Feather River Democratic Club

Monthly Newsletter **June, 2016**

General Meeting

Third Thursday of each month, 7-8 PM
Yuba City High School. Room 322,
850 B Street, Yuba City, CA

Inside This Month's Issue

Club Officers

Chair: Janet Brown
Vice-Chair: Candy Sawyer
Treasurer: Linda Hicks
Secretary: Joene Tranter
Parliamentarian: Bob Morrish

April/May Meetings

E-Board Meeting: June 7
General Meeting: June 16
E-Board Meeting: July 12
General Meeting: July 21

Special Events

Newsletter Editor

Joene Tranter

No, Not Trump, Not Ever
David Brooks, *The New York Times,* March 18, 2016

Donald Trump is epically unprepared to be president. He has no realistic policies, no advisers, no capacity to learn. His vast narcissism makes him a closed fortress. He doesn't know what he doesn't know and he's uninterested in finding out. He insults the office Abraham Lincoln once occupied by running for it with less preparation than most of us would undertake to buy a sofa.

Trump is perhaps the most dishonest person to run for high office in our lifetimes. All politicians stretch the truth, but Trump has a steady obliviousness to accuracy. This week, the Politico reporters Daniel Lippman, Darren Samuelsohn and Isaac Arnsdorf fact-checked 4.6 hours of Trump speeches and press conferences. They found more than five dozen untrue statements, or one every five minutes. "His remarks represent an extraordinary mix of inaccurate claims about domestic and foreign policy and personal and professional boasts that rarely measure up when checked against primary sources," they wrote.

He is a childish man running for a job that requires maturity. He is an insecure boasting little boy whose desires were somehow arrested at age 12. He surrounds himself with sycophants. "You can always tell when the king is here," Trump's butler told Jason Horowitz in a recent Times profile. He brags incessantly about his alleged prowess, like how far he can hit a golf ball. "Do I hit it long? Is Trump strong?" he asks.

In some rare cases, political victors do not deserve our respect. George Wallace won elections, but to endorse those outcomes would be a moral failure.

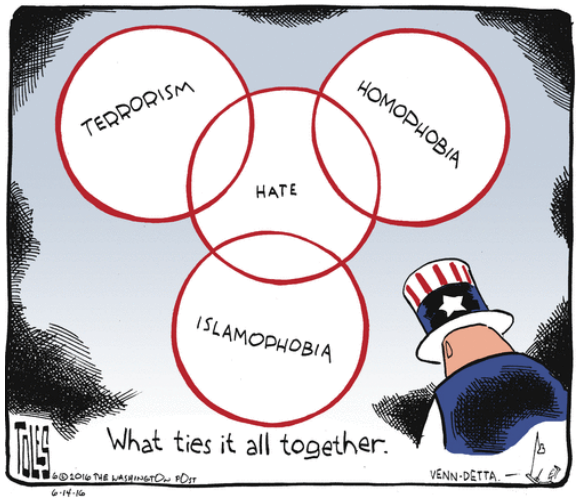
And so it is with Trump.

Donald Trump is an affront to basic standards of honesty, virtue and citizenship. He pollutes the atmosphere in which our children are raised. He has already shredded the unspoken rules of political civility that make conversation possible. In his savage regime, public life is just a dog-eat-dog war of all against all.

As the founders would have understood, he is a threat to the long and glorious experiment of American self-government. He is precisely the kind of scapegoating, promise-making, fear-driving and deceiving demagogue they feared.

Trump's supporters deserve respect. They are left out of this economy. But Trump himself? No, not Trump, not ever.

Donald Trump's Exploitation of Orlando
David Remnick, *The New Yorker,* June 12, 2016



In the rhetoric of Donald Trump, mendacity and cynicism compete for equal time. It is hard to say which prevailed today as the Republican Party standard-bearer, a man who pretends to the most powerful political office in the land, tweeted this at his followers: "Appreciate the congrats for being right on radical Islamic terrorism."

This came in the wake of the most horrific mass shooting in the history of the United States—a slaughter of fifty men and women in an L.G.B.T. night club called Pulse, in Orlando, early Sunday morning. Trump allowed that he didn't want "congrats" so much as he wanted "toughness & vigilance." Just as profoundly, he announced, "We must be smart!"

Trump also told his followers—and hence the world—that President Obama should "immediately resign in disgrace" for failing to "mention the words radical Islam" in his remarks on the shooting. And, he suggested, Hillary Clinton might want to get out of the Presidential race for making the same sin of omission in her statement.

With every month, it has become clearer that Trump is a makeshift politician, whose rancid wit resides in his willingness to say whatever it takes to arouse the fears of a political base. He might have started his campaign with the idea of winning some votes and publicity, increasing his profile as a marketing whiz, and then dropping out. Good for business! But now that he has stunned the political world—and, likely, himself—he has shown little inclination (or, perhaps, capacity) to grow into his role, to modify his language, be it for the sake of the Republican establishment or of simple decency. He'll have none of that. Whatever inflates his sense of self and prods the anxieties of the country—that's what works for him.

It feels indecent on such a day to engage these comments of Trump's at all. But their velocity, vapidity, and sheer ugliness reflect his character, his emptiness, and, most of all, the shape of the election campaign to come. Since Trump has ascended, it's been clear that his demagogic instincts could be tested precisely by the sort of tragedy suffered in Orlando. And, when faced with the path of modesty and the path of dark opportunism, he has chosen the latter. That's what he is about. It's who he is.

This might have been predicted. In the wake of the attacks in Brussels, last March, Trump was asked if he would consider using nuclear weapons to fight ISIS. "Well, I'm never gonna rule anything out," he said. "The fact is, we need unpredictability." He said the terrorists were "winning," and "we don't do anything about it." Waterboarding, he said, "would be fine."

Now, Trump is again pounding the notion of American leadership as "weak," as complacent. "If we do not get tough and smart real fast, we are not going to have a country anymore," Trump said in a statement posted on his campaign's Web site. "Because our leaders are weak, I said this was going to happen—and it is only going to get worse. I am trying to save lives and prevent the next terrorist attack. We can't afford to be politically correct anymore."

Trump's ruse is that somehow the United States is not engaged militarily in the fight against ISIS, or that "political correctness" is the chief factor undermining American security. He feeds his constituents daily with the misbegotten notion that the country is being flooded with countless unchecked "aliens" from the Middle East, South Asia, and Mexico. The mouth moves and the lies pour forth. Any contrary evidence, any complexity, is foreign. Questioned on television to prove his points, faced with contrary evidence, he talks past it. Never mind all the firepower expended against ISIS targets, the territory gained, and the difficulty of taking back cities when ordinary civilians are used, en masse, as human shields. We are weak; we are politically correct.

No one, not least the President, failed to take note that the man identified by authorities as the killer in Orlando—a twenty-nine-year-old American citizen and security guard from Fort Pierce, Florida, named Omar Mateen—had carried out a terrorist attack. Official sources also revealed that he had pledged allegiance to ISIS on a 911 call made just before the attack, and that he had legally purchased arms, including an AR-15 assault rifle, the same rapid-fire weapon used at Sandy Hook. The ISIS attitude toward homosexuals is well known: they are summarily executed, often thrown from rooftops. Trump, for his part, had nothing to say about the easy availability of weapons like the AR-15; he is deep in an embrace with the leadership of the National Rifle Association, which has endorsed him.

President Obama, in his statement, displayed a sense of calm resolution, grief, and outrage—as he has done repeatedly, after mass shootings in Binghamton, Fort Hood, Tucson, Aurora, Oak Creek, Overland Park, Newtown, Chapel Hill, Charleston, Chattanooga, San Bernardino, and elsewhere. Hillary Clinton, too, issued a statement that was rational, heartfelt, and touched on all the necessary aspects of the killings as we know them thus far—terrorism, the need to go on battling terrorism, the preposterously easy availability of guns, the victimization of the L.G.B.T. community.

The horror in Orlando was unspeakable. And we will learn much more about it in the days ahead. But today the event was made that much worse by a Presidential candidate who seeks to lead the country in complicated times and in its darker moments with self-aggrandizing tweets and hollow words.

The New Overtime Rule is One of Obama's Most Progressive Actions
Jared Bernstein, *Washington Post,* May 18, 2016

The Obama administration's new overtime rule was finalized Tuesday night, and it will go into effect in the nation's workplaces on Dec. 1 of this year. I'll get to the details in a moment, but this update of a vital labor standard is a great advance for working people. This may be the administration's most significant action on behalf of middle-class paychecks. Here are the basics of the final rule:

The new salary threshold is $47,476, or $913 per week, just about double the current weekly threshold of $455. In order to prevent abuse of the overtime law, which maintains that all hourly workers must be paid "time-and-a-half" (1.5 times their base hourly wage) for weekly hours worked beyond 40, employers can't simply make someone exempt by paying them a salary. Salaried workers whose pay is below the OT threshold must also get OT pay. The new threshold represents the 40th percentile pay of full-time, salaried workers in the southern region of the United States. I know: why 40th, why southern, etc.?

A number of us who have been agitating for this change argued that the last time the threshold was consistent with the intent of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) was back in 1975, when it was a bit more than twice the current threshold (obviously, it wasn't indexed to inflation or wage growth). The new threshold gets close to the 1975 level, adjusted for inflation, which corresponds to about the 40th percentile today. However, during the comment period, when the Department of Labor did its due diligence and listened to stakeholders on all sides of the change, it was suggested that the threshold should reflect regional wage and price differences. Instead of having a bunch of different thresholds, it decided on the 40th percentile of the lowest-wage region, i.e., the south. This took the threshold down from around $50,000 when the president first introduced the change to about $47,500.+

The new rule will directly affect 4.2 million workers. According to the Department of Labor, that's the number of salaried workers newly eligible for overtime pay. That is, their salary stands between the current and the new threshold, between $455 and $913. Of course, not everyone in that range will end up working overtime — though about 20 percent regularly do so — but if they do, they'll now be eligible for the OT premium.

The Department of Labor believes the new rule will also indirectly affect 8.9 million workers. These are also workers who earn between the old and the new thresholds but the difference between them and the directly affected group is that these workers should already be getting overtime pay, but aren't. The rules state that when someone's duties at work are such that they're not bona fide exempt workers, they should be covered by OT. These workers tend to not really manage or supervise other workers – they're not recognizable as executives, professionals, or administrators – and thus should be non-exempt. Now, because their pay is under the new threshold, there should be no more ambiguity about their coverage status. That's about 8.5 percent of employment, affected directly or indirectly.

The new threshold will be adjusted every three years to the 40th percentile, full-time salary of the lowest paid region. So how will this all play out in the real world? Some people who should have been getting overtime pay but weren't, either because the threshold was allowed to stagnate or because their employers failed to correctly apply the "duties test" (admittedly ambiguous in some cases), will now get it. Others may work fewer overtime hours, but remember, they weren't getting paid at all for those extra hours before, so they're unquestionably better off (their weekly earnings would be unchanged but they'd be working fewer weekly hours).

Some adjustments may come through lower base pay rates, such that an employer's total wage bill, including OT, will be only slightly higher as they partially offset the impact of the increase through the lower wage. Others in the affected range may again end up exempt, but only after a salary bump up to the new threshold. And one impact I expect to see — one I'd argue is particularly welcome — is more hiring of straight-time workers by employers who want to avoid higher OT costs.

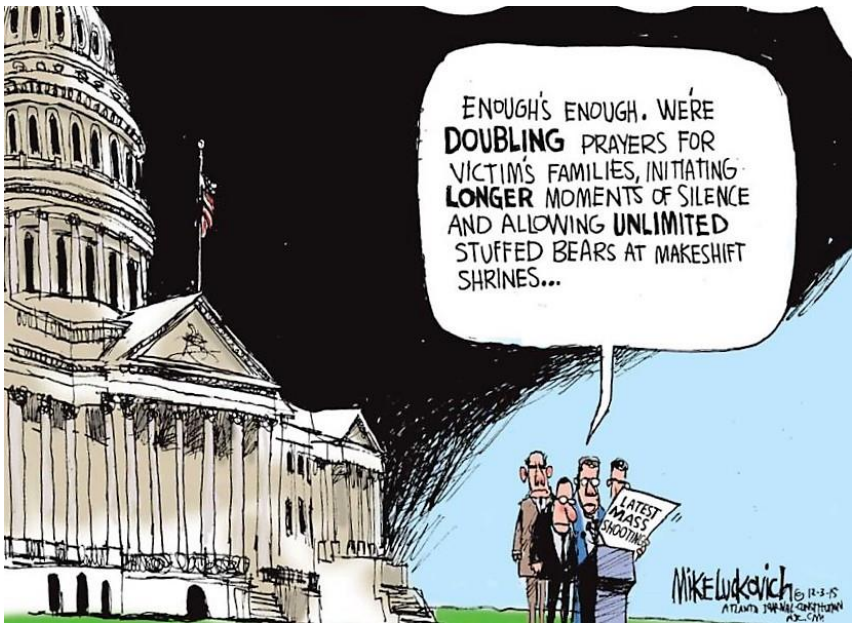
The Department of Labor estimates that the new rule will cost employers $1.5 billion a year: $1.2 billion in new OT pay and $300 million in administrative expenses to implement the change. In a nation with an annual aggregate wage bill of over $8 trillion, that's about 0.03% of total pay.

In other words, what we have here is a progressive change that was a long-time coming, one that will deliver a boost in pay to some workers and relief from unpaid overwork for others. It will transfer a relatively small amount of the nation's wage bill from employers to workers, and in doing so, restore the purpose of a labor standard that is as important now as it was when it was first introduced in the 1930s.

Here's how Labor Secretary Tom Perez, who was instrumental in bringing this rule to fruition, put it to me: "This rule is about ensuring middle-class jobs pay middle-class wages. The FLSA stands for the basic proposition that if you work full-time in America, you should be able to get by; and when you take on important responsibilities and work extra, you should be in the middle class. Today's announcement will go a long way to restoring the luster of that crown jewel of worker protection… overtime goes to the heart of what it means to be middle class. It stands for the idea that hard work should be rewarded, that if you work extra, you should get paid extra." Amen to that.

One final point. The reason this is happening is that it's an executive rule change, not legislation. This Congress would never have taken a step like this to help middle-class, working families. But if the next president is hostile to the new rule, it can be reversed (it takes some time to do so, but it can be done). That means the fate of the new overtime rule is tied to the outcome of the election. Or, to put not too fine a point on it, from the perspective of the middle class, the electoral stakes just got even higher.

Death and Humor in America: When Silence is Just Not Loud Enough
Roger Simon, *Politico,* June 15, 2016



Our president was speaking to us in his grave, yet hopeful, voice, a timbre and tone he has had much practice in using. Far too much practice. He uses it when there has been a mass shooting in America. And by some counts this was his 14th time. "We have to make it harder for those who want to kill Americans to get weapons of war," our president is saying.

We have been working on that one for a while. But it is really not a matter of human lives lost, people lying in pools of blood, or corpses shredded by gunfire. Solving that problem would be relatively easy. The real problem is political. Which is why no gun legislation with a serious chance of passing stands before Congress.

The body counts, the gore, the all-too-vivid last moments captured on a hand-held camera, mean nothing compared to the politics of gun ownership. It remains very easy to buy a semi-automatic rifle almost anywhere in America. Only seven states ban them. So the killing continues. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2013 guns were used in 11,208 homicides. That's a lot. That's nearly 31 per day.

Why so many? Crazy is a popular choice. Do you have to be crazy to shoot and kill 49 people in a nightclub? How about +20 small children in an elementary school? Or 12 people at a Batman movie?

Were all the shooters crazy? Could be. But foreign countries have crazy people, too, and their murder rates are much, much lower than ours. Again, why? One reason is that in America we allow individuals to own weapons of mass destruction: semi-automatic firearms with large magazines. And though Congress banned them for 10 years — 1994 to 2004 — it has refused to reinstate the ban even though mass killings continue.

In America, a gun is not just a gun. It is a fetish, a totem, an icon. It has an appeal that defies mere logic. Charles Bronson — and I swear I am not making up the name — is the former commissioner of agriculture and consumer services for the state of Florida. He used to be in charge of gun permits. Today, he is still against more stringent gun laws like the ones that would ban semi-automatic AR-15 military-style rifles. "People use AR-15s to hunt deer, to hunt hogs, to hunt all kinds of game," Bronson told a reporter, and said it would be a shame to change the gun laws "because of one person's lawlessness." I am trying to see his point of view: One person kills 49 people and wounds 53 others, and that is nothing compared to the pleasure of executing a hog.

All these arguments are familiar. Everything about mass shootings is achingly familiar: the moments of silence, the lighting of candles, the wearing of ribbons, the hourlong news specials, the flags at half-staff, the president coming down to the briefing room and then the full-scale speech like the one he will make Thursday in Orlando.

"These mass shootings are happening so often now that lamenting them afterwards is becoming a national ritual," Conan O'Brien said Monday. O'Brien is a late-night comic. He is also an observer of life in these United States. It is sometimes hard to observe that life and still remain a comic, and I admire him for trying. "I have really tried very hard over the years not to bore you with what I think," he said, his voice growing angrier as he spoke. "However, I am the father of two, and I like to believe I have a shred of common sense, and I simply do not understand why anybody in this country is allowed to purchase and own a semi-automatic assault rifle. These are weapons of war, and they have no place in civilian life. I do not know what the answer is, but I wanted to take just a moment here tonight to agree with the rapidly growing sentiment in America that it's time to grow up and figure this out."

Time to grow up. A fine idea. And I really wish the sentiment behind it was "rapidly growing." Because not everybody in America will get a chance to grow up. Some of those children we send each morning to the "safety" of their schools will never make it back home alive. (According to the Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Since 2013, there have been at least 188 school shootings in America, an average of nearly one a week.")

On Capitol Hill on Monday, Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan called for a ritual moment of silence in the House chamber to commemorate those killed in Orlando. Connecticut Democrat Jim Himes stood up and walked off the floor instead. Previously, he had tweeted: "I will not attend one more 'Moment of Silence' on the Floor. Our silence does not honor the victims, it mocks them. The Moments of Silence in the House have become an abomination. God will ask you, 'How did you keep my children safe'? Silence. If God is an angry God, prepare to know a hell well beyond that lived day to day by the families of the butchered. I will not be silent.'"

And I, for one, hope he keeps talking, tweeting, speaking out and walking out.

The Right Wing Has a Solution for Poverty: Pretend It Doesn't Exist
Rebecca Vallas, *The Nation,* June 15, 2016

This past Sunday, I joined C-SPAN's *Washington Journal* for a discussion on the House GOP poverty plan released earlier in the week. My conservative counterpart on the show—Robert Rector of the right-wing Heritage Foundation—made his views on poverty clear early on in the conversation when he lamented that our aid programs are "too generous." Believe it or not, he went on, poor people in America have basic household appliances such as refrigerators, stoves, ovens, microwaves, and—gasp! —air conditioning. He accused folks on the left—and the nonpartisan Census Bureau—of "exaggerating" the state of poverty in the United States.

These are hardly new talking points for Rector. He's been putting out "research" on how good poor Americans supposedly have it for years. Back in 2011, Rector's brazenly titled paper "Air Conditioning, Cable TV, and an X-Box: What is Poverty in the United States Today?" got the attention of Stephen Colbert, who gave it the treatment it deserves on *The Colbert Report*: "A refrigerator and a microwave? They can preserve *and* heat food? Ooh la la! I guess the poor are too good for mold and trichinosis." All joking aside, the fact that Rector is still peddling this line reflects just how out of touch right-wing views on poverty are today.

For starters, are our aid programs "too generous"?

As I noted on *Washington Journal*, Rector should try telling that to the more than 6 million Americans whose only income is food stamps—which provides just $1.40 per person per meal in nutrition assistance. Or the three in four low-income families who are eligible for housing assistance but don't receive it and can spend 60, 70, or 80 percent of their income on rent and utilities each month, while they remain on decades-long waiting lists for aid. Rector should see how his line goes over with the three in four families with children in poverty who are not helped by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), because it was converted to a flat-funded block grant that's lost one-third of its purchasing power since 1996. Or even with the small fraction of families lucky enough to receive TANF—because in no state are benefits greater than *half* the federal poverty line.

And are poor people in America secretly living high on the hog?

Most observers view the austere federal poverty line as an inadequate measure of hardship. Experts say a family of four needs an annual income of $50,000 to achieve an adequate but basic standard of living—more than twice the poverty line for a family of four, which is a measly $24,000. By that measure, the number of people in this country struggling to make ends meet far exceeds the 47 million Americans with incomes below the poverty line; it amounts to nearly one in three Americans—more than 105 million people—living on the economic brink today. This much larger figure is confirmed by recent survey data. In a report released last month by the Federal Reserve Board, one-third of American adults say that they struggle to make ends meet.

It is clear that after decades of growing income inequality, economic hardship can hardly be described as an "us and them" phenomenon. With working families facing flat and declining wages and gains from economic growth increasingly concentrated in the hands of the wealthy, economic instability is now a widespread experience.

Rector's comments on *Washington Journal* made clear his proposed solution: Just deny the existence of poverty and hardship in America. If poor families are actually doing just fine—they have refrigerators *and* microwaves, after all—then not only does that free up policymakers to slash aid programs, it also removes any need to boost wages or enact any other policies that would cut poverty and make it easier to get ahead. But for the 105 million Americans struggling to get by, the fact that they are fortunate enough to be able to refrigerate—and heat!—their food offers cold comfort,

It's not just Heritage who's out of touch. Last week, House Speaker Paul Ryan released a long-awaited poverty plan as part of his "A Better Way" House GOP policy agenda. He unveiled the plan at a drug rehab center, offering a not-so-subtle reminder of his views on the causes of poverty. As Congresswoman Gwen Moore (D-WI) pointed out, if Ryan truly understood poverty in America, rather than seeing struggling individuals as "broken people," he would have given the speech at a McDonald's, surrounded by low-wage workers struggling because of a broken economy. Even more out of touch were the comments made by Representative Andy Barr (R-KY) at the plan's release—he actually referred to people living in poverty as "untapped, dormant assets."

Speaker Ryan and his colleagues' limited understanding of poverty is also evident in the "A Better Way" plan itself, which echoes many of the themes found in their previous budgets. (This year's House GOP budget, for example, got three-fifths of its cuts from programs that serve low- and moderate-income people, while protecting tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations.) In addition to slashing housing assistance in the midst of a national affordable-housing crisis, and proposing to cut school lunches, their solutions to poverty include legalizing bad financial advice by rolling back the Obama administration's "fiduciary rule" and blocking the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's proposed regulation to protect cash-strapped borrowers from predatory payday lenders.

Perhaps even more notable than what's in the plan is what it leaves out: any policies to create jobs or boost wages. Indeed, Ryan made clear in the Q&A following his speech that, despite his previous claims to want to "push wages up," he and his colleagues remain steadfastly opposed to raising the minimum wage.

Bipartisan interest in tackling poverty and expanding opportunity would be a welcome development. But instead of putting our heads in the sand, policymakers on both sides of the aisle must acknowledge the very real experience of poverty in America—and the many structural barriers that stand in the way of getting ahead.

That starts by admitting that poverty exists.

The Crippled Supreme Court
Editorial Board, *The New York Times,* May 16, 2016

Every day that passes without a ninth justice undermines the Supreme Court's ability to function, and leaves millions of Americans waiting for justice or clarity as major legal questions are unresolved.

On Monday, the eight-member court avoided issuing a ruling on one of this term's biggest cases, Zubik v. Burwell, which challenges the Affordable Care Act's requirement that employers' health care plans cover the cost of birth control for their employees. In an unsigned opinion, the court sent the lawsuits back to the lower federal courts, with instructions to try to craft a compromise that would be acceptable to everyone.

This is the second time since Justice Antonin Scalia's death in February that the court has failed to reach a decision in a high-profile case; in March, the court split 4 to 4 in a labor case involving the longstanding right of public-sector unions, which represent millions of American workers, to charge collective bargaining fees to nonmembers.

The Zubik litigation, which involves seven separate cases, was brought by religiously affiliated nonprofit employers like hospitals, colleges and social service organizations that do not want any role in giving their employees access to contraception.The Obama administration, mindful of concerns over religious freedom, has already provided a way out for these employers: They must notify their insurer or the government, in writing, of their objection, at which point the government takes over and provides coverage for the contraceptives at no cost to the employers. This sensible arrangement was not enough for several plaintiffs who said it still violated their religious freedom under a federal law, because the act of notification itself made them complicit in the provision of birth control.

Eight federal courts of appeals have already rejected this claim, finding that such a minor requirement did not place a substantial burden on the objectors' religious freedom. In her opinion for the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, Judge Cornelia Pillard wrote that under both federal law and the Constitution, "freedom of religious exercise is protected but not absolute." This was the right answer, and should have easily guided the justices in resolving this case. But in a highly unusual order issued days after oral arguments, the justices asked both sides to consider a potential compromise — having a religiously affiliated employer tell an insurer of its objection to birth control coverage, and then having the insurer separately notify employees that it will provide cost-free contraceptives, without any involvement by the employer.

In Monday's opinion, the court said both sides' responses indicated that a compromise was possible. Without weighing in on the merits of the litigation, the court sent the lawsuits back to the federal appeals courts and told them to give the parties "an opportunity to arrive at an approach going forward that accommodates petitioners' religious exercise while at the same time ensuring that women covered by petitioners' health plans 'receive full and equal health coverage, including contraceptive coverage.'"

This move solves nothing. Even if these plaintiffs can find their way to an agreement with the government that satisfies their religious objections, there are other employers with different religious beliefs who will not be satisfied, and more lawsuits are sure to follow. The court could have avoided this by affirming the appellate decisions that correctly ruled in the government's favor. Unfortunately, the justices appear to be evenly split on this issue, as they may be on other significant cases pending before them.

The court's job is not to propose complicated compromises for individual litigants; it is to provide the final word in interpreting the Constitution and the nation's laws. Despite what Senate Republicans may say about the lack of harm in the delay in filling the vacancy, the court cannot do its job without a full bench.

If you would like to join our club, please call Janet Brown at 530-674-9227 or attend our June 16 meeting. We meet from 7PM – 8PM at Yuba City High School, Room 322, 850 B Street, Yuba City.

The Return of Democratic Socialism
Lawrence Wittner, *Huffington Post,* May 24, 2016

Democratic socialism used to be a vibrant force in American life. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Socialist Party of America, headed by the charismatic union leader, Eugene V. Debs, grew rapidly, much like its sister parties in Europe and elsewhere: the British Labour Party, the French Socialist Party, the Swedish Social Democratic Party, the Australian Labor Party, and dozens of similar parties that voters chose to govern their countries. Publicizing its ideas through articles, lectures, rallies, and hundreds of party newspapers, America's Socialist Party elected an estimated 1,200 public officials, including 79 mayors, in 340 cities, as well as numerous members of state legislatures and two members of Congress. Once in office, the party implemented a broad range of social reforms designed to curb corporate abuses, democratize the economy, and improve the lives of working class Americans. Even on the national level, the Socialist Party became a major player in American politics. In 1912, when Woodrow Wilson's six million votes gave him the presidency, Debs—his Socialist Party opponent—drew vast, adoring crowds and garnered nearly a million.

This promising beginning, however, abruptly came to an end. Socialist Party criticism of World War I led to a ferocious government crackdown on the party, including raids on its offices, censorship of its newspapers, and imprisonment of its leaders, including Debs. In addition, when Bolshevik revolutionaries seized power in Russia and established the Soviet Union, they denounced democratic socialist parties and established rival Communist parties under Soviet control to spark revolutions. In the United States, the Socialists fiercely rejected this Communist model. But the advent of Communism sharply divided the American Left and, worse yet, confused many Americans about the differences between Socialists and Communists. Although the Socialist Party lingered on during the 1920s and 1930s, many individual Socialists simply moved into the Democratic Party, particularly after its New Deal programs began to steal the Socialist thunder.

The Socialist Party's situation grew even more desperate during the Cold War. With the Communists serving as cheerleaders for the Soviet Union, Americans often viewed them as, at best, apologists for a dictatorship or, at worst, subversives and traitors. And the Socialists were often mistakenly viewed the same way. By the 1970s, the once-thriving Socialist Party was almost non-existent. And, then, remarkably, democratic socialism began to revive. Of course, it had never entirely disappeared, and occasional polls found small-scale support for it. But, in December 2011, a startling 31 percent of Americans surveyed by the Pew Research Center said that they had a positive reaction to the word "socialism," with young people, Blacks, and Hispanics showing the greatest enthusiasm. In November 2012, a Gallup survey found that 39 percent of Americans had a positive reaction to "socialism," including 53 percent of Democrats.

Why the rising tide of support for socialism in recent years? One key factor was certainly a popular backlash against the growing economic instability and inequality in America fostered by brazen corporate greed, exploitation, and control of public policy. In addition, college-educated young people—saddled with enormous tuition debt, often under-employed, and with little recollection of the Soviet nightmare—began to discover the great untold political story of the postwar years, the remarkable success of European social democracy.

Of course, Bernie Sanders played an important role in this public reappraisal of democratic socialism. Once a member of the Young People's Socialist League, the youth group of the old Socialist Party, Sanders forged a successful political career as an independent, serving as a popular mayor of Burlington, Vermont, a U.S. Congressman, and, eventually, a U.S. Senator. During these years, he consistently attacked the greed of the wealthy and their corporations, assailed economic and social inequality, and stood up for workers and other ordinary Americans. For many on the American Left, he provided a shining example of the continued relevance of democratic socialism in America.

Sanders's plunge into the Democratic Presidential primaries, though, drew the attention of a much larger audience—and, as it turned out, a surprisingly sympathetic one. Although the communications media were quick to point out that he was a socialist, a fact that many assumed would marginalize him, he didn't run away from the label. Perhaps most important, he presented a democratic socialist program in tune with the views of many Americans: universal healthcare (Medicare for All); tuition-free public college; a $15/hour minimum wage; increased Social Security benefits; higher taxes on the wealthy; big money out of politics; and a less militaristic foreign policy. This sounded good to large numbers of voters. In June 2015, shortly after Sanders launched his campaign, a Gallup poll found that 59 percent of Democrats, 49 percent of independents, and 26 percent of Republicans were willing to support a socialist if he were the candidate of their party. This included 69 percent of Americans 18 to 29 years of age and 50 percent of those between 30 and 49 years of age. To the shock (and frequent dismay) of the political pundits, Sanders's poll numbers have risen steadily until they rival those of Hillary Clinton, the presumed Democratic nominee, and he has won 20 of the Democratic state primaries and caucuses conducted so far.

But whether or not Sanders reaches the White House, it's clear that democratic socialism has made a comeback in American life.

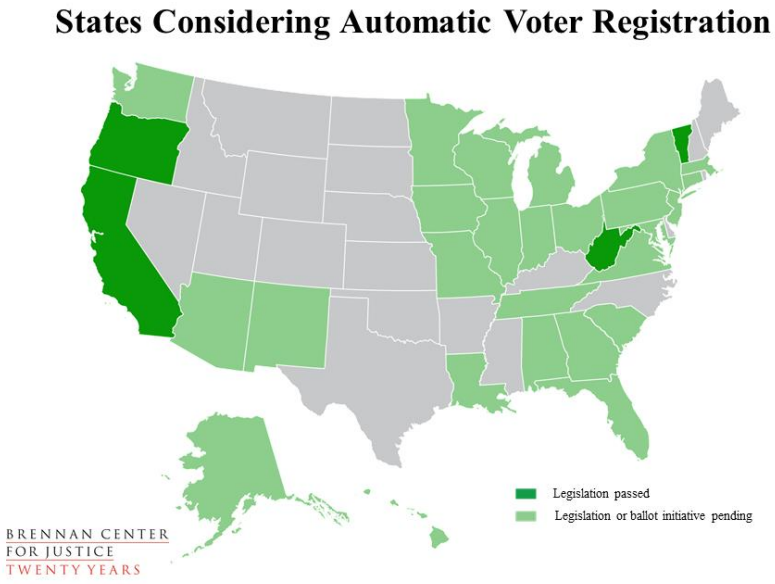
Automatic Voter Registration in Oregon is Revolutionizing American Democracy
Ari Berman, *The Nation,* May 16, 2016

Oregon's presidential primary is tomorrow, but the bigger story is how many new voters there are in the state. More than 100,000 new voters have registered so far in 2016, over half through the state's new automatic voter registration system. The 51,558 voters signed up through automatic registration is an average of 12,889 new voters per month, three times higher than the average of 4,163 monthly registrants in 2012. The number of voters registered has been higher than initial projections, and half of new registrants are under 35.

This year Oregon became the first state to automatically register eligible citizens who request or renew a driver's license through the DMV. They are sent a card informing them of their registration status and have 21 days to opt out from the voting rolls. The burden of registration shifts from the individual to the state. Only 6 percent of registrants have chosen to opt out, "a ratio of nearly 15 eligible citizens added to the voting rolls for every 1 person who declined," reports Liz Kennedy of the Center for American Progress (CAP). (However, three-quarters of registrants declined to identify with a political party and unfortunately won't be able to vote in tomorrow's closed primaries.)

Oregon's registration system should be a model for the rest of the country. Three other states—California, Vermont, and West Virginia—have passed automatic registration laws this year and 28 states are considering the reform, according to the Brennan Center for Justice.

"Oregon's system is truly groundbreaking—and it offers a clear path forward for states looking to make their elections more accessible and convenient for voters. It costs less, increases the accuracy and security of our voter rolls, and curbs the potential for fraud," writes Jonathan Brater of the Brennan Center.



Support is growing at the national level as well, notes the Brennan Center. In February, President Barack Obama called on legislators to "make automatic voter registration the new norm across America." In a campaign speech in June 2015, Hillary Rodham Clinton embraced automatic, universal voter registration for eligible citizens once they turn 18, and Senator Bernie Sanders introduced an automatic registration bill in Congress in August. Senator Sanders' bill was the second automatic registration bill introduced in Congress this year; in June, Rep. David Cicilline and 45 cosponsors introduced legislation requiring automatic registration for federal elections at all DMVs.

Oregon is also leading the way on voting rights by adopting reforms like all-mail voting, online voter registration, and pre-registration for 17-year-olds. At a time when too many states are restricting voting rights, Oregon is committed to removing barriers to voting.

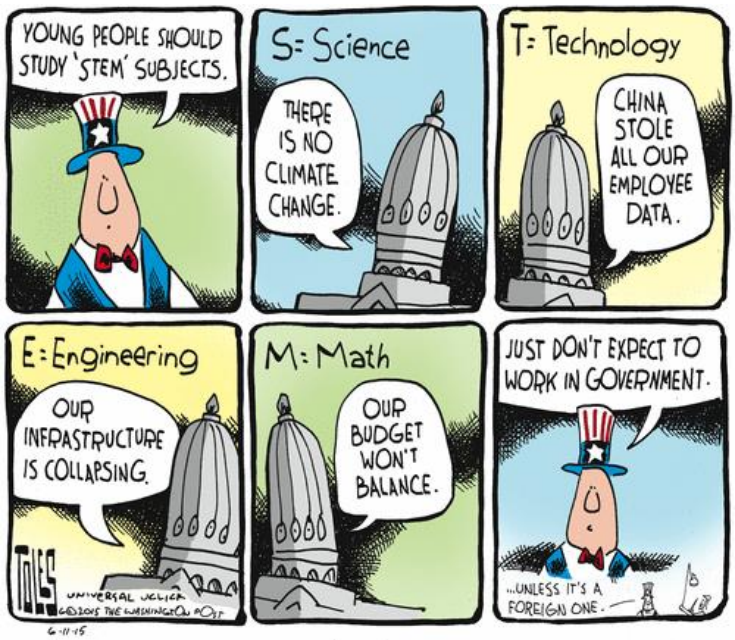
It's a national tragedy that a quarter of eligible Americans—51 million people—aren't even registered to vote. CAP reports that currently 46 percent of eligible 18- to 24-year-olds are not registered to vote; 41 percent of eligible Latino citizens are not registered to vote; 44 percent of eligible Asian American citizens are not registered to vote; and 37 percent of eligible people with incomes less than $30,000 are not registered to vote.

Automatic registration can solve this problem. In California alone, 6 million new people could be added to the rolls when the state adopts the new registration system next year.

Beyond the numbers registered, automatic registration can reframe the debate over voting rights. Throughout American history we've frequently talked about the vote as a right but treated it far more as a privilege, excluding many from participating in the democratic process. As Liz Kennedy of CAP writes, "Automatic voter registration can transform voter registration from a barrier to democratic participation into its gateway."

SEE WHAT OUR CALIFORNIA DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATORS THINK ABOUT CURRENT ISSUES
Congressman John Garamendi, California 3rd Congressional District: www.garamendi.house.gov
Senator Barbara Boxer: www.boxer.senate.gov
Senator Dianne Feinstein: www.feinstein.senate.gov

Democracy Needs to be Taught
Sam Uretsky, *The Progressive Populist,* June 1, 2016



The March issue of Harper's magazine offered an article titled "America's Best Idea", which turned out to be a defense of public universities. The sad part, of course, is that they need any defense. One of the great things about the United States is that it not only has some of the finest universities in the world, but some of these schools are state universities. When US News ranked Best Global Universities, their top 4 slots went to American private universities, and then Oxford slipped in at number 5 and Cambridge at 6. But what was impressive was that UCLA made number 8 and the University of Washington #11. Looking at the rankings it seems as if the people doing the rankings have a strong preference for English speaking universities, but it seems safe to generalize: some of the best universities in the world are in the United States, and some of those schools are state schools. Or were. There's something chilling about the fact that the highest ranked public universities are all part of the University of California system. Other traditional public ivies seem to have slipped.

In past years, state universities were very much like private universities with better football teams. Then, in 2010, many state governments flipped from Democratic to Republican, and the attitude of the state government towards the state university turned around. The University of Wisconsin has made one of the fastest reversals of any public university with elimination of tenure and changes in faculty control of the school. The faculty of the University scheduled a vote of no-confidence in university leadership, which State Assembly Majority Leader Jim Steineke, (R) described as evidence of the arrogance of the faculty. "It's a clear example of the complete disconnect between UW-Madison faculty who seem to expect their job to come with a forever guarantee and the average Wisconsin family struggling just to make ends meet."

Tenure is far from a guarantee of job security, but it is intended to make it a bit more difficult to fire tenured faculty than adjunct. And Mr. Steineke's comments sound like a clear threat to anybody who might want to express an unfavorable opinion of Gov. Scott Walker (R) and his friends. When Gov. Walker dropped out of the race for the Republican nomination for president, after apparently receiving a no-confidence vote from the Koch brothers, he spoke about "basic conservative principles of limited government and a strong military ..." It's not quite clear how the principle of limited government fits in with Gov. Walkers elimination of faculty input into university management and transferring all responsibility to committees that report to the Governor.

Another example was Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin (R) recommending that state colleges train more electrical engineers and fewer French literature scholars. Rick Scott, Republican governor of Florida, used anthropology as his choice of academic subjects that the state shouldn't spend money on. North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory (R) objects to gender studies. Schools have been cutting back on programs in the humanities, and while the red states have been mean spirited about it, just about every state has had to look at programs from the viewpoint of expenses. According to the web site *study.com*, "Earlier this summer, the University of Minnesota announced plans to turn away many Ph.D. applicants who would receive financial assistance such as university fellowships or teaching positions. The humanities were hit the hardest, with over one hundred fewer students admitted in literature, language and the arts. Spots were not reduced for students who could pay their own way, or applicants for high-demand research areas such as the biomedical sciences." State University of New York at Albany announced drastic cuts in programs, with most of the cuts aimed at the humanities.

The spring 2016 issue of *Humanities* (published by the National Endowment of the Humanities) reports a link between study area and participation in democracy. Verbal ability, whether inherent or trained, is directly related to participation in democracy. Students with higher verbal SAT scores were more inclined to participate in politics. Liberal arts and humanities majors are significantly more likely to vote, sign a petition, attend a rally, write a letter to a representative or run for office than STEM majors. Natural ability, a high verbal SAT score, predicts participation in mass democracy, but natural talent, people with high SAT scores, aren't enough to maintain a vibrant society – we have to teach democracy to make it work.

Political indifference can be linked to weakness in the economy, which could be easily fixed by more public activism. Economic revival calls for more spending on vital infrastructure programs on bridges and roads. What we get is more austerity, cutbacks in the name of small government. Where we need more citizen activism, we get Right to Work laws to weaken unions, and tightening in voter eligibility. Where we need social activism we get indifference and people trained to believe that Napoleon is always right. Democracy works, but it has to be taught.

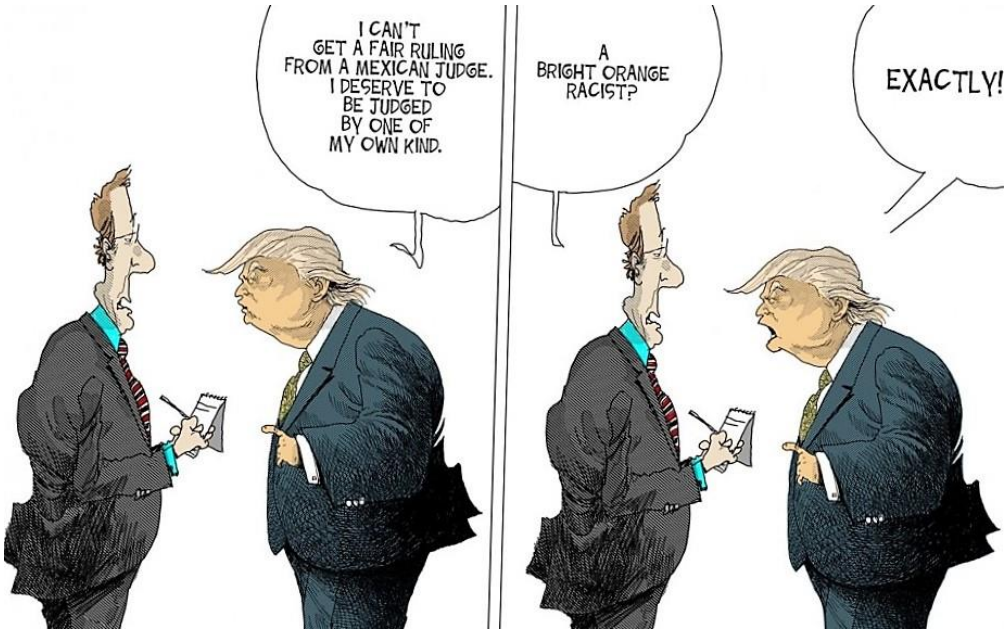
Trump: Mexicans Swarming Across Border, Enrolling in Law School and Becoming Biased Judges
Andy Borowitz, *The New Yorker*, June 6, 2016

Unless the United States builds a wall, Mexicans will swarm across the border, enroll in law school en masse, and eventually become biased judges, Donald J. Trump warned supporters on Monday.

At a rally in San Jose, the presumptive Republican nominee said that "making America great again" meant preventing the nation from becoming "overrun by Mexican judges."

"We don't win anymore," he told the crowd. "We don't win at judges."

While Trump offered no specific facts to support his latest allegations, he said that he had heard about the threat of incoming Mexican judges firsthand from border-patrol agents.



"They see hundreds of these Mexicans, and they're coming across the border with LSAT-prep books," he said. "It's a disgrace."

In a line that drew a rousing ovation from supporters, Trump blasted Mexican leaders for their role in the crisis, claiming, "They're sending us their worst people: lawyers."

As We Feared, Delta-Destroying Language Has Passed the House
Congressman John Garamendi, May 27, 2016

A few days ago, I alerted you to an effort by San Joaquin Valley Republicans to ram a bill through the House that would gut the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, and the biological opinions that protect the Delta. Unfortunately, these fears have come true. House Republicans attached provisions based on Representative Valadao's H.R. 2898 to the Energy Policy Modernization Act. These provisions would do nothing to address the ongoing drought, while:

- Gutting the Endangered Species Act
- Limiting application of court-approved biological opinions
- Opening the Tracy pumps to export more water south
- Undermining San Joaquin River restoration efforts; and
- Overriding longstanding California water law

I teamed up with other Delta members on the House floor in an effort to strip these disastrous riders from the bill. However, our efforts were unsuccessful due to strong opposition from the House Republican majority. The overall bill passed late Wednesday night on a largely party-line vote.

House Republicans will stop at nothing to gut the Delta's environmental protections so that they can export Delta water on behalf of private interests. House leadership has already named members to a conference committee, which will work out the differences between the House and Senate versions of this bill.

I will continue to fight these attacks on the Delta and work with my colleagues on a much better path forward. However, I also urge you to contact the House Committee on Energy and Commerce and the House Committee on Natural Resources, who will be leading the House's representatives on the conference committee.

Together, we can make sure that these destructive provisions never become law. I appreciate your interest in this important issue and I will continue fighting to protect the Delta.

The Feather River Democratic Club urges readers of this newsletter to do as Congressman Garamendi suggests and contact the House committees on the conference committee, either by phone or written communication.

House Committee on Energy and Commerce
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202/225-2927

House Committee on Natural Resourcess
1324 Longworth HOB, Washington, D. C. 20515
202/225-2761