

OUR VIEW

# Lawmakers go unacceptably silent on guns

The irony could be funny if the topic weren't so gravely important. Legislators traveled to Richmond and convened on Tuesday morning for the special session Gov. Ralph Northam had called to address gun violence in the state. Their backsides hadn't warmed their chairs before they arose and departed, passing a Republican-schemed plan to adjourn, to hand off proposed legislation to the state crime commission and to delay any real focus on gun issues until after November's election.

Gov. Northam had called the special session following the mass murder of 12 in Virginia Beach on May 31, and the abrupt adjournment on Tuesday brought to mind the words from members of our legislative delegation in describing how they had viewed this important session. Maybe you remember them, too:

State Sen. Bill Stanley (R-Franklin): "... to me it seems that Gov. Northam's calling of this special session is more about politics than having an earnest discussion about what should be good public policy decisions to prevent these senseless shootings from happening, like the one that just occurred in Virginia Beach."

State Del. Charles Poindexter (R-Franklin County): "It's just a divisive move in an election year."

State Del. Danny Marshall (R-Danville): "Are we going there to get something done, or are we going there for the governor to rebuild his brand?"

Well, Del. Marshall, the answer was neither, and we think your comment, on an admittedly orchestrated strategy by your party, is more than a little disingenuous.

Still we understand politics. We understand every seat in the General Assembly is up for election. We understand gun rights and gun safety form as hair-trigger an issue as there is for any lawmaker.

Sure, putting off consideration of any legislation — and dozens of bills were filed for consideration during the special session — buys time for candidates to be able to rely on studies by state agencies rather than their own character.

But it also buys time for someone to take up an assault weapon, to load high-capacity magazines with the deadliest of ammunition and to fire at innocent people. How many dozens of times does that happen every year? It will happen again before November. Somewhere.

Lawmakers also bought time after the massacre of 32 at Virginia Tech — the clock says 12 years and still buying — and little has changed except the world has become less safe and our leaders have become more timid and inept.

So if we are buying time, when do we purchase the day, hour, minute or second when a true leader steps forward and displays the courage to do the right thing and not the politically prudent thing?

Maybe the problem here is that such an instant already has been bought and hushed, like a tabloid purchasing an expose on a lust-ridden public figure paying off a woman for her silence. Maybe potentially good and righteous leaders have been silenced just the same.

What we had Tuesday was a special session that was special for all the wrong reasons. Legislators were summoned to consider ideas and implement plans to make our commonwealth safer.

Oddly the legislators stood to honor those who died in Virginia Beach. Sadly, they didn't stand for anything after that.

Instead they voted to leave Richmond without doing anything, protecting (their reputations rather than taking action.

They say they plan to return in mid-November to consider these issues anew.

We have another idea: Maybe they should leave and not return at all.

Yes, maybe we should remember their words and their inaction on Nov. 5.

Del. Poindexter: "Generally, not much comes from special sessions. [This time] maybe something will happen, or maybe it won't."

Sadly, he already knew what was going to happen. Politics.

7/11/19 7-9

## WORLD CUP



### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

#### Hot cars and the child in the back

**To the editor:**

We are writing you today as concerned parents, professionals, and community members. 2018 was officially the worst year in United States history for hot car deaths — 52 children died of vehicular heatstroke. In 2019, there have been 14 child deaths nationwide to-date. These children died simply because they were forgotten or left unattended in a vehicle. What makes these deaths more tragic is that they were completely preventable.

July 31 is National Heatstroke Prevention Day. Heatstroke is the number one vehicle-related killer of children, outside of crashes. Although warmer weather brings a greater risk, children

have died in hot cars on days when the temperature was in the lower 50s. It is important that parents, caregivers and community members remain vigilant at all times to ensure that these preventable deaths do not continue.

Child Care Aware of Virginia encourages the public to never leave a child in a vehicle unattended, always look in the back seat every time you leave your car, always lock your car and always put your keys out of reach from children.

Even a loving, responsible parent can unknowingly leave their child vulnerable to these senseless deaths. Life is hectic and routines change. With our children's lives on the line, we can't afford to be distracted. Establish a system to remind yourself that your child is in the car. Try placing a briefcase, purse

or cell phone next to the child's car seat; that way you will always check the back seat before you leave your car. We recommend ordering a BabyIn/BabyOut hangtag for your rear view mirror to remind you to #LookBeforeYouLock. Ask your child care provider to alert you if your child does not show up as planned. You can even set a daily reminder on your cell phone.

Bystanders should know that Virginia has a "Good Samaritan" law to protect from lawsuits for helping a person in an emergency. If you are a bystander and see a child alone in a hot vehicle, call 911 immediately and, if necessary, safely do what is needed to rescue the child.

**SARAH CHAMBERLAIN**  
Child Care Aware of Virginia, Midlothian

# Convince voters to overlook economy? Ha!

On Oct. 28, 1980, in the final debate of his race against Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan asked a question that has come to define presidential politics.

"Next Tuesday all of you will go to the polls, will stand there in the polling place and make a decision," Reagan said. "I think when you make that decision, it might be well if you would ask yourself, are you better off than you were four years ago?"

The answer for most voters was no, and Reagan won the election with 489 electoral votes to Carter's 49.

The question, or some close variation of it, has popped up many times since. "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" asked Bill Clinton in 1992. (In 1996, seeking reelection, Clinton declared, "We are better off than we were four years ago.")

"Are you better off than you were four years ago?" asked Barack Obama in 2008.

It worked for Clinton, and it worked for Obama. Now, the question is whether it will work for Donald Trump.

The president's Democratic 2020 challengers face a daunting problem: Unless there is a serious economic downturn, the answer to the are-you-better-off question will work in the president's favor, not his opponent's.

The unemployment rate, 3.7 percent, is the lowest it has been in half a century. June's employment report — 224,000 new jobs — brought another strong performance. The economy is growing at a slightly better than 3 percent annual rate. Most important, in the context of an elec-



**Byron York**

tion, wages have grown 3.1 percent over last year with low inflation — improvement that has not been seen in years.

Any commentary on the 2020 election should include the warning that things could change. But barring a significant reversal, in 2020 most voters would likely answer yes when asked if they are better off than they were four years ago. And then they would vote to re-elect the incumbent president.

That leaves Democrats with the task of convincing millions of Americans to vote against their economic interests, to choose a Democrat over the president, during a time of economic satisfaction.

How to do it? Some Democrats have chosen to argue that there is something so wrong with the president — he's a racist, or he is an agent of Russia, or he is something equally terrible — that the traditional measures of a successful presidency do not apply.

Look at Democratic front-runner Joe Biden's entry into the race. Biden's announcement video focused entirely on the August 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville in which a counter-demonstrator was murdered.

"We are in the battle for the soul of this nation," Biden said. "If we give Donald

Trump eight years in the White House, he will forever and fundamentally alter the character of this nation — who we are — and I cannot stand by and watch that happen."

Fast-rising Democratic contender Kamala Harris chose another approach. "I know predators," the former prosecutor said recently, "and we have a predator living in the White House."

Other Democrats have portrayed Trump as a threat to American values, a threat to the rule of law, and a threat to the "norms" that guide our politics and lives.

Together, the message could be characterized as: Yes, the economy is growing, unemployment is low, and wages are rising. But America under a re-elected Trump would become a racist dystopia in which all the beliefs Americans hold near and dear would be under constant siege. How could any decent person vote to re-elect the president?

Beyond that, Democrats hope educated voters will be susceptible to anti-Trump social pressures, to being shamed out of voting for the president. The idea is that those voters will focus on their objections to the way Trump has conducted himself in office — the tweets! — and not on the economic results of his presidency. Indeed, a number of polls have shown that a significant group of voters who are happy about the economy still plan to vote against Trump.

"Trump's tenure is straining one of the most enduring rules in presidential politics:

the conviction that a strong economy benefits the party holding the White House," wrote analyst Ron Brownstein in *The Atlantic*. "Across many of the key groups in the electorate, from young people to white college graduates, Trump's job-approval rating consistently runs at least 25 points below the share of voters who hold positive views about either the national economy or their personal financial situation."

Of course, Democrats can't ignore the economy. So far, when they have addressed it, they haven't been terribly creative, relying on the standard-issue Democratic critique of Republican presidents — that Trump is creating an economy that benefits only his rich friends.

"Who is this economy really working for?" asked Elizabeth Warren at the first Democratic debate. "It's doing great for a thinner and thinner slice at the top."

It's not clear how well that will work. As *The Wall Street Journal* editorial board pointed out recently, under Trump, "wages are rising at the fastest rate in a decade for lower-skilled workers, and unemployment among less-educated Americans and minorities is near a record low." The result of the president's policies, the *Journal* argued, "has been faster growth and less inequality."

Another way to say that is that millions of Americans are better off than they were four years ago. The question in 2020 will be whether that matters.

York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

## MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

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### How to submit a letter to the editor

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Our View

# Yes, sheriff was wrong

We now know with precise clarity that Henry County Sheriff Lane Perry planned to create a public event at the sheriff's office for a private reason: He wants to be re-elected to a job he has held for three terms.

The emails Perry exchanged with his public-information officer, Capt. Wayne Davis, with county managers and his fellow law enforcement officers show that ruse was the rule when Perry called a press conference for April 9.

A single email sent to Davis on the morning of that event was the most revealing piece of news uncovered in this unsightly, unethical and, as one expert tells us, unlawful manipulation of public property and people for personal gain:

"The media will try to start picking to find out," Perry wrote. "If they know, they start weighing out which story they're working on."

We in the media don't like to cast ourselves in a story. We strive to stay distant and objectively describe what plays out. But in this case the sheriff made us the story by leveraging our professional commitment to reporting real news.

Yes, we started asking questions so we could assign plan our coverage. Had we known, we likely would have relegated coverage to an inside page. The emails multiple media organizations sent to the sheriff's office show some thought the press conference might be about the long-unsolved Short family homicide.

And the sheriff and his captain hid their strategy behind that veil of expectations. If we thought this was big news, we would be there with cameras rolling and notebooks bobbing, Perry calculated.

We in the media likewise do not seek sympathy. But we do expect you to care we were string-pulled by a politician who would be a defender of right and wrong:

Sheriff Perry used the money you pay to protect himself and his office.

Sheriff Perry trampled on your good faith by manipulating those who record his efforts to keep you safe.

Sheriff Perry doesn't think he did anything wrong.

That last misstep perhaps is the most troubling. We see examples all the time of politicians who use public money to try to further their electoral successes.

That's a line that is not to be crossed, and Sheriff Perry crossed it with both feet. He made excuses based on his relationship with the media — which he has jeopardized — and that because his race is non-partisan, he wasn't subject to the federal Hatch Act. Oh yeah, party affiliation separates right from wrong.

We're sure the next time the sheriff arrests someone he will release that suspect because he or she had a good relationship with law enforcement and the law didn't apply to this suspect because he was a Baptist or a Ruritan. Right.

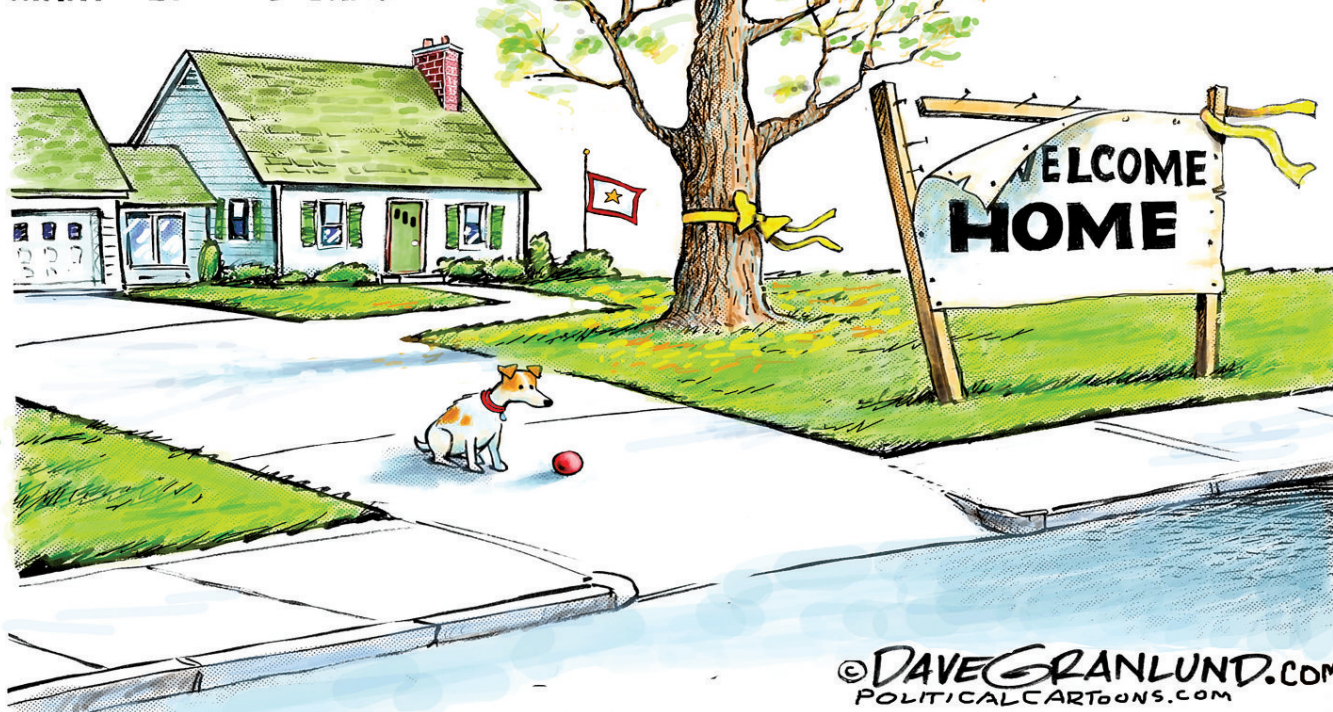
That the sheriff defends his actions is only one sad aspect of this ethical entanglement. We equally are disappointed that no other official has suggested he went too far and that those law enforcement officers who showed up to support Perry misrepresented how they spent their days. They are all complicit.

But mostly we are disturbed someone has to explain to our delineator of right and wrong that what he did was wrong.

Sheriff Perry needs to own up to his mistake, apologize to the public for spending its money for his own cause and move forward.

Otherwise, voters may need to move him in another direction this fall.

MANY NEVER RETURN...



The Sunday Columns

# An in-theater death, regardless

BY JEREMY BUTLER

The Central Intelligence Agency held its annual ceremony Tuesday to honor those in its ranks who have died in the line of duty. For each fallen officer, a star is placed on the CIA's Memorial Wall, recognizing that they "gave their lives in the service of their country."

One of the stars from 2014 raised some controversy recently. It represents Ranya Abdelsayed, who died by suicide in Afghanistan less than 48 hours before she was set to head home after a difficult year-long deployment. CIA memorial stars are reserved for those whose deaths are of a heroic nature, or resulted from enemy actions or hazardous conditions. But some are questioning whether Abdelsayed's death was truly heroic or deserving of a star.

We can never know for sure why she chose to end her life, but former CIA Director John Brennan, who made the decision to include her star on the wall, told The Washington Post that he believed her death was "a direct result of her work and her dedication in a very difficult overseas environment." If that was the case, it would be similar to the injuries suffered by veterans who returned from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan with post-traumatic stress disorder.

The conversation about whether Abdelsayed deserves a star perpetuates a

fear and insecurity that many veterans carry with them: that experiencing the effects of trauma is somehow unheroic or not a natural result from enemy actions or hazardous conditions.

Suffering from trauma is not a sign of weakness or a failure of an individual's resilience. It is an injury. Exposure to trauma rewires the brain, potentially affecting our ability to make rational assessments of the world around us.

The effect of trauma on the brain is no different from a torn anterior cruciate ligament's impact on mobility. And, just as an ACL can heal with the help of treatment and a long, uncomfortable rehabilitation process, a brain can rewire itself to recover from trauma. There is hope for those who have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and for those who are suffering from the effects of trauma, even without a diagnosis.

When we question the validity of these kinds of injuries, we do a great injustice to the men and women who serve our country in conflicts overseas. We also risk pushing these injuries underground and dissuading people from seeking help. Mental-health injuries are a natural and predictable result of charging Americans with the defense of our nation. We reward those service members who are physically injured in battle with Purple Hearts, yet we stigmatize and question the sacrifices of those whose brains are injured by the same battle experience.

It is time to put an end to this double standard. Our nation is struggling with a veteran suicide crisis. Twenty veterans and service members die by suicide a day, and more than half of them have diagnosed mental-health injuries. As shocking as the veteran suicide statistic is, it does not include countless brave Americans who deploy to overseas conflicts, such as members of the intelligence community and contractors. We lost Abdelsayed in theater, but we lose many more once they return home, still feeling the effects of injuries incurred abroad.

This one star on CIA's wall is an important step in the right direction. Let us stop stigmatizing and recognize trauma injuries for what they are. When we plan for war, we plan for physical casualties, and we plan to honor the sacrifices made by those who are injured. We need to think similarly about mental-health injuries. It is only by talking about these issues constructively and accurately that we will make inroads in addressing the public-health crisis of suicide.

Abdelsayed deserves her star on the CIA's Memorial Wall. Let us all work toward giving hope to those suffering from trauma injuries and preventing more stars like hers from appearing on our memorials.

Butler is chief executive of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. He wrote this commentary for The Washington Post.

# Payday lenders a 'blight' on America

The Loan Shark Protection Act would limit the interest charged on credit cards to 15 percent. A 15 percent cap would be too low — naively too low. Too bad the bill's sponsors, Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, weren't more careful, because their clumsy approach hands ammo to foes of those reining in truly abusive forms of consumer credit, the most obscene example being the payday loan.

As the name implies, a payday loan is a quick infusion of cash to tide the borrower over until the next paycheck arrives, when it's paid off. But that's not what usually happens. Here's the usual scenario:

Joe takes out a \$300 payday loan to be paid back in two weeks. He'd be charged something like \$45 in fees and interest. That comes to an APR (average percentage rate) of 391 percent. Pretty high borrowing costs, but it's for an emergency, right?

But more than 75 percent of borrowers don't pay it right back. They typically turn the



Froma Harrop

loan into 10 loans a year. Each loan is not a new \$300 credit. It's cycling the same \$300 loan nine times, every time adding these high fees and interest. So Joe's costs keep piling up, and he finds himself stuck in a debt trap. The debt trap is the payday loan's business model.

Payday loan rates and fees vary from state to state, with some allowing astronomical borrowing costs. A typical payday loan in Texas carries an APR of 661 percent! In Nevada, Idaho and Utah, it is 652 percent.

Why do people take out such loans? Because they don't know what they're getting into. The payday loan storefronts market their wares as "quick" or "easy" money to be used in emergencies. Some lure customers into the net by

giving them the first loan free at zero percent interest.

The ideal payday loan customer is a trusting member of the working poor who is not sophisticated about personal debt. Importantly, the borrower has a dependable trickle of income to tap. The money could come from a job or three, or a disability or unemployment check. (Payday lenders are fond of military personnel. And they always demand that borrowers have a bank account.)

A recent Wall Street Journal editorial tried to tie the unfortunate Loan Shark Protection Act to unrelated criticism of payday loan abuses. It praised payday loans as a welcome alternative to loan sharks and organized crime.

"The availability of legal loans is what helped to put Louie Legbreaker out of business," the editorial said.

Actually, the loan-sharking business is alive and well, only Wall Street now runs it. Private equity investors include payday lending companies in their portfolios. The desperate folks borrowing from Louie

Legbreaker at least knew who they were dealing with.

"Price ceilings on any good or service inevitably reduce supply," the editorial piously states. You'd think that credit is a basic human right that cannot be denied. In fact, there are people even today's payday lenders won't bother with — those without assets or income.

In any case, curtailing the supply of debt traps that its victims have described as "soul crushing" and "a living hell" would not be a bad thing. This industry preys on individuals trying to survive on a typical income of only \$25,000, for heaven's sake.

Of course, pauperizing a large portion of our low-skilled workforce can't be helping the economy, never mind the human cost. Face it, payday lending, and the politicians who protect it, are a blight on America's moral standing. Honestly, I don't know how some people sleep at night.

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MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

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**United States Constitution, Amendment I:**  
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievance.

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OUR VIEW

# Darkness around city council is unacceptable

Any day now we half expect a worker to go into City Council chambers at the Martinsville Municipal Building and remove all the light bulbs.

Increasingly we get the impression council members are content to work in the dark.

That's an impression that flashed before us twice just this past week.

First, the council has not chosen to discuss in public the recent hiring of its contracted attorney, Eric Monday, as assistant city manager.

Then we learned the public broadcast and video archiving of council meetings, which was interrupted in June by a equipment issues, wouldn't be returning because a new system would cost \$100,000.

This second issue is more important, because it deals with elected officials operating in public light, but let's focus on these in the order they came into light.

When Monday was hired Aug. 1, we wondered why we hadn't heard council discussing this issue before it was allowed. We understand the structure — Monday works for the city manager who works for the council — but he first worked directly for the council, under a 12-year-old rollover contract that also didn't get a public nod before being renewed at the start of this fiscal year.

We are not going to assess Monday in his roles. He may be an all-star in both, but that doesn't mean the council doesn't owe it to taxpayers to discuss potential conflicts and to be sure everyone understands. Council member Danny Turner raised this question, but it's clear almost no one else on the council appears to have recognized this could be a problem.

But curiously, Mayor Kathy Lawson, City Manager Leon Towarnicki and Monday took the step of negotiating and signing a "disclosure agreement" that says "any potential conflict which may arise in the future will always be resolved in favor of City Council."

First of all, this "agreement" is a contract, and, if it's signed by two members of the council — Lawson and Deputy Mayor Chad Martin apparently did so — it has to be reviewed and approved in public by all members of the council. Well, we guess, unless City Attorney Monday suggests it doesn't, which would make our point. But we don't care if Monday likes it. We don't like it, and we don't think this "agreement" does anything more than tee up our best argument.

If Monday, city employee, were to create an issue with which the council must deal, members can't turn to their attorney for advice, because that attorney is Monday. That at the very least means more expense to hire outside counsel (which is more costly than video equipment). But no one seems to care.

"We've got bigger issues on the table, especially with reversion," Martin said. "If anybody is in the room, I would definitely want Eric in the room talking about reversion."

Yes, reversion. The city's devolving into part of Henry County seems imminent. It will be an important step that affects all citizens. Only those citizens won't be able to see how their leaders are deciding all of this without trekking to city hall.

That's a headline reason why it is ever more important the city reach out to creative experts in the community to find an affordable solution to broadcasting council meetings, capturing video and continuing to post to its YouTube channel. We wonder how difficult that can be.

A solution here is urgent. The public must be able to watch every discussion the city council undertakes and understand why decisions such as reversion are being made or why a question about a conflict can't be discussed in public.

We hope that bulb of enlightenment goes off for council members — just not the ones overhead.

THE SUNDAY COLUMNS

# Sanders goes all in on the climate

"It is no secret that we must transition away from fossil fuels. Period," declared would-be Democratic presidential nominee Bernie Sanders at a town-hall event in California on Thursday. "End of discussion," he added. "There ain't no middle ground here."

Suddenly, a bright line in the Democratic field. By proposing a \$16.3 trillion dollar "Green New Deal" via a New York Times interview, Sanders, an independent senator from Vermont, confronted every climate activist with a stark choice. Former vice president Joe Biden has offered a plan to stop emissions that racks up a \$1.7 trillion price tag.



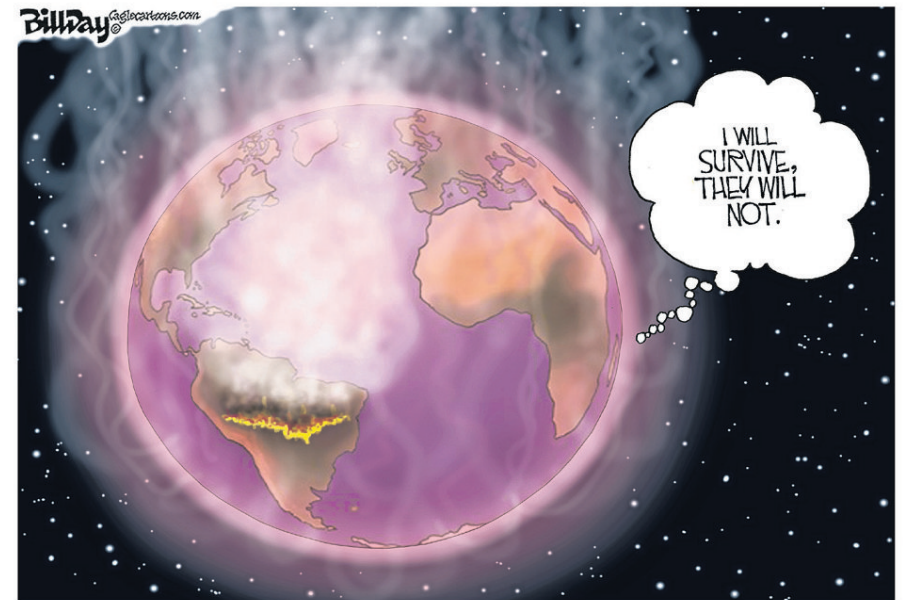
**Hugh Hewitt**

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., saw Biden and raised her bid to a \$2 trillion plan! Then Sanders walks in and says, in essence, "That is nothing, nothing! You are throwing pebbles at a battleship!" He didn't say that actually, but he did say, "There ain't no middle ground."

Which means of course that Biden and Warren, along with South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg, Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., and even industrialist and destroyer-of-the-Earth-turned-climate-activist Tom Steyer are all pikers when it comes to taking the apocalypse seriously. Sanders isn't pretending. And if you take that doomsday scenario seriously, he has given you no choice. Get on the Bernie Bus or be exposed as a climate-change-activist poser.

Recall the 1998 end-of-days flick "Armageddon." Nobody fussed about the cost of Bruce Willis's mission to save the planet from an approaching asteroid. More to the point, the pencil-necked accountants didn't drive President Franklin D. Roosevelt's wartime spending or the U.S. military's vast expansion led by his Army chief of staff, George C. Marshall. They were facing the Nazis in Europe and imperial Japan in the Pacific. Imagine running against Roosevelt for the nomination in 1944 on a platform of slashing war spending by 90%! So Sanders has proposed what the rhetoric of climate-change apocalypse demands: All hands on deck, and damn the torpedoes, provided you don't use any fossil fuels in mounting your charge.

This is no mere "carbon tax," no "cap



and trade." Sanders's program mocks the Paris climate agreement, though not openly. Sanders is the real deal. And he just flanked the Democratic field for every voter who genuinely believes in the Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez 12-year countdown to the end of the planet.

No self-respecting climate-change activist can win an argument for Biden or Warren now, not when Sanders has lapped them eight or 10 times in the fictional commitment game. What are they going to say? Our program can get through Congress and Sanders's can't? None of them can, unless the country is persuaded that this whole "existential threat" stuff is real. Sanders believes it. He put our money where his mouth is.

Those of us who acknowledge the temperature of Earth has indeed increased a degree or so in the past century, who believe humans contribute to that increase — perhaps significantly and, if so, mostly these days by the Chinese and the Indians who show no intent to stop emitting carbons as they have billions of mouths to feed — are all for mitigation and adaptation. Many of us strongly support nuclear power as the key to replacing carbon emissions. See on this point the new book by Daniel Poneman, President Barack Obama's deputy energy secretary, "Double Jeopardy: Combating Nuclear Terror and Climate Change." If you are serious about slowing climate change, you have to be for nuclear power, Poneman concludes. (Similarly, nuclear power production

need not result in weapons proliferation, but that's another subject.) Poneman's a true believer that carbon emissions must be curtailed, but his program is detailed, incremental and balanced. That's not Bernie.

But Poneman isn't one of the Democratic primary voters lying awake at night imagining that the 2004 film "The Day After Tomorrow" understated what's ahead. Sanders doesn't need Poneman's vote. Sanders doesn't care about the approval of policy wonks. Sanders needs the climate-change vote. Sanders needs the true believers.

And, this week, he got them. Sanders went all in.

If you really think the world is on the edge of catastrophe, are you going to waste your vote on a pretend climate-change "policy," or go all in with Sanders?

I'm hoping Sanders is the nominee. A choice, not an echo campaign on climate change, is what we need. "There ain't no middle ground." Let's put that to the people in a Bernie Sanders-Donald Trump vote. Sweep aside the pretenders and get to the candidate who is genuinely serious about changing everything to save Mother Earth. That's Sanders. By about 14 trillion bucks total.

Hewitt, a Washington Post contributing columnist, hosts a nationally syndicated radio show on the Salem Network. The author of 14 books about politics, history and faith, he is also a political analyst for NBC, a professor of law at Chapman University Law School and president of the Nixon Foundation.

# Smarter nominating process needed

Is anything really wrong with Jay Inslee? Was John Hickenlooper not qualified to be president? And is Steve Bullock a weak candidate? The answers are no, no, no and for all three, "on the contrary."

Any of them could be a remarkably attractive Democratic nominee for president. In a general election, they might do better than the two firebrand senators trailing Joe Biden in the polls: Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders. But their campaigns never took off. Something in the Democrats' nominating process isn't working for their kind of candidacy.

Inslee, governor of Washington state, distinguished himself by seriously addressing the crisis of global warming. He's left the race. So has Hickenlooper, former governor of Colorado. He is now running for the Senate. Early polls give him a solid lead against the Republican incumbent, Cory Gardner.

The only one still in is Bullock, governor of Montana. Bullock's main argument to Democrats is his ability to win elections in red parts of the country. In 2016, Donald Trump took Montana by 21



**Froma Harrop**

points, but Bullock won the governorship by four.

As far as Bullock is concerned, defeating Trump should make 2020 a one-issue election for Democrats. And "if we can't win back places that we lost," he said, "we're not going to win this election," he told a recent CNN town hall meeting.

Yet the latest Democratic polls put Bullock's support at a meager 1 percent. One of his problems might be that some of the very stances a Democrat needs in a red state are not deemed adequately progressive for party activists.

In Montana, many still work in coal, and hunting is part of life. So Bullock finesses his views on climate change and gun control in ways that may bother those wanting more aggressive approaches. (Note, however, that when he ran for governor, the billionaire Koch brothers poured their fossil

fuel riches into supporting his Republican opponent.)

Bullock insists he is progressive. "I'm a pro-choice, pro-union, populist Democrat that's actually gotten things done."

As governor, Bullock pushed through an expansion of Medicaid. He lists publicly funded preschool as a top priority. An outspoken environmentalist, he has helped lead the charge against the Republican crusade to transfer public lands to private interests. Being a hunter helps his credibility.

Bullock is outspoken about other handicaps that campaigns like his face. Governors, he insists, have a harder time because they actually have to govern. That often means compromising with Republicans.

Democratic senators in Washington, particularly now that they are in the minority, accomplish little. "D.C. is now set up to have grand speeches, but not actually get anything done," he told The Atlantic.

The three Democratic front-runners — Biden, Warren and Sanders — are or were senators.

As governor of purple-hued Colorado, Hicken-

looper also worked with Republicans. And given the relentless partisanship of the age, that meant coaxing even moderate Republicans who perpetually fear attacks from the right.

Some Democratic Party rules are also tough on noncelebrity candidates from the heartland. Bullock is angry that billionaire Tom Steyer may have bought himself a spot on the next debate stage — something he has not achieved.

"Tom Steyer just spent \$10 million to get 130,000 donors," Bullock said on MSNBC. That number of unique donors is a threshold for admission into the debate next month. So is 2 percent support in four approved polls by the end of the week.

"We're getting to the point where we're spending money online as opposed to actually talking to voters," Bullock complained, not without reason.

In any case, what an interesting presidential candidate Bullock or Hickenlooper or Inslee would or would have been. But don't rule out vice presidential running mate.

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### How to submit a letter to the editor

The Martinsville Bulletin invites letters to the editor dealing with issues of local concern. Letters must be typed or written legibly, be limited to 300 words and take as their starting point an article or other item appearing in The Bulletin. Letters are subject to editing and/or rejection. Letters that are factually inaccurate, contain personal attacks on private figures or hate speech are not considered for print. Writers must provide the Bulletin with sources or documentation to verify any facts in their letters. Only letters with an address and phone number for verification purposes will be considered for publication. Only the writer's full name and city will be published. All letters must be signed; no anonymous communication will be published. Email letters to info@martinsvillebulletin.com or mail or deliver them to 204 Broad St., Martinsville, P.O. Box 3711, Martinsville, Va. 24115.

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