

“It isn't true that convicts live like animals; animals have more room to move around.”

— Mario Vargas Llosa (born 1936), Peruvian writer, politician, journalist, essayist and college professor

## Our View

# We're at critical mass. Where do we go now with jail overcrowding?

The stories you have read over the past seven days and today — published by The Bristol Herald Courier following a comprehensive eight-month investigation into overcrowding at the Sullivan County Detention Center and Bristol Virginia Jail — sum up a catastrophe unfolding in slow motion.

Here we are, at a tipping point Sullivan County Criminal Court Judge James Goodwin in 2017 termed “critical mass.”

Inmates sleep on the floor. Guards, the few that there are, and inmates are at constant risk of violence. Conditions in the Sullivan County jail are so treacherous that inmates nicknamed it the “Thunderdome.”

A wave of addicts — from opiates and, more recently, methamphetamines — are being funneled by mandatory sentencing into these already overburdened facilities, but there are too few rehabilitation programs to effectively help break the offend-release-reoffend cycle.

Yet, the region's elected officials have for years ignored the warning claxons, pushing scarce resources to more politically palatable areas — ones that sound snappier on campaign advertising — or simply deferring the problem.

As this project shows, we're out of time. Deferral is no longer possible as a strategy. We could even be past the point of no return. We must start here and now to solve the increasingly urgent, systemic deficiencies that have led us into this criminal-justice morass.

The Bristol Herald Courier is stepping up to lead this discussion. As a starting point, in addition to our investigative journalism on “Critical Mass,” the newspaper hosted a town hall Wednesday night at the old Sullivan County Courthouse in Blountville. If you couldn't be there, you can see the archived livestream on our Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/heraldcourierdotcom](http://www.facebook.com/heraldcourierdotcom)). We invite you to join the discussion.

Jail overcrowding is a complex, interconnected issue, and so are the solutions. We may have to resign ourselves that even the simplest resolutions could take years. The structural origins of the issue — the ones beyond simple bricks and mortar and manpower, which lie in the realm of criminal-justice philosophy and the national economy — may be entirely outside local control.

According to The Sentencing Project, the U.S. leads the world in incarceration, with 2.2 million people in U.S. corrections facilities in 2017. Prison populations have grown by 500% over the past four decades.

But that doesn't mean our communities are helpless or solutions beyond reach.

If one thing is clear, though, building larger facilities to house more offenders is an unrealistic long-term option, especially given the influx of drug-related convictions — a painful hangover from war-on-drugs sentencing policies of the '80s.

We can't jail our way out of the problem. But we can reduce the influx.

In the short term, the Tennessee state legislature must revisit drug-sentencing laws that require mandatory jail time. As we were told by Julie Canter, a defense attorney in Sullivan County and a former assistant district attorney in the locality, a simple possession misdemeanor meth charge carries a mandatory 30 days in jail. That can be enough to begin a lifetime in and out of detention.

The state must commit funding to comprehensive and truly rehabilitative recovery programs that allow the scores of incarcerated addicts a shot at escaping the sinkhole of addiction.

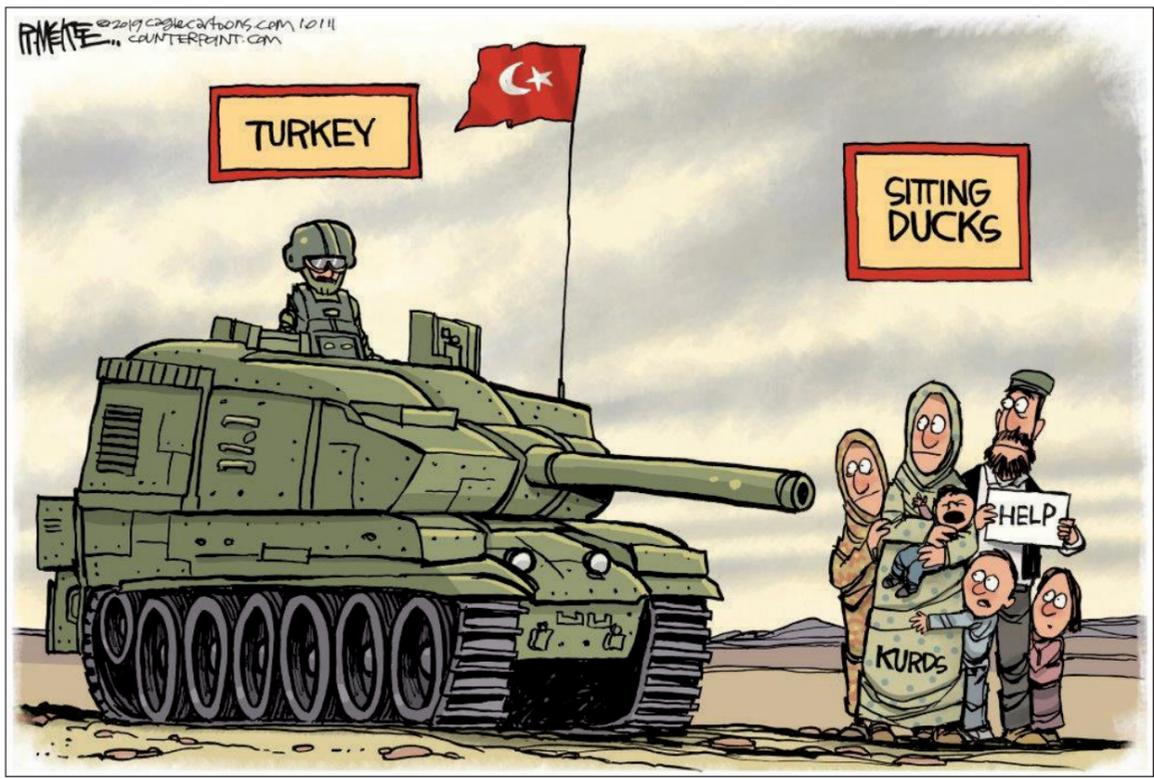
Longer term, we must bring together law enforcement, prosecutors, the judiciary, incarceration experts and elected officials to answer tough questions about the root causes that lead to overcrowding.

Copious resources exist for us to draw on, and we must use them.

In the longest term, we have to work toward a robust regional economy based on a comprehensive educational system that is committed to excellence, and the growth of industry and businesses that provide varying levels of employment with livable salaries and rounded health care.

Right now, it's a mess — an inhumane, dangerous, immoral mess that only feeds on itself; nothing more than human warehouses — a production line that battery farms criminality out into our communities in a never-ending cycle.

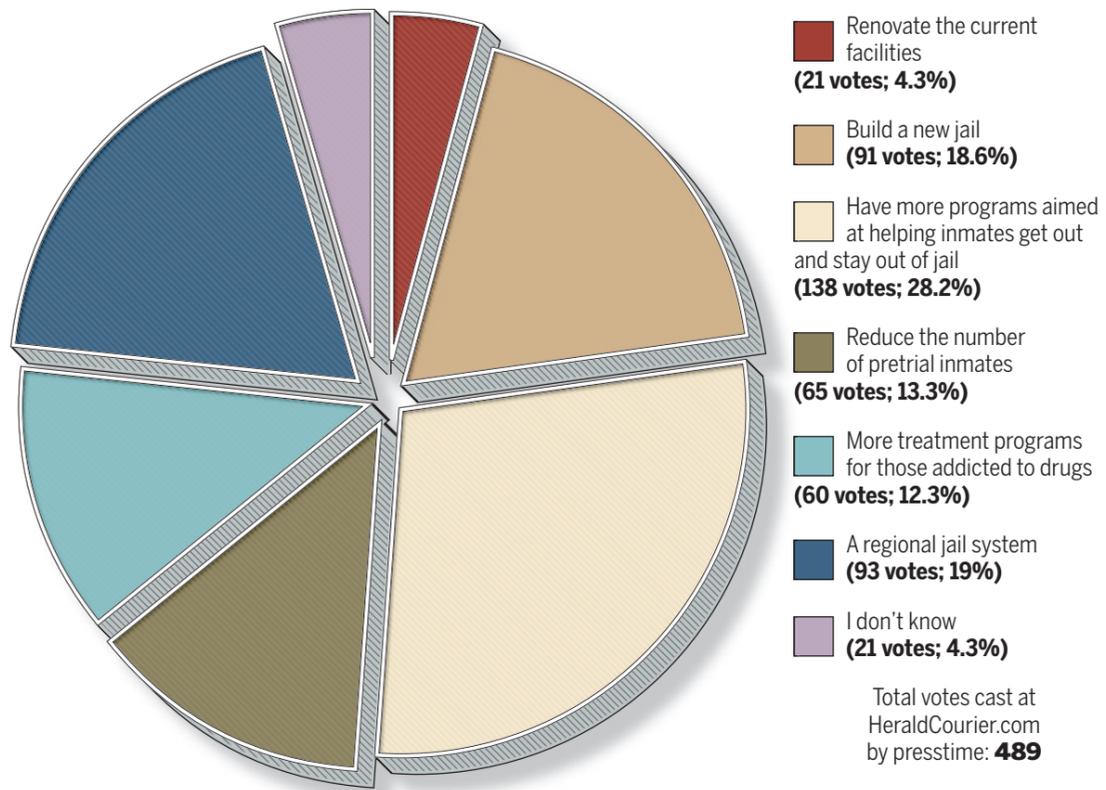
We could return to the status quo. We can continue to ignore it. We would do so at our peril.



RICK MCKEE / CAGLECARTOONS.COM

## Online Poll

### What do you think is the answer to local jail overcrowding?



The Bristol Herald Courier notes that our polling is unscientific. This means we don't choose a scientific, or random, sample to poll. Instead, our polls are available online to whoever would like to take them there. In order to make this process as even-handed as possible, we promote our polls through various digital platforms and our print version. Also, a certain number of people must take our polls for us to publish the results. Those answering our online polls are additionally limited by their IP address — they can vote only once.

# Why this latest Trump tactic is different

Even for President Donald Trump, “I'll impeach you!” is an idiotic comeback to House Democrats who are pursuing an impeachment inquiry. To state the obvious, lawmakers don't get impeached, but if they did, I'd be willing to give up one of them to get rid of Trump (sorry, but I am certain the Democrats understand). The “No puppet, you're the puppet” game simply does not work in the current situation.

In the past, if Trump were to say the constitutionally proscribed impeachment process is a “coup,” or that our allies will somehow uncover evidence contradicting the unanimous conclusion of U.S. intelligence officials that Russia interfered in our 2016 election the media might respond, “By coup, the president must really mean ...” or “while most experts believe Russia interfered with the election ;” Those days of contrived “balance” and deference to a corrupt president are gone.

Mainstream outlets have collectively decided that Trump is now a threat to democratic elections, so it is time to get serious and drop the pretense that there is a legitimate “side” (e.g., Ukraine has the DNC server! Asking China to interfere in our elections is fine, just fine!) whom Trump, Fox News and the Trump cultists represent.

As media organizations knock down the Potemkin village of normalcy they had erected around Trump, nearly all but the Trump dead-enders (e.g., Reps. Devin Nunes of California, Jim Jordan of Ohio) seem unwilling to defend Trump's impeachable actions.



Jennifer Rubin

They've either gently called him out, as Sens. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and Rob Portman, R-Ohio, did, or tried to pretend it did not happen (It was a joke! Just joking!). You are not getting a whole lot of Republicans willing to condone foreign countries picking our presidents.

One can conclude that Trump finally “went too far,” but there are other factors at play that distinguish this situation from past crises. For starters, Trump's crazier-than-usual reaction (borne of panic) and utter lack of message coordination have left most Republicans unable to help him, even if they wanted to. When they are rather mute and the media won't give equal time to crazy talk, the truth has a way of bubbling up.

Second, as we saw with the trade war and with the Kurds in Syria, the president's awful and inept policy choices are coming home to roost. International chaos, a humiliating and disastrous sellout of the Kurds and an economic slowdown prompted by a trade war are really pushing Republicans to consider whether Trump's survival is in their best interests.

Third, the commencement of formal impeachment proceedings

certainly adds a level of gravity to events and has had a corresponding effect of wiggling Trump out. The swift movement in the polls in support of impeachment seems to have stunned Republicans and has disabled their usual confidence that spin will save them.

Finally, there is the four-year election cycle. The realization that both the White House and the Senate could be lost is having a sobering effect on some Republicans. At the same time, it is also a daunting prospect to think about another five exhausting, mortifying years of this president.

In short, what may have seemed inconceivable just a couple of months ago — a not-zero chance Trump will not be on the ballot in 2020 — is the result of multiple factors. The media overestimated and contributed to the “facts don't matter” canard, but now have stopped. The 2018 midterm elections provided Republicans with a hint of what may lie ahead, and the entire country seems disgusted with the crazy-man routine coming from the White House each day. Even Republican lawmakers seem weary of defending the indefensible.

It remains highly unlikely the Senate would vote to remove him, but resignation to avoid humiliation or a bipartisan but less than two-thirds majority votes to convict in the Senate (leaving Trump mortally wounded for 2020), for the first time in his presidency, seems possible. Yes, it is different this time.

Jennifer Rubin writes reported opinion for The Washington Post.



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**Editor's note:** Opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of this newspaper staff and management. In support of the First Amendment right of free speech, the Opinion page offers opportunity for diverse, civil discussion on topics of public interest. Guest opinions are accepted on a limited basis and the publisher reserves the right to reject any submission.

## Adoption of DST bill in Tennessee would sow confusion for us all

Who doesn't love an extra hour of sunlight in the evening when the clocks spring forward in March?

That's why we appreciate the intention behind a bill filed in the Tennessee Legislature by Rep. Rick Tillis, R-Lewisburg, to permanently adopt the hour change of daylight saving. The time change that accompanies the winter and spring months "is a practice that has been in place for over 100 years, and it serves no purpose at all," Tillis said. "What I'm hoping is that we can create a domino effect in the country to where the federal government does away with the practice of changing the clocks twice a year."

A noble goal. In actuality, the result, should Tillis' bill be enacted, would be a confusing mess of scheduling — particularly here in the Twin City, where the Tennessee/Virginia line runs down the middle of State Street.

Imagine the bill passes. Now, when it's 8:30 a.m. and time to start work on the Bristol, Virginia, side during winter and fall, Tennessee will already be an hour into its day.

Let's assume a half-hour of travel time to get from Virginia to your job in Bristol, Tennessee. You'd need to leave at 7 a.m.; at least, going the other way, you'd get to leave at 4:30 p.m. your time and be home at 5. If you live in Virginia and leave your job at 5:30 p.m. and commute a half hour, you'd be home at 7.

(Working out the difference is like a particularly noxious math test. Imagine how much more difficult these calculations would be if you live in the part of Tennessee on central standard time.)

"It would be incredibly challenging for us as a community," Bristol Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Beth Rhinehart, whose organization opposes the bill, told Bristol Herald Courier reporter Lurah Spell.

Once daylight saving kicks in, the two states will once again be in sync, and everyone will have to adjust to wholly different schedules all over again.

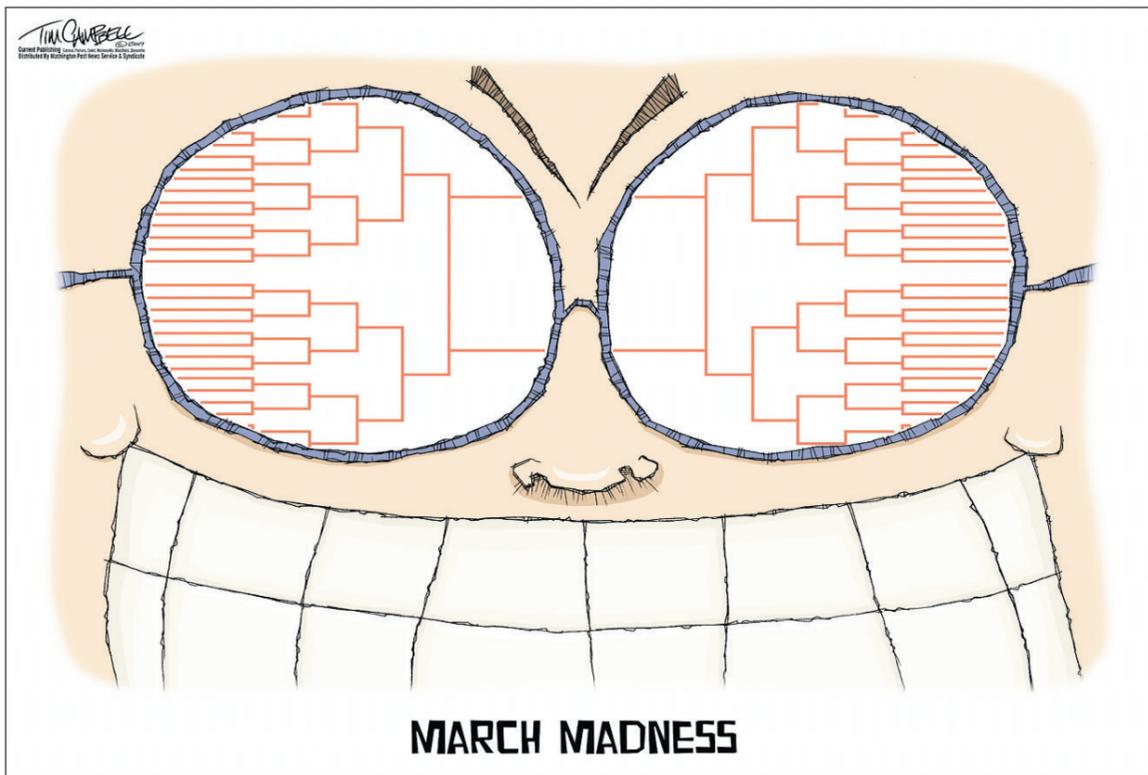
We can thank Benjamin Franklin for penning the original argument for changing times. And the idea was then and in iterations since to conserve energy costs and enjoy a little more evening daylight. Fair enough. Recent studies have shown that DST really doesn't impact energy consumption that much, although it can exacerbate other mental health issues such as seasonal affective disorder.

Science aside, the bill has major impediments other than the difference in times it would create.

That domino effect, for example. Even if other states adopt concurrent times, it's improbable the federal government in its present state of division will ever agree on a universal time standard, no matter how many states go their own way.

Nor should enactment hang on whether other states go first, an amendment Rep. John Crawford, R-Kingsport, has urged Tillis to adopt. And in both of these scenarios, imagine the coordination that would be needed between Tennessee and its eight neighbors to come to an agreement where that hour hand should land. If you think that's going to happen, well, Virginia recently considered legislation to adopt standard time — chronologically in the opposite direction.

So, is there some pressing reason to return to a "chaos of clocks," as TIME magazine referred to what preceded passage of the federal Uniform Time Act in 1963? The answer is no. People can learn to live with a lot of inconveniences and irritations, but why make it purposely harder on them?



MARCH MADNESS

TIM CAMPBELL / THE WASHINGTON POST

### Your View

#### For all of the nay-sayers, building a wall is needed

When you debate a non-supporter of President Trump on the importance of building a wall, a 30-foot tall physical wall, you will get nowhere. Well, you will get somewhere, like we can use drones, more inspection stations, blah, blah, blah. The bottom line with these loons is that keeping President Trump from a win of any sort is more important that common sense. Think about the daily efforts you go through each and every day to secure your personal security. And then think about the loss of innocent citizens we hear about every week because some undocumented immigrant couldn't control his testosterone level for that day. You have to be in some sort of hatred and denial in order to think that we do not need a wall to control some of this illegal activity.

Maybe, just maybe, it has to affect your immediate family before you see the light. Lord help those of us that we are so blinded when it comes to common sense.

My wife often complains that I drive too slow. The reason that I drive the speed limit with a great deal of caution and awareness is because one time I wasn't paying attention and I totaled my car. Nobody was hurt, but the car was totaled. I had to suffer a consequence in order to learn the importance of a lesson. I'm afraid that we have citizens that will have to be directly affected by the intrusion of illegals before they realize that all could have been avoided if only they listened to their common sense instead of some loon or loons that hate President Trump.

**Ken Spangler**  
Blountville, Tennessee

#### Giving your view

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## Look at the losers running for the Democratic presidential nomination

WASHINGTON — Look at the losers running, or considering a run, for the Democratic presidential nomination.

I don't mean that pejoratively. I mean it literally.

Beto O'Rourke's presidential candidacy is the ultimate expression of the participation trophy culture on the left. It used to be you had to win on the state level before taking the national stage. Barack Obama won a Senate seat from Illinois before immediately declaring his intention to run for president. At the time, that was considered pretty audacious. He hadn't accomplished anything in the Senate before he decided on a presidential run. But at least he won. O'Rourke lost his race to unseat Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, last year. He got a participation trophy. Apparently, he thinks that qualifies him to be the leader of the free world.

Well, he must have some accomplishments other than almost winning a Senate seat, right? Not really. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was flummoxed when asked what O'Rourke had accomplished in Congress, saying he "brought a great deal of vitality" to his work "preserving our planet and protecting our people." (In fact, O'Rourke passed a single bill, H.R. 5873, which renamed a courthouse in his hometown of El Paso.) Texas Democratic Party Chairman Gilberto Hinojosa was questioned by Ed Henry on Fox News, "What would you say is Beto O'Rourke's top accomplishment that he brings to the table?" Hinojosa could not name a single one. "I'm not even talking about Congress," Henry said. "What has he done in his life?"



**Marc Thiessen**

"Your question is meaningless," Hinojosa replied.

So, if O'Rourke hasn't accomplished anything, he must at least have some clear ideas of what he wants to accomplish in the Oval Office, right? Nope. The Post reports that "unlike candidates such as Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, who launched their campaigns with clearly articulated policy platforms, O'Rourke focuses more on sweeping calls for unity and pitching himself as the best antidote to the country's toxic politics." The motivation for his run, apparently, is him. As Vanity Fair's Joe Hagan explains in a recent profile, O'Rourke "can't deny the pull of his own gifts." He tells a reporter, "Man, I'm just born to be in it."

He's not the only statewide loser taking the national stage. Stacey Abrams lost the governor's race in Georgia in 2018, yet national Democrats tapped her to deliver the official rebuttal to the State of the Union — a task normally given to those who actually won their races. And now, The Post reports, she is considering a race for president as well. "I think that I am a skilled communicator," she said. "I think I'm a very good thinker. No, I know I'm a good thinker. I know I have policy chops. I have foreign policy experience." Foreign policy experience?

She served as minority leader of the state House of Representatives. Her official bio lists her as "former term member of the Council on Foreign Relations" (a temporary membership for young people) as well as "a Council on Italy Fellow, a British-American Project Fellow, a Salzburg Seminar-Freeman Fellow on U.S.-East Asian Relations, a Salzburg Seminar Fellow on youth and civic engagement and a Yukos Fellow for U.S.-Russian Relations." That might qualify her for an entry-level job at a left-wing think tank, but it hardly qualifies her to be commander in chief. Even O'Rourke can claim experience on the House Armed Services Committee.

Democrats point out that President Trump had never won statewide office before running for president. That's true. But he also had not run for state office and lost. He ran as a successful outsider, not as a failed insider. And unlike O'Rourke, he had actual accomplishments — including a multibillion-dollar real estate empire.

This is not to dismiss O'Rourke's chances. He raised a whopping \$6.1 million in his first 24 hours as a candidate, just edging out Sanders's first day haul of almost \$6 million. That is the best of any Democrat running for president so far. As the New York Times noted, "In a single day online, he raised nearly a quarter of what Barack Obama, then a senator, did in the entire first quarter of 2007." Apparently, Democrats like losers. We'll soon see if one can win the presidency.

Follow Marc A. Thiessen on Twitter.  
@marcthiessen.

“We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us.”

— Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968), American Baptist minister and activist who became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the civil rights movement from 1954 until his assassination in 1968

## Time for a clean slate in Virginia

Enough is enough. Gov. Ralph Northam, Attorney General Mark Herring and Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax must resign.

Northam and Herring have both admitted to wearing blackface; Fairfax has been accused of serious sexual assault and rape.

We won't relitigate for you what's led up to this sorry state of affairs. You've probably read the reports. It's hard to miss them. Virginia has been at the epicenter of national attention and condemnation. All three men have become a liability. Northam's increasingly desperate maneuvering to cling to the governor's seat has grown more embarrassing by the day. Northam, Herring and Fairfax can no longer adequately carry out the duties of their office. This furor will not die down, nor will it go away while they remain.

Members of Northam's own party have called on him to step aside, and if he does so, it's only sensible that Herring do the same. Yes, they may have evolved as people; yes, they may be entirely different adults than they were young men, but this is not about how they perceive themselves to be as much as how others see them. Politics is perception; Northam and Herring's reputations are perceived by friend and foe alike as fundamentally damaged to the point of irretrievability.

The disturbing charges against Fairfax have been described as “credible” by no lesser a personality than former Gov. Terry McAuliffe, who, along with other influential members of the Democratic Party, has called on the lieutenant governor to resign. We believe that's the right thing to do. The charges against Fairfax are serious and, if the alleged rape proven true, criminal. This historically unique situation has triggered a political crisis for Old Dominion Democrats, who would, if all three men step down, lose control of the state's top office. According to the rules of succession, conservative Republican House Speaker Kirk Cox is next in line for the governorship.

And while Republicans are salivating over this opportunity, we doubt they'd be quite so energetic if the governorship was theirs to lose. (Adding insult to injury, there are members of the state's GOP also facing charges of racism. That bell is now ringing for Republican senate Majority Leader Thomas K. Norment Jr. Who knows who else in the GOP might be swept up as yearbook revelations pour forth?)

What other way forward is there, other than a incapacitated, morally tainted leadership, one that is unfit — and unable — to effectively serve the state of Virginia because it has lost the trust of the people who put it there, or the ascendance to power of a party that the people didn't choose?

There may be an unconventional but clean way out of this, however, that retains the party leadership the people voted for — Democratic control of the governor's mansion — while allowing a scandal free candidate to take control. (We can't lay claim to this idea; it was first floated by Geoffrey Skelley of the FiveThirtyEight Politics podcast. But it has merit, even as we doubt those involved will have the selflessness or moral grit to put it in motion.)

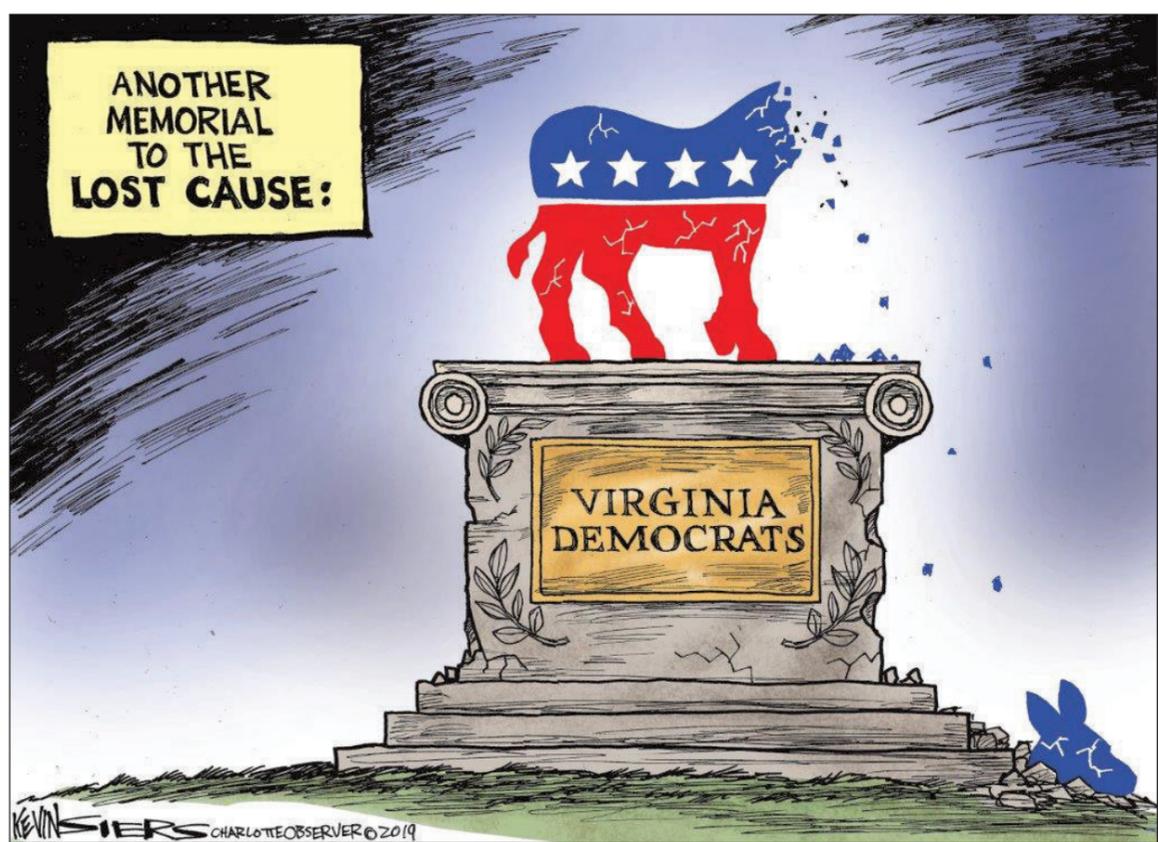
The scenario is this: Northam resigns. Fairfax becomes the governor, and is free to choose a new lieutenant governor, one who is thoroughly vetted, without a hint of scandal. Then Fairfax steps aside, allowing that scandal-free selection to serve out what remains of the term.

However this shakes out, tumultuous times are ahead for Virginia. The question is, for how long?



Cliff Cumber

Herald Courier columnist



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KEVIN SIERS / THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, NORTH CAROLINA

### Your View

#### It was 35 years ago; accept Northam's apology and move on

Let me start by saying I am not a fan of Gov. Ralph Northam. I didn't vote for Ed Gillespie, I voted against Ralph Northam. I simply don't believe that he is what Virginia needs at this time. So, obviously, I am not a hard-core Democrat who thinks a Democrat politician can do no wrong. However, right is right and wrong is still wrong. Gov. Northam has been wronged twice within the past week, and there are still a few of us around who are able to look past popular rhetoric and see that.

First there was the totally biased reporting by Fox News concerning Gov. Northam's remarks on the questionable abortion bill being debated. Regardless of what position anyone takes on this issue, the “reporting” offered by Tucker Carlson was erroneous and skewed to the point of rivaling the amoral trash put out by CNN. The man simply did not say

what he was reported to have said. Perhaps our nation's “journalists” could benefit from a remedial course in English grammar, not to mention the ethics course most of them apparently skipped.

Second is the call for his resignation over a 35-year-old picture in a college yearbook. Yes, the picture was despicable. No, it should never have happened. Gov. Northam's retraction after apologizing for it only shows that, at some time, he participated in something that left enough doubt in his mind that he had to think about whether he was in that picture. But my point is this: Is there anyone who would not change some indiscretion from their youth? Are you the person you were 35 years ago? Are you the person you will be 35 years from now?

Gov. Northam, I accept your apology. May we now move on to more current matters?

Scott Parker  
Saltville, Virginia

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## A rose for job-creating textile plant opening soon

**I**t seems like a long time ago when we got the news that American Merchant would spend \$20 million to transform the old Ball Corp. facility in Bristol, Virginia, into a textile-manufacturing business. But it was just 14 months ago — December 2017 — when we learned the city beat out efforts from seven

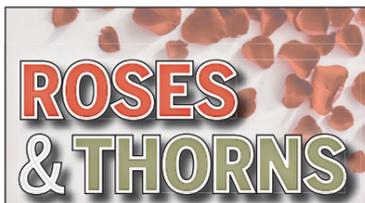


other states to land the business that will create 400 jobs. I'm still amazed by that feat because it's rare these days for a city or county to lure a manufacturer promising that many jobs. The plant was expected to be operating by now, but there have been a few delays — in getting machinery and an issue with federal grant funding. I've had some questions from readers about whether it's still happening. That's not surprising, given the city is still reeling from the closing last fall of Bristol Compressors, which resulted in the loss of nearly 500 jobs. But we can relax. Turns out, there's a lot going on. Last week, the Bristol Herald Courier toured the facility, which is now filled with millions of dollars worth of equipment featuring the latest technology. On Friday and Saturday, the company had its first job fair to fill the first round of positions. **And by the third quarter of this year, the towel-manufacturing plant is expected to begin its long-awaited production.**

**A** number of organizations in our region work every day to help animals. But what if a number of them over a large area combined their efforts, energy, talents, knowledge and resources? And what could happen if they decided to take a



**different, judgment-free approach that focuses on getting help for a suffering animal? That's what's happening with a new coalition called Appalachia: Mission Pawsible — and it's exciting.** The



Susan Cameron

City Editor

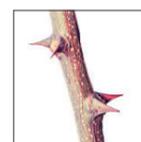
group provides shelter, bedding and food to needy dogs and cats. Around 20 organizations from Knoxville to Wytheville are involved in the effort, which has been in the works for a while but got kick-started by sheer need when brutal, single-digit temperatures enveloped the region two weeks ago. AMP provided about 12 dogs with food and what may have been life-saving doghouses insulated with straw. Jamie Farris, co-founder of the coalition, said the “sole focus is the animal so we're trying to take an approach that a lot of people don't want to take, which is not to go in and judge, but to just go in and help the animal. ...” I applaud the fresh approach and the willingness to work together. Want to help? AMP needs supplies ranging from doghouses to dog and cat food. Check out its Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/groups/missionpawsible/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/missionpawsible/) or the wish list on Amazon at [amzn.to/2G88PW2](http://amzn.to/2G88PW2).

**A**nd the accolades just keep coming for Bristol and its newest hotel. The latest came last week, when none other than the Travel Channel deemed the Twin City one of the 50 most charming small towns in America. One town was selected from

each state, and Bristol was the choice for Virginia. It was just December when Bristol was chosen the best small town to visit in Virginia by an international travel blog called The Discoverer. Both mention the city's two-state status, the

Birthplace of Country Music Museum and the number of music venues available here. Also last week, U.S. News and World Report named The Bristol Hotel one of the top 30 hot new hotels to check out in 2019. In January, the boutique hotel in downtown Bristol was named No. 8 on USA Today's list of 10 best new hotels in the country. Looks like the rest of the nation and world are catching on.

Last September, I gave a rose to a bank teller in Bristol who said no to a would-be robber. Although I ac-



knowledged that those who work with money are told to hand it over when faced with a robbery attempt rather than risk their

lives, I admired the spirit of the person who verbally turned the man away. **But a convenience store clerk in Bristol, Virginia took things way too far on Jan. 30, when a man entered the store, threw a backpack on the counter and demanded money. Instead of complying, the male clerk walked around the counter and proceeded to shove and smack the would-be robber around the store, sending items flying off the shelves.** [If you haven't seen the video, check it out on [heraldcourier.com](http://heraldcourier.com).] That young man had no idea whether there was a gun or knife involved. He put his life in danger, and although the robber eventually left and no one was hurt, there could have been a much bleaker outcome. No amount of money is worth taking that kind of chance with your life.

Do you have a suggestion for a rose or thorn? Email City Editor Susan Cameron at [scameron@bristolnews.com](mailto:scameron@bristolnews.com).

#### ONLINE

» Jennifer Rubin's regularly scheduled column can be found this week at [HeraldCourier.com](http://HeraldCourier.com).

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