins the company as the vice president of corporate development and as an antibody research fellow. He has worked in development for more than 30 years testing products for the commercial sector.

This is the second company started by Birkmeyer in Delaware. He founded Strategic Diagnostics in 1990 after a career at DuPont. That company, which later went public, sold its life science assets to OriGene Technologies. The company was under control of CEO Francis M. DiNuzzo when that happened.

Birkmeyer said last year he hoped to replicate the success of that company with starting up CD Diagnostics.

And he wants to do it again in Delaware.

"Our goal is to improve patient outcomes," Birkmeyer said.

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Ellendale Leaders Call For Cleaner Water

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

ELLENDALE – Church and community leaders in Ellendale gathered Monday to express dissatisfaction with the health of their town's drinking water, which bears the scars of contamination from polluting commercial sites in decades past.

"We are not going to sit down and relax and let this thing go away," said Diaz J. Bonnaville of the Ellendale Community Civic Improvement Association.

Ellendale has sewer service through Sussex County, but there is no government-run drinking water infrastructure in town. All homes rely on private wells. A referendum to build a public water system failed in 2009.

Story: Group has setback in chicken plant fight

Since the 1990s, the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control has monitored groundwater underneath a property near Mount Zion AME Church that used to be a gas station and auto salvage yard. Water samples from the well that the church used until 2009 showed very high amounts of benzene, MTBE and naphthalene.

An environmental consultant's report filed to DNREC on May 15 noted those chemicals had diminished in the old well, but were still found in concerning amounts at a nearby mobile home's well. One chemical, benzene, hadn't been detected in three tests during 2013, but it showed up late last year in a fourth test – a sign a plume of groundwater pollution may be moving around the area. The report recommended more testing, and possibly installing more monitoring wells.

A. Iona Smith Nze, pastor of the Mount Zion, said the church members remain concerned about the water quality. A deeper well was dug in 2009 for the church's use, but Nze said the church still doesn't use it for drinking and serves parishioners bottled water.

"Our property continues to be contaminated," Nze said Monday evening. "These are concerns that could be cleaned up if the water was cleaned up."

Because there's no municipal water system, there isn't much public data on drinking water in Ellendale. A restaurant in town, Southern Grill, does have a well that's monitored by state regulators. Data from that well show MTBE levels rose as high as 3.69 parts per billion in May 2013. That's not high enough to trigger a public health response. In Delaware, MTBE levels at or above 10 parts per billion are considered a public health concern.

Now, a year later, MTBE levels are 0.6 parts per billion.

"It looks like it's gone down a bit," said Ed Hallock, program administrator in the Office of Drinking Water. The state, he said, checks the restaurant's water four times a year.

Shaleé Murray, 22, an Ellendale resident and mother, said the water that comes from her faucets is often clouded with particles. In another part of town, she said, water can be discolored, or smell odd.

"I've been living in Ellendale for 11 years, and it's gotten worse," Murray said, noting that she gives her young son bottled water. "Knowing what's in it, I'm not willing to give it over to him."

Nze and Bonnaville are concerned by the higher than normal incidence of cancer in a census tract a mile north of Ellendale.

Church leaders want Gov. Jack Markell's proposed Clean Water Initiative, if it becomes law, to help pay for any cleanup efforts.

"We'll see if they'll become partners with us," said Harold Truxon, president of the civic association. "And we are going to go back to County Council and ask for assistance."

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Specialisterne Links Businesses, Autistic Workers

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

NEWARK – Mike MacAllister was among more than a dozen people working at Computer Aid Inc. on a recent day to carefully digitize paper files.

Elsewhere in the office, a robot made of Legos that can solve a Rubik's Cube sat on a table. The creation was built as part of a training program for employees like MacAllister, who have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The global IT service firm, commonly called CAI, is one of several companies coordinating with a nonprofit called Specialisterne, which helps link employers with potential employees living with autism.

"It's a great job-creation model," said Ernest Dianastasis, managing director of CAI.

Specialisterne, which last year opened an office in Wilmington, helps firms identify, train and retain workers who have been diagnosed with ASD but have the ability to work if given some support.

Among them is SAP, a global leader in the technology sector, which is bringing five new employees who have autism into its Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, office. The company's leaders acknowledge it is not a large influx of new workers, but that's intentional: They want to build in supports around the new employees and learn how they can best adapt to be more inclusive.

By 2020, SAP said, it plans to have about 1 percent of the workforce represented by those who have autism. The company has more than 66,700 employees worldwide and serves customers in more than 180 countries.

The Centers for Disease Control defines ASD as "a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges."

What other people might see as a disability can also be a person's strength, advocates say. That's why Specialisterne has a dandelion in its imagery, said Thorkil Sonne, who founded the company. Where other people might see a weed, children see a flower to make into necklaces.

"It's all about the mindset," Sonne said.

He was speaking at an event hosted earlier this month to SAP employees and community partners in its office in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, about its efforts to increase the number of people with autism on its staff. They outlined how they plan to start small and scale up the program, bringing a group to each of its worldwide offices. SAP leaders say they don't see it just as a nice thing to do – it's also good for business.

"You are giving people a shot who were never given a shot before," Gov. Jack Markell said at the event.

About 15 new people are working at the CAI Innovation and Technology Center in Newark. The firm partnered with Specialisterne shortly after it came to Delaware last year.

Founded in 2004 in Denmark, Specialisterne brought an office to Delaware as part of its growth into the United States after Markell recruited them. The company helps people with autism find jobs by providing training, mentoring and other support functions.

A diverse workforce is better able to anticipate the needs of consumers if they bring to the table a wide swath of perspectives, several SAP leaders said during their May 1 presentations.

For instance, attention to detail, recognizing patterns and precision are all valuable skills for information technology and software creation, said Jose H. Velasco, the SAP autism and workplace coordinator.

A corporate office setting might screen out people who have trouble with eye contact or traditional communication skills. But they still have valuable assets they can contribute to the organization if given a chance, advocates say.

SAP intends to “think differently about how to evaluate talent,” said Anka Wittenberg, SAP chief diversity and inclusion officer.

SAP is working with Specialisterne, local nonprofits and government agencies, so they are including outside organizations with expertise in autism spectrum disorder. This helps them identify potential employees, interview them and train them so they are set up for success, leaders said.

The model is built so there is a circle of supporters who can help the employee and the workplace adapt to be more inclusive to those who might not fit in to the traditional corporate model.

The training isn’t just for new workers. Existing employees also are given information so they can learn how to help a new colleague. Some are serving as mentors.

SAP leaders said they needed four volunteer mentors in Newtown Square. More than twice as many said they wanted to do it.

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Wilmington Council, Mayor Reach Budget Deal

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

Wilmington City Council and the mayor have reached a budget deal that would increase property taxes at a lower rate than the administration previously proposed and also limit the increases on other services charged to city residents.

The agreement calls for a 5 percent increase in the city’s property tax rate, about half the 9.9 percent hike initially proposed by Mayor Dennis P. Williams for the fiscal year starting July 1.

Water, sewer and stormwater rates will climb by 5 percent under the compromise. The administration had sought to increase the water and sewer rate by 8 percent and the stormwater rate by 7 percent.

Council’s Finance Committee sent the \$150 million proposed budget, along with property tax and utility changes, to the full Council for a vote on Thursday.

The owner of a home assessed at \$45,000, the city average, would have an annual property tax bill of \$832 under the compromise, up from \$793 now and less than the \$871 sought under the mayor’s initial spending plan.

The water, sewer and stormwater rate increases of 5 percent would raise the average customer’s monthly bill by \$2.39, city officials said. The mayor’s proposal would have raised the rate to \$3.78 a month.

A top city official said the administration can’t guarantee layoffs won’t happen over the next few years, while leading Council members said they wished the administration had trimmed more vacant positions to save more money.

The administration had estimated its proposed tax increase would generate \$3.6 million, save nearly 100 jobs over the next four years and create a \$2.7 million budget surplus that would prevent any more

tax increases until 2018. But the compromise will bring fewer dollars into city coffers, creating new challenges.

"We're hoping to not be looking at layoffs, but we're going to have to continue making hard decisions," said Cleon Cauley, the mayor's chief of staff. "For me to sit here and say this is something that will absolutely not happen, I couldn't do that.

"We're no longer asking for an increase that we really believe we needed to get us through the next four years. We're asking for something less in order to reach a compromise and pass a budget."

Among other things, the compromise includes \$794,000 in spending cuts and the elimination of four vacant jobs in the mayor's information technology office and the law, finance and public works departments.

About half of the cuts will be offset by an additional \$353,000 for a police academy class that will allow the department to fill about 15 vacant officer positions.

Council members and Cauley said the new crime prevention program, Cure Violence, and police won't be affected by the compromise. But the spending cuts will result in fewer demolitions of vacant homes and put a hold on some new police uniforms, among other things.

Councilman Bud Freel, the finance committee chairman, said the administration could have identified more cost-savings had it looked at cutting more of the city's roughly 80 vacant positions. Freel said the compromise came after Council members asked for \$2.5 million in cuts.

"They came back with a 5 percent tax increase and just under \$800,000 in cuts but added \$350,000 back in for the police class, which should have been in the original budget," he said. "We came back and said that was not acceptable. We wanted to see more in cuts, a minimum of \$1.25 million, and they said, 'We don't think we can cut anymore.' "

Freel said vacant jobs are among the best way to cut costs because more than half of the budget is tied to personnel. He said the city is cutting four vacant positions but is really adding the equivalent of one and a half positions when all the jobs are counted.

"It's disappointing when I hear the Wilmington Financial Advisory Council telling us we should be trying to reduce [vacant jobs] by five a year, and here we are still increasing them," Freel said. "I honestly believe there are other positions that we can be deleting and not impact city services, at all."

Council President Theo Gregory echoed Freel's thoughts on the vacant positions but said it was much too late in the year to look at those jobs. He said it would be tough now to pick out vacant jobs to cut.

"That's the reason I said these decisions have to be made before the budget," Gregory said. "The budget process is not the time to do a lot of heavy lifting in terms of transforming and reforming city government. That needs to be done in September, October, November. Then when you start your budget process, you fold your budget back into the new framework you set up for city government."

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WILMINGTON JOURNAL NEWS EDITORIALS

Did Jeb Magruder Tell All About Watergate Scandal?

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

Jeb Magruder, who died May 11, was one of the central figures of the Watergate scandal.

Magruder was key to the original Watergate operation because, as operational manager of Richard Nixon's re-election committee, he was the direct supervisor of G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, who organized the break-in and orchestrated campaign intelligence and dirty tricks.

COLUMN: Second-term tumbles and the lessons of history

Magruder, 79, was the last surviving attendee of the meeting where (according to Magruder) the "Gemstone" Liddy/Hunt operation was approved by campaign director and former Attorney General John Mitchell, though Mitchell never accepted responsibility. In a 2003 interview, Magruder also claimed he had heard Mitchell receiving orders from Nixon to go after Democratic National Committee Chairman Larry O'Brien's office in the Watergate. I'm skeptical there's very much to that story.

Magruder's role in the cover-up and its breakdown was second only to John Dean's. When the original cover story began to collapse in early 1973, Dean and Magruder raced to cut the best deal with prosecutors. Magruder lost, though both wound up in federal prison and both spilled the beans on important pieces of the puzzle.

Magruder takes with him some of the hope of solving some of the remaining Watergate mysteries, though I don't think he knew much about Nixon's personal involvement or knowledge before the arrests in June 1972. He certainly knew (at least within the limits of memory) what happened in the authorizing meeting that included himself, Mitchell and Frank LaRue, but we'll never know if he told the truth about it.

COLUMN: Should Delaware still have the death penalty?

Magruder also may have known more about the decision to target the Watergate. If Liddy told the truth, however – and on this there's no particular reason to think he hasn't – the burglars chose Democratic headquarters principally out of expediency. It was easier to get into than George McGovern's campaign offices.

However, other than the overheard phone call, there's no reason to believe that Magruder knew anything about Nixon. Our last opportunity to learn more from a first-person witness probably ended with the death of Chuck Colson two years ago. It is possible, but less likely, that Magruder may have had second-hand information he never told, such as a conversation with Mitchell or Bob Haldeman. The only remaining hope for learning more about Nixon's "pre-" role will be from physical evidence. Perhaps some day engineers will manage to recover more information from the tapes.

On the other hand, though we never did learn the whole story of Nixon's involvement, I don't think it's that big a deal. We know that he personally supervised the original cover-up, and that the cover-up of the cover-up was practically a one-man affair on his part. We know that he was aware of criminal activity before the Watergate break-ins even if we don't know whether he knew about that particular operation. We know that he ordered his staff to commit crimes, even if we don't know whether he ordered any of the crimes they actually committed (we know that his staff ignored some of his orders). And we know that he was personally responsible for the general atmosphere of illegality in the White House and in his campaign, and that he personally cultivated the obsession with obtaining political information that led directly to Watergate and other crimes.

Magruder wasn't the worst of Nixon's men. As far as I know, his post-Nixon life as a minister was respectable and responsible. He was, like Dean, an ambitious guy in the wrong place, who then made the wrong decisions. He'll always be known as a criminal and an important figure in perhaps the greatest political crime in U.S. history.

Jonathan Bernstein is a Bloomberg View columnist covering U.S. politics.

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Obamacare Critic Sets Himself For A Fall In Column

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

Kevin Wade, a 2012 Republican candidate for U.S. Senator, recently blasted the Affordable Care Act in a News Journal column headlined, "Obamacare will fail because it's not honest."

"In the end," Wade wrote, "Obamacare fails because its leaders, sponsors and cheerleaders refused to be honest with the people. You can't build health care or a nation on a lie, but you can destroy it. That's the truth and the lesson for an entire generation."

Wow. Biblical prophets of old rarely spoke with such authority. But he also set a high bar for his own truth-telling.

Let's see how he did.

Here's Wade on why people reject the Affordable Care Act: "They liked their original insurance. The insurance that suited their needs. The insurance that was affordable. The insurance that was their best choice."

Not a lie, but a bit disingenuous.

Reading Wade's comments, you might think all Americans were completely satisfied with their health insurance options. If that were the case it wouldn't have been an issue in the first place.

The comment also ignores the millions of people who were unable to get any health insurance and those with substandard policies.

Wade goes on to say, "The majority of the public, in numerous opinion polls, never liked Obamacare."

You hear this argument a lot, but there's only one poll that really counts: Election Day. Running on a platform that included broader health insurance coverage, Obama won in 2008. After four years of unrelenting, even hysterical attacks against Obamacare, he won again in 2012.

It's nonsense to say the "majority of the public never liked Obamacare" after voters twice elected the man whose signature achievement is the Affordable Care Act.

Polls also show that some Obamacare features poll very well and that people favor fixing the Affordable Care Act as opposed to repealing it. They include:

- Ending insurance denials because of pre-existing conditions.
- Allowing children to be included on their parents' policies until age 26.
- Eliminating lifetime limits on insurance coverage.

The provision about pre-existing conditions is so popular that Republicans repeatedly claim their "plan" supports the measure.

Here's Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., presenting the Republican rebuttal to President Obama's 2014 State of the Union Address:

"Republicans believe health care choices should be yours, not the government's. And that whether you're a boy with Down syndrome or a woman with breast cancer, you can find coverage and a doctor who will treat you."

It's a good thing Rodgers's nose doesn't grow like that Pinocchio character in the Geico ad. Her nose would have burst through the TV screen.

The only reason people with pre-existing conditions can find health insurance now is because of Obamacare. The idea that a woman with breast cancer could find coverage under a Republican plan is preposterous. There is no Republican plan. Just listen to their leaders. They're running on repealing Obamacare. They're even not offering an alternative.

Here's a claim from Wade. Among the reasons he cited for people not liking Obamacare is the IRS "adding 16,000 new staffers." That figure is baloney.

According to U.S. News and World Report, the IRS had just under 118,000 employees in 1992. "By 2012," the article said, "this had fallen 23 percent to 90,280. At the same time, the number of returns increased 27 percent, from 113.1 million to 143.4 million."

Sequestration has intensified that trend. At the end of fiscal year 2013, according to the IRS Data Book, the agency had 83,613 employees.

IRS staffing levels have been going down, not up – the opposite of what Wade said. But the real problem with the Republicans' stance on health care goes beyond such bogus arguments. Their position is dishonest at its core.

If someone is injured, they will be treated at the hospital. That's the law.

Not all these people will be able to pay. Some will file for bankruptcy.

But eventually the bill has to be paid. One way is through higher health insurance costs for people who are already paying for their own coverage. That's the problem Republican Gov. Mitt Romney was trying to solve when he instituted his health care plan in Massachusetts.

He wanted to rid the system of what he called "free riders," people who chose to force their health insurance costs on others. Obamacare was modeled on the Massachusetts plan, which in turn was based on an idea by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank now headed by former Sen. Jim DeMint.

But now Republicans have chosen to abandon what was their own idea and pretend problems like "free riders" and medical bankruptcy don't exist.

Wade said you can't build health care and a nation on a lie. How about a political party?

Don Flood of Lewes is a columnist for the Cape Gazette.

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Attorney General Cites True Threat To Civil Rights

[Wilmington \(DE\) News Journal](#), May 19, 2014

The thing to remember about the commencement address Attorney General Eric Holder gave Saturday is not that he wrote off the racist musing of people such as Donald Sterling and Robert Copeland. As deplorable as they were, he correctly said, they "are not the true markers of the struggle that still must be waged" against far greater threats to the civil rights of this nation's minorities.

Sterling is the owner of the Los Angeles Clippers basketball team who was caught on an audio recording speaking disparagingly of blacks. Copeland is the Wolfeboro, N.H., police commissioner who was overheard in a restaurant referring to President Obama as "that f— n—." As bigots go, both men were forged from the same mold that produces the rank and file Klansman.

COLUMN: What the Brown decision should mean, 60 years later

But Holder didn't come to this city, the birthplace of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, to call out the foot soldiers of this nation's still deeply entrenched resistance to civil rights. He didn't have to travel up the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and take the stage of Morgan State University's commencement ceremony to do that, no matter how many news organizations put that tag on his speech.

Instead, Holder – the first black to hold the job as the nation's top law enforcement officer – courageously named Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts as a greater threat to the cause of civil rights than "misguided words that we can reject out of hand."

Coming from a sitting attorney general, Holder's sharp rebuke of Roberts – and the conservative majority that he leads – is unprecedented. But it is not unwarranted.

COLUMN: Should Delaware still have the death penalty?

He “has argued that the path to ending racial discrimination is to give less consideration to the issue of race altogether,” Holder said of the chief justice. “This presupposes that racial discrimination is at a sufficiently low ebb that it doesn’t need to be actively confronted.”

Then Holder craftily – and maybe too subtly for some reviewers – invokes the words and judicial logic of one of the Supreme Court’s liberal justices to counter Roberts’ myopia.

As “Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote recently in an insightful dissent in the Michigan college admission case, we must not ‘wish away, rather than confront, the racial inequality that exists in our society. ... The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to speak openly and candidly on the subject of race.’ “

Indeed. Holder, of course, knows that. But by using the platform of a university commencement speech to focus attention on “policies that too easily escape” the strict scrutiny courts give to openly discriminatory laws “because they have the appearance of being race-neutral,” Holder is calling out the conservatives on the court.

Can I get an “amen” here?

Such biting criticism will not endear the attorney general to the conservative legion that is the Praetorian Guard of Roberts’ “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” school of racial justice. But there are times when a battle for that which is right must be fought in the court of public opinion.

Holder understands that the victory he seeks in the fight for racial justice needs the support of a broad cross section of Americans – not just the minorities who will be its most obvious beneficiaries. I suspect that is why he made this point: “In our criminal justice system, systemic and unwarranted racial disparities remain disturbingly common.” Black men, he said, “have received sentences that are nearly 20 percent longer than those imposed on white males convicted of similar crimes,” he told the members of Morgan’s graduating class.

Then, smartly, he left this emerging generation of leaders to make the connection between that harsh fact and Roberts’ head-in-the-sand strategy for ending racial discrimination.

It didn’t take much of a stretch to do that.

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