

DEMOCRATIC CLUB OF WILLOW VALLEY

NEWSLETTER

June 2026

Paid for by Democratic Club of Willow Valley

Treasurer, Steve Wright

Editor Ross Fairweather (rossfair63@gmail.com)



Addressing the Issues

IN THIS ISSUE

Political News:

On Superpower Suicide	02
Has Trump's Republican Party Become a Criminal Enterprise?	11
All the President's Thefts	15
Trump is Leading the GOP Off a Cliff	20
The Great Society	25

Club/Local News:

Coming Events	29
General Meeting Minutes	30

On Superpower Suicide



On Superpower Suicide

And the recovery of justice

TIMOTHY SNYDER
MAY 9

The United States has just spent billions of dollars to lose a war that enriches its oligarchs, impoverishes the citizenry, sabotages its alliances, and strengthens its enemies. As justification for the self-destructive mindlessness, the White House gestures towards Jesus and genocide.

On April 20th I was asked to speak in New York about ethics and power. My thinking, which I expressed in a conversation at the [Council on Foreign Relations](#), on this [little video](#), and in [the media](#), was that our utterly unethical war was also utterly self-destructive. The war, a catastrophe in itself, suggests the guiding principle of Trump foreign policy: *superpower suicide*. The term has since come into more [general](#) use, and readers have been asking me to spell it out.

Empires have risen and failed before, but to my knowledge no state has ever chosen to kill its own power, and succeeded with such rapidity.

It is hard to see this clearly. Even as we oppose individual Trump adventures, we hope that in some way they are based on some understanding of the national interest. They are not. To get the perspective we need to see the nature of this anti-strategic self-slaughter, it will help to consider thirteen traditional bases of state power.

Cont'd next page

On Superpower Suicide (cont'd)

1. Statehood. A superpower must, at a minimum, be a modern state. This means that it must be an arrangement that includes, via law and other institutions, a larger body of citizens within a common endeavor. There is no sign that the Trump administration regards the United States of America as a state. It treats the existence of the United States as a commercial opportunity for a select few people, American and otherwise.

2. National interest. Another minimal requirement of superpower would be a sense of why that power must be used. The Trump administration exhibits no interest in the good of the people. Theorists of international relations have differed as to how leaders understand national interests; we are intellectually unprepared, however, for a situation in which the leader simply does not care about either the state or the nation.

3. Succession. Again, for a state to maintain itself as a superpower, it must maintain itself over time. The basic requirement of such continuity is a succession principle, a means by which authority is transferred from some people to other people while institutions continue to function. In the United States, democracy enables succession. Historically, there are means of succession, for example by dynasty (or dynastic adoption, as in second-century Rome) or by the decision of a politburo, as in China or the USSR (in the US this would be a capitalist politburo, the sort of oligarchical coven that got us JD Vance). Getting from democracy to such different arrangements would end the American republic. Trump aspires to stay in power indefinitely, and says so. By putting the vote in question, he puts America in question, and thus American power.

4. Elites. For states to thrive and to accumulate and maintain power, the right people have to be in charge. There is no perfect means to achieve this, and there is the inevitable tension, as the Roman Stoics and others have noted, between the skills needed to rise to the top and those suited to serving some general interest. And those who rise to a position of authority will try to pass it on to their children; the

Cont'd next page

On Superpower Suicide (cont'd)

Roman Catholic Church went to the extreme of insisting on priestly celibacy to block this tendency. Historically, powerful states seek ways to enable qualified people to serve in positions of authority, regardless of birth. Ancient China had an examination system. Napoleon established the principle of merit in both civilian and military life. The United States had a civil service that was the envy of the world as well as a military that was its most meritocratic institution. The Trump administration has chosen to disable the civil service and to purge the military command of people of quality. This process has been carried out by people who are themselves wildly unqualified to hold any sort of office, let alone cabinet positions. To see where we are, we must understand that people such as Tulsi Gabbard, Kash Patel, and Pete Hegseth, about whom one might raise other objections, had no business accepting their nominations, since they lack any qualifications. The fact that such people could be considered, let alone appointed, is a marker of superpower suicide.

5. Education. In a deeper sense, a superpower must have a mechanism to refresh its society, and thus its politics and administration, by preparing its population to understand the challenges of the world. This administration has done the contrary. University students are forbidden to gather and to speak their minds; university administrations are threatened with retaliation if they allow their faculty to teach freely; libraries around the country, including in military academies, are purged of useful books; public education generally is replaced with scams whereby tax money is transferred from the poorer to the richer while schools themselves are starved; an unregulated internet is allowed and indeed encouraged to transform the public sphere into a realm of emotions and recriminations.

6. Science. The rise of great powers often involves an alliance between politics and science. The ancient Mesopotamians were astronomers whose systems of describing the heavens still mark our ways of thought; so were the Mayans. The Romans managed to operationalize Greek science to build, defend, and cure. The Renaissance was, by no coincidence, also the age of exploration. Modern imperial

Cont'd next page

On Superpower Suicide (cont'd)

powers built state institutions to fund science and attract scientists; the United States from the 1940s was the outstanding example of this trend, and science (often as practiced by immigrants) was the most important basis of American superpower. Current American policy is to fund science on the basis of primitive ideological taboos, and to discourage young scientists from immigrating to the United States. Senior scientists are also leaving; a colleague in a central position in US science just told me that he is leaving the country in part because the overall environment is better in other places. It is also US policy to cast doubt on basic scientific observations, such as that of human-caused climate change.



7. Energy. Human groups that pioneer new forms of energy technology rise; those that do not fall. This might be the most profound truth of our history; a magnificent [forthcoming book](#) demonstrates the significance of energy transitions at the most profound level, that of the history of life on earth itself. Humans who mastered fire could consume more energy themselves. Humans who domesticated dogs could use their energy to hunt mammoths. Humans who domesticated plants

Cont'd next page

On Superpower Suicide (cont'd)

could turn solar energy to their own purposes. Humans who understood weather and climate could turn wind energy to the purpose of exploration and conquest, as did the Vikings. The United States was established on the cusp of a transition to hydrocarbon energy: coal, oil, natural gas. These forms of energy are now becoming obsolete, not only in ecological but also in economic terms. And yet this administration has chosen to cancel America's energy transition and subsidize technologies that have no future. This is superpower suicide in perhaps the most basic form. And nothing could benefit America's chief rival, China, more than this choice.

8. Technology. It requires little effort to associate technology with the rise of great powers. Military achievement is associated intimately with innovation; from the spur to the machine gun, the causal relationship is not really contestable. While the United States spends gigantic amounts of money on weaponry, the Trump administration has chosen to focus on weapons from the past rather than of the future. Trump's idea is battleships named after himself based on what he remembers of a movie. The plans for "Trump-class" battleships are a mixture of the fictional and the vulnerable, which does reflect the man. The notion is to invest untold amounts of money into a kind of weapon has been understood to be obsolete since 1943, and which if somehow built would be highly vulnerable to weapons other countries now have. This strategic atavism draws the United States away from national security in its most basic sense. The shape of modern warfare is revealed by the high-tech war between Russia and Ukraine, especially in Ukraine's successful self-defense. The Trump administration chose to ignore the lessons of that war and to demean and defund America's Ukrainian ally, to the detriment of American interests and American warfighting.

9. Diplomacy. This art, celebrated by great powers, has been trashed by the United States. It cannot be practiced without understanding other countries, as the most focused American diplomats have stressed (for example, Henry Kissinger, who can hardly be accused of softheartedness). It has rested, in the American and other cases, on the deliberate construction of a diplomatic corps where people train in

Cont'd next page

On Superpower Suicide (cont'd)

languages and trade in knowledge. Under the Trump administration, the foreign service has been trashed. The principle of diplomacy, such as it is, is that other countries will do what we want because we are big and bad. This has not worked. The bizarre notion that the president can himself “make deals” is the sign of a religious cult; like most cults, its activity is the generation of ever more creative excuses for the lack of performance. There is no evidence that Trump knows how to negotiate, and abundant evidence that he does not: for example, defeat in trade wars with China; personal vulnerability to the preferences of Russian leaders, and the disaster of Iranian nuclear enrichment, of which Trump himself is the chief sponsor. In practice, critical negotiations, with Iran and elsewhere, have been put in the hands of two people, Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, with close personal relationships with the president and obvious economic stakes in the relevant conflicts. The diplomacy of the Huns was far more sophisticated than this. It is hard to overstate how primitive the current American approach is, and how much joy it brings to America’s enemies.

10. Alliances. Great powers have allies. To be sure, they might change these alliances rapidly for reasons of interest, as the East Roman (Byzantine) Empire famously did. The whole history of the Roman Empire, for that matter, was one of active diplomacy with neighboring barbarians (as the Romans saw matters); archaeology bears witness to the arrangements that were made. The history of modern European empires was also one considered alliances, as the architects of American superpower understood. Under the Trump administration, useful allies are mocked and marginalized for no reason other than personal whimsy and a sense of grievance. Because there is no sense of state or national interest, there can be no understanding that alliances are of service. Trump feels annoyed because he is losing a war and removes US troops from Germany; those troops are there to enable the United States to win wars. I personally cannot think of any other example in which the leaders of a great power behaved in this way, presumably because these kinds of choices are inconsistent with the maintenance of power. The United States now seems to be treating as “allies” middle eastern countries that have nothing to offer

Cont'd next page

On Superpower Suicide (cont'd)

except their own interests in the use of American armed forces in their own region, permanent engagement in the disastrous politics of oil, and financial opportunities for people personally close to Trump.

11. The international system. Postwar America did something far more impressive than build a system of alliances; it essentially created a set of laws, rules, and norms that allowed American power to maintain itself and to expand. The European Union and NATO, so abused by the Trump people today, were indirect and direct results of American policies intelligently designed to maximize American trade and security interests. But the achievement was far broader than that, and indeed historically unprecedented: the construction of laws and conventions that kept one country in the center of the world. Today, the Trump people make themselves at the World Economic Forum, the Munich Security Conference and similar gatherings and complaining that the rules are against them -- the exact opposite was the case, because America made the rules. In deliberately destroying *its own* international system, this American government is improving the position of its rivals China and Russia, who have been calling for exactly this to happen, but who lacked the ability to make it happen.

12. The idea of victory. A superpower wins in confrontations, at least some of the time. This administration loses again and again, and is seen to lose by others. Trump announced that his main weapon of influence would be tariffs, but then lost his trade war with China, leaving Beijing more powerful and more emboldened. The Russo-Ukrainian war is a curious case. It would serve the interests of the United States in prosperity and stability for Ukraine to win; but under Trump the United States has switched its policy to one of support for Ukraine to support for Russia. So it has lost in that way. But since the United States has made that pivot, Ukraine has performed ever better in the war, and Russia has performed worse. And so the United States, amazingly, has managed to be the loser in the same war a double sense: by failing to see its own interests, and then by failing to fail. The Iranian war is an obvious strategic defeat in every traditional sense; insofar as there were any American

Cont'd next page

On Superpower Suicide (cont'd)

objectives, they were not achieved. Trump's policies have left Iran with more enriched uranium in the hands of a more radical regime which holds new sources of economic power in the world. In the current situation, in which military options have been self-humiliatingly exhausted, the useful instruments would be those that involved communicating with the Iranian people or influencing Iranian society. Those institutions existed until very recently; they were willfully demolished, to great fanfare, in early 2026.

The United States is now governed by people who celebrate defeat in symbolic terms characteristic of states in disastrous decline. Consider Defense Secretary Hegseth's description of the rescue of a US pilot as the resurrection of Jesus. The screaming blasphemy of this might distract us from its strategic helplessness. Christological images of this sort are used as propaganda to transform defeat in the real world into victory in some imaginary one. The US lost the war in Iran. Among other things it was not able to sustain an air campaign. The downing of a US fighter meant that an individual mission failed. It is happy news, of course, that the pilot survived. But the notion that this was a "literal miracle," as Hegseth claimed, brings the United States, sadly, into the tradition of losers who use Jesus to claim to be winners. An historical example of this was Polish Romanticism, with its idea that the collapse of a republic (chiefly due to wealth inequality) made of Poland the "Christ of Nations." Donald Trump's own self-deification has to be seen in similar terms: a president who could assert power in this world would not have to claim that his real authority comes from another one. His fantasies of the total destruction of Iranian civilization are part of an apocalyptic panorama that is inconsistent with decent politics.

13. Finances. Though not the most interesting historical subject, budget disaster stands behind many of the most notable collapses of state power, ancient and modern. Under Trump our national debt now approaches \$40 trillion. National debt is higher than GDP of the country for the first time since the end of the Second World War. That is a notable point of comparison: it is normal to run big deficits when facing

Cont'd next page

On Superpower Suicide (cont'd)

the challenge of the scale of a world war. We are running huge deficits for an entirely different reason: because we decline to tax wealthy individuals and corporations. That is not an approach that is consistent with fighting and winning wars, nor with maintaining the social services that allow a modern society to function. More profoundly: it reflects an approach to politics -- government as customer service to the very wealthy -- that leads us from power to ethics.

The war can lead us to a diagnosis of superpower suicide. Wars cannot be won by people who have no idea what they are doing, because they have no frame of reference (such as the nation or the state) beyond their own feelings. They cannot be fought well when the wrong people are making the daily decisions and the wrong weapons are being deployed. They cannot be reasonably brought to an end when there is no practice of diplomacy and no notion of the value of alliances and no concern about corruption.

But even a strict focus on power will lead us back to justice. But just as the war is only a symptom of superpower suicide, so superpower suicide is only a symptom of a still deeper condition, the one that must be addressed.

Even if all we cared about were American power, we would have to ask ourselves how to undo the distortions of democracy and the drastic inequalities of that enabled world-historical levels of strategic [buffoonery](#). After a year of Trump, we face a situation where reform and repair are not the relevant categories. And, in a certain sense, this is useful. The fact that we reached this point, the fact that just a year of Trump could bring superpower suicide, shows us that the prior status quo was unsustainable.

The systems that made the United States a superpower cannot be rebuilt as they were, nor should they be: they involved structural injustices that made the present attempt at self-annihilation possible. From where we stand now there are two ways forward: one is the self-induced downfall of the American republic; the other is to reconsider [American ideals](#) and to restructure American politics so as to bring the people greater power over [a more just future](#).

A Criminal Enterprise?

Has Trump's Republican Party Become a Criminal Enterprise?

Trump's purge of all political opponents, including Senator Bill Cassidy, leaves it with no purpose other than helping Trump achieve his lawless goals

ROBERT REICH

MAY 18



Friends,

On Saturday, Trump took revenge on Louisiana senator Bill Cassidy for Cassidy's vote five years ago to convict Trump, in his second impeachment, for instigating an attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Cont'd next page

A Criminal Enterprise? (cont'd)

Cassidy thereby became the first GOP senator defeated by a Trump-endorsed candidate in a Republican primary. (Other Republican senators who have stood up to Trump — such as North Carolina's Thom Tillis and Utah's Mitt Romney — saw the writing on the wall and didn't seek reelection.)

Trump's purge of Cassidy comes in the wake of Trump's purges of House Republicans who stood up to him, such as Wyoming's Liz Cheney.

Trump's next Republican target in the House is Kentucky representative Thomas Massie, who had the guts to oppose U.S. military involvement in Iran, demand release of the Epstein files, and criticize Trump's spending bills for adding to the national debt. Massie appears likely to be defeated by a Trump-backed opponent in Tuesday's Kentucky primary.

Trump is marshaling the full force of his MAGA machine — spending more than \$30 *million* on a House Republican *primary* — to purge another of his political enemies from the Republican House. Even Secretary of "War" Pete Hegseth is flying to Kentucky today to campaign for Massie's challenger. It's all seen as an investment in intimidating and disciplining Republican office-holders who might otherwise think of straying.

Trump has also purged *state* legislators who have refused to do his bidding, such as the seven Indiana Republicans who refused to redistrict the state as Trump demanded they do, and who Trump insured were defeated in their recent primaries.

The message is clear to every current or aspiring Republican politician: Be a toady to Trump, or you're out.

In his concession speech Friday night, Cassidy stated the obvious reference to Trump:

"Our country is not about one individual. It is about the welfare of all Americans, and it is about our Constitution. And if someone doesn't understand that and attempts to control others through using the levers of power, they're about serving themselves. They're not about serving us. And that person is not qualified to be a leader."

Cont'd next page

A Criminal Enterprise? (cont'd)

Nicely put but sadly irrelevant because Trump — who's clearly serving himself rather than the American public — now possesses all levers of power in the official Republican Party.

As Republican senator Lindsey Graham said yesterday on *Meet the Press*, "There's no room in this party to destroy [Trump's] agenda."

Former generations of Republican politicians had principles, beliefs, ideals. They thought the federal government too large. Or believed it spent too much money. Or was too lenient on criminals. Or was too eager to support the civil rights of Black people. Or any number of issues with which Democrats disagreed.

Today's Republican Party no longer has any purpose other than achieving whatever Trump wants, which is mainly to make Trump richer and more powerful. The GOP is now Trump's; it is no longer America's.

Today's Republican *voters*, by contrast, are showing increasing frustration with Trump. Those who think of themselves as traditional Republicans don't like Trump's expansive use of federal power. Those who are fiscally conservative, like Thomas Massie, are upset by Trump's wanton spending, tax cuts, and soaring debt. "America-first" Republican voters are concerned about Trump's intrusions into Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, and elsewhere. And they want the rest of the Epstein files released.

Yet for *elected* Republicans, survival now depends on personal loyalty to Trump.

All of which raises a fundamental question: Has the official Republican Party — now nearly purged of anyone willing to reflect the concerns of Republican voters rather than Trump's will — become complicit in Trump's criminality? Is it aiding and abetting Trump's lawlessness?

A case can be made that the official Republican Party is indeed complicit.

For Trump, the first and most basic sign of loyalty to him — and therefore survival as a politician in Trump's Republican Party — is a willingness to publicly proclaim

Cont'd next page

A Criminal Enterprise? (cont'd)

as *truth* what we know to be two big lies: that Trump won the 2020 election, and that he did not seek to overturn its results by illegal means. As a result, almost all congressional Republicans are now election deniers.

Trump has also made it clear that loyalty to him bars any criticism of his unlawful immigration dragnet, which has so far resulted in the murders of three U.S. citizens by ICE agents and the detention and deportation, without a hearing, of people suspected of being in the U.S. illegally.

To Trump, loyalty requires full support of his foreign policy — including the abduction of a foreign leader, an undeclared war with Iran, and the killing on the high seas of people only suspected of smuggling drugs, in violation of international law.

Loyalty also demands unquestioned support for other of his lawless acts — using the Justice Department to prosecute his political opponents, building a mammoth White House ballroom, issuing no-bid contracts to his friends, promoting his family's businesses and implementing policies favorable to them, accepting gifts from foreign powers, and defying court orders.

Is it fair to conclude from all of this that today's official Republican Party — the people who are in office because Trump has put them there, or who maintain their office because they back whatever Trump wants — has in effect become a criminal organization, analogous to the mafia or a drug cartel, whose members are blindly loyal to their criminal bosses?



Heather Cox Richardson has announced a project which features stories about American people who made America what she is. This includes the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, the Constitutional Convention, Ruben Salazar, Yellowstone, the AIDS Quilt, the Acadians, the Erie Canal,; and the story of actress and dancer Rita Moreno. Check it out [250 to 250 - YouTube](#)

All the President's Thefts

All The President's Thefts

Trump reinforces the fact that he is the most corrupt president in American history

DAN RATHER AND TEAM STUDY

MAY 18



Credit: Getty Images

Donald Trump's gift of the American people is not an open secret. Actually, there is absolutely nothing secret about it. He is looting the country in plain sight, with nary a concern that he will be called out for it.

Why should he worry when he holds such sway over enough Republican members of Congress to give him a free pass? It's not even a Get Out of Jail Free card. It's a Do Whatever You Want While We Look the Other Way card.

cont'd next page

All the President's Thefts (cont'd)

The news Monday of his latest swindle may take a moment to sink in. But it details one of Trump's most audacious steals yet, and that is obviously saying a lot.

Among the many schemes to benefit himself, this ranks among the most harebrained and calls renewed attention to the fact that he is the most corrupt American president ever.

You may remember that Trump sued the Internal Revenue Service, an agency he controls, for \$10 billion. The suit alleged that the IRS did not do enough to prevent a contractor from downloading Trump's tax records and giving them to the media. Because of the disclosure, the suit claims, Trump and his family have suffered "reputational and financial harm," as well as "public embarrassment."

Apparently, they got over it. Early Monday morning, Trump's lawyers surprised Judge Kathleen M. Williams of Florida's Southern District by telling her the president was dropping the case.

Some thought he was doing so because of intense pushback on what may be the most galling lawsuit ever, or because of an outright con to create a fund of taxpayer money to compensate those who claim they were victims of President Biden's justice department.

Not two hours later, the Trump Department of Justice announced the creation of that exact fund, worth \$1.776 billion. Get it? 1776? Nothing like forking over nearly 2 billion taxpayer dollars to help us celebrate our nation's 250th birthday. Happy birthday, America! Now, open your wallets.

The money is nothing more than a slush fund to pay Trump's allies and acolytes, including the 1,600 people convicted of participating in the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, or anyone else deemed to have a qualifying complaint against Biden, and "to provide a systematic process to hear and redress claims of others who suffered weaponization and lawfare."

So, those who attacked the Capitol can now be paid for doing so. By you.

Here's the administration's rationale: "The machinery of government should never be weaponized against any American, and it is this department's intention to make right the

Cont'd next page

All the President's Thefts (cont'd)

wrongs that were previously done while ensuring this never happens again,” said Todd Blanche, the acting attorney general, with no apparent irony.

The fund, part of an interconnected web of corruption, will be overseen by a five-person commission appointed by the attorney general, which will have broad authority to funnel taxpayer dollars to friends of Trump. The commission will have virtually no oversight, except that Trump can remove members. We may never fully know who receives payments, or how much they get.

Trump's personal lawyers effectively performed an end run around the American justice system. By dropping the suit they keep Judge Williams from dismissing the case outright, which she was reportedly considering, or being able to approve (or not approve) a formal settlement.

In their filing, the lawyers said the dismissal meant that “no judicial analysis is appropriate” for the suit. In other words, no oversight.

Minutes after the announcement of the fund, 93 Democratic lawmakers filed court papers accusing the Department of Justice of colluding with Trump.

“Never in the history of the United States has a sitting president sought a monetary settlement from the government he leads — let alone sought many billions of dollars in taxpayer funds,” the lawmakers wrote in court documents. The filing is moot now that the suit has been dropped.

In an interview on ABC's “This Week,” Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD) called the fund “unconstitutional.”

“This, of course, is a political grievance fund that Donald Trump can use to pay off his friends. If these people have a valid cause of action, they should bring it to the court like every other American does, and use the system of due process, and proving things by clear and convincing evidence, or a preponderance of evidence, go and prove it. But the idea that Donald Trump can just pass it out like a pardon is absurd,” Raskin said.

Cont'd next page

All the President's Thefts (cont'd)

As is so often the case, this is not Trump's only egregious transgression of the past few days. On Friday, the president disclosed a flurry of personal stock trades made during the first quarter of 2026. His legally required financial filings revealed a whopping 3,700 trades totaling between \$220 and \$750 million. That's more than 40 trades a day during the first three months of the year.

"This is an insane amount of trades," Matthew Tuttle, chief executive officer of Tuttle Capital Management, told Bloomberg News. Tuttle said it looks more like the trading history of a hedge fund that buys and shorts stocks rather than a personal account.

The 2012 STOCK Act requires the president and members of Congress to disclose all commodity transactions. Because every other president who held securities since 2012 has put them in a blind trust, Trump is the first to trigger the requirement.

The reason presidents, other than Trump, put their holdings in a blind trust is because many public companies do business with the federal government. Most public officials, other than Trump, want to avoid conflicts of interest. Trump seems to embrace them, regularly mixing presidential duties with personal business.

Trump bought and sold stocks in dozens of companies he directly did business with as president, including Nvidia, Microsoft, Oracle, eBay, Uber, Meta, and Amazon.

Just last week, the Boeing CEO joined Trump on his trip to China, where President Xi Jinping agreed to buy 200 Boeing jets. His filings show Trump traded Boeing stock during the first quarter.

The disclosure forms showed six trades involving Intel, while the administration was working on an agreement to buy 10% of the company for \$9 billion.

Trump bought and sold Netflix, Paramount Skydance, and Warner Bros. Discovery stock as his Federal Communications Commission considered the purchase of Warner Bros. by the two media giants.

Once upon a time, a president would get in trouble for insider trading.

Cont'd next page

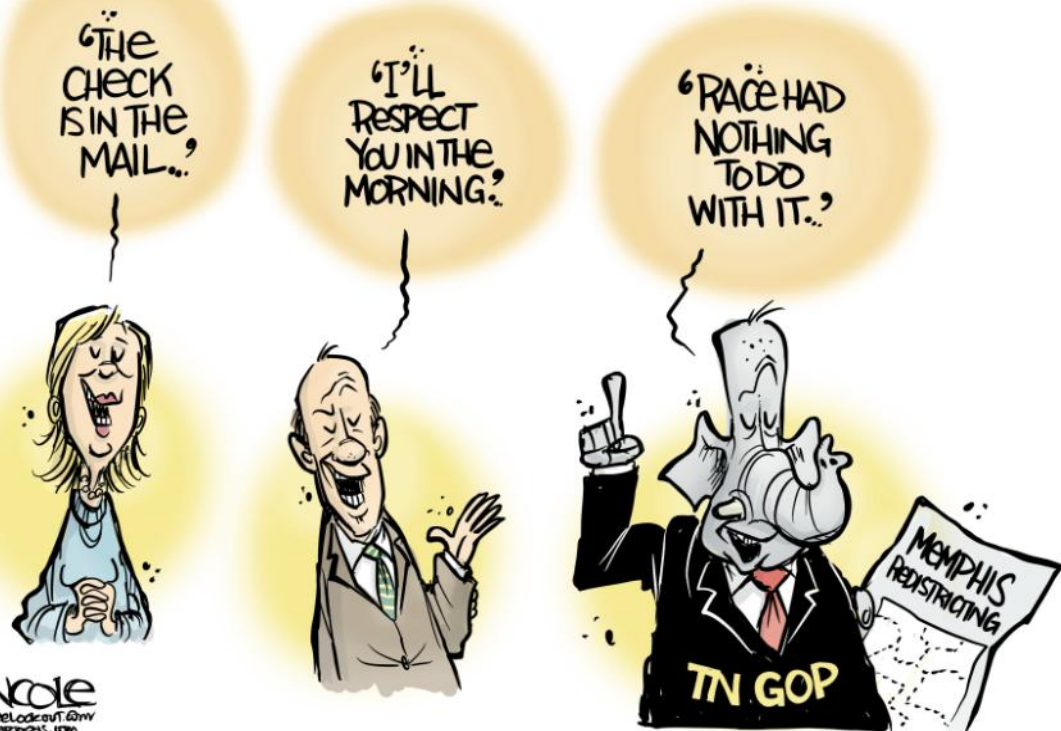
All the President's Thefts (cont'd)

Trump's capacity to misuse his office for personal gain is astounding and it is blatantly wrong. But it is not without consequences. *The New York Times* released a new poll Monday that shows that the president is vastly unpopular and that he is losing support, even from his base.

His approval rating has shrunk to a second term low of 37%, with 59% disapproval. Almost two-thirds of respondents believe he was wrong to attack Iran. And that number jumps to 75% among crucial independents. He is down on all metrics including his handling of the economy and the cost of living.

This is not the kind of poll Republicans want to see less than six months before the midterms. And Trump's continued grifting doesn't figure to help their cause, no matter how often they redraw the maps.

THE 3 BIGGEST LIES:



Trump is Leading the GOP Off a Cliff

Trump is Leading the GOP Off a Cliff

Members of Congress are pushing back against his latest scam

DAN RATHER AND TEAM STEADY

MAY 21



Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche was unable to quell Senators' concerns about the "anti-weaponization" fund. Credit: Getty Images

It is becoming increasingly clear even among Republicans that the president has lost interest in anything that doesn't make him and his family richer or inflate his ego. The Republican Party abandoned hope months ago that Trump would tout "affordability" as the party's message ahead of the midterms.

Cont'd next page

Leading the GOP Off a Cliff (cont'd)

His economic message was a non-starter after he dropped the first bomb on Iran. Since then, prices are heading in the opposite direction of his popularity. So, now Donald Trump spends his time and our money on retribution campaigns and glorification projects.

All of this is terrible for Trump's party, but it could be good for the country if his irresponsibility can be checked. In the meantime, my Steady friends, it's incredibly difficult to watch this never-ending train wreck.

The words "criminal enterprise" have crept into the presidential conversation for the first time since I covered Richard Nixon.

Monday's "settlement" between Trump and the Internal Revenue Service, creating a \$1.8 billion slush fund to reward the president's loyalists, was a startling low-point in a presidency swamped with low-points. Then Trump doubled down — down being the operative word.

On Tuesday, acting Attorney General Todd Blanche signed a "release of claims" form, an addendum to the original settlement creating the billion-dollar-plus fund to pay off the president's pawns, including January 6 insurrectionists, even the ones who pleaded guilty are eligible.

The one-page document, posted on the Department of Justice website, states that the IRS is "forever barred and precluded" from pursuing "examinations" of Trump, his family, and his businesses. It specified "tax returns filed before the effective date" of the settlement, which was Monday.

The IRS audit of Trump, which started years ago when he hosted "The Apprentice," will evaporate. Trump reportedly took the same losses twice and experts say he owes, with interest and penalties, more than \$100 million.

Blanche signed away the ability of any federal agency to investigate, audit, or sue Trump et al., in the future and for perpetuity. It amounts to unbridled corruption in the guise of preemptive exoneration.

Cont'd next page

Leading the GOP Off a Cliff (cont'd)

Trump effectively gave himself legal cover to never pay taxes again, since he cannot be audited. Remember those 3,700 stock trades he made during the first quarter of the year? He earned somewhere between \$220 and \$750 million dollars and is now free to pay zero taxes on those gains.

In true Trump style, this is uncharted tax territory. "I am unaware of a single precedent where the IRS has agreed in advance to permanently forgo examination of previously filed tax returns for a specific person or business," Danny Werfel, a recent IRS commissioner, told *Politico*.

Jennifer Ricketts, a former branch director at the IRS, told *The New York Times* that she had "never heard of the department ever being willing to grant blanket immunity. That seems blatantly corrupt. It's a shocking gift to the president."

Can this be legal? Likely not. According to Brandon DeBot, the director of the Tax Law Center Policy Director, the entire settlement is "a breathtaking abuse of the tax and legal system."

Under U.S. law the president and most of the executive branch cannot ask the IRS to end an investigation. Because it was the acting attorney general who signed the order, Trump's army of lawyers, both personal and governmental, will argue that they are on solid legal ground.

Blanche did not come up with this idea on his own. Trump was playing the long game. First, he brought a bad faith lawsuit against the IRS. Then, he had it dismissed before a judge could rule on its merits, so that he could negotiate a settlement that had nothing to do with the original suit.

The \$1.776 billion "anti-weaponization" fund also runs afoul of existing law. It violates a Trump administration directive put forward by former Attorney General Pam Bondi. It states that the government is prohibited from paying groups not involved in an underlying lawsuit.

The settlement has upended a lot of pieces on the political chess board.

Cont'd next page

Leading the GOP Off a Cliff (cont'd)

On Thursday afternoon, Senate Republicans canceled a planned vote on an immigration enforcement bill. It should have been a slam-dunk since it is filibuster-proof, and thus needs only 51 votes for passage. With Trump always unwilling to abandon his personal political agenda, in this case the slush fund, the Republican leadership decided to pause rather than lose.

A bipartisan effort is underway in the House to kill the fund. Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA.) and Tom Suozzi (D-NY) are drafting legislation, according to *Politico*. Fitzpatrick said his constituents “don’t want a DOJ slush fund that has not been described or explained to anybody.”

As one might imagine, the editorial board of *The New York Times* takes exception with Trump’s latest chicanery. Thursday’s headline read, “There Has Never Been an Example of Presidential Corruption Like This.”

More surprising was Republican operative Karl Rove’s *Wall Street Journal* editorial, where he wondered about Trump’s “\$1.8 billion slush fund that critics are concerned could go to Jan. 6 felons.” He argued that the only way Republicans can hold onto control of Congress is to rein in the president.

“The more undisciplined the White House messages on war and the economy, the more at risk GOP candidates will be. The more Mr. Trump thrusts himself into the campaign, the more damage he’ll do to Republicans and his own cause. The more he focuses on projects like his ‘world-class, beautiful ballroom’ or ‘Triumphal Arch,’ the more voters will conclude he’s unconcerned about them,” Rove wrote.

Rove is right, but no one in the current White House has the power or the guts to restrain their boss. The arch no one wants is inching closer to reality. On Thursday, the Trump-packed Commission of Fine Arts voted to approve the 250-foot arch that will block the intentionally unobstructed view of Arlington National Cemetery from the Lincoln Memorial. Several veterans are suing to stop construction.

Even though the \$1 billion line item for Trump’s ballroom has been removed from the immigration funding bill, construction of the building (that Trump promised was being paid for solely with private money) is ongoing.

Cont’d next page

Leading the GOP Off a Cliff (cont'd)

The nonpartisan parliamentarian of the Senate ruled that ballroom funding could not be included in a reconciliation bill, though Republicans reportedly didn't have the votes anyway. For the rest of the year, the Senate is going to be a hard place for Trump to get his unpopular measures passed.

Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC) is retiring and has been no friend of Trump. Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) lost his primary this week, after Trump backed his opponent. Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) may lose his primary next week since Trump endorsed his MAGA extremist challenger. And then there are all the incumbents in close races who need to distance themselves from the increasingly unpopular president. (see Rove above)

The absurdity of Trump giving himself a free pass from investigation by any federal agency should not be ignored or minimized. But Trump's corruption is not wholly unchecked .

The courts, especially the Supreme Court, and both Houses of Congress have the power to at least slow him, if not stop him. But only if they have the courage to do so. Down the road, impeachment and conviction could become a factor, but we're a long way from that.

All of which brings us to the fact that the final deciders are we the people and our votes.



The Great Society

The Great Society

HEATHER COX RICHARDSON

MAY 23

On May 22, 1964, in a graduation speech at the University of Michigan, President Lyndon Johnson put a name to a new vision for the United States. He called it “the Great Society” and laid out the vision of a country that did not confine itself to making money, but rather used its post–World War II prosperity to “enrich and elevate our national life.” That Great Society would demand an end to poverty and racial injustice.

But it would do more than that, he promised: it would enable every child to learn and grow, and it would create a society where people would use their leisure time to build and reflect, where cities would not just answer physical needs and the demands of commerce, but would also serve “the desire for beauty and the hunger for community.” It would protect the natural world and would be “a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods.”

“But most of all,” he said, it would look forward. “[T]he Great Society is not a safe harbor, a resting place, a final objective, a finished work. It is a challenge constantly renewed, beckoning us toward a destiny where the meaning of our lives matches the marvelous products of our labor.”

Johnson proposed rebuilding the cities, protecting the countryside, and investing in education to set “every young mind...free to scan the farthest reaches of thought and imagination.” He admitted that the government did not have the answers to addressing all of the problems in the country. “But I do promise this,” he said. “We are going to assemble the best thought and the broadest knowledge from all over the world to find those answers for America. I intend to establish working groups to prepare a series of White House conferences and meetings—on the cities, on natural beauty, on the quality of education, and on other emerging challenges. And from these meetings and from this inspiration and from these studies we will begin to set our course toward the Great Society.”

Cont’d next page

The Great Society

Johnson's vision of a Great Society came from a very different place than the reworking of society launched by his predecessor Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s. Roosevelt's New Deal had used the federal government to address the greatest economic crisis in U.S. history, leveling the playing field between workers and employers to enable workingmen to support their families. Johnson, in contrast, was operating in a country that was enjoying record growth. Far from simply saving the country, he could afford to direct it toward greater things.

Immediately, the administration turned to addressing issues of civil rights and poverty. Under Johnson's pressure, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibiting voting, employment, or educational discrimination based on race, religion, sex, or national origin. Johnson also won passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which created an Office of Economic Opportunity that would oversee a whole series of antipoverty programs, and of the Food Stamp Act, which helped people who didn't make a lot of money buy food.

When Republicans ran Arizona senator Barry Goldwater for president in 1964, calling for rolling back business regulation and civil rights to the years before the New Deal, voters who quite liked the new system gave Democrats such a strong majority in Congress that Johnson and the Democrats were able to pass 84 new laws to put the Great Society into place.

They cemented civil rights with the 1965 Voting Rights Act protecting minority voting, created jobs in Appalachia, and established job-training and community development programs. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 gave federal aid to public schools and established the Head Start program to provide comprehensive early education for low-income children. The Higher Education Act of 1965 increased federal investment in universities and provided scholarships and low-interest loans to students.

The Social Security Act of 1965 created Medicare, which provided health insurance for Americans over 65, and Medicaid, which helped cover healthcare costs for folks with limited incomes. Congress advanced the war on poverty by increasing welfare payments and subsidizing rent for low-income families.

Cont'd next page

The Great Society

Congress took on the rights of consumers with new protective legislation that required cigarettes and other dangerous products to carry warning labels, required products to carry labels identifying the manufacturer, and required lenders to disclose the full cost of finance charges in loans. Congress also passed legislation protecting the environment, including the Water Quality Act of 1965 that established federal standards for water quality.

But the government did not simply address poverty. Congress also spoke to Johnson's aspirations for beauty and purpose when it created the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities. This law created both the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities to make sure the era's emphasis on science didn't endanger the humanities. In 1967 it would also establish the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, followed in 1969 by National Public Radio.

"For better or worse," Johnson told the University of Michigan graduates in 1964, "your generation has been appointed by history to deal with those problems and to lead America toward a new age. You have the chance never before afforded to any people in any age. You can help build a society where the demands of morality, and the needs of the spirit, can be realized in the life of the Nation.

"So, will you join in the battle to give every citizen the full equality which God enjoins and the law requires, whatever his belief, or race, or the color of his skin?" he asked.

"Will you join in the battle to give every citizen an escape from the crushing weight of poverty?..."

"There are those timid souls who say this battle cannot be won; that we are condemned to a soulless wealth. I do not agree. We have the power to shape the civilization that we want. But we need your will, your labor, your hearts, if we are to build that kind of society."



If you missed Jerry Henige's presentation about the **Democratic Party Organization in Pennsylvania**, you can find it here:

[file:///C:/Users/rossf/Downloads/The%20Structure%20Of%20The%20Pennsylvania%20Democratic%20Party%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/rossf/Downloads/The%20Structure%20Of%20The%20Pennsylvania%20Democratic%20Party%20(1).pdf)

Coming Events

Understanding Our Democracy Series

Tuesday, June 16, 2026 1:00 - 2:30 pm

“Democracy for Sale? How Citizens Can Fight Back”

led by Nancy Morgan and Jeff Keyser

Are billionaires drowning out the voices of everyday voters? What can we do about it? Join us for an eye-opening and action-oriented discussion on the role of money in politics—and how you can be part of the solution. This event will explore how we got to this moment and what’s at stake for our rights as citizens and our future.

Events will be in the Cultural Center Education Room

Dems Club General Meeting

Tuesday, June 30th 1:00 – 2:00 pm

Fair Districts with Tony Crocamo and Cindy Davidson

Tuesday, August 25 1:00 – 2:00 pm

Jess Branas

Democratic Candidate for PA 197th House District

Tuesday, September 29th 1:00 – 2:00 pm

Nancy Mannion

Democratic Candidate for US Congress

Events will be held in the Cultural Center Education Room

Dems Club Field Trips

Lancaster Food Hub

Wednesdays July 15 am & 29 pm (duplicate events)

Check your email mid June for registration details.

Meeting Minutes

Democratic Club of Willow Valley General Meeting May 26, 2026

Education Chair Jerry Henige opened the meeting at 1 p.m. with an informative talk on the **Structure of the Pennsylvania Democratic Party**. He began at the local level and carried through to the national.

Committee persons (CP)

Locally elected officials act as a direct link to community and serve a four-year term. They are elected in the primary of the year of the Governor's election.

Each voting precinct has up to two officials.

Their duties include distribution of literature, canvassing for candidates, advocacy for important issues, Get Out The Vote efforts, and organizing greeters for Election Day coverage.

Newly elected CPs: Locust-Susan Highfield re-elected, Ross Fairweather. Lakes – Jerry Henige re-elected.

Districts (next level above precincts)

Lancaster County districts (16 in number) are determined by the school districts they are in.

Willow Valley is part of Lampeter-Strasburg District (L-S Dems) with 10 precincts within the district: 7 in West Lampeter, 2 in Strasburg Boro, one in Strasburg Township.

District leaders (chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer) are elected by CPs.

District responsibilities include raising funds, supporting candidate campaigns, recruitment of local candidates, among others.

County Parties

The Lancaster County Democratic Committee (LCDC), made up of the 16 districts, has seven subcommittees focused on administration and 10 caucuses which focus on advocacy and constituencies.

County-level organizations coordinate grass roots efforts, raise funds, and recruit local candidates.

Cont'd next page

Meeting Minutes

PA Democratic State Committee (PADSC)

This group meets three times a year and is made up of elected officials at the county level. The number of each is determined by its share of registered Democrats in PA. Lancaster has 7 members.

PADSC steers the direction of the party, organizes Democrats across the ballot, holds nominating conventions, and passes and promotes the party platform.

Current state party officers are Chair Eugene Depasquale, Vice-Chair Peggy Grove, Treasurer Scott Conklin.

PADSC is made up of eight regional councils. Lancaster is part of the Southeast Caucus.

Democratic National Committee (DNC)

Members are elected by the PASDC to represent Pennsylvania on the DNC.

They help shape national platform and select dates for Presidential primary events.

The party elections in 2026 run from May 19 primary though July when leaders of each organization are elected.

Democratic Club of Willow Valley (former name WV Dems Plus) was founded in 2010 by Jen Porter. She sought official WV approval of a Democratic Club on campus as there was already a Republican Club. DCWV is not an official party organization but works alongside local L-S Dems with overlap in effort to increase Democratic presence. Its impact was felt in the May 19 primary as Jerry reported. Voter turnout across the county was 25%, but Locust precinct had 45% and Lakes 55%.

Following his informative talk, Jerry opened the floor to Q&A. Questions asked:

- relationship between local and state Democratic organizations
- Chester County's turn from red to blue in 2018 and how to repeat in Lancaster
- acquirement of funds for operations among the different levels in the party
- role of the party in security of elections.

Cont'd next page

Meeting Minutes

Business Meeting

Treasury: balance is \$8,464.87.

Expenses were \$1,000 each for candidates Mannion, Branas, Stelson

Membership: 220

Dues: \$5150.00

Donations: \$2445.00

Scholarship: Two Lampeter-Strasburg High School students were awarded \$1,000 each

Audrey Wieand – community service winner

Brooke Hess – technical school winner

Advocacy: Barbara Bonanno has committed to 1,000 post cards for Nancy Mannion and will need volunteers. She will organize a list of those interested and begin scheduling dates.

May 19 Primary results: Democratic candidates moved on:

Josh Shapiro and Austin Davis (Governor and Lt. Governor)

Nancy Mannion (11th Congressional District) cut Smucker's 2024 margin in half

Jess Branas (PA #97) cut Mentzer's 2024 margin by $\frac{3}{4}$.

Locust: Susan Highfield re-elected and Ross Fairweather elected as write in

Lakes: Jerry Henige re-elected

Ross thanked those who served as greeters at the polls with a list of those who volunteered.

Upcoming Events

Understanding Our Democracy: Tuesdays 1 p.m., Education Room

June 16 "Democracy for Sale?

How Citizens Can Fight Back" with Nancy Morgan and Jeff Keyser

July 21 Nancy Mannion will discuss the consequences of the over \$500 billion in cuts to Medicare forced by the Republican 2025

Billionaire Tax Cuts

General Meetings: Tuesdays, 1 p.m. Education Room

June 30 Fair Districts with Tony Crocarno and Cindy Davidson

August 25 Jess Branas

Sept. 29 Nancy Mannion

Lucy Painter
Secretary