

Community Matters

*A Voice of, by, and for the People
of Delaware, Ohio*

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Send info, articles, questions & comments to
delawarecommunitymatters@gmail.com

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CALENDAR OF LOCAL EVENTS

Outdoor Siren Test (1/2)

The Delaware County Emergency Management tests its outdoor warning sirens on the first Wednesday of each month, at 12:01 pm. This is only a test.

Noontime Organ Recital Series (1/3)

Asbury United Methodist Church at 55 W. Lincoln Ave. will continue its First Thursday Noontime Recital Series through May 2. Dr. Jason Keefer from the Pontifical College Josephinum will be the soloist on Thurs., Jan. 3 (12:15-12:45 pm). Free & open to the public. Coffee & tea are provided.

First Friday: "Fire and Ice" (1/4)

The theme for January's First Friday event is "Fire and Ice." Join the fun on Fri., Jan., 4 (6-8 pm). Fire barrels and an ice sculptor will be downtown for your enjoyment. Businesses will be offering free events, samples, shows, make-and-take crafts, entertainment, and more.



Art Exhibit "Glitz and Glamour" (1/4 – 2/16)

"Glitz and Glamour" is an art exhibit by Columbus resident Brenda Lee Churchill. It can be viewed at Gallery 22 (22 E. Winter St.) from Jan. 4 through Feb. 16. Opening reception is Fri., Jan. 4 (6-8:30 pm). Refreshments will be served. Regular gallery hours are Fri. &

Sat., 6-8:30 pm. To learn more about "Blee Churchill" and see samples of her work, visit www.brendachurchillart.com.

"Steps to Sustainability" Workshop (1/6)

Preservation Parks of Delaware County is offering a free "Steps to Sustainability" workshop on Sun., Jan. 6 (1 pm) at Shale Hollow Park, 6320 Artesian Run in Lewis Center, on the west side of US 23 S. The workshop teaches parents & children to identify environmentally friendly food products and other items. Small changes at home can have a positive impact. Participants will receive a tool kit to take home. For ages 10 and up. Registration is required by Jan. 1. Visit www.preservationparks.com, go to "Programs," click on the Jan. 6 calendar day, and follow the RSVP instructions there. Free & open to the public.

School Begins (1/7)

The first day of classes at the Delaware City Schools is Mon., Jan. 7. The last day of classes is Wed., May 29. Spring break is from March 25-29.

Olentangy Watershed Alliance (1/8)

OWA's mission statement is "to inspire appreciation and stewardship of the Upper Olentangy River and its watershed." The next monthly meeting is Tues., Jan. 8 (10 am – 12 pm) at Delaware's Waste Water Treatment Plant (225 Cherry St.). The meetings are open to the public. Annual dues are \$20 (\$10 for seniors, \$5 for students). For more info, contact Caroline Cicerchi (Delaware's Watershed / Sustainability Coordinator) at ccicerchi@delawareohio.net.

Daddy-Daughter Dance (1/11)

The City of Delaware and the YMCA invite you to the 2019 Daddy-Daughter Dance, held Fri., Jan. 11 (6:30-8:30 pm) at OWU's HWCC Campus Center. The recommended age is 4-13. An Ice Cream Bar will be available at 6:30 pm, followed by games & dancing. A professional digital photo is included in the price. Formal dress is encouraged. New DJ this year! The popular event may sell out, so register soon. The cost is \$25 for the couple, \$10 for each additional daughter. There is a \$5 late fee after Jan. 1. To register, visit the YMCA's Welcome Center or <https://goo.gl/em8KZ4> online. (The YMCA provides financial assistance for adults & families who cannot afford the full cost of a program. Supporting documentation to verify household size, income & any special circumstances is required.)

"Wandering Ohio" (1/13)

It took Chuck & Beth Hewett 76 days to hike the 1,444-mile-long Buckeye Trail around Ohio, and they lived to write a book about it – "Wandering Ohio: A Buckeye Trail Thru-Hike" (2017). On Sun., Jan. 13 (2 pm), you have a chance to meet & greet the authors at Preservation Parks' Shale Hollow Park (6320 Artesian Run, Lewis Center, just off US 23 S.). Their book will be available for purchase.

OWU Spring Semester Begins (1/16)

The first day of classes at Ohio Wesleyan University is Wed., Jan. 16. The last day of classes is Tues., April 30. Spring break is from March 9-13.

Progressive Dinner Event (1/16) – \$

The public is invited to join Main Street Delaware on Wed., Jan. 16 (6-8:30 pm) for its 3rd annual Kick-Off Dinner. This year's event features a progressive dinner with 30-minute stops at 5 of downtown Delaware's finest restaurants. The event will also incorporate Main Street Delaware's annual meeting. Ticketholders will begin with appetizers at the Oak & Brazen Wine Co., 38 E. Winter St., and end at the newest downtown establishment, Gather, at 53 N. Sandusky St., where the annual meeting will begin at 8 p.m. The meeting will include updates, recognitions & a vote on candidates to join Main Street Delaware's Board of Directors. Tickets are limited to 75 participants and may be purchased in any of the following combinations: individual tickets – \$30, pair of tickets – \$55, 4 tickets – \$110. To purchase tickets, visit www.mainstreetdelaware.com.

"The Annual State of the City" (1/17) – \$

Delaware City Mayor Carolyn Kay Riggle and City Manager Tom Homan will present "The Annual State of the City" address on

Thurs., Jan. 17 (11:45 am – 1 pm) at SourcePoint, 800 Cheshire Rd. The event is sponsored by the Delaware Area Chamber of Commerce. Tickets are \$25 (\$20 for Chamber members) and include a buffet lunch.

"Community Matters" has requested for years that a no-lunch option be added to permit residents to hear the annual talk by these public officials (both paid by taxpayer money) for free. Unfortunately, pay-to-play politics continues to be the norm in "Dollarware."

Historical Society Presentation (1/17)

Stacey Halfmoon, Director of American-Indian Relations at the Ohio History Connection, will present a program on "American Indians – Then and Now" on Thurs., Jan. 17 (7 pm). Due to construction work occurring at the Barn at Stratford, the first three community programs this year will be held at William Street UMC at 28 W. William St. Free & open to the public.

Democratic Party Meets (1/17)

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Delaware County Democratic Party is Thurs., Jan. 17 (7:30 pm) at 212 Willis Education Center, 74 W. William St. The meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month are open to the public.

Central Ohio Communities Project Meets (1/17)

The Central Ohio Community Project (COCP) and Sustainable Delaware Ohio (SDO) have a workshop meeting on Thurs., Jan. 17 (7:30 pm), at the Andrews House, 39 W. William St. COCP has been working on ideas and an action plan to make Delaware a resilient "Transition Town" free of fossil fuels and ready to face the consequences of climate change. The meeting's focus will be on green corridors in the nation, incl. the envisioned Delaware Run Greenway. To learn more, please contact Terry Hermsen (thermsen@otterbein.edu). Free & open to the public.

High School Band Festival (1/19)

The 55th annual OWU President's High School Band Festival features high school musicians from around Central Ohio & OWU's Symphonic Wind Ensemble, conducted by OWU music professor Larry Griffin. The concert will be held Sat., Jan. 19 (7-9 pm) in Gray Chapel inside University Hall, 61 S. Sandusky St. Free & open to the public.

"We Are Women" Concert (1/20)

"We Are Women" is a faculty / guest recital on Sun., Jan. 20 (3:15 pm) at Jemison Auditorium inside Sanborn Hall, 23 Elizabeth St. Ensemble members are Jennifer Whitehead (soprano), Carolyn Redman (mezzo soprano) & Mariko Kaneda (piano). Radio personality Christopher Purdy from WOSU in Columbus will be the narrator. (This event was originally planned for fall 2018, but was rescheduled.)



Martin Luther King Breakfast (1/21)

The 26th annual MLK Celebration Annual Breakfast will be held Mon., Jan. 21 (8:30-9:30 am) in the Benes Rooms of OWU's HWCC Campus Center. The breakfast buffet will open at 7:45 am. The invited guest speaker is Bishop Tracy S. Malone, Ph.D., of the East Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. Individual tickets are \$25, table settings for 8 are \$175. Proceeds help fund scholarships for Delaware County students. For inquiries & tickets, please contact Sharon Hayes (sehaves@owu.edu, 740-368-3083) at OWU's Chaplain's Office. Tickets can also be purchased through Eventbrite (www.eventbrite.com).

Ribbon-Cutting at COhatch (1/21)

The Chamber of Commerce has announced that Mon., Jan. 21 (4 pm) is the official ribbon-cutting at the latest COhatch franchise, called "The Newsstand," at 18 E. William St. To learn more about the

services COhatch offers in 6 Central Ohio locations, visit www.cohatch.com.

Full Moon (1/21)

The full moon can be admired on Mon., Jan. 21. Free & open to the public.

Ross Art Museum (1/22 – 3/31)

OWU's Ross Art Museum at 50 S. Sandusky St. presents its first exhibit featuring works exclusively by African-American artists and artists of the African diaspora, entitled "Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow." An opening reception will be held on Sun., Jan. 27 (2-4 pm) at the museum. The exhibit is curated by Bettye Stull, an expert in African-American art and longtime curator for the King Arts Complex. The show can be seen from Jan. 22 through March 31. During the school year, the Ross is open Tues., Wed., Thurs. & Fri. from 10 am to 5 pm (until 9 pm on Thursdays). It is open Sundays from 1-5 pm. The museum is handicap-accessible, and admission is always free.

DCDL Author Visit: Laura Kamoie (1/24)

"Hamilton: The Musical" is coming to Columbus in February. In conjunction with the event, bestselling author Laura Kamoie will speak on Thurs., Jan. 24 (7 pm) at DCDL's Orange Branch Library (7171 Gooding Blvd.) about the history and writing of her new novel "My Dear Hamilton: A Novel about Eliza Schuyler Hamilton," co-written with Stephanie Dray. Kamoie specializes in historical fiction, based on contemporaneous documents. Q&A and a book signing will follow. Books will be available for sale that evening. Tickets are on sale at Eventbrite (www.eventbrite.com).

"The Central Park Five" (1/30)

Author & filmmaker Sarah Burns will screen and discuss "The Central Park Five" on Wed., Jan. 30 (7:30 pm) in Gray Chapel inside University Hall, 61 S. Sandusky St. It is a documentary about the 1989 Central Park jogger case in which 5 black teenagers were coerced into confession and wrongfully convicted of raping a woman. They spent between 6 and 13 years in prison before a serial rapist confessed. Burns directed "The Central Park Five" with her father, acclaimed filmmaker Ken Burns, and she wrote a book of the same name. Her 3-hour screening represents OWU's 2019 Butler A. Jones Lecture on Race and Society. Free & open to the public.

"Transition 2.0" at Andrews House (2/1)

Delaware Unitarian Universalist Fellowship will show the documentary "Transition 2.0" on Fri., Feb. 1 (7:30 pm), at the Andrews House, 39 W. Winter St. Free & open to the public. – DUUF will continue the conversation on Sun., Feb. 3 (10-11 am), as part of their Sunday church service at 190 W. Winter St.

Central Ohio Communities Project Holds Second Summit (2/2)

Central Ohio Communities Project (COCP) and Sustainable Delaware Ohio (SDO) are holding a second working summit on Sat., Feb. 2 (9 am – 4 pm) at Stratford Ecological Center, 3083 Liberty Rd. A dozen task forces will meet to draft a local climate-action plan, "Dreaming a Greener Delaware." The hope is to make Delaware a resilient "Transition Town" free of fossil fuels and ready to face the consequences of climate change. To learn more, contact Terry Hermsen (thermsen@otterbein.edu). Free & open to the public. Attendees are encouraged to bring a potluck dish to share.

OEFFA Conference in Dayton (2/14-16)

Registration is now open for the 40th annual OEFFA conference on Feb. 14-16 at the Dayton Conference Center, 22 E. 5th St. OEFFA is the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association. To learn more, visit www.oeffa.org.

"Great Decisions" Lecture Series Starts 2/22

People have inquired about the start of the next "Great Decisions" lecture series. According to Corinne Lyman, retired professor of politics & government at OWU, this year's start is Fri., Feb. 22. Speakers are lined up, and a poster will be available soon. "Great Decisions" explores topics of national and international importance. The weekly brown-bag events take place every Friday (12-

1 pm) at William Street UMC at 28 W. William St. They are free & open to the public. Coffee & tea are always provided.

UPCOMING EVENTS IN 2019

- Earth Day, Mon., April 22
- Rugged Maniac, Sat., May 11
- Arts Festival, May 18-19
- Northern Olentangy Watershed Festival, Sat., June 22
- Symphony Concert & Fireworks, Thurs., July 4
- Ironman, Sat., July 28
- Delaware County Fair, Sept. 14-21
- Election Day, Tues., Nov. 5

CITY OF DELAWARE

Turning Point Meets Financial Goal

Turning Point, the Delaware Shelter for victims of domestic violence, has announced that it has met its \$3.2 million goal and that it is "ready to open." Thanks to generous donors, Turning Point was able to make the necessary renovations to the existing buildings at 500 N. Liberty St. The improvements include a lot of safety and security measures. The 7.5-acre site is gated, cameras monitor the grounds, and all doors and windows have alarms. There is only one entrance to the shelter, which means that a connector had to be built to link the two primary buildings.

The City of Delaware in January

City Council meets Mon., Jan. 14 and 28 (7 pm). The 1/14 meeting includes public hearings for the proposed Fahey Bank at 75 W. William St. & the Blue Sky Car Wash, part of the Coughlin's Crossing Development on US 23 S. Additional meetings include the Sister City Advisory Board (Tues., Jan. 8, 6 pm), Civil Service (Wed., Jan. 9, 3 pm), Board of Zoning Appeals (Wed., Jan. 9, 6:30 pm), Parks & Recreation (Tues., Jan. 15, 6:30 pm), the Planning Commission (Wed., Jan. 16, 6:30 pm), the Airport Commission (Thurs., Jan. 17, 6:30 pm), the Historic Preservation Commission (Wed., Jan. 23, 7 pm), and the YMCA Advisory Board (Thurs., Jan. 24, 6 pm, YMCA / Delaware Community Center, 1121 S. Houk Rd.). Meetings will take place at City Hall, 1 S. Sandusky St., except as noted.

New Meeting Times for Commissions & Boards

Mayor Riggie has announced that beginning Jan. 1 the following 6 city commissions and boards will start at 6:30 pm instead of 7 pm: Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, Airport Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, Shade Tree Commission, and Parks & Recreation. The change is the result of a survey conducted last summer and was triggered in part by the fact that meetings can last hours. The city also says the earlier start will help reduce staff hours. Some exceptions apply. The following commissions and boards meet at 6 pm: Public Works / Utilities, Parking & Safety, and the Sister City Advisory Board. The Civil Service Commission continues to meet at 3 pm. Other committees will meet as necessary. All meetings are open to the public and are also streamed live on the city's website (www.delawareohio.net).

City Council Approves 2019 Budget

On Dec. 20, City Council approved the 2019 budget. The City's general fund includes almost \$24 million, with the largest portion (\$9.1 million or 38%) going to the police dept. The fire and EMS operations fund (\$11.2 million) are financed by a levy and not part of the general fund. Total appropriations for 2019 total nearly \$119.7 million and also include water, sewer, refuse, capital improvements, road construction, and self insurance. The budget passed with a vote of 5 to 2. Council members Lisa Keller and Chris Jones expressed some unease over the optics of a budget that does not appear to be balanced on the surface. On paper, expenditures are exceeding revenues by \$250,000. However, City Manager Tom Homan and Finance Director Dean Stelzer pointed out that the budget is indeed balanced when factoring in reserves and carry-over funds. There is no question that the City's revenue streams are robust, with plenty of

safety mechanisms built in. However, Lisa Keller also has a point when she says that for the past decade building "a balanced budget" has been a point of pride for the city. "Why can't we now?" – Detailed info on the City's Delaware's 2019 budget is available on the website (www.delawareohio.net) under "City Hall."

Pay Raise for City Council Members

At the Dec. 20 meeting, City Council gave itself a pay raise, effective Jan. 1, 2020. Salaries were last adjusted in 2016. Effective Jan. 1, 2020, the salary of each member of City Council will be \$10,000 per year, up from currently \$8,260 (an increase of 12.1%). The mayor will receive a salary of \$11,500 per year, up from currently \$8,760 (an increase of 13.1%). Council member George Hellinger voted against the increase from currently \$8,500 to \$10,000. Council members receive their salaries in biweekly installments. – According to a 2018 MORPC salary survey, the City of Delaware pays its council members less than average. Low salaries increase the potential for financial vulnerability of officials and may make them more susceptible to bribes and campaign contributors from lobbyists, so we should not begrudge them their latest salary increase.

Strained Partnership with YMCA

The partnership between the City of Delaware and the local YMCA branch, housed in the city-owned Delaware Community Center at 1121 S. Houk Rd., is under "some strain." At the Dec. 20 meeting a member of the public read a prepared statement in which she outlined several concerns with the YMCA management, specifically with the Swim Team. They included lack of communication, poor financial accountability, missing funds, strong-arm tactics, excessive fee increases of more than 100%, personnel issues, lack of oversight & leadership, professional misconduct, fear of retaliation, and more. Her remarks raised some uncomfortable questions: Is the Y "meeting expectations"? Is it operating in the best interests of the local community? City Council and City Manager Tom Homan were already aware of some of these issues and already had meetings. They are hopeful that the existing challenges will be addressed and resolved by the new Interim President and COO of YMCA Central Ohio, Kim Jordan.

The Building Industry Association and the City

On Dec. 10, Executive Director Jon Melchi of the Building Industry Association (BIA) of Central Ohio personally came to Delaware to speak at City Council on behalf of his organization. This was the first time he had done so. In his prepared remarks, Melchi (pronounced "Melk-eye") spoke in support of Ordinance 18-114, an ordinance to amend the schedule of fees and service charges for developers. He added, "we appreciate our opportunity over the past year to work with the city administration to bring the ordinance to Council."

The BIA approached the City of Delaware a while back to discuss topics that were near and dear to the heart of the industry lobby group. City staff was "amenable," to use the Planning Director's term, and went out of its way to accommodate the BIA's demands. None of the multiple and wide-ranging meetings were public. They were closed even to the members of the City's various commissions and boards. The full scope of the concessions made by City staff remains unclear, but that a culture of deference exists is undeniable.

There is of course nothing wrong with having an on-going dialogue with important stakeholders such as the BIA. However, it is the considered position of "Community Matters" that the BIA is currently exerting an outsized and pernicious influence on the City of Delaware. For example, the BIA Build PAC, chaired by Ron Sabatino, has made generous campaign contributions to several members of City Council. None of them have ever recused themselves when asked to make decisions that benefit their donors. As reported last summer, the BIA's webpage proudly and shamelessly states, "in recent elections, we have successfully supported winning candidates for county commissioner, township trustees and city councils." The result is a city administration that prioritizes the narrow needs of developers over the broad needs of city residents.

BIA Report Warns of Housing Shortage

A study commissioned by the BIA of Central Ohio has found that the region is not building anywhere near enough housing at all price points and for all communities, incl. affordable housing. To meet

the projected demand, permitting activity would have to double or triple over the next decades. Compared to similar metropolitan areas (e.g., Austin, Charlotte, or Nashville), Central Ohio is severely “underbuilding” relative to demand. The BIA has long noted its concerns about labor shortages, material inflation, and regulatory costs. However, in the view of Jon Melchi and Robert Schottenstein the biggest culprit is density requirements – how many homes and apartments can be built on one acre. In an op-ed piece published in the Columbus Dispatch on Dec. 24, Melchi says cumbersome “local regulatory barriers are making it nearly impossible to produce the level of housing needed to meet demand.” Many of the required construction and design guidelines have “little or no value to the homebuyer,” but add to the cost. Generally speaking, the BIA wants a rollback on rules and regulations that, in the organization’s view, serve no purpose and are inconvenient & expensive. Melchi also complained about “a tax structure that leads communities to prioritize commercial activity over residential building.”

The problem of density has been an on-going conversation at Delaware City Council. It has come up throughout the 2018 calendar year. City Council members favor lower density over higher density, single-family homes over multi-family apartment complexes, and urban sprawl (building out) over vertical construction (building up). However, the fact is that Delaware is a rapidly growing city, and more density within its core is the unavoidable consequence of urbanization. At the same time, there is a growing demand for affordable apartment-living among millennials, empty-nesters, and low-and-moderate-income (LMI) folks. Many cannot afford the \$200,000, \$300,000, \$400,000, and now \$500,000 homes that are built on the outskirts. In 2019, the City should start a conversation about what the desirable density is. The next Comprehensive Plan should also address the issue head-on in a deliberative fashion.

The BIA is generally correct in its assessment. However, it must be noted that it too is part of the problem and thus of the solution. For example, it should pay more attention to the restoration and modernization of existing housing stock. Too many homes are being dismembered and demolished instead of being restored and rehabilitated. Another solution would be a mandate that sets aside of a certain guaranteed percentage of houses and apartments for LMI folks – be it 10% or 20%. Too many people are currently priced out of the housing market, in part because the BIA does not prioritize the principle of affordable housing.

City-County Mergers

Here is a radical idea for the City of Delaware and Delaware County. Many municipalities around the U.S. have explored combining their city and county governments, a number of them have voted on it, and a handful of them have enacted legislation to this effect. Prominent examples are Baltimore, Indianapolis, Jacksonville, Kansas City, Lexington, Louisville, Nashville, New Orleans, and New York City. Efforts failed in Buffalo, Cleveland, Memphis, and Pittsburgh, among other cities. In fact, over the years there have been more defeats than victories. On the other hand, no consolidated government has ever divorced. – Consolidating city and county into a single entity allowed Louisville (2003) and Nashville (1962), for example, to work together rather than at cross-purposes, helped save enormous amounts of money, removed existing inequities, and allowed substantial growth. City-county mergers make most sense in areas where the city population constitutes the majority of the county population, e.g., Columbus and Franklin County. That is not the case in Delaware County where the city stands at 40,000 and the county at 200,000. Consolidations are hard to pull off because somebody has to give up sovereignty and power. Barring calamitous circumstances or a mandate from above, it is unlikely that Delaware will ever see such a merger. However, it is not an idea that should be dismissed out of hand.

Man Crushed to Death at Liberty Casting

Early Friday morning, Dec. 28, a 72-year-old man was killed in an industrial accident at Liberty Casting, 550 Liberty Road in Delaware. Michael D. Crow was a resident of Baltimore, Ohio in Fairfield County. He was crushed by a large piece of equipment and was pronounced dead at the scene.

Delaware police says it was “a tragic accident.” That’s probably police talk for saying that foul play is not suspected, not that

the homicide was beyond human control. The fact is that Liberty Casting has an abysmal safety and environmental record. Over the years there have been numerous violations against OSHA and OEPA regulations, resulting in penalties and fines. It was last August when 5 workers suffered severe burns as the result of an explosion at the plant; 4 of them needed to be hospitalized. The Ohio Occupational Safety and Health Administration is investigating the latest incident, which no doubt will result in another hefty fine.

It seems, however, that Liberty Casting is unable to change its culture on its own. It has operated this way for decades with impunity, fines being the cost of doing business for them. The Chamber of Commerce even gave them an award a while back. The City of Delaware also maintains that Liberty Casting is “a good employer.” For others, the private company, owned by C. Frank DeMeo, is a poster child of corporate malevolence.

*there is a plant in dollarware
that causes much pollution
and the powers that be in the city and state
are part of the collusion*

*the stench gives people big headaches
makes them dizzy sick and nauseous
some throw up or wear masks outside
they’ve learned to be quite cautious*

*explosions are a common thing
workers are severely burned
one old man was just crushed to death
through newspapers we learned*

*city council has not interest
in clean air and worker’s health
the chamber of commerce is also besotted
with steady growth and wealth*

*frank demeo is the owner
of dollarware’s casting plant
he likes to keep his name a secret
to him we dedicate this chant*



SDO Tours Renergy

Members of Sustainable Delaware Ohio recently visited the Renergy biodigester north of Ashley in Delaware County (461 Ohio Rt. 61, Marengo, OH 43334). The farm is owned by the Ringler family, hence the term “Renergy.” The tour was organized by Jim Titus, a retired employee from Delaware’s Wastewater Treatment plant. Delaware’s Watershed and Sustainability Coordinator Caroline Cicerchi was also part of the group. The guests were greeted by Ashleigh Lemon, Communications & Sustainability Specialist, and Rich Oberfield who explained the technical side of the operation.

Generally speaking, an anaerobic biodigester diverts agricultural, municipal, and food waste from landfills and, in the process, produces renewable energy and fertilizer. In Renergy’s case, the plant takes in all kinds of organic materials, incl. dairy products, meat, and pet food that are expired or did not meet specifications. The first step is for machines to mechanically open containers and to separate the contents from the packaging. Renergy’s “depackaging” equipment can process aluminum and steel cans, plastic pouches, and cardboard containers. (Different companies then handle the bailed cardboard, plastics, and metal.) Anaerobic digestion begins in a holding tank for 24 to 36 hours. Microorganisms continue to break down the waste for 20 to 22 days in a 750,000-gallon dome. In

addition, the facility has several ponds, incl. a 5-million-gallon lagoon for long-term storage. Everything is connected with oodles and noodles of above-ground and below-ground pumps and pipes, which – according to Oberfield – are “the heart of the operation.”

Renergy, commissioned in 2013, makes money by charging tipping fees, by selling nutrient-rich fertilizer, and by capturing methane and generating renewable energy. The City of Delaware sends about 6 dump trucks of sewage waste every week, each loaded with 20 to 22 tons of sludge. According to Delaware’s 2019 budget, the city currently pays between \$280,000 to \$290,000 annually for “sludge removal.” How exactly the expenditure is allocated is not clear. In any case, the amount is cheaper than taking the slurry to the landfill, where it would also release into the open methane, a dangerous greenhouse gas.

Consolidated Electric Cooperative is the main energy company Renergy partners with. Through IGS Energy, Renergy also sells compressed natural gas (CNG). AEP has so far shown little interest, but that may change in the future as AEP is slowly diversifying its portfolio.

Renergy has an identical facility in Fairborn, a Dayton suburb. It has plans to expand both within and beyond Ohio. According to its website (www.renergy.com), each year Renergy currently powers 2,000 homes with renewable energy, generates 17,000 tons of natural fertilizer, and displaces 12,000 tons of carbon dioxide (CO2).

Interested in Becoming a Master Gardener?

The Master Gardeners of Delaware County are offering another 8-week workshop, beginning in February. Trainees will receive 50 hours of education in horticultural topics, followed by a 50-hour internship. The workshops will be held every Wednesday from 9 am – 4 pm, with the starting date TBA. The cost is \$250. Applications are accepted now. For info, contact Kenzie Johnston at the Delaware County Office (149 N. Sandusky St.) or email her at johnston589@osu.edu.

MASH Food Pantry Comes to Delaware

The Delaware Community Market at 222 E. William St. closed effective Dec. 24, but the building will have a new tenant soon. As first reported by Paul Comstock in “This Week Delaware News” (12/9), MASH Pantry & Resource Center plans to open a free food pantry for military veterans in February. Delaware resident Tonya Freeman, whose son was killed in Iraq, will manage the pantry. It will offer food, with clothing and other items to be added at a later point.

MASH, which stands for “Military and Service Heroes,” first opened in 2015 and operates free pantries in Grove City, Whitehall, and at Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base. It also has free produce markets for veterans in Columbus, Commercial Point, and Gahanna and a number of mobile units. MASH is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit that provides food, clothing, toiletries & hygiene products, as well as emotional and physical support & resources to military personnel and veterans throughout the Columbus metropolitan area. This includes active-duty personnel, military families, reservists, and survivors. The organization was a Jefferson Award winner in 2017. MASH President Amber Hudson, a veteran herself, hopes to hold the Delaware ribbon-cutting celebration on Feb. 2. For more info, visit www.mashpantry.org.

Second Ward Community Initiative (SWCI)

SWCI at 50-A Ross St. has seen a number of recent changes. For the first time, the community center has an executive director, Karriejo Coit, who plans to further enhance SWCI’s educational mission and focus on health & well-being for all age groups. For the first time, the center also has a well-designed website (www.swcidelaware.org) with useful information. The community garden at Ross St. continues to flourish. Also noteworthy is the fact that the City of Delaware is planning on increasing the size of the Ross Street Park next year, which would give the annual Community Unity Festival access to more space.

St. Mary’s Father Michael Watson Retires

Father Michael Watson from St. Mary Catholic Church, the only Catholic priest in Delaware, has announced that he is retiring for personal reasons. A farewell gathering took place Sun., Dec. 30.

Delaware County District Library

DCLD’s Delaware, Orange, Ostrander, and Powell branches all have their own book clubs that meet monthly. The Delaware branch will read and discuss Min Jin Lee’s “Pachinko” on Jan. 8 and Maya Angelou’s “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” on Feb. 5 (Afternoon Club, 1 pm) as well as C. J. Tudor’s “The Chalk Man” on Jan. 30 and Patrick Phillips’ “Blood on the Roof” on Feb. 27 (Evening Club, 7:30 pm). – For the full listing, visit www.delawarelibrary.org or consult their quarterly newsletter.

Boardman Arts Park Receives Award

The 2018 Keep Delaware County Beautiful (KDCB) awards were handed out at a Dec. 13 ceremony at Stratford Ecological Center. Among the recipients was the Northwest Neighborhood Association (NNA). It received the Community Stewardship Award for establishing the Boardman Arts Park at 154 W. William St., across from OWU. Creativity and community meet at the 2.2-acre site, home to various outdoor art installations. In addition, it has hosted a multitude of community events and activities this year. The hope is to make the Boardman Arts Park a permanent feature within the City of Delaware. – KDCB, led by Jenifer Way-Young, is part of the countywide Delaware General Health District (DGHD). More info can be found at <https://delawarehealth.org>.

Stratford Ecological Center

Stratford Ecological Center (SEC) at 3083 Liberty Rd. also received a KDCB award for demonstrating sustainability in the community. It got the “Going Green Award” for installing 154 solar panels on two of its rooftops. A public-donation campaign helped Stratford raise the required funds of \$115,000. The solar-panel array produces 70,000 KWH annually, removes 90% of the operations from the power grid, and saves \$9,000 annually. Stratford has also recently installed a solar car charger and has hosted a solar information workshop for residents.

“Trash Menagerie” at Arts Castle (through Jan. 12)

Seven days a week, 52 weeks a year we create trash. Seven artists from Central Ohio take items we may view as waste and turn it into elements of whimsical fun or earthly beauty in the current exhibit, “Trash Menagerie,” at The Arts Castle (190 W. Winter St.). Artist Jaiymie Kiggins twists metal components into contemporary forms or a familiar item that feels lifelike. Ohio Alliance for Arts Education instructor, Eric Marlow, shines with metallic blooms, while Catherine Bell Smith embraces nature’s own debris and forms delicate mosaics and 3-dimensional fairylike structures. Mary Ann Crago scours the forgotten portraits and puts a new spin on life stories, Shelly Brenner Baird takes discarded messages and preserves them with the encaustic technique. Lauren Smith Richards takes scrapbooking to a new dimension, and John Taylor Lehman, from Zanesville, rounds out the group with colorful bottle cap art. “Trash Menagerie” runs through Jan. 12. Exhibits are free & open to the public Mon. – Fri. 9-5 and by appointment. More info can be found at www.artscastle.org or by calling 740-369-2787.

SDO Member Jerry Geist Dies

Another long-time member of Sustainable Delaware Ohio (SDO) has passed away. Thomas J. (“Jerry”) Geist (1944-2018) died on Dec. 8 at the age of 73. A graduate of Bishop Hartley High School in Columbus, he was in the Navy during the Vietnam War. However, he never talked about his experience. He retired from a job with the State of Ohio. Jerry was obviously very interested in sustainability issues and loved the outdoors. It is not a coincidence that he asked that in lieu of flowers donations be made to Preservation Parks of Delaware County where he served as a volunteer. He was a devout member of the Catholic Church, but was eager to read Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical on climate change and environmental justice, “Laudato Si’” – a major statement on climate change that was largely ignored by the Catholic Church in America but that was embraced by Jerry. He was a member of St. Mary’s Green Team in Delaware where he spearheaded the recycling program. He was also active within SDO and served on the board of SDO for a number of years. He had an open mind, contributed research, and organized tours to sustainability-

related sites in Central Ohio. His own mobility was increasingly limited in recent years, however. On a personal level, he is being remembered as a kind and caring, sweet and gentle soul who never said a disparaging word about anyone or anything. He was laid to rest Dec. 17 at the Resurrection Cemetery in Lewis Center, across from Highbanks Metro Park.

(Sheila Fox contributed information to this entry.)

DELAWARE COUNTY & CENTRAL OHIO

Central Ohio Continues to Grow

The population of Central Ohio is now estimated to be 2.4 million people, according to MORPC, and on track to reach 3 million by 2050. The largest city, Columbus, has surpassed the 900,000 mark for the first time. All of Franklin County had 1.3 million people in 2018, MORPC estimates. The annual growth rate for Central Ohio is 1.8%. Over 30 years that would translate into as many as 1.29 million additional residents, assuming the current trends continue. – Delaware County and the City of Delaware are among the fastest-growing quadrants in the area. The county now has 200,000+ people, the city 40,000+. However, growth can lead to unintended negative consequences and must be managed responsibly.

Delaware County Approves \$113 Million Budget

The three Delaware County Commissioners approved the \$113.3 million budget for 2019. The budget includes the necessary renovations to convert the former Delaware Area Career Center (North Campus) into a multi-purpose Delaware County campus. The new site at 1610 State Rt. 521 will house the Engineer's Office, the Sheriff's Office, the Regional Sewer District, the Code Compliance District, the Delaware County Regional Planning Commission, the Delaware Soil & Water Conservation District, and OSU Extension Service. For more info, visit the new & improved website of Delaware County at www.co.delaware.oh.us.

Old Jail to Be Transferred to Land Bank

Delaware County has been attempting to rid itself of the old jail at 20 W. Central Ave. for some time. Both the objectives and the process were "not very clean," Commissioner and Chairman of the Board Gary Merrell has admitted. For example, there was no stipulation that the jail be kept standing, and many in the community feared that the old jail might be demolished. It might still come to that. The Board of Commissioners has plans to transfer the old jail to the county's land bank, the Delaware County Land Reutilization Corporation (DCLRC). The land bank was created in January 2018, perhaps for the express reason to address the jail situation. It is interesting to note that the old jail would be the land bank's first project, according to the "Columbus Dispatch," although the county has dozens of abandoned and blighted properties.

Delaware County Treasurer Jon Peterson says, "there is a misconception generally that land banks are for and only for the purpose of taking dilapidated, abandoned properties, and rehabbing them or in some cases demolishing them. That's a misunderstanding because in many, many counties the mandate is to redirect, to repurpose, to renovate where appropriate, a piece of property that hasn't really been abandoned but isn't being used to the extent that it might be. I think this might be the purpose here." Peterson may be technically correct. However, over many years it has become abundantly clear that Central Ohio land banks were created exclusively for the purpose of procuring grants, demolishing buildings, and repurposing the land. (Note that the DCLRC is for "land reutilization," not "building reutilization.") For example, there is no record that the City of Delaware has restored and rehabilitated a single residential unit. Instead, it has condemned and razed several dozen homes in recent years. To suggest that the DCLRC serves a different purpose is disingenuous. In an interview with the "Delaware Gazette" (1/2/18) about the newly formed DCLRC, Peterson admitted that demolition is "an integral part of that process." There is no question that Delaware's old jail continues to be in mortal danger.

"Hickory Woods Park" Coming in 2019

Preservation Parks of Delaware County is getting closer to opening its latest addition, a 114.8-acre park located at 1271 Pollock Rd., just south of Delaware on the Olentangy River. The park system expects to open the park, or portions of it, in the fall of 2019. The former agricultural fields ("Logan Property") are planned to be transformed into wetlands & prairies, and reforested with native oak & hickory trees. Appropriately, the new park will be named "Hickory Woods Park."

OHIO WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

OWU Scheduled for Accreditation Visit

OWU is hosting a visit March 4-5 by the Higher Learning Commission, headquartered in Chicago. The team will review the college's on-going ability to meet HLC's standards for accreditation. The assessment is required every 10 years. The commission looks at the mission and integrity of institutions, but most of the attention is devoted to the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning. Colleges and universities like to brag about the academic research their faculty produce; it is typically the main or sole criterion for awarding tenure and promotion. It is interesting to note that HLC has an entirely different value system – one that is student-centered. The process is usually perfunctory and smooth. It is rare that a college loses its accreditation or is put on probation. However, it does require an enormous amount of preparation. The point person at OWU is Dr. Barbara Andereck, Dept. of Physics & Astronomy. OWU has been accredited by HLC since 1913. Stakeholders are encouraged to submit comments to HLC by the February 4 deadline. Comments must be in writing and should address substantive matters related to the quality of the institution or its academic programs. For more info, visit www.hlcommission.org.

It may be by coincidence or by design, but there will be no survey on faculty satisfaction and morale before the accreditation visit. If interested in the subject and the on-going debate, visit the website of OWU's independent student newspaper, "The Transcript" (<https://owutranscript.com>).

Perkins Observatory in 2019

In 2019, OWU-owned Perkins Observatory on U.S. 23 S. will once again host public events on most Friday nights, except for holiday weekends. Programs are held rain or shine, but the content varies depending on sky conditions. Admission to all programs is by tickets only. Tickets are \$10 per person and may be ordered by telephone (740-363-1257) with a major credit/debit card. They can also be purchased for \$12 at the door on the day of the event, assuming that space is still available. You should always call ahead, however. In addition, Perkins can accommodate field trips. It also runs a monthly lecture series called "New Vistas in Astronomy." For details and more info, visit <http://perkins.owu.edu>.

OWU to Perform "Hamlet"

OWU's Dept. of Theatre & Dance will perform William Shakespeare's tragedy "Hamlet" this spring (April 11-14). The timeless classic exposes the consequences of corruption and injustice as a young man seeks revenge for his father's murder. Shakespeare takes the audience on a perilous journey of madness, lost love, and loyalty. "To be or not to be – that is the question." The rest is silence. The play is directed by OWU faculty member Elane Denny-Todd.

Some Famous Quotes from William Shakespeare's "Hamlet"

"This above all: to thine own self be true."

"Conscience doth make cowards of us all."

"There are many things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

"Brevity is the soul of wit."

"Listen to many, speak to a few."

"Madness in great ones must not unwatched go."

"Something is rotten in the state of Denmark."

Improvement of this future park will expand habitat for a variety of wildlife that call this site home. They include cottontail rabbits, red foxes, grey tree frogs & spring peepers. Interpreting this transformative process will be a focus of the Preservation Parks' education department. In addition, several small existing streams and the Olentangy River offer the potential for exploration during nature programs and can educate visitors about how soil erosion, nutrient-loading & herbicide transport affect the Olentangy watershed. Central to the park will be a 4-season picnic shelter that will allow for year-round use for programming and can be rented by the public. A picnic area, sled hill & natural and traditional play areas will be located adjacent to the picnic shelter. An extensive trail system will provide both gravel and primitive trail surfaces that will lead visitors through the park for exploration and discovery. The theme for this new park will be "Inspiring Outdoor Exploration." Its topography, vegetation, previous land uses and proximity to current & future residential neighborhoods means that the park will lend itself to activities that will appeal to a wide range of visitors: small children using the play areas and sledding hill; teens fishing in the pond; adults running the hills; and seniors hiking through the woodlands enjoying the wildlife. A Concept Master Plan is available on the website of Preservation Parks (www.preservationparks.com). A so-called bioblitz of the park's fauna & flora was conducted in 2014. The amazing 15-page list of animals, plants & fungi can be found on the same website.

Some of the above-mentioned details are preliminary and may change. As more specifics become available, "Community Matters" will share them with its readers.

Greif Acquires Caraustar

Delaware-based packaging company Greif has announced it would acquire Caraustar for \$1.8 billion. Owned by H.I.G. Capital, Caraustar is based in Austell, Georgia and employs more than 4,000 workers in over 80 facilities in the U.S., including in Ohio. It is a leader in the production of recycled coated and uncoated paperboard. It is said to be a socially responsible corporation, committed to environmentally sound practices. Greif has 200 sites around the world and about 13,000 employees in some 40 countries. The company also manages timber properties in the southeastern U.S. As is not uncommon in such mergers, Greif's shares fell by 18% amidst concerns over debt and short-term profitability. However, both companies are confident that shareholders will be rewarded by the deal in the long run. For more info about the company, visit www.greif.com.

Planet Oasis vs. Arcadia

The legal battle over "Planet Oasis" remains unresolved. Tony Sekulovski of Blue Horseshoe Ventures has renamed the project "Arcadia," an Ancient Greek term for an area of bucolic pleasure and pastoral delight. The new name was suggested by Westerville college student Ian Shaw, who received a \$1,000 gift card for his suggestion. Sekulovski has also announced that his revised master plan would not contain a saltwater lake, a Ferris wheel, or a roller coaster. – David Glimcher & partner Lenni Male, however, say the 350-acre project in Delaware County is moving forward under its original name, "Planet Oasis."

Obviously, all this legal wrangling has already led to significant delays. Sekulovski maintains construction will begin "next summer," but that optimism seems misguided. As long as the legal situation remains murky, investors would be fools to put any money in the project. As of today, no development plans have been submitted and no traffic studies completed. Court proceedings may stall the project for years to come. Planet Oasis / Arcadia is on hold indefinitely.



Ashley Has a Musical Garden

Recreation Unlimited in Ashley has announced that phase 2 of its Musical Garden has been completed. Located on the campus of Recreation Unlimited at 7700 Piper Rd., the Musical Garden is an

outdoor therapeutic space that integrates music with nature. Visitors with visual impairments or on the autism spectrum may particularly benefit from the sounds, vibrations & tactile interactions with the instruments. Phase 2 saw the addition of chimes, a xylophone & a harp. The mission of Recreation Unlimited is to serve youth and adults with physical & developmental challenges and health issues by building self-confidence and self-esteem through sports, recreation & education. Paul Huttlin is the executive director and CEO of the organization. To learn more, visit www.recreationunlimited.org.

Judge James Schuck Sworn In

Delaware County Common Pleas Court Judge Everett H. Krueger retired Dec. 31. His replacement is Judge James P. Schuck who ran unopposed in November as a Republican.

Jim Schuck was born and raised in Findlay. After graduating from Findlay High School, he spent a year at Taylor University, a small Christian liberal-arts college in Indiana. He graduated from BGSU and received his law degree from Capital University. Schuck came to Delaware in 2001 and has worked at Bricker & Eckler LLP in Columbus for the past 17 years. The job gave him "the opportunity to do work for the party and several Republican candidates," Schuck is quoted in a 2017 interview. For the past 4 years, he has chaired the Delaware County Republican Party. He is married and has 3 teenaged children.

In a Dec. 22 "Delaware Gazette" article Schuck says that "politics and law are in my family." In the above-quoted interview he states that he is a great fan of Ronald Reagan. In that conversation, he very much sounded more like a political operative and a partisan hack rather than an independent judge. Let's hope he has the wisdom to differentiate between the executive and the judicial branch and will not allow his legal professionalism be tainted by political ideology.

Delaware County Prosecutor Carol O'Brien

Delaware County Prosecutor Carol O'Brien, recently elected President of the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association (OPAA), says she is big on fighting abuse and violence against women. But a recent article published in the Columbus Dispatch (12/11) raises doubts about her carefully curated public image and her ability to be fair and just. In 2015, Courtney Smith from Powell reported to police that her former husband, OSU assistant football coach Zach Smith, had grabbed her, thrown her, cut her, strangled and choked her, and threatened to kill and destroy her while she was pregnant. Some of this alleged physical, mental, and emotional abuse took place out of state, in Florida and the Dominican Republic. Powell police officer Ben Boruchowitz, who interviewed and videotaped Courtney Smith, said she had good reasons to be petrified of her husband because in his view it was likely that Zach Smith "may actually follow through with it."

Powell police sent a summary of its findings to the Delaware County prosecutor's office and requested charges of felonious assault and domestic violence before a grand jury. However, Carol O'Brien declined to follow the police recommendation, saying she did not think felony charges were warranted or could be proven: "We didn't find any felony charges that we thought we could prove," she told the Columbus Dispatch on 12/10. She did not pursue lesser misdemeanor charges either. She seems to have dropped the ball and abandoned long-suffering Courtney Smith. Thanks to Carol O'Brien, abuser Zach Smith walked away from his crimes without any consequences.

On Dec. 13, Theodore Decker of the Dispatch called her behavior "baffling" and suggested that "who Zach Smith was might have superseded what he was accused of doing." In other words, had he not been affiliated with OSU's football program, he might have been treated differently. Decker also reminded his readers that just a couple of months ago Prosecutor O'Brien called for a state law that would make domestic violence involving strangulation rise to the level of a felony.

Powell Police only released its materials after a public-records complaint filed by the Dispatch. Coach Zach Smith was fired by OSU Head Coach Urban Meyer in July 2018. The scandal was a contributing factor in Meyer's own retirement from OSU effective Jan. 1, 2019.

A Climate-Change Plan for Columbus

A task force led by OSU's Byrd Polar and Climate Research Center has presented a 125-page report with 43 recommendations to the City of Columbus. Jason Cervenec, Education & Outreach Director

for the Byrd Polar and Climate Research Center, served as chairman of the Columbus Climate Adaptation Plan Task Force.

The report highlights the many effects of climate change, from rising temperatures to more rain events. It also factors in the expected population growth in Central Ohio and the higher demand for electricity. It makes 21 "necessary" and 22 "aspirational" recommendations. Many require a public-education campaign, shoring up infrastructure, modernizing the electric grid, establishing cooling centers, and measures to reduce flash floods & water contamination.

Unfortunately, the report does not address how Columbus can lower greenhouse-gas emissions, which actually cause the higher temperatures. According to Cerveneck, that's "a separate conversation."

Climate change stands out as one of greatest challenges urban areas face in the 21st century. Many have developed plans to deal with the long-term effects of climate change, among them Chicago, Cincinnati, and Cleveland. Expect to hear more about "resilience planning" and "risk reduction" in the future.

Locally in Delaware, there is also a collective forming that is working on a climate-action plan, to be submitted to city officials as part of Delaware's next Comprehensive Plan. Terry Hermsen, Ph.D., is spearheading the effort by the Central Ohio Communities Project (COCP). A second climate summit is coming up on Sat., Feb. 2, which is Groundhog Day. Folks interested in learning more about COCP and upcoming workshops can contact "Community Matters."

Tax Incentives Tied to \$15 Minimum Wage

On Dec. 10, Columbus City Council discussed and passed an ordinance that mandates a \$15 minimum wage of companies hoping to receive tax credits from the City of Columbus. City Council members are eager to bring so-called "living-wage jobs" to the local community. Councilwoman Elizabeth Braun says, "When a job doesn't pay a living wage, employees struggle to support their families, the opportunity gap widens, and many families must rely on public assistance to bridge the gap." The measure ensures that all new jobs subsidized by tax dollars pay living wages of no less than \$15.

Something for the City of Delaware to consider? It is interesting to note that Delaware City Council is rarely concerned about issues of relevance to employees. Employers and developers, on the other hand, always have their full attention.

Columbus Updates Eviction Laws

When tenants complain about substandard housing conditions, they often face landlords who retaliate against them and evict them. Columbus City Council has now shifted the burden of proof to landlords to demonstrate a justifiable reason for evicting tenants. No one testified against the proposed law before it was approved by City Council in December. – More than 18,000 eviction cases are filed each year in Franklin County, the most in the state. The eviction epidemic creates hardships for low-and-moderate-income folks, including minorities, and has led to a nationwide increase in homelessness.

Homelessness in Franklin County

Nationwide, homelessness is on the rise (see the entry under "Nation"). The same is true locally. The number of homeless folks in Franklin County jumped from by 6.4% to an estimated 1,807 people in 2018. About 31% of them were classified as "families" with children. It is estimated that Ohio's homeless population is 10,249, based on the annual point-in-time count conducted last January. However, there is no way to know the actual number.

The reason for the trend is the exploding prices of real estate and rents combined with low-wage jobs and stagnant compensation. The lack of affordable housing keeps Ohio's homeless shelters full. Many people who come into the area shelters have jobs, but in the current market it is often not enough to pay for rent, utilities, food, transportation, and other expenses.

Columbus Police Chief Retires

Columbus police chief Kim Jacobs has announced she is retiring. Her last day on the job will be Feb. 8. She joined the police force in 1979 and, in 2012, became the first female police chief in the city's history. Mayor Andrew J. Ginther said an interim chief will oversee the PD while a national search will be conducted. Ginther, a

Democrat, said the next chief will have to be "a change agent" and focus more on "neighborhood policing," also called "community policing." It is a philosophy and strategy that establishes and maintains communication, bridges, and trust with local residents, especially with communities of color.

Union president Keith Farrell, president of the Fraternal Order of Police Capital City Lodge No. 9, sees things differently: "We need a person who is independent from politicians, that is willing to make policing decisions that they feel is best for policing and the community and not necessarily what politicians want them to do." Farrell and the FOP are opposed to hiring a police chief from outside current ranks. There have been systemic tensions between police unions and city administrations in the nation. Time and again, unions have defended police misconduct such as excessive force, leading to widespread distrust and lack of cooperation among minorities. Perhaps Farrell needs to be reminded that it is the elected mayor who runs the city, not the unelected police chief.

Evolution Theatre Company

Evolution Theatre Company is Central Ohio's award-winning LGBTQIA professional theater company. Starting in 2019, it will begin operating under a contract with Actors' Equity Association. All productions will take place at the Columbus Performing Arts Center at 549 Franklin Ave. in downtown Columbus. – On the program for 2019 are three area premieres, a new play, and a musical: "The Vultures" (May 22 – Jun 2 11), "The View Upstairs" (July 17-27), "Who Killed Joan Crawford?" (Aug. 21-31), "Cabaret" (Sept. 18-28), and "The Turkey Men" (Oct. 16-26), which is a new play by local playwright Douglas Whaley. Subscription tickets are \$50 before Dec. 31. For more info, visit www.evolutiontheatre.org.



Explore Legoland Discovery Center

The interlocking Lego bricks of the Danish company Lego Group have been around since 1932. Many adults grew up with them and have fond memories. A Legoland Discovery Center opened last fall at 157 Easton Town Center, and you may want to take the grandchildren, kids, and yourself there. Adults must be accompanied by at least 1 child. There are numerous attractions and activities, from building and exploring to rides and movies. The place is open daily and also accommodates birthday parties, school trips, etc. However, tickets are not cheap. They are on a spectrum between \$20 (cheapest online ticket) and \$34 per person. Walk-up prices cost more. Unlimited annual passes are available for \$60 per person. To learn more, visit www.columbus.legolanddiscoverycenter.com.

Although Lego bricks (and Mega blocks) are made of hard plastic, it is our view that they do not contribute much to environmental pollution. They are collected and treasured, not easily discarded into the environment. It is very rare during street clean-ups and river sweeps to find a single Lego or Mega brick. We are willing to make an exception for these popular toys that have been around for almost a century.

2018 Delaware Reservoir Christmas Bird Count by Dr. Richard Bradley

Every year for the past 30 years a group of dedicated naturalists have ventured out during the holiday season to conduct a "Christmas Bird Count" here in and around Delaware, Ohio. The count is one of many (thousands) around the world and organized by the National Audubon Society. Each count is conducted in a specified 15-mile diameter circle. In our area the count was first organized by Sally Waterhouse and Jed Burt (deceased). Rich Bradley has been the compiler for the past 6 years.

This year the count was held on Sunday, Dec. 16. There were 2 days of rain, some heavy, before the count day, and water was high, plenty of "standing water," but none frozen. Weather on the day

was cloudy with some breaks, cool (39-43 F°), dank, some drizzle reported, little wind in the early morning increasing during the day, variable 1-10 mph. We had a total of 41 observers. Our count extended from 04:30 to 17:30 (5:30 pm).

We detected a very low diversity of waterfowl, which seemed odd for a year with open water and relatively mild temperatures. Relatively few sparrows were seen by most groups (esp. American Tree Sparrows). Some teams reported reasonable numbers of American Tree Sparrows, but many groups reported few or even none of this normally common winter visitor which nests in the Arctic. The total (299) was the 7th-lowest ever. We saw the greatest number of Blue Jays ever (510). The average for the previous 29 years is 188. We also set a record for the most Tufted Titmouse (112), and White-breasted Nuthatch (134) compared to the averages of 56 and 75, respectively. We also had the 2nd-highest number of Golden-crowned Kinglets with 81; the average is 20. One group found a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, which has only been seen on 7 previous counts here. We detected a paucity of blackbirds, considering that it wasn't all that cold. Our total of 87 Carolina Wrens was the second largest ever (we had 88 back in 2006). The average number is 29. Two species (Sandhill Crane, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker) were detected during the "count week," but not on the count day. Our final total was 65 species, a bit above average (60), with 9,474 individuals. The number was well below the average of 12, 553 individuals.

I thank everyone for their effort in conducting this annual census and hope you enjoyed the day.

Richard Bradley, Ph.D., is retired from OSU where he taught Biological Sciences. He continues to be an active researcher. 3 major publications are about spiders: "In Ohio's Backyard: Spiders" (2004), "Common Spiders of Ohio: Field Guide" (2010) & "Common Spiders of N. America" (2013).

Baby Elephant Dies at Columbus Zoo

An unnamed baby elephant born Dec. 6 passed away Dec. 26 in the Columbus Zoo & Aquarium. This comes after two giraffe calves and one of their mothers recently died despite efforts to save them. The incidents raise uncomfortable questions. Were the deaths preventable? Does the zoo have the expertise, resources, equipment, and personnel to look after the health & welfare of the animals in its care? For years, it seems, the Columbus Zoo has prioritized growth, marketing, revenues, showmanship, and entertainment, a culture that started decades ago with former director Jack Hanna. There is nothing wrong with a bit of PR and "edutainment" as long as the core mission remains undiluted. However, at this point an independent, external review or investigation is necessary, and zoo accreditors may wish to explore whether there are opportunities for the Columbus Zoo to do better in the future.

Columbus Guitar Society

On Dec. 16, Paul Comstock profiled the Columbus Guitar Society in "This Week Delaware News." The amateur group, which is focused on classical guitar, began in 1992. It organizes concerts and regularly performs at the James Cancer Hospital for patients. Members meet the third Saturday from approx. 1-4 pm of each month at Starbucks in Bexley, 2450 E. Main St., to discuss shop and "noodle" their instruments. The society also organizes concerts: Russian guitarist Irina Kulikova is the featured artist on Sat., Jan. 12 (8 pm) at Huntington Recital Hall on the Capital Univ. campus (2199 E. Main St.) in Bexley. Tickets are \$20 general admission. Delaware resident Eugene Braig is the group's artistic director. To learn more about CGS, visit <https://columbusquitarociety.org.wordpress.com>.

Deal Reached to Keep Crew in Columbus

Major League Soccer (MLS) has announced that "an agreement in principle" has been reached to keep the Columbus Crew in Ohio. The Crew's current owner, Precourt Sports Ventures, will surrender control and form a new team, "Austin F.C." in Austin, Texas. Cleveland Browns owners Dee & Jimmy Haslam, along with former team doctor Peter Edwards, have agreed to take over the Columbus Crew. Part of the deal is the construction of a new soccer stadium in Columbus. The current venue, Mapfre Stadium, will be repurposed as a community sports park and training facility.

OSU Football Coach Urban Meyer Retires

It's a weird world where a football coach is the highest paid employee of a public university and dominates the news cycle. However, we would be amiss not to mention the departure of Urban Meyer after 7 seasons at OSU. Meyer, 54, will retire after the New Year's Rose Ball against Washington. After Jan. 1, Ryan Day, 39, will take over for him. Meyer, an Ohio native, faced a number of challenges in recent months and years all of which contributed to his decision. He has suffered from debilitating headaches due to an arachnoid cyst in his skull. Then there was a 3-game suspension in 2018 as a result of an investigation into his questionable handling of former assistant coach Zach Smith. Officially, his health was the driving factor for his decision. Unofficially, however, it is clear that OSU was ready to leave behind recent scandals and negative headlines, which hurt the university's brand, and restart with a clean slate.

winter

*the days are short
the wind blows cold
more snow is on the way
we are told*

*the sun is hidden
the earth stays dark
and in the woods
the deer eat bark*

*plants and animals
make no sound
they are asleep
deep underground*

*at night no stars
guide our way
to unknown gods
we fearfully pray*

*time stands still
the frost is grim
we may not make it
the outlook is dim*

*the world is not fit
for beast or man
the candle flickers
life is wan*

OHIO

Ohio Second in Nation for Opioid Deaths

There were 4,293 overdose deaths in Ohio involving opioids in 2017, a 19% increase over 2016. That's the 2nd-highest rate per capita after W. Virginia. 3,523 of the deaths resulted from synthetic opioid overdoses, mostly fentanyl and carfentanyl. Preliminary results are likely to change because in many cases coroners have not yet completed their investigations. Ohio has invested some money to fund education, prevention, intervention, and treatment, but authorities are aware that much more must be done. For example, more attention needs to be paid on how and why addiction develops in the first place.

Mike DeWine to Be Sworn in Jan. 14

Republican Mike DeWine will be sworn in as Ohio's 70th governor shortly after midnight on Jan. 14 in a private event at his home near Cedarville. The public oath-of-office ceremony for DeWine and Secretary of State Jon Husted will occur at noon at the Statehouse in Columbus. The inaugural gala will also be staged at the Statehouse, beginning at 7:30 pm. All events require a ticket. – DeWine, 71, will celebrate his 72nd birthday on Jan. 5.

Gubernatorial Campaign Breaks Records

During the 2018 gubernatorial campaign, Republican Mike DeWine and Democrat Richard Cordray spent a total of \$55.1 million on the race. DeWine's portion was about \$35.6 million (65%), Cordray's portion about \$19.5 million (35%). Both DeWine's share and the combined total shattered the past record for spending. DeWine defeated Cordray on Nov. 6 by 164,070 votes (3.7%). Predictably, DeWine's support came from Ohio business executives and utility and corporate political-action committees. Cordray benefitted from labor unions and progressive PACs.

House Speaker Situation Unresolved

The House Speaker situation remains unresolved. Both Rep. Ryan Smith, R-Bidwell, and Rep. Larry Householder, R-Glenford, are vying for the position. Neither one seems to have the majority required – 50 votes in the 99-member House – to become speaker outright when the next legislature convenes on Jan. 7. In fact, at the moment it appears the gulf between the two sides is deeper than ever. Angry words such as "illegitimate" and "dereliction of duty" are being tossed about. Normally, the Speaker of the House is chosen weeks and months before the new legislature meets, but in this case the fight has dragged on and on and has become a major distraction for Ohio Republicans. Even if Smith receives the most votes on the 11th round of balloting and is elected speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives, as is expected, the bitter acrimony will likely continue.

Ohio's Graduation Standards

Ohio has had difficulties enforcing its high-school graduation standards because they would leave too many students at risk of not getting their high-school diploma. Currently, only 65-66% of students meet the end-of-course-exams option. Instead, the Ohio legislator has been offering additional options and alternative pathways to allow students to graduate, such as a 2.5 gpa, good attendance, a capstone project, community service, work experience, and the like. Lawmakers relaxed the standards for the class of 2018 and will do so again in 2019 and possibly in 2020 as well. Critics argue that softer standards are counterproductive and do nothing to better prepare Ohio's students for work or college. About 40% of students entering public colleges and universities are not college-ready and require remedial coursework. Chad Aldis from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a conservative think tank with an office in Columbus, says, "unfortunately, instead of rolling up our sleeves and helping all Ohio graduates attain the skills necessary to learn a living wage and support a family, we've once again said that simply showing up is enough." Ohio does not demand much from graduates. Education is not the highest priority. The result is a workforce and a student body that lags behind the rest of the world, esp. in STEM sciences.

Andrew Brenner and Cursive Writing

Andrew Brenner, R-Powell, finally got his will. Ohio lawmakers on Dec. 12 passed House Bill 58, an ALEC-inspired bill that requires the Ohio Dept. of Education (ODE) to develop materials designed to enable students to create readable documents using legible cursive handwriting by the end of grade five. The law does not mandate schools to teach cursive writing. Instead, it provides schools the opportunity to do so if they choose to do it and/or if teachers and parents demand it. There is nothing wrong with the bill per se. On the surface, it seems benign. All students should develop the ability to recognize and read cursive writing, commonly used in historic documents. And better writing skills are certainly welcome in this semi-literate nation of folks who do not read, cannot spell, and are often unable to speak and write coherently. This has been a long-standing complaint from both employers and colleges.

However, it seems odd and appears suspect that cursive writing has been elevated to such a high priority, along with the heartbeat bill and stand-your-ground bill. Isn't there an opioid crisis in Ohio and in the rest of the U.S.? What about gun deaths? There are wars in the world that cause millions of people to flee their home countries, creating problems for other nations. The whole world is concerned about the growing dangers of climate change, and Ohio legislators are worried about trivial things such as the state of cursive writing? This is hard to believe. Is this an instance where someone wants to create the illusion of action? Is this to compensate for the

fact that Brenner has not been able to effect much change in other areas? Or is it a proxy battle in the on-going culture wars in which the representative the Powell has been involved for years? In any case, it is difficult to see how House Bill 58 helps prepare students become job-ready or college-ready in the 21st century.

Ohio's Heartbeat Bill

The so-called heartbeat bill passed the GOP-controlled House by 60 to 35 votes on Nov. 5 and, after delays, the GOP-controlled Senate by 18 to 13 votes on Dec. 12. However, Governor John Kasich vetoed it, saying the measure is unconstitutional and would cost millions to defend in court. Legislators returned during Christmas break to override his veto. The House voted 60-28, but the Senate fell one vote short (19) of the three-fifths needed (20) to cancel Kasich's veto. The bill will be re-introduced when the General Assembly convenes in the new year. Governor-elect Mike DeWine, who takes office Jan. 14, has indicated he would sign the bill if and when it reaches his desk. If enacted, the measure would be instantly challenged and spend years in court.

The controversial legislation bans abortions after 6 to 7 weeks of pregnancy. It makes no exceptions for rape or incest or for women with mental-health disabilities. Doctors in violation of the measure would be sent to prison for up to one year. Opponents fear that many doctors would leave Ohio when being forced to choose between practicing medicine according to the standard of care, or facing criminal penalties. Critics also argue Republicans idolize the unborn but do nothing to support the life of a baby once it is born and takes its first breath.

The legislators were able to override two additional bills that Governor Kasich had vetoed – the stand-your-ground measure and the pay raises over the next 10 years for lawmakers (26%) and other elected officials (17.5%).

John Kasich Shifts on Gender Discrimination

When John Kasich became governor of Ohio in 2011, one of the first things he did was to remove gender identity from the state's anti-discrimination policy. For 8 years, Ohio did nothing to protect women, LGBT folks, or transgender people from discrimination in employment and housing. Now, 25 days before leaving office, Kasich went ahead and once again barred discrimination in state employment based on gender. A genuine change of heart or a cynical and hypocritical ploy to endear himself to "the coastal elites" for his next presidential run, as critics on both the left and the right assert? The fact is that most politicians are untrustworthy chameleons who routinely change their ideological colors. They can be bought and sold by the highest bidder. Former Speaker of the House John Boehner showed a similar facility when he abruptly abandoned his tough-on-crime position and accepted a lucrative job within the marijuana industry. – In any case, it is likely that Ohio's next governor, Mike DeWine, will once again remove the protection of women and LGBTQ as soon as he can. In 2016, he was one of the people who sued President Obama over transgender protections.

People with Felony Convictions Locked Out of Jobs

There are 994,000 Ohioans with felony convictions, and they are locked out from 1.3 million jobs, according to a new report by Policy Matters Ohio, "Wasted Assets: The Cost of Excluding Ohioans with a Record from Work." Some 850 laws and rules apply to 1 in 4 Ohio jobs, often the better paid ones. "And, because minorities tend to be treated more harshly by the criminal-justice system, they're disproportionately the ones who are locked out of them" (Columbus Dispatch, 12/27). The fact that so many are ineligible for certain jobs condemns folks to live in poverty and holds Ohio's economic development back. Policy Matters Ohio recommends that Ohio legislators eliminate excessive, unreasonable, and arbitrary restrictions against licensing and hiring when unwarranted. – Louis Tobin, executive director of the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association, on the other hand, says "there are good reasons why most of these restrictions are in place." The OPAA likes the status quo because it means power, money, and job security for them – justice be damned.

Pike County Sheriff under Investigation

Pike County Sheriff Charles ("Charlie") Reader is under a state investigation for allegedly having stolen money that his office

received from drug raids and property forfeitures. According to an anonymous whistleblower, Reader is a compulsive gambler with tens of thousands of dollars in debt. He is also accused of improper use of impounded vehicles. The Ohio Auditor's office started the probe in early November and is currently looking at thousands of pages of financial records dating back several years, involving a dozen local businesses and individuals and the complete personnel files of the Pike County Sheriff's office. The investigation is on-going and has not yet resulted in an indictment. – Reader has been Pike County Sheriff since 2015.

Hocking Hills among the Most Popular Travel Destinations

According to homeaway.com, a vacation rental website, the Hocking Hills region in southern Ohio is among the fastest-growing travel destinations in the nation. Demand for vacation-home rentals has increased by 120% over 12 months and 375% over three years. Another up-and-coming travel destination is the Ozark National Forest in Arkansas. The full 2019 trend report is available at www.homeaway.com under the "Media Center" link.

The Buckeye Trail

The 1,444-mile Buckeye Trail is still young and unknown to many. Chuck & Beth Hewett hiked it (it took them 76 days) and wrote a book about it – "Wandering Ohio: A Buckeye Trail Thru-Hike" (2017). On Jan. 13 the public can meet and greet the authors at Preservation Parks' Shale Hollow Park at 6320 Artesian Run in Lewis Center. This is what amazon.com says about the trail and the Hewitts' book:

"Venture with Chuck and Beth on the Ohio 1444-mile Buckeye Trail that is still young and undiscovered by the masses. The trail is perhaps the longest loop trail in the world. There are rock ledges, waterfalls, lazy rivers, rushing streams, lakes, state parks, Native American ceremonial mounds, covered bridges, canal towpaths, canal boat rides, pioneer homesteads, military campaigns, and museums of bicycles, airplanes, early forts, and U.S. presidents. Add to that, people to meet, with stories of their own to share. Backpacking along the trails and roads that make up the loop they tent camp, stay at state lodges, motels and fascinating bed and breakfasts. Come along on their 76-day adventure; perhaps you will find a section that entices you to take a walk."

Wikipedia lists the following potential "hazards": severe weather, tick-borne diseases, mosquitoes, biting flies, chiggers, steep grades, limited water, diarrhea from contaminated water, poison ivy, and venomous snakes. Of course, these are risks one finds everywhere. They should not deter you from exploring the Buckeye Trail.

UC Founder Charles McMicken Owned Slaves

The founder of the University of Cincinnati, Charles McMicken (1782-1858), owned enslaved people in Louisiana and may have fathered more of them. Before he died in 1858, of pneumonia, he bequeathed to the city between \$800,000 and \$900,000 to fund a university for "white boys and girls" only. The university was established in 1870, after the Civil War. McMicken was also involved in efforts to resettle African-Americans back in Liberia, Africa. University President Neville Pinto said that the institution will create a commission to examine the life and work of its founder, following a vote by the student government to remove McMicken's name from the College of Arts and Sciences. UC has already removed McMicken's name from signage and marketing campaigns.

"The Annotated Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant"

Eight of the U.S. presidents were born in Ohio, more than from any other state. One of them was Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885), the 18th president who served from 1869-1877. His "personal memoirs," first published in 1885-86, have now been edited and reissued, with an introduction by Elizabeth D. Samet (Liveright 2018, 1068 pp., \$45). The bulk of Grant's memoir focuses on his military career, from the Mexican-American War (1846-48) to the Civil War (1861-1865). The editor has done a superb job to enrich the text with an abundance of relevant historical, biographical, and literary background. Samet also provides maps and photographs. Grant may have been a middling student at West Point (where Samet teaches), but he was not the drunk and brute that his enemies said he was. Samet is also able to prove that, contrary to a persistent legend, Grant

did not have his memoirs ghost-written by Mark Twain or anyone else. His wartime letters and memos consistently demonstrate his distinctive clarity and forceful style. There is no question that Grant's memoirs are a classic of American autobiography and history.



Meet Ohio Author Celeste Ng

Bestselling novelist Celeste Ng is famous for "Everything I Ever Told You" (2014) and "Little Fires Everywhere" (2017). Both novels are headed for the big screen. Ng is the daughter of two scientists who emigrated from Hong Kong in 1968. Although she was born in Pittsburgh, she grew up in Shaker Heights near Cleveland where her mother taught at Cleveland State Univ. (Her father died in 2004.) Shaker Heights is the setting for "Little Fires Everywhere," which is the story of two families. Ng graduated from Shaker Heights High School in 1998, from Harvard Univ. in 2002, and obtained a master's degree from the Univ. of Michigan. She now lives in Cambridge, is married to a lawyer, and has an 8-year-old son.

"Little Fire Everywhere" takes place in Shaker Heights, an orderly Cleveland suburb where everything is planned – from the layout of the winding roads, to the colors of the houses, to the successful lives its residents will go on to lead. And no one embodies this spirit more than Elena Richardson, whose guiding principle is playing by the rules. Enter Mia Warren, an enigmatic artist and single mother who arrives in this idyllic bubble with her teenaged daughter Pearl, and rents a house from the Richardsons. Soon Mia and Pearl become more than tenants: all four Richardson children are drawn to the mother-daughter pair. But Mia carries with her a mysterious past and a disregard for the status quo that threatens to upend this carefully ordered community. When family friends of the Richardsons attempt to adopt a Chinese-American baby, a custody battle erupts that dramatically divides the town and puts Mia and Elena on opposing sides. Suspicious of Mia and her motives, Elena is determined to uncover the secrets in Mia's past. But her unhealthy obsession comes at an unexpected and devastating price. "Little Fires Everywhere" explores the weight of secrets, the nature of art & identity, the ferocious pull of motherhood – and the danger of believing that blindly following rules can avert disaster.

Celeste Ng is very interested in race-related issues and has a large influence on Twitter. As an Asian-American woman, she is supportive of other minority writers. She is a member of Immigrant Families Together, a volunteer group dedicated to reuniting separated immigrant families.

NATION

The Latest Government Shutdown

In normal countries, a "government shutdown" would be a completely alien concept. Not in America, where people have gotten used to a dysfunctional Congress and such stalemates. The longest shutdown took place in December 1995 and lasted 21 days.

As a result of the current shutdown, which began Sat., Dec. 22, some 800,000 federal employees are either furloughed without pay (380,000) or forced to work without pay (420,000) if deemed "essential." Many are stressed and anxious, some in panic mode. Worried about their ability to pay rent, the mortgage, and the utility bills, they have curtailed spending, are working a second job, have begun to dip into their savings, or are considering a loan. Contrary to fake news, what these people are experiencing is not a long "vacation." Chances are they will be paid retroactively, as has been the norm in the past, but in the meantime the uncertainty is a nerve-racking experience for them. The many government contractors, on the other hand, never get back pay for being idled.

All this is leaving President Trump unperturbed. He says he is prepared for a "very long" shutdown and that he will not yield and not reopen the government until Democrats agree to fund the border wall he fancies.

U.S. Population Growth Anemic

The population of the U.S. grew at its slowest pace since 1937, when the country was in the grips of the Great Depression. The growth rate between July 2017 and July 2018 was just 0.62%. Births still outnumbered deaths by 3.86 million to 2.81 million. In 9 states, however, the population actually declined: Alaska, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, New York, W. Virginia, and Wyoming. Puerto Rico's population also shrank by about 4%. Maine and W. Virginia saw more deaths than births. If the current trends continue, the "natural increase" (births minus deaths) will soon be negative.

Many states already suffer from acute shortages of younger workers and professionals, declining tax revenues and strains on infrastructure & social services. Experts agree that new immigrants will play an increasingly important role to fill the gaps and rejuvenate the country.

Why the GOP Lost the House Majority

The influential GOP pollster, David Winston of the Winston Group, has issued a blistering report about the results of the 2018 midterm elections in which the Democrats flipped 40 seats in the House. Donald Trump and the Republican Party miscalculated when they prioritized immigration, the migrant caravan, and the border wall. While it is true that among self-identified Republicans immigration was the most important issue, this was not the case with more moderate swing voters and independents. They wanted to hear more about jobs and the economy, along with healthcare, according to Winston.

He also pointed out that the GOP's obsession with evil Nancy Pelosi was a mistake. Republicans should have focused on a positive message instead, for example by highlighting the strong economy. The tax cut played almost no role during the campaign. Only 32% of the voters knew what was in the tax-cut bill and believed the bill reduced taxes for them. The majority of voters did not think that people like them would benefit from the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, passed in late 2017, and the GOP did nothing to change that perception.

President Trump excels at fear-mongering. However, this is not a message that resonates with the majority of Americans. "Voters want solutions designed to help people still living paycheck to paycheck," says Winston. He is urging his fellow Republicans to refocus on the economy in 2020 if they hope to win the House back.

Paul Ryan's Farewell Speech

Paul Ryan, R-Wisconsin, was House Speaker from 2015-18, following John Boehner. On Dec. 19, he gave a 30-minute farewell speech at the Library of Congress in which he defended his record and expressed regret over unfinished business such as "entitlement reform." (He was a known zealot for reining in Medicare and Social Security.) Ryan was also unwilling or unable to accomplish several additional goals: a compromise on immigration reform, an infrastructure initiative, an anti-poverty program, and criminal-justice reform.

It is noteworthy that Ryan used his speech to decry the deeply venomous and corrosive nature of politics in the age of Trump. Although he never mentioned the president by name, his remarks were a stinging indictment of Trump's toxic breed of politics: "Outrage has become a brand and, as with anything that gets marketed, it gets scaled up. It is just emotional pabulum fed through a trough of outrage. It's exhausting. It saps meaning from politics, and it discourages good people from pursuing public service." He called the political system "broken."

Given Ryan's relatively young age (48), it seems unlikely that the conservative lawmaker will stay away from politics forever. He may run for governor of Wisconsin some day, become a senator, or accept a cabinet position in another Republican administration. However, given the direction the country is going those opportunities are diminishing fast.

President Trump Reshuffles Cabinet

In a major shake-up, President Trump has once again reshuffled his cabinet and the people he surrounds himself with. Among his objectives are: preparing for the presidential 2020 elections and defending himself against attacks from the House, which is now controlled by Democrats. Turnover in the White House is not unusual, but the Trump administration has seen a disproportionate number of

voluntary and involuntary high-level departures within the last two years. It's been a revolving door at the White House.

William Barr is the new Attorney General, a man who holds expansive views of executive powers. Fox TV personality Heather Nauert, a woman with no diplomatic experience, will take over for Nikki Haley as U.N. Ambassador. In an interesting twist, the position is being downgraded to a sub-cabinet job. The Trump administration has displayed open contempt for the U.N. and its affiliated agencies. The departure of Chief of Staff John Kelly is also certain. The new interim Chief of Staff is Mick Mulvaney, a Trump loyalist. Also stepping down amidst ethics investigations is Interior Minister Ryan Zinke. He was a champion of "energy dominance," an agenda that his successor as acting Interior Secretary, David Bernhardt, is likely to continue. Lastly, Trump has fired Secretary of Defense General James Mattis effective Dec. 31. Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan will assume the title of Acting Secretary of Defense starting Jan. 1. Originally from Washington State, Shanahan studied mechanical engineering and business at MIT and later joined Boeing as an engineer in 1986. He has no military expertise, but is reportedly a vocal supporter of the Trump's plan to establish a 6th branch of the armed forces, known as the Space Force.

The Presidency or Prison

President Trump has a powerful incentive to run again in 2020. The statute of limitations for campaign-finance violations is 5 years. Under Justice Department guidelines, a sitting president cannot be indicted. If Trump decides not to run again or if he loses, it is likely that he would be charged for crimes committed in 2016 while being a candidate. Re-election is thus the ticket for Trump to evade justice and stay out of prison. This is a perilous moment for the nation. How far is Trump prepared to go? He could make ill-advised decisions to save himself, for example by starting a war somewhere, by scapegoating and persecuting a group of people, or by granting himself a pardon. These are banana-republic tactics, of course, unworthy of a noble republic and democracy. But Trump has proven time and again that he does not give a fig about normality, legality, and civility.

Donald Trump's "Bone Spurs"

In July 1968, future president Donald Trump had exhausted 4 education deferments after graduating from college. Desperate, he sought a medical exemption although, at 22, he was athletic and healthy. The New York Times revealed on Dec. 26 that he was probably able to do so with the help of one or two podiatrists, Dr. Larry Braunstein (who died in 2007) and possibly Dr. Manny Weinstein (who died in 1995). Both physicians lived in properties owned by Fred C. Trump. Braunstein's daughters confirmed the rumor that Donald Trump did not have a disqualifying foot ailment and that their father signed the necessary document "as a favor" to his landlord whom he knew personally. In the 1960s this was common practice. For the sons of wealthy and well-connected families there were numerous ways to avoid the military draft.

Few Believe Trump's Fibs

Most Americans don't believe the many exaggerations and false claims Donald Trump makes on an on-going basis. Since becoming president, Trump has made thousands of erroneous or misleading statements. Fewer than 3 in 10 Americans believe his claims, however. On the other hand, 6 in 10 Americans say they believe fact-checking organizations when they attempt to correct the record. Also noteworthy – ten years ago a poll found that 70-71% of Democrats and Republicans said it was "extremely important" for presidents and presidential candidates to be honest. A new poll found that the share of Republicans prioritizing honesty has fallen to 49% while the share of Democrats and Independents remained unchanged.

Trump Foundation to Dissolve

President Trump's charitable foundation has agreed to dissolve amidst allegations of unlawful conduct. It was alleged that the Trump Foundation used its funds to help bolster the president's campaign; to make political grants to organizations that supported Trump; to settle legal claims against the president's businesses; to purchase personal items; and to buy ads promoting Trump's hotels. New York's Attorney General Barbara Underwood accused the Trump Foundation of operating as "little more than a checkbook to serve Mr.

Trump's business and political interests." Her lawsuit sought \$2.8 million in restitution and a 10-year ban on Trump and his three eldest children from running any charities in New York. Trump has always maintained that his foundation's payments went to "wonderful charities" only, but the Trump Foundation has now agreed on a court-supervised shutdown of the organization and the distribution of the remaining funds in the amount of \$1.7 million to other nonprofits.

In the past, the Clinton Foundation was also accused of improprieties, especially for promising and providing national and international donors access to high-level influencers.

Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke Quits

Ryan Zinke, Interior Secretary since 2017, is leaving the Trump administration in the midst of more than a dozen federal investigations into his political activities, financial conflicts of interest, and ethical breaches. He is departing just days before Democrats are taking control of the House. He was considered vulnerable and a prime target, and the White House pressured him to resign. In line to replace him on an interim basis is deputy secretary David Bernhardt, a former lobbyist for the oil-and-gas industry who – unlike like Zinke himself – is an experienced manager. As acting Interior Secretary, he will oversee proposals that could directly benefit his former clients such as Halliburton. Raul Labrador (of the House Freedom Caucus) and Jeff Denham have also expressed interest in the position.

Zinke, 57, played an instrumental role in Trump's efforts to roll back federal environmental protections and promote "energy dominance" on behalf of the oil-and-gas industry. He supported offshore drilling and oil & mineral extraction on public land. He also shrank two national monuments (the largest rollback of federal land protection in the nation's history) and weakened the standards of the Endangered Species Act. His tenure was denounced and opposed by most conservation groups. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer tweeted, "Ryan Zinke was one of the most toxic members of the cabinet in the way he treated our environment, our precious public lands, and the way he treated the government like it was his personal honey pot." House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, said to become speaker in January, stated Zinke had been "a shameless handmaiden for the special interests" and his "staggering ethical abuses have delivered a serious and lasting blow to America's public lands, environment, clean air, and clean water." In the view of the Executive Director of the Center for Biological Diversity, Kieran Suckling, "Zinke will go down as the worst Interior Secretary in history." Zinke was not a responsible steward of the earth, but under President Trump it is doubtful that his successor will be an improvement.

CDC Expunges the Word "Climate"

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has quietly consolidated its Climate and Health program into a branch that studies asthma, expunging the word "climate" in the process. It fits a pattern that has been in evidence from the start of the Trump administration. One of the first things the new president did was to strip the phrase "climate change" from the website of the White House. He has consistently denied the existence of anthropogenic climate change, has announced that the U.S. would leave the Paris Climate Agreement, and has publicly doubted the conclusions of the latest National Climate Assessment report. The former head of the Climate & Health program, Dr. George E. Luber, has been reassigned to the agency's waterborne diseases unit.

Under pressure from the NRA, the CDC is also prohibited from conducting meaningful research on the nation's gun epidemic. These developments clearly suggest that for the foreseeable future scientific advice issued by the CDC cannot be taken at face value anymore. Research results may be biased and tainted and intended to favor corporate interests rather than serving the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

George H. W. Bush

Much has been written about the 41st U.S. President George H. W. Bush (1924-2018), who died Nov. 30 at the age 94. As is appropriate for eulogies, he was praised by many as a noble, honorable, decent gentleman and public servant who always attempted to do what was best for the country. He negotiated NAFTA, signed the ADA Act, and passed historic clean-air legislation – all examples of him being able to forge bipartisan agreements. He also

formed a grand international coalition that liberated Kuwait from Iraq in 1991.

However, there was another, darker side as well. During his campaign against Michael Dukakis he turned out to be a fierce competitor. He did not act gentlemanly when he relentlessly attacked the liberal views of the Democratic governor from Massachusetts. The 1988 campaign was dirty and infamously exploited fears of race and crime by tying soft-on-crime Dukakis to Willie Horton, an African-American convict who raped a white woman during a weekend furlough program. Lee Atwater, Bush's bulldog, later apologized for his hardball tactics, but Bush himself never seemed to have expressed regret for the Horton ad. His relationship with race was complicated, it seems. In 1964 and as president, he opposed civil-rights legislation, but later changed his mind for the sake of political expediency.

Then, there was HIV and the deadly AIDS virus. Bush and society as a whole failed to understand the urgency of problem and did little to address it. For Bush, the LGBT community was "not normal" and therefore undeserving of attention and assistance. In addition, it was George H. W. Bush who appointed Judge Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court in 1991 where he continues to serve, 27 years later. He has been one of the most conservative judges on the court, departing far from the jurisprudence of his predecessor, Thurgood Marshall. Lastly, we must not forget that Bush was CIA director in 1976-77 at a time when the U.S. actively propped up military dictatorships in Latin America and elsewhere.

As is almost always the case, this president's legacy is a mixed one.

Homelessness Is Up in the Nation

A federal report released on Dec. 17 shows that at least 552,830 people were homeless at a point-in-time count conducted in Jan. 2018. Of those, 194,000 lived in the streets, encampments, vehicles, or other "unsheltered" places. Point-in-time counts are notoriously unreliable because many homeless do not wish to be detected, fearing harassment, eviction, or the loss of their children. It should also be kept in mind that many large cities (e.g., San Francisco) did not even conduct any counts of unsheltered homeless populations this year.

There are stories circulating that suggest that some large cities have seen decreases in the number of people living on the streets (e.g., San Diego). They are not credible. What really happened in San Diego is that after downtown encampments were cleared out the number of people along the San Diego River doubled in size. Nobody really knows how many homeless people there are in the U.S., but their numbers are steadily increasing. Rising rents and stagnant wages continue to push many people into the streets.

Under Ben Carson, the secretary for home and urban development, HUD has remained on the sidelines of the affordable-housing crisis. In fact, budget director Mick Mulvaney has once again proposed deep cuts to public housing and voucher programs for the poor. However, there are communities that have started to wake up to the crisis. In 2017, voters in Los Angeles approved \$1.2 billion to construct 10,000 new units of affordable housing, but most city councils do not feel they have a social obligation to help the homeless. Churches and non-profits carry most of the burden, but what is needed is state and federal legislation to address the nationwide problem. Among the solutions might be tax incentives for the construction of affordable housing, rent-control measures, and subsidized housing. It is unfathomable why in one of the richest countries on Earth hundreds of thousands of people, including many families and folks with mental-health issues, are forced to scurry like rats in the streets.

Jury Selection Is Often Biased

When it comes to the selection of juries, prosecutors have the ability to block large numbers of potential jurors without needing to give the court any reasons for the exclusion. The public perception is that prosecutors often use this prerogative to remove non-white jurors who are statistically more likely to acquit. Research has now shown that this perception is accurate. In North Carolina, Ronald Wright and his team found that prosecutors remove about 20% of African-Americans available in the jury pool, compared to only 10% of whites. Judges too remove black jurors "for cause" more often than they do white jurors. Inevitably, the result is that African-Americans

hold a much smaller number of seats in the jury box than they did in the original jury pool. It is not surprising that many blacks are skeptical and cynical about a criminal-justice system that excludes them from jury service and does not allow defendants to be judged by a jury that reflects a cross-section of their communities.

Judges against ICE

Agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) like to hang around courthouses and arrest suspected undocumented immigrants who came into contact with law enforcement. Nearly 70 retired state and federal judges from 23 U.S. states have now sent a letter to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director Ronald Vitiello in which they are complaining about the practice. According to their memo, courthouse arrests disrupt the criminal-justice system. For example, witnesses are afraid to appear in court and defendants are sometimes deported before a verdict is reached. The judges urged Vitiello to add courthouses to the list of so-called "sensitive locations" that are generally free of ICE visits. Among those sensitive locations are churches, schools, and hospitals. In the view of the judges immigrants should be free to visit the halls of justice without having to fear separation from their families, detention, and deportation.

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How a Mistrial Came About

The high-profile case seemed airtight. Chanel Lewis, who is black, had confessed to the 2016 murder of Karina Vetrano in Queens, N.Y., and his DNA had been found on her body. In the past, this kind of evidence would have sufficed to send a defendant to jail. However, something has shifted. Savvy jurors no longer accept evidence submitted by prosecutors at face value. They have learned that confessions can be coerced and that DNA contaminated. Skepticism and distrust is particularly high in minority communities. In the case of Chanel Lewis, the 5 people who had doubts about his guilt were all of black, Hispanic, and Indian descent. They questioned the way Lewis was apprehended in the first place – he was stopped when "acting suspiciously" in a white neighborhood. He was harshly interrogated for hours before he "confessed." They noted his learning disabilities and confusion. And they commented on the fact that his DNA had been handled by several officers before it was sent to the lab. The possibility of intentional or unintentional DNA transference could therefore not be ruled out. Unable to come to an agreement, Judge Michael B. Aloise declared a mistrial. The case will be picked up again in January.

Black Woman Dies in Police Custody

Janice Dotson-Stephans, a black grandmother of 10, was arrested on July 17 for "trespassing," a misdemeanor. Unable to pay her \$300 bond, she was kept in the Bexar County Jail (San Antonio) in

Texas for the next 6 months. Her family was unaware that she was incarcerated. She died on Dec. 14 while still in custody, apparently of natural causes. Dotson-Stephans, 61, may or may not have had mental-health issues. Regardless, keeping someone in jail for half a year over \$300 sounds like "debtor's prisons" are alive and well in Texas. California Senator Kamala Harris was one of the first to draw attention to this injustice.

James A. Fields Convicted of Murder and Sentenced to Life

In Virginia, the 9-day trial against white supremacist and domestic terrorist James A. Fields has ended. Fields is the 21-year old Ohio man accused of plowing his car into a crowd of peaceful protesters last year on Aug. 12, injuring 28 people and killing Heather Heyer, 32. Fields was charged with first-degree murder, aggravated malicious wounding, and fleeing the scene of an accident, among other charges, and could face life in prison. His lawyers did not dispute that he was at the wheel of the vehicle. However, they argued that Fields felt threatened and under attack. He was part of a group of white nationalists and supremacists that had marched through Charlottesville earlier. According to people who knew him, Fields has had a long fascination with Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany.

At the end of the trial, the 12-member jury unanimously convicted Fields of murder and 9 other charges and sentenced him to life in prison. His overall sentence was 419 years and \$480,000 in fines. The verdict was cheered by many who say it sends a strong signal that violent white supremacy is no longer tolerated in America. Fields also faces a second trial on federal hate-crime charges next year.

Lynching Still Not a Federal Crime

The NAACP estimates that between 1882 and 1968 at least 4,700 people were illegally lynched in the U.S., the vast majority of them black. Perpetrators were rarely prosecuted. The phenomenon was pervasive, especially in the South. In 1901, Mark Twain wrote an essay entitled "The United States of Lyncherdom," but it was not published until after his death.

It is hard to believe, but to this day lynching is not a federal crime in the U.S. Attempts to introduce anti-lynching legislation on the federal level failed multiple times. Another attempt was made last June when three African-American senators – Cory Booker, Kamala Harris, and Tim Scott – introduced the "Justice for Victims of Lynching Act." However, the legislation has not yet received a vote and may have to be reintroduced next year. If and when enacted, the bill would be largely symbolic. Obviously, there are other charges that could be brought against "lynchers." However, the bill would send the clear message that society no longer condones and tolerates hate crimes. It might also have a deterrent effect. In addition, a long-overdue anti-lynching bill would also be a welcome step toward race reconciliation.

Nearly 40,000 Firearm Deaths in 2017

New CDC data shows that in 2017 there were 39,773 gun deaths in the nation. About 60% of them were suicides, while about 37% were homicides. (A small were inadvertent accidents or could not be determined.) Suicides are now the 10th-leading cause of death in the U.S.

Under pressure from the NRA, Congress in 1996 effectively took away CDC's freedom to conduct research on the gun epidemic. The NRA continues to demand that physicians "stay in their lane" and never talk about gun deaths and gun-safety measures. However, the public mood has shifted in recent years, and more people are willing to consider common-sense measures such as background checks, banning bump stocks, and keeping guns out of the hands of people with mental-health issues. In the 2018 midterm elections, gun-control groups actually outspent the National Rifle Association.

Police Have No Duty to Protect

On Feb. 14, Nikolas Cruz killed 17 students and staff members at a mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida. 17 others were injured. An armed school officer who heard the gunfire, Scot Peterson, did not go in and did nothing to stop the attack. Many have called him a coward and have asked, "Did he not have a legal obligation to assist those in need?"

An interesting fact has come to light in the aftermath of the shooting. Police officers, it seems, have a legal obligation to protect

people only when they are in their direct and immediate custody and when they have "a special relationship" with them. Law professor Darren L. Hutchinson (Univ. of Florida) is quoted in the "New York Times" as saying, "Neither the Constitution, nor state law, impose a general duty upon police officers or other governmental officials to protect individual persons from harm – even when they know the harm will occur. Police can watch someone attack you, refuse to intervene, and not violate the Constitution."

Based on this thinking, one judge, Beth Bloom, has come to the conclusion that Peterson, because the students were not in state custody, did not have a constitutional obligation to confront the shooter and therefore was not negligent in his duties. However, another judge, Patti Englander Henning, came to the opposite conclusion. She reasoned that Peterson indeed had "a special relationship" with the students under his care because he had been specifically assigned to the high school to offer protection. He is therefore liable under state negligence laws.

It is noteworthy that the law professor and both judges agree on one thing, however: contrary to a widely held belief, the duty of police officers to protect the public from harm is not enshrined in law. Police can indeed "watch someone attack you, refuse to intervene, and not violate the Constitution." It seems the public has no constitutional right to expect their governments to protect them. This is not a reassuring thought as we start a new year. It also begs the question, what exactly is the mission of police officers if not to protect lives, and of government in general?

Fox' Tucker Carlson Berates Immigrants

Tucker Carlson from "Tucker Carlson Tonight" at Fox News Channel has said immigrants make the country "poorer and dirtier and more divided." A few days later he added that in the American Southwest "huge swaths of the region are covered with garbage and waste that degrade the soil and kill wildlife." He has since reiterated that in his view "unregulated mass immigration has badly hurt this country's natural landscape."

Carlson is right to be concerned about the problem of littering and the pristineness of nature. However, immigrants produce not more or less garbage than other ethnic groups. Most trash is produced, dumped, and left behind by white Americans. Suggesting that immigrants are unsanitary ("poor and dirty") is an ethnic slur that did not sit well with several Fox advertisers. The IHOP restaurant chain, for instance, responded by saying the company "stands for welcoming all folks from all backgrounds and beliefs." Pacific Life Insurance also rejected the remarks, saying "as a company we strongly disagree with Mr. Carlson's statements." Several additional companies concerned about the risk to their brand have since pulled their ads from the show, but continue to advertise on other Fox News programs.

Earlier this year, Laura Ingraham lost advertisers after making negative comments. Bill O'Reilly also saw advertisers abandon him following reports of sexual misconduct. He has since left the network. A year ago, Sean Hannity faced a similar backlash after comments he made about Roy S. Moore.

A First Step for Criminal-Justice Reform

Congress recently passed the "First Step Act," a sweeping criminal-justice bill, and President Trump signed it promptly on Dec. 21. The new legislation has many components: *it reduces some mandatory minimum sentences, *it permits low-and-minimum-risk prisoners to earn early release (credit for good behavior); *it allows reviews of sentences that reflect significant disparities between ethnic groups; and *it boosts rehabilitation efforts and inmates' re-entry into society. At one point, the draft also included a ban for shackling pregnant women during labor and delivery. However, it is not clear if this survived the final version.

The bill was a compromise. Tough-on-crime conservatives argued, of course, that it would allow dangerous criminals to get early release (which is nonsense). Others were disappointed that most provisions of the bill do not apply retroactively. The warehousing of many rehabilitatable inmates continues. Too many Americans are imprisoned for non-violent crimes. It must also be noted that it is the states that are responsible for the vast majority of incarcerated people in the country, not the federal government. The "First Step Act" does not apply to states, at least not directly. However, despite its flaws and

limitations, the "First Step Act" is a positive change. Even the Koch Brothers supported it, and that's saying something.

"Justice" Is the Word of the Year

Merriam-Webster has selected "justice" as the word of the year. The dictionary company said in a statement that "justice" was looked up on its website 74% more this year than in 2017. It certainly is true that "justice," which is closely related to "truth," has been on the minds of many people this year. Both notions are being questioned and under relentless attack. – Other companies chose different words. Oxford Dictionaries opted for "toxic" while Dictionary.com went with "misinformation."

Tariffs Lead to the Cancellation of Solar-Energy Projects

A year ago, President Trump imposed tariffs of up to 30% on most imported solar cells used in solar panels. Instead of boosting domestic manufacturing, the tariffs have caused major delays and cancellations in the amount of \$8 billion of utility-scale projects. The Solar Energy Industry Association, the main trade group, also estimates that 9,000 jobs in construction and engineering were either lost or not added because of the tariffs. As a result, the U.S. has fallen further behind other nations in the area of clean and renewable energy.

California Insurance Claims Sky-High

In November, California experienced wildfires that destroyed or damaged some 20,000 structures and killed at least 86 people. The wildfires were not only the deadliest in the state's history, they were also the costliest. Insurance claims have already reached the \$9 billion mark and are expected to rise further. It will cost additional billions to clear the debris. – In the wake of climate change, the costs for storms and fires have steadily gone up for insurers. There is now concern about how close to a breaking point the country is.

Noam Chomsky Celebrates 90th Birthday

Noam Chomsky's 90th birthday came and went unnoticed by the general public. In the rest of the world, however, Noam Chomsky is considered one of most important global voices. He has represented America's liberal conscience for half a century. Avram Noam Chomsky was born in 1928 in Philadelphia as the son of East European Ashkenazi Jews. He studied linguistics, among other subjects, and became famous with his paradigm-shifting study "Syntactic Structures" (1957), translated into many languages. In the 1960s, he spoke and wrote against the Vietnam War and ended up on President Nixon's enemy list. He became an ardent critic of capitalism, neo-liberalism, neo-colonialism, globalization, imperialism, and totalitarianism. He is, by the way, also a supporter of the BDS boycott movement against Israel. Teaching at MIT, he has written more than 100 books and countless articles on linguistics, philosophy, and politics. His latest publication, "Global Discontents" (2018), collects the conversations he had with writer and radio broadcaster David Barsamian. Noam Chomsky is one of the greatest intellectuals alive today, but strangely few Americans outside academe have heard of him.

Colleges Don't Fact-Check Applications

An article in the New York Times (12/17) reveals that few colleges and universities fact-check student applications. To a large extent, the system relies on trust and the honor system. Admission counselors do look for inconsistencies and red flags. With experience comes the ability to sniff out made-up materials. However, it is possible for students to submit personal essays that are largely fictional. Admission staff does not have the luxury to independently confirm whether someone indeed did work in a soup kitchen, was on the football team, played the violin, or traveled abroad. Sometimes it is the parents who encourage their kids to embellish their résumés. In a recent case, an entire school – the T. M. Landry College Preparatory School in Louisiana – submitted doctored transcripts and fabricated stories to land students at selected universities. At least one college – St. John's University – allowed an admitted Landry student to stay and offered personal support instead of revoking admission.

However, enrolling in college underprepared and under false pretenses is never a good idea. It is a recipe for failure and disappointment on all sides. Some students or parents insist on the very best schools, but it is better to do well at a lower-tier institution

or a community college than to fail at an elite university. Cheating always gets you into trouble sooner or later. Honesty is the best policy.

"Ghosting" a Growing Phenomenon

The term "ghosting" usually applies to dating, but it is now an increasingly common phenomenon in the job market. Workers never show up or quit abruptly, and are then impossible to contact. Of course this has always happened, but it seems to be happening with increased frequency. Many "ghosters" are young and restless millennials, but the trend now includes older workers as well. The unemployment rate is low, and job openings are exceeding the number of applicants. Many skills are in demand, and so an increasing number of people skip the bureaucratic steps of giving notice, entering a waiting period, exit interviews, signing papers, and other out-processing procedures. Some people for whom a commitment may have been premature also walk away from their school, home, or family. Many end up growing roots elsewhere, but some never settle down and remain wandering nomads.

A Bible for Negro Slaves

The Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., is currently exhibiting a copy of the holy book specifically written "for the Negro Slaves in the British West-India Islands." The rare book from 1807 (only 3 copies are known to exist) is on loan from Fisk Univ., a historically black institution in Nashville, Tennessee. Produced by British missionaries, it is a much abridged version of the Bible. About 90% of the Old Testament and about 50% of the New Testament are missing. What may be of particular interest are the selections that were included or excluded. For example, the entire story of the Israelites' captivity in Egypt (Genesis) and their liberation (Exodus) were excised. The point was not to implant any dangerous ideas about hope, rebellion, and freedom into the minds of the slaves. On the other hand, pro-slavery passages about obedience and bondage were fastidiously kept, incl. Ephesians 6:5: "Slaves, render obedience to your earthly master, with reverence and awe." In an interview with National Public Radio, associate curator Anthony Schmidt said that Caribbean planters at that time were generally opposed to missionary work among the black slaves, who far outnumbered people of European descent. The British missionaries had to prove to them that what they were doing would not jeopardize the islands' political and economic status quo that was based on slavery.

Nunchucks Now Legal in New York

In 1974, New York lawmakers criminalized the production, possession, and use of so-called nunchucks – two rods connected with a rope or chain. (New York State law called them chuka sticks.) They were considered a threat to public safety. That did not sit well with James M. Maloney, a life-long martial-arts student. Unaware of the ban, he was arrested in 1981 after doing a public demonstration with his nunchucks. A lawyer and a university professor by trade, he filed a complaint in 2003. The case slowly made its way through the court system and finally ended up in the hands of Judge Pamela K. Chen of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York.

Judge Chen has now ruled that throughout the centuries nunchucks were used as defensive weapons and thus fall squarely under the Second Amendment. Not only did she strike down the entire ban on the weapon but also a related law that prohibited the nunchucks from being manufactured or transported in New York.

Maloney, now 60, is happy with the outcome. It indeed made absolutely no sense that deadly firearms should be legal but not nunchucks. There is no known case that nunchucks were ever used as a weapon of terror, to commit a crime, or to compromise public safety. The legislation has always been "a travesty," writes columnist Marc A. Thiessen in the "Columbus Dispatch" (12/28). He, too, was arrested and dragged before a court in the 1980s for the same reason: "It was absurd that a teenager could have had his life ruined and be stuck with a criminal record, simply because he wanted to be like Bruce Lee."

Copyright Laws Expire after 95 Years

In 1998, Congress extended copyright protections from 75 years to 95 years after publication. The measure benefitted the heirs of writers and musicians, but it also meant that many classic works became inaccessible to the public. "Many scholars and legal experts

argue that American copyright law [...] has skewed toward enriching companies and the heirs of writers and artists at the expense of the public," the New York Times said on Dec. 30.

In January 2019, works published in 1923 or prior to that date are now in the public domain. They can be freely copied and sold as paper or ebooks. As a result, they can be produced cheaper and be made available to a wider circle of readers. Watch for Library of America, Penguin Classics, and Vintage Classics to come out with excellent new publications, for instance. The current list includes Edgar Rice Burroughs' "Tarzan," Kahlil Gibran's "The Prophet," and Jean Toomer's "Cane. Also newly available are titles by Bertolt Brecht, Willa Cather, Agatha Christie, Joseph Conrad, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sigmund Freud, Robert Frost, Rudyard Kipling, D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Mann, Katherine Mansfield, Marcel Proust, Wallace Stevens, Edith Wharton, P. D. Wodehouse, and many others.

Literature, music, and the arts belong to the people. While it is a sound idea that the creators of these works (along with their families) benefit during their careers, it makes little sense to extend the copyright laws for almost an entire century. It condemns many titles to a life in obscurity.

"Punishment without Crime"

A new book by California law professor Alexandra Natapoff is a serious indictment of the American criminal-justice system. Below is a slightly edited description of "Punishment without Crime: How Our Massive Misdemeanor System Traps the Innocent and Makes America More Unequal" (Basic Books, 2018).

"The meticulously researched study offers an urgent interpretation of inequality and injustice in America by examining the paradigmatic American offense: the lowly misdemeanor. Based on extensive original research, legal scholar Alexandra Natapoff reveals the inner workings of a massive petty-offense system that produces over 13 million cases each year. People arrested for minor crimes are swept through courts where defendants often lack lawyers, judges process cases in mere minutes, and nearly everyone pleads guilty. This misdemeanor machine starts punishing people long before they are convicted; it targets the innocent; and it criminalizes normal human behavior. As a result, vast numbers of Americans – most of them poor and people of color – are stigmatized as criminals, impoverished through fines & fees, and stripped of drivers' licenses, jobs & housing. For too long, misdemeanors have been ignored. But they are crucial to understanding the punitive criminal system and the widening economic & racial divides in the nation."

Steven Spielberg's "Shoah Foundation"

In 1994, movie director Steven Spielberg founded the Shoah Foundation. He intended the organization to collect testimony from Holocaust survivors, and it has indeed done so. Housed on the campus of the University of Southern California, the Shoah Foundation has collected over 51,000 recordings from 65 countries in 43 languages. Today the group has 82 employees and a budget of \$15 million.

Now, however, Spielberg has expanded the foundation's vision and mission to include not only the Jewish Holocaust but modern genocide in countries such as Armenia, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Rwanda as well. The Shoah Foundation is not only about the past, it also shines a light on the present. In addition, it now also includes hate speech and hate crime in all forms, including when it occurs in places such as Charlottesville, Virginia. "Genocide can happen anywhere when an ordinary society goes wrong," says Spielberg. Hate crimes can easily escalate to persecution and genocide if not reined in. Spielberg is very concerned about the uptick of hate, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism in the world. It is hatred that tears the fabric of society apart, he says. Working with the Discovery Channel and filmmaker Alex Gibney, he is now working on a 6-hour exploratory study called "Why We Hate."

Charley Darkey Parkhurst (1812-1879)

Prior to the arrival of the railroad, stagecoach drivers played a crucial role in American history. They transported passengers, mail, and freight, including gold. Charley Parkhurst (1812-1879) was one of these legendary daredevil "whips" who braved storms, Indians, robbers, grizzly bears, rattlesnakes, primitive trails, and more. He was a whiskey drinker, cigar-smoker, and tobacco-chewer who wore a black eye-patch after having been kicked in the face by a spooked

horse. But when Parkhurst died at the age of 67 of cancer of the tongue (all that tobacco!), an astounding surprise awaited the public. A doctor determined that the famous stagecoach driver was biologically a woman and that she had given birth earlier in her life. Charley had been short for Charlotte.

Parkhurst's story is relatively well known, but mysteries remain. She was born in New Hampshire or Vermont where she grew up in an orphanage. She ran away at age 12, in boys' clothes, and ended up in Worcester, Mass. A mentor, Ebenezer Balch, taught her how to handle horses, and she became a stagecoach driver. During the California gold rush, she traveled via Panama to the West Coast where she continued his/her trade. She retired in the 1860s when stagecoach driving was superseded by trains, worked as a lumberjack, and also operated a saloon for a while.

It is not clear if Parkhurst was a straight woman who liked her freedom and independence. At least two novels depict her as such ("Charley's Choice" by Fern J. Hill and "The Whip" by Karen Kondazian). There is also a fictionalized biography of Parkhurst's life written for children, "Riding for Freedom" by Pam Muñoz Ryan. Others believe she was a gay or transgendered woman at a time when that was considered a degenerate disease and a crime.

Charley Parkhurst might be able to claim another distinction. An 1867 registry in California's Santa Cruz County lists a Charles Darkey Parkhurst from New Hampshire as having registered to vote. Although there is no evidence that she voted in any presidential election, she might very well have been "the first woman to vote in the U.S." In any case, that's what her gravestone says in Watsonville, California.

"Erectile Dysfunction" and Guns

Isn't it peculiar that advertisements for erectile dysfunction and firearms often occur together in the sports sections of newspapers? Erectile dysfunction, or ED, "affects around 50% of men over 50," says one ad. However, it can be successfully treated in most cases. An initial doctor's appointment is only \$99.

It seems that the purchase of guns fulfills a similar phallic need in men. For what appears to be a comparable price you can get pistols or carbines of various lengths. The exact barrel length is listed in each case – e.g., 3.1" or 3.2" barrels for pistols, 16" or 18" barrels for rifles. No rationale for why guns are needed is needed or provided. It is self-understood that the purpose of guns is to "shoot" in offensive or defensive situations. "Hunting" may or may not be involved.

Both erections and firearms seem to be closely related to a man's identity. Without that hardware you are not a full man, the ads seem to suggest. A real man "stands" his ground, is assertive and aggressive, ready at all times "to rise to the occasion," and "shoot" or "fire" at will when the occasion warrants it. There is a connection between erotic and military fantasies, it seems. Sex is weaponized, war is eroticized. "Scoring" and "winning" is the objective in both instances. Lyndon B. Johnson is quoted as saying he didn't want to pull out of Vietnam because it wouldn't be viewed as "manly." Nancy Pelosi recently called Trump's beloved border wall "a manhood issue." Is she right? A wall – or a steel fence – 30 feet high does seem to suggest a certain psychological insecurity on the part of the president.

How about cultivating less phallicentric, abusive, toxic forms of masculinity? Men capable of expressing their feelings? Men showing compassion? Men admitting vulnerability? The real measure of a man is not how "hard" he is; it is how soft and tender he can be.

WORLD

The U.S. Leaves Syria

To the horror of the military and against the unanimous recommendation of his own top security advisers, President Trump on Dec. 19 announced the rapid withdrawal of the 2,000 U.S. troops currently stationed in Syria. He claimed victory of ISIS. However, there is near-universal agreement that a hasty and disorderly departure is premature because the vacuum allows ISIS to regain territory and influence; it abandons the Kurdish SDF forces in eastern Syria who are now vulnerable to Turkish conquest; it surrenders Syria to Russia and Iran; it cements the political survival of Syrian dictator Assad; it weakens Israel's geopolitical position; it undermines trust in America's reliability and commitment as a partner; it calls into question Trump's

fitness to be commander in chief; and more. The step taken by the president will haunt America for years to come.

Why would Trump do such an ill-advised thing? Well, it's political. Here are two reasons: 1. It seems that his decision was triggered by a phone call he had with Turkish dictator Erdogan on Dec. 14. Ignoring the script he was given, Trump sided with Erdogan on the Syria question and promised him a withdrawal. Caught off guard, Erdogan warned against a hasty retreat because Turkey does not yet have the necessary forces mobilized to move in and start an assault on the remaining Islamic State forces and the Kurdish resistance.

2. Trump had a bad week – the Democrats are taking over the House soon; criminal investigations are closing in on him; the market is entering bear territory; the Trump Foundation was just shuttered; and there is resistance against funding his beloved border wall, perhaps or perhaps not leading to "a very long" government shutdown starting Dec. 22. Maybe Trump just wanted to change the subject, to divert attention away from the personal drama. He frequently does that. In the process, however, he became even more of a target of national and international criticism and derision. Even his friends at Fox News questioned him. Host Brian Kilmeade had this to say: "He's giving Russia a big win. Vladimir Putin praised him. He's also doing exactly what he criticized President Obama for doing. He said President Obama was the founder of ISIS. He just refounded ISIS." Putin indeed congratulated "Donald," saying he made the right decision. Russia is, of course, likely to be the main beneficiary of America's withdrawal in Syria.

Another interesting observation: it is increasingly clear that the Trump administration no longer considers countering terrorism to be the primary goal of American policy, as it was for years. For Trump, the real enemy seems to be unregulated immigration from Latin America. He has stated his preference that he wants to deploy the military to build the wall between the U.S. and Mexico and also be prepared to shoot and kill refugees and asylum seekers if they dare to cross the border.

James Mattis' Letter of Resignation (Excerpt)

"One core belief I have always held is that our strength as a nation is inextricably linked to the strength of our unique and comprehensive system of alliances and partnerships. While the US remains the indispensable nation in the free world, we cannot protect our interests or serve that role effectively without maintaining strong alliances and showing respect to those allies. Like you, I have said from the beginning that the armed forces of the United States should not be the policeman of the world. Instead, we must use all tools of American power to provide for the common defense, including providing effective leadership to our alliances. NATO's 29 democracies demonstrated that strength in their commitment to fighting alongside us following the 9-11 attack on America. The Defeat-ISIS coalition of 74 nations is further proof.

Similarly, I believe we must be resolute and unambiguous in our approach to those countries whose strategic interests are increasingly in tension with ours. It is clear that China and Russia, for example, want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model - gaining veto authority over other nations' economic, diplomatic, and security decisions - to promote their own interests at the expense of their neighbors, America and our allies. That is why we must use all the tools of American power to provide for the common defense.

My views on treating allies with respect and also being clear-eyed about both malign actors and strategic competitors are strongly held and informed by over four decades of immersion in these issues. We must do everything possible to advance an international order that is most conducive to our security, prosperity and values, and we are strengthened in this effort by the solidarity of our alliances."

Above is a substantial excerpt of James Mattis' resignation letter, submitted Dec. 20. The Secretary of Defense wanted to resign effective Feb. 28, but Trump dismissed him effective Dec. 31. It is clear from his letter that Mattis no longer believes that his and the president's views are aligned. Trump has shown little interest in the kinds of traditional strategic alliances that Mattis refers to, and he has not treated America's partners "with respect." Instead, he has turned a

blind eye to authoritarian regimes and even cultivated personal relationships with what Mattis calls "malign actors."

Trump has never had a conducive relationship with the academic world, the artistic community, and the media. There is now growing evidence that his ties with the judiciary and the military are also fraying – perhaps the two strongest pillars of American democracy. Mattis' letter is indicative of the fact that Trump is increasingly a man standing, thinking, and acting alone – unhinged and unbound. It is a deeply unsettling and disturbing prospect for many.

hold fast

*be steady and hold fast
together we get past
this dark and stormy night*

*stay strong and keep the faith
don't be a forlorn waif
not long until the morning light*

*ghosts and goblins are ruling now
putting on a scary show
but they will not last*

*let's stick together and be one people
not spineless timid sheeple
have hope, be true, hold fast*

No Climate-Change Progress in Katowice

After two weeks of climate-change negotiations in Katowice, Poland, the conference ended on Dec. 15 with no progress made. The final text welcomed the completion of the latest IPCC report, but not its conclusions and recommendations. There was no reference made to specific reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions. The almost 200 countries represented in Katowice agreed on universal, transparent rules on *how* to measure, track, and report emissions, but not on actually reducing them. Obviously, this lack of action cannot be considered progress. It is a sham of a plan. Climate change is happening faster than international governments are responding to it. The U.S. is one of the countries that are actively undermining efforts to address the dire situation. Oil-and-gas producing nations in particular (Russia, Saudi Arabia, the U.S.) are opposed to real progress.

López Obrador's First Month

The new president of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has a leadership style that sets him apart from many other world leaders. He gets around in Mexico City in an old Volkswagen, eschewing a presidential limousine. He also turned the official presidential residence into a cultural center and opened it to the public. He himself will continue to live in his old home in southern Mexico City for now. He has also sought to sell his presidential airplane, flying only economy on commercial airlines. He disbanded the presidential secret service, surrounding himself with unarmed citizens representing a cross-section of Mexican society. López Obrador says he values his relationship with the people. In addition, he has cut his salary in half and reduced the salaries of more than 30,000 public officials while raising the minimum wage by 16%.

Skeptics and critics may say that some of this is hollow showmanship. There is plenty wrong with Mexico, and it is indeed not easy to believe that López Obrador is a leader who means and does what he says. But he is off to a good start, relentlessly focusing on ordinary people, the disenfranchised, and indigenous populations. He has vowed to look out for all citizens, not just the rich. His proposed budget seems to confirm that. It includes increases in social security, more scholarship opportunities for students, and billions for job-training programs for the unemployed.

Trump Says He Will Extradite Gülen

According to European sources, U.S. President Trump has assured Turkish President Erdogan that he is prepared to extradite Fethullah Gülen, the Islamic preacher who is a permanent resident of the U.S. and has lived in self-imposed exile in rural Pennsylvania since 1997. Turkey has also requested the extradition of more than 80 Gülen followers who live in the U.S. The cleric is almost 80 years old and ailing. Gülen and Erdogan were once the best of friends, but Turkey has long demanded the extradition of Gülen and others who, they say, orchestrated the coup attempt in 2016. Erdogan views the Gulenists as deep-state enemies of his autocratic rule, not unlike Trump. Gülen has denied any responsibility and culpability. After the putsch, tens of thousands of people were arrested and dismissed from working as teachers or judges, journalists or police officers from the state.

Washington has never considered Gülen a terrorist threat, and it was the position of the Obama administration and the former Justice Dept. that the cleric would be extradited only if his guilt were proven by established standards of evidence. Trump, always eager to please strongmen around the globe, seems to see the case differently. If Gülen is indeed guilty of a political coup attempt (which neutral observers doubt), he would most certainly not receive a fair trial in Turkey and face the death penalty.

Just recently, it came to light that in 2016 Turkey conducted a secret campaign to pressure the U.S. to expel Gülen. Two associates of former national security adviser Michael Flynn (Bijan Kian and Ekim Alptekin) were charged on Dec. 17 to covertly and unlawfully influence public opinion and U.S. politicians on behalf of the Turkish government.

In the meantime, Turkey's President Erdogan has invited President Trump to a state visit in 2019. It was announced shortly after the U.S. agreed to withdraw its troops from Syria. It's another bromance in the making. Clearly, Erdogan has learned how to play Trump.



Japan Wants to Resume Whaling

Japan has confirmed that it is withdrawing from the International Whaling Commission (IWC), which established a moratorium on whale hunting in 1986. As part of the withdrawal, the country can no longer hunt whales in international waters. The Antarctic will henceforth be a true sanctuary for whales, dolphins, and porpoises. However, Japan has announced that it will resume commercial whaling in its own territorial waters, starting in July. The Asian country has long maintained that many whale species are not endangered and that eating whale is part of the traditional Japanese food culture. Under the guise of "scientific research," the nation has poached hundreds and thousands of minke whales and others over the years. – Iceland and Norway are also openly defying the international ban on commercial whale fishing.

A Novel about Benito Mussolini

Italian writer Antonio Scurati, who teaches at the IULM University in Milan, has written a new novel about the Italian duce, Benito Mussolini (1883-1945). "M" has provoked quite a discussion. The 839-page novel, the first of an intended trilogy, is a genre-defying work that blends fiction and fact. Interwoven are countless newspaper articles, police reports, letters, telegrams, and the like. All direct quotations are drawn from historical sources, and Scurati says that "nothing is invented."

Scurati (born in 1969) says he is not a fascist. A number of years ago he wrote another novel about anti-fascist Leone Ginzburg. However, critics are concerned about the moral ambiguity of "M." They have noted that the book depicts the history of Italian fascism and Mussolini without any political or ideological filters or moral value judgments. The chapters present largely the perspective of Mussolini and his followers. Mussolini appears not as a historical monster, but as a sympathetic character. Some observers are worried about what they see as the on-going rehabilitation of Mussolini in Italian media,

literature, and politics and say that many readers will flock to the novel not because they abhor Mussolini but because they identify with him.

HAPPY NEWS

Columbus Dispatch Offers Happy-News Stories

Following the lead of "Community Matters," the "Columbus Dispatch" is now also offering good news. Actually, it was the "New York Times" that started the trend a while back. "Dispatch" editor Alan Miller wrote on 12/16 that the new "Good Life" collection was done in response to laments from readers who complained about the absence of happy news. The fact is that the "Dispatch" prints positive news stories all the time, but if readers want to binge on nothing but good news, they can now go to www.dispatch.com/thegoodlife where there are "substantive, meaningful stories about people who improve the quality of life in Central Ohio, who inspire us with their generosity and good will or who simply do things that make us smile." You can also sign up for the "Good Life" newsletter, which will arrive weekly in your email inbox.

A Climate-Change Plan for Columbus

A task force led by OSU's Byrd Polar and Climate Research Center has presented a 125-page report with 43 recommendations to the City of Columbus. Jason Cervene, Education & Outreach Director for the Byrd Polar and Climate Research Center, served as chairman of the Columbus Climate Adaptation Plan Task Force. The report highlights the many effects of climate change, from rising temperatures to more rain events. It also factors in the expected population growth in Central Ohio and the higher demand for electricity. The report makes 21 "necessary" and 22 "aspirational" recommendations. Many require a public-education campaign, shoring up infrastructure, modernizing the electric grid, establishing cooling centers, and measures to reduce flash floods & water contamination. Unfortunately, the report does not address how Columbus can lower greenhouse-gas emissions, which actually cause the higher temperatures. According to Cervene, that's "a separate conversation."

Climate change stands out as one of greatest challenges urban areas face in the 21st century. Many have developed plans to deal with the long-term effects of climate change, among them Chicago, Cincinnati, and Cleveland. Expect to hear more about "resilience planning" and "risk reduction" in the future.

Locally, there is a collective forming that is also working on a climate-action plan, to be submitted to Delaware as part of that city's next Comprehensive Plan. Terry Hermsen, Ph.D., is spearheading the effort by the Central Ohio Communities Project (COCP). A second climate summit is coming up on Sat., Feb. 2. Folks interested in learning more about COCP and upcoming workshops can contact "Community Matters."



Free to Smile Foundation

In 2008, Columbus physician Dr. Byron Henry, his wife Stacy, and his family founded the Free to Smile Foundation that helps children with cleft lips and palates in the developing world. To date, Free to Smile has performed more than 1,000 free surgeries in various Central American, African, and Asian countries. Free to Smile partners with nonprofits in countries such as Ethiopia, Guatemala, Niger, the Philippines, and Zimbabwe. Those groups help them identify patients and organize "surgery weeks." In those poor countries, children with severe cleft deformities suffer from malnutrition because they cannot properly breastfeed and eat. They are also shunned socially. – Thank you, Columbus Dispatch (12/4), for printing this inspiring story.

"The Big Explore"

Several Columbus attractions teamed up recently for "The Big Explore" – a day of free admission to the Columbus Museum of Art, COSI, the Franklin Park Conservatory & Botanical Gardens, the

National Veterans Memorial & Museum, the Ohio History Connection, the Pizzuti Collection, and the Wexner Center for the Arts. Not only that, on Sat., Dec. 29, the Columbus Foundation paid for all COTA bus rides. As a result, bus lines were busy and lines were long. It was a welcome opportunity for ordinary people to visit Columbus' public collections for free. A weekly or monthly day of free admission should be part of every museum's mission.

Minimum Wage Increases to \$8.55 in Ohio

The Ohio minimum wage increases to \$8.55 per hour on Jan. 1 for non-tipped employees and \$4.30 for tipped employees. The new minimum wage applies to employees of businesses with annual gross receipts of more than \$314,000 per year. The \$8.55 minimum wage is intended to keep up with inflation, but it is not a "living wage."

Ohio House Drops "Pink Tax"

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has long classified tampons and pads as tax-free "medical devices," but the majority of states still charge state taxes for female-hygiene products. After years of arguments, the Ohio House has finally agreed to drop the so-called "pink tax." On Dec. 5, the House voted 81-1 to exempt from the state sales tax all menstrual products, such as tampons and panty liners, after July 1, 2019. The bill will now go to the Senate. If approved, the menstrual-products exemption will cost the state about \$4.5 million annually.

Ohio Senate Bans Female Genital Mutilation

On Dec. 19, the Ohio Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 214. It means that Ohio is now on its way to join 27 other states that ban female genital mutilation (FGM) of minors even if they or their parents granted consent. The bill also prohibits Ohioans from taking girls out of state to have the procedure done. People performing the operation would face a second-degree felony charge, punishable by up to \$15,000 in fines and 8 years in prison.

An estimated 513,000 children and girls in the nation are at risk of or have already undergone FGM, according to the nonprofit AHA Foundation. More than 24,000 live in Ohio, which has the nation's second-largest Somali population. Worldwide, more than 200 million women living today in mostly African countries have undergone the barbaric procedure that consists of removing some or all of the external female genitalia.

Shelter Pets Now the Official State Pet

Animal-rights activists have long suggested to make shelter animals, especially dogs and cats, the official pet of the State of Ohio. With Senate Bill 86, the state has now done so. The bill is in part intended to raise public awareness and to promote the adoption of animals from shelters.

Missouri Poacher Sentenced to Watch "Bambi"

The BBC reports that Missouri hunter David H. Berry Jr. must watch the 1942 Disney movie "Bambi" at least once every month while serving a 1-year prison sentence for illegally killing "several hundred" deer. Berry, 29, was arrested in August for killing the animals, severing their heads for trophies, and leaving the bodies to rot. His father and brother were also arrested after a monthslong investigation. It was one of the biggest poaching cases in Missouri's history. Father and son had their hunting privileges revoked for life by the Missouri Conservation Commission. – It is doubtful that the unusual condition that Judge Robert E. George of Lawrence County Circuit Court imposed on David Berry on Dec. 6 will lead to more compassion and empathy in Berry's heart of stone, but since no one is beyond redemption it is certainly worth a try.

Nevada Has Female Majority in Legislature

Nevada has become the first U.S. state with a female majority in the legislature. Women now have 51% of the 63 seats in the Nevada legislature. They hold 9 of 21 seats in the Senate and 23 of 42 seats in the Assembly, giving them an overall female majority of 32. Democrats are in control of both chambers.

Before 2018, New Hampshire was the first state to have a female majority in any legislative chamber. There, women held a majority in the state senate between 2009 and 2010. No state house in history has ever crossed the 50% mark.



An example of a wildlife overpass

A Wildlife Corridor in Washington

For countless wildlife species, the Interstate is a deadly border that restricts their movements. For that reason, engineers have increasingly constructed a network of tunnels and bridges to allow wildlife to migrate in search of food, shelter, or mates. Washington is now putting the finishing touches on the largest wildlife bridge ever constructed in the state. It is a 35-foot-tall, 66-foot-wide structure across both lanes of I-90 between the Cascade Mountains and Seattle. Fencing and landscaping are being installed to guide animals across the overpass, and 8-foot noise walls will block the traffic noise. The bridge cost \$6.2 million to build. Studies have shown that collisions between animals and humans cost about \$8 billion to the national economy per year, from emergency-room visits to road closings and car repairs. Seen in this light, wildlife overcrossings and undercrossings are good economic investments.

Bump Stocks Banned

On Dec. 18 the Trump administration banned so-called bump stocks, the firearm attachments that allow semi-automatic weapons to fire like machine guns. Bump stocks were used in the Las Vegas mass shooting and are highly controversial. The new regulation will take effect in March. Gun owners have until then to turn in their devices or destroy them. It is impossible to know how many bump stocks are out there, but the ATF estimates that between 280,000 and 520,000 were sold since 2010. Most owners of bump stocks are expected to comply with the new law, but many will not. – Gun Owners of America resisted the law as “unconstitutional.” The NRA has called on the Justice Dept. to provide amnesty for gun owners who already have bump stocks; the organization wants to see existing bump stocks “grandfathered” in.

U.S. Legalizes Hemp

Hemp is an incredibly versatile material. It can be used to produce textiles, clothing, shoes, rope, paper, jewelry, insulation, plastics, paint, biofuel, food, animal feed, and more. A provision in the latest farm bill, approved Dec. 12, removes hemp from the list of federally controlled substances and treats it like any other agricultural crop. It means that hemp farmers are now able to get bank loans, apply for grants, get insurance policies, write off business expenses, and ship across state lines just like any other farmer. The new legislation could double and triple the overall hemp market to \$2.5 billion by 2022.

Central America to Get \$10.6 Billion Aid

Finally a sensible plan from the Trump administration – the U.S. has pledged to provide Mexico and several Latin American countries a total of \$10.6 billion, \$5.8 billion for Mexico and \$4.8 billion for the “Northern Triangle” of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The money is designed to create better job opportunities and security conditions in these poor countries so that fewer people will be forced to emigrate. This is a win-win situation for everyone. The foreign aid will help stabilize these Latin American countries, create new political partners and economic markets for America, and curb illegal immigration across the borders. Mexican President López Obrador is dreaming of the day when “nobody will want to go work in the United States anymore.” That day is still far off, but this financial-aid package brings the world one step closer to peace and prosperity.

In the meantime, however, President Trump has threatened to withhold funding for the three countries. The man changes his mind from one hour to the next. It is difficult to see a clear logic and strategy behind his tweets and moves.



A New Species of Salamanders Discovered

The swamps in northern Florida and southern Alabama are hotspots for biological diversity. Scientists have now discovered and described a new species of aquatic salamander – the reticulated siren that can grow up to 2 feet long. It is the largest vertebrate discovered in the U.S. for decades. The reticulated siren – erroneously called a “leopard eel” by biologists who encountered it in the past – is an elusive species that is distinct from its cousins, the lesser siren and the greater siren. Eel-like, the animals have no hind-legs and dwell in the thick muck at the bottom of swamps and ponds. They are hard to find and collect. Scientists still do not know a lot about them, but they assume their main diet is crustaceans and insects. They seem to reproduce by fertilizing their eggs externally, as fish do. All sirens are poorly researched and understood, and not much is known about their conservation status. Hopefully the new discovery will stimulate more interest in them.

McDonald’s Will Curb Antibiotics

McDonald’s, the world’s biggest fast-food chain, has announced that it plans to reduce the use of antibiotics in its global beef supply by the end of 2020. Scientists have warned for years that the overuse of antibiotics diminishes the drug’s effectiveness in both animals and people. Some bacteria and other microbes are now resistant to traditional antibiotics. Environmental groups have praised the decision and hope that other restaurant chains will follow suit. A 2015 report gave 20 of the top 25 restaurants chains an “F” for not having or not disclosing a policy on antibiotics.

Norway Leads in Electric Cars

Some 30% of all new cars in Norway are electric vehicles. The nation of 5.3 million, which is in full support of the 2015 Paris Climate Accord, offers numerous incentives, subsidies & perks to encourage the switch from gasoline-powered to electric cars. There are no import tariffs and zero sales taxes for electric vehicles. Owners do not have to pay road tolls and get to use ferries for free. They are also allowed to use the bus lanes in Oslo and other congested city centers. Unlike many other countries, Norway has a dedicated Minister of Climate and Environment, Ola Elvestuen, who was appointed in January 2018. (Ola is a male name, just in case you are wondering.)

Luxembourg Offers Free Mass Transit

The small Central European country of Luxembourg is the first in the world to offer free transit for its workers. The duchy has only about 560,000 inhabitants, but more than 180,000 workers commute daily into Luxembourg from neighboring Belgium, France, or Germany. To get some of these cars off the road and to ease congestion and pollution, the country is now offering the free use of trains, buses, and street cars. Various European cities have been doing this for years, but Luxembourg is the first country to do so.

Great Britain Bans the Sale of Third-Party Puppies and Kittens

To crack down on “puppy farms” or “puppy mills,” Great Britain has banned third-party sales of dogs and cats. The legislation will make it harder for unscrupulous dealers with little or no regard for the health & welfare of animals. According to Britain’s Animal Welfare Minister David Rutley, the ban is intended to protect dogs and cats from exploitation. The decision follows a public consultation that found overwhelming support for banning third-party sales. Under the new measure, people wishing to adopt a puppy or kitten would have to deal directly with a breeder or an animal-rescue or animal-rehoming center instead of pet shops or other commercial dealers. The change was endorsed by one of Britain’s best-known animal shelters, the Battersea Cat and Dogs Home.

[12/31/18]