



The Lancaster County Democrat

November 2023

What say you?

By Pastor Janet Goodman Banks

I feel compelled to start off with some of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr (MLK) quotes that guided the title and the inspiration behind this article.

The first quote is: "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools." Folks, we have approximately 11 months to come together as Democrats and win, or go on our merry little way separately, divided, and lose the presidential election. It's that simple, this is straight talk, and I'm keeping it 100 per cent.

The Democratic Party's national motto is "Big tent party." It does not say "pup tent," which is designed to only hold one person. The diversity displayed in this "Big tent party" is strong, capable, caring, and mature enough to host a multitude of diverse views. Let me say this upfront, "We are not always going to agree." It's okay. It really is. True maturity is learning how to "Agree to disagree." I'm reminded of another MLK quote: "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear." What say you?

The beauty of the Democratic Party is that strength, force, advocacy, and activism regarding core principles is important to all. Our value systems may or may not be the same, but our belief in our communities, counties, states, country, humanities, and the constitution is what is supposed to bind us together in making this world a better place. That cannot happen if we undermine any one of us, regardless of the rationale. "We are better together," and with all due respect, need to operate in that manner if we have any intentions on keeping the White House, holding the U.S. Senate, and winning back the U.S House of Representatives. Otherwise, in my late Don Meredith voice: "Turn out the lights, the party's over," made popular by Willie Nelson, is what it will unfortunately come down to. What say you?

Another MLK quote is, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Our democracy is on life support. It was there during the 2020 presidential election and has since remained. Voting, Rights, Civil Rights, Human Rights, Religious Rights, Women's

Rights, Parent's Rights, African American History, Native American History, Latino History, Education, Book Banning, Affirmative Action, Homelessness, Food Insecurities, Climate Change, and so many more, are under attack. Everyone or issue listed here has relevance, significance, and an agenda. We can move forward collectively, to establish the needs and solutions for each one or not. What say you?

My last MLK quote is, "The time is always right to do right." My heart aches over the number of people who are no longer affiliated with the Democratic Party. This is true state and nationwide. Personally, I have heard countless stories surrounding the hurt and intentional bullying of members towards other members in the party. Not only do those behaviors cause harm towards many, they do not live up to the mottos of our state or on the national level. We all play a part in making those mottos true. "Everybody matters."

Authenticity does not belong to one person or community. It belongs to us all. "Representation matters." It matters in every level of government, in organizations, in institutions, across our state, and country. Do what's right regarding your culture and community. Nobody knows those areas better than you. No permission or authorization needed. Do what's right. The time is always right. What say you?

We have "one shot" between now and November 5, 2024, to get it right. How important is it to you to witness democracy prevailing again? It will take all of us, not some, but all of us to see democracy remain. Kindness goes a long way. Thoughtfulness, professionalism, courtesy, love, and commitment must be at the forefront going forward. What say you?

Whether any, or all of the above is pursued, the 2024 Presidential election will be a "tell all" of all of our efforts. Wisdom crieth out. What say you? We shall see.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

In the October 2023 issue of the *Lancaster County Democrat* newsletter an article blames the “mainstream media” for misconceptions and misinformation. Certainly, trust in mainstream news outlets has been eroding for some time. News organizations are regularly accused of reflecting corporate or political interests. But this idea, in my opinion, is not only a dangerous fantasy, it is harmful for our way of life. For example, the article states, “The press has simply failed in its duty to accurately inform the American people about the status of the country and simply isn’t up to the task of defending democracy.”

Two quick thoughts about that statement:

1. The press is not responsible for defending democracy—that’s the job of every citizen. The “press” is a commercial enterprise, designed to turn a profit for its shareholders. At the same time, however, to our great benefit, it employs thousands of talented and energetic reporters and writers who ask questions of people the rest of us can’t reach. They are embedded with troops in the front lines of war, stationed in desperate hospitals and medical clinics, and standing steadfast in the paths of tornados, hurricanes, and forest fires.
2. The press is not accurate. Really? The *New York Times* alone has about 1,700 journalists working in more than 160 countries. Would you like to trade that for all the social media posts coming out of the Middle East? The press provides a vital filter to the flow of information thanks to an editing process that means stories pass through several sets of hands before reaching the public.

The mainstream media are too often blamed for having a liberal bias, a conservative tactic to move the center point of every debate further to the right. In fact, “mainstream media” is dominated by Fox News which has been the number one network in basic cable for the last seven years and the most-watched television news channel for more than 21 consecutive years.

But most of us think of something else when we hear “mainstream media.” According to a recent Pew Center poll most Americans think the mainstream media includes ABC News, two cable news outlets (MSNBC and CNN) and three legacy

print publications: the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Post*.

The idea that these diverse media conspiratorially seek to advance certain arguments is a fantasy concocted by Rush Limbaugh many years ago. I hope that none of us swallow that whopper.

As Nora Benavidez, senior counsel for *Free Press* puts it, “Reliable news organizations used to function as curators, verifying information and contextualizing it, and they still do.

Best,
Jim Schaffer



**DON'T USE SOCIAL MEDIA
TO IMPRESS PEOPLE;
USE IT TO IMPACT PEOPLE.**
- DAVE WILLIS



**DIFFERENT
DOESN'T
MEAN
WRONG**

Donald Trump Is Not a Well Man — He Should Not Run Again

By Dennis Crawford



Trump is deteriorating before our very eyes.

The GOP and the “liberal” mainstream press have been misleading the voters for months about President Joe Biden’s health. In a four-day period in September, the cable news stations mentioned Biden’s age 193 times while Trump’s age was mentioned just 56 times. (MediaMatters.org on September 29, 2023.) After this one-sided coverage, these same media outlets then polled the voters about Biden’s age and found (surprise!) that voters are more concerned about Biden’s age than Trump’s age. It’s garbage in and garbage out.

What is seldom mentioned by the mainstream press is that numerous prominent Republicans have said that Joe Biden is fit for duty. “Speaker Kevin McCarthy testified that Mr. Biden had been “very professional, very smart, very tough” during their talks. Yet people who deal with him regularly, including some of his adversaries, say he remains sharp and commanding in private meetings.” *New York Times* on June 4, 2023.

After Biden concluded his debt ceiling deal with McCarthy in June, the extremist so-called House “Freedom” Caucus members complained that Biden “outsmarted” McCarthy in the negotiations. The House GOP’s most extreme members hate Biden and have zero incentive to tell the truth about Biden’s good state of health.

After the recent ouster of McCarthy as speaker, even more evidence emerged from prominent Republicans that Biden is still energetic and sharp. “On a particularly sensitive matter, McCarthy mocked Biden’s age and mental acuity in public, while privately telling allies that he found the president sharp and substantive in their conversations — a contradiction that left a deep

impression on the White House.” *The Politico* on October 4, 2023.

On October 2, Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) took to the floor of the House to denounce the deal that funded the government for forty-five days. Gaetz said, “It is going to be difficult for my Republican friends to keep calling President Biden feeble while he continues to take Speaker McCarthy’s lunch money in every negotiation.”

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- Politico

Meanwhile, the mainstream press has largely ignored and downplayed Trump’s declining mental condition and increasing tendency to threaten violence. Probably the only mainstream media piece that accurately described the respective health of Biden and Trump was in the *New York Times* on June 4, 2023.

The pertinent excerpts are as follows: “While in office, Mr. Trump generated concerns about his mental acuity and physical condition. He did not exercise, his diet leaned heavily on cheeseburgers and steak, and he officially tipped the scales at 244 pounds, a weight formally deemed obese for his height.

After complaining that he was overscheduled with morning meetings, Mr. Trump stopped showing up at the Oval Office until 11 or 11:30 a.m. each day, staying in the residence to watch television, make phone calls or send out incendiary tweets. During an appearance at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, he had trouble lifting a glass of water and seemed to have trouble making his way down a modest ramp.

Most striking was Mr. Trump’s cognitive performance. He was erratic and tended to ramble; experts have found that he had grown less articulate and that his vocabulary had shrunk since his younger days. Aides said privately that Mr. Trump had trouble processing information and distinguishing fact from fiction. His second chief of staff, John F. Kelly, bought a book analyzing Mr. Trump’s psychological health to understand him better, and several cabinet secretaries concerned that he might be mentally unfit discussed invoking the 25th Amendment to remove him.”

Meanwhile, the Former Guy continues to deteriorate before our very eyes. In a recent bizarre rant on the campaign trail, Trump said he would prefer to die by electrocution rather than be eaten by a shark. In these remarks, Trump, slurred his words, saying he'd rather face "elecstrocutation" than be eaten by a shark.

The four-time indicted former president followed that up with a bizarre, stream of consciousness pitch to California voters on September 29, promising to fill the state's canals with enough water to irrigate bathrooms and dampen forests to prevent wildfires. "All the currently dry canals will be brimming and used to irrigate everything including your own homes and bathrooms and everything — you're going to be happy and I'm going to get it done fast," Trump said. "They say that there's so much water up north that I want to have the overflow areas go into your forests and dampen your forests because if you dampen your forests, you're not going to have these forest fires that are burning at levels that nobody's ever seen before."

And that's not all. This is part of a recurring pattern. These aren't isolated statements. The highlights (or lowlights) of Trump's deteriorating condition are as follows.

Trump forgot who is currently president, and claimed "the Obama administration" recorded the length of his "border wall."

He even claimed Jeb Bush invaded Afghanistan and Iraq! Trump appeared confused when he said Jeb Bush was president during the Iraq War. "You know he was a mili — he got us into the, uh, he got us into the Middle East ... Right?"

In September, Trump mixed up Biden and Obama, and claimed Biden might start World War TWO. Trump even said you need a government photo ID to buy a loaf of bread.

At the same time, Trump's remarks have taken a dark turn and he has repeatedly threatened violence. Trump suggested that General Mark Milley should be executed. If anybody else had said that, they would be getting a visit from the FBI. The fact that this isn't being treated as major front-page news is astonishing to me.

The twice impeached former president mockingly asked how Nancy Pelosi's husband was doing, referring to the brutal attack on Paul Pelosi in 2022 during a home invasion by a perpetrator the police said was obsessed with Trump's election conspiracy theories.

The former television reality star made menacing remarks about New York Attorney General Letitia James in a New York City courtroom. As he was

walking into the courtroom, Trump said, "You ought to go after this attorney general." This is a clear signal to his most unhinged supporters.

Trump promised extrajudicial killings at a recent speech in California. He said, "We will immediately stop all of the pillaging and theft. Very simply, If you rob a store, you can fully expect to be shot as you are leaving that store," he said, drawing loud applause. "Shot!" he added for emphasis. The crowd went wild.

In speeches, interviews and on social media in recent weeks, Trump:

- Said former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley [committed "treason"](#) and suggested he be executed.
- [Called for Judge Engoron](#) to be disbarred, thrown out of office and criminally prosecuted, in addition to attacking the judge's clerk.
- Labeled New York Attorney General Letitia James — who's suing Trump for fraudulently inflating his wealth and assets on financial records — a ["racist" and "a monster."](#)
- Said special counsel Jack Smith — who's prosecuting Trump in the Jan. 6 and classified documents cases — is ["deranged" and a "psycho"](#) who "looks like a crackhead."
- Posted online, "IF YOU GO AFTER ME, I'M COMING AFTER YOU!" — one day [after swearing in federal court](#) that he would not intimidate witnesses in the election interference case.
- [Mocked Paul Pelosi](#) after he was brutally assaulted by a home intruder who was searching for Pelosi's wife, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.)
- Called for [police to shoot shoplifters](#) on sight.
- Said migrants illegally crossing into the U.S. are ["poisoning the blood of our country."](#)

The runaway front runner for the GOP presidential nomination said Comcast, the owner of NBC and MSNBC, "should be investigated for its 'Country Threatening Treason'" and promised to do so should he be re-elected president next year. Why does the press continue to cover up Trump's poor health when he has promised to go after them? How can they be so stupid?

It's pretty wild that, of the two leading presidential candidates, the guy found liable for rape and who is facing ninety-one criminal indictments isn't the one who is facing calls to step aside for someone else to run. The mainstream media has lost all sense of scale and proportion. The media fixation with Biden as opposed to this clearly impaired guy is journalistic malpractice.

Will they ever catch on? When will the press call on Trump to step down? Where is the scrutiny?

It's up to us to save democracy in 2024. We can't count on the press, prosecutors, or the courts. We have to do the hard work of turning back the fascist threat to our country by electing more Democrats. The Democratic Party is the only check and balance on Trump and the MAGA Republicans.

Organize! Vote!

Pillen's Water: High nitrate detected on hog farms owned by Nebraska's governor

By Yanqi Xu, Flatwater Free Press

Monitoring wells at 16 Pillen family-tied operations have tested for nitrate levels far above legal drinking water limit. One was so high, an expert said, "it should be a 911."

Covered swine barns dot the landscape near Platte Center, where tens of thousands of hogs are raised.

Many of these barns are owned by a local boy who grew up a few miles from here, built his small family farm into a global pork empire and then became governor.

Gov. Jim Pillen's hog operations bring jobs and prosperity to this area near his hometown. They also may bring risk to Platte Center's drinking water.

The town had to dig a new well three years ago, after another well recorded nitrate at nearly 12 parts per million. That's higher than the level the federal government says is safe to drink.

High nitrate has been linked to [a variety of health conditions](#), including cancer in children.

Nebraska has the highest pediatric cancer rate west of Pennsylvania. Counties with higher nitrate levels often have higher rates of pediatric cancer, a recent University of Nebraska Medical Center [study](#) shows.

Andrew Greisen, Platte Center's water operator, says the area surrounding town has seen several cancer cases this year.

"Prostate cancer, breast cancer and brain cancer, just everything," he said. "I just think it's got to be the food we're eating or the water we're drinking."

Greisen is now working with Natural Resources District experts as they map nitrate inside Platte Center-area aquifers – studying where it may be flowing from.

One potential culprit: The nitrogen fertilizer applied for decades to corn fields surrounding this small town.

Another: The Platte Center West hog farm. The farm, 6 miles northwest of town, recorded a 61-parts-per-million nitrate level – six times above the legal drinking water limit – in a monitoring well last year.

Another nearby hog farm, Janssen Platte Center Nursery, has shown "strong elevated nitrates and chloride levels," according to a recent Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy groundwater review.

Both these hog farms are registered to an owner at 4438 Old Mill Court in Columbus, the headquarters of Pillen Family Farms.

Greisen suspects most nitrate comes from fertilizer dumped on cornfields long ago. He also said that there's a "good possibility" that hog farms with high nitrate readings affect the area's water quality. "It throws a red flag, it really does," he said.

[Since 1993](#), Pillen and his family have owned or operated at least 108 livestock facilities – mostly hog barns – across Nebraska, according to permitting records.

Only 27 of these facilities are required by the state to have monitoring wells installed on them.

Sixteen of those 27 have recorded nitrate levels higher than 50 parts per million at least once since monitoring began, according to a *Flatwater Free Press* review.

A few have violated the state's livestock waste control rules. They have housed more hogs than permitted, the state alleged, failed to report spills and submitted groundwater test results late – all of which could increase nitrate risks, [research](#) shows.

Pillen is far from the only big hog producer facing these issues. In many places, concentrated livestock operations contribute to nitrate pollution, the research noted.

To be clear: No one is directly drinking from these monitoring wells on Pillen hog farms. But some of that nitrate will move along with groundwater, experts say, potentially contributing to Nebraska's nitrate problem and posing a risk to residents.

Nebraska's governor didn't respond to interview requests from *Flatwater Free Press* and Investigate Midwest about his hog operations.

In a December 2022 interview with the [Nebraska Examiner](#), Pillen portrayed nitrate pollution as a problem largely stemming from the past. “And if there are a few silly things going on, it’s easy to be able to identify that and granularly fix that,” he said.

A spokesperson for the governor directed all questions to Pillen Family Farms.

Pillen Family Farms co-CEO Sarah Pillen, the governor’s daughter, emailed a statement in response to an interview request, noting the company employs a 17-member team who work to protect Nebraska’s groundwater. The company, she wrote, has “always placed a strong commitment on being positive environmental stewards of the land.”

She and other Pillen Family Farms executives did not respond to questions about high nitrate detected on specific hog farms, potential causes of high readings and the company’s remediation efforts.

Many Pillen hog barns have few to no known nitrate issues, data show. Other Pillen hog barns look much like the hundreds of other pig farms spread across Nebraska, which tend to show at least slightly elevated nitrate levels at some points.

Still other Pillen operations, like a Holt County hog farm, have recorded nitrate levels higher than Chris Jones, a former University of Iowa water researcher, says he’s ever seen.

The Holt County farm, called CRB Finish, recorded a reading of 445 parts per million in 2016.

“If you’ve got a monitoring well that’s 400 parts per million and there’s drinking water wells in the area, that should be a 911,” Jones said.

Another expert, Rebecca Muenich of the University of Arkansas, said it’s a “huge, huge, huge human health concern” if nitrate near this level makes it into nearby drinking wells.

“That’s water that you can sell as fertilizer for sure,” said Muenich, who specializes in analyzing water quality data near livestock facilities.

The nitrate levels in that Holt County hog farm monitoring well have dropped markedly since 2020, dipping to near zero in November 2022.

Many other livestock facilities tied to Pillen Family Farms continue to show flashing nitrate warning signs.

Nine different hog farms that the state lists as being Pillen-affiliated reported nitrate higher than 70 parts per million this year, according to an FFP review of groundwater reports. Two of those are near Platte Center.

The 355-person village Platte Center is surrounded by nearly 50 livestock facilities within a five-mile radius, including feedlots and hog barns.

The three that have monitoring wells on site, including one not owned by Pillen Family Farms, all show significantly elevated nitrate levels.

The town recently drilled a new, deeper well that’s currently delivering clean water. The price tag: Roughly \$500,000. The state footed nearly half the bill.

Greisen is worried about Platte Center’s future. One municipal well in the nearby village of Lindsay has regularly violated the safe drinking water standard since 2010. Greisen wonders: Is more polluted water coming Platte Center’s way?

A Nitrate Mystery

Sometimes called “liquid gold,” hog manure contains much nitrogen matter, which converts to nitrate when exposed to oxygen. Nitrate is great fertilizer for crops. But it can also easily find its way into groundwater, which supplies drinking water to 85% of Nebraskans.

Experts say monitoring wells on hog farms sometimes detect nitrate plumes generated decades ago. They could detect nitrate from fertilizer, since many hog farms are near cornfields.

But sometimes hog operations are the direct source of nitrate, depending on how they store feed, manage wastewater and apply manure to surrounding land, experts say.

That’s why the NDEE often requires multiple-well monitoring programs — at least one well upstream that indicates background contaminant levels, and two downstream.

High nitrate readings in a downstream well can indicate that the feedlot or hog barn has released large amounts of nitrogen into the aquifer, said Dan Snow, director of the University of Nebraska Water Sciences Laboratory.

Snow said spiking nitrate and ammonia at CRB Finish, the Pillen hog farm in Holt County, suggests there were multiple leaks in the wastewater distribution system. It appeared a spill “allowed the ammonia and other contaminants to flow directly into the aquifer,” he told the Flatwater Free Press after reviewing monitoring data.

Pillen Family Farms executives didn’t respond to Flatwater Free Press emails asking about the potential cause of high nitrate there.

Holt County’s sandy soil means that nitrate can get quickly washed into the water table, Snow said. “Maybe having animal feeding operations in that part of the state is not a good idea, just because it’s much easier to contaminate the local groundwater,” he said.

Hog manure is often applied to nearby fields to avoid transportation costs, thus exposing nearby water to contamination risks, said Muenich, the University of Arkansas water expert.

"... It can be accidental application or deliberate; it doesn't matter," Snow said. "If it's at the surface ... and the plant doesn't use it, it can eventually end up at the water table."

State regulators point out that livestock facilities like the Pillen Family Farms hog barns must sit at least 100 feet from existing domestic wells and 1,000 feet from municipal wells.

Some animal feeding operations are also asked to monitor nearby drinking wells, said Carla Felix, NDEE spokesperson, in an email.

No hog barn is known to have contaminated a rural resident's drinking water, Felix said.

"NDEE is not aware of any documented incidences where a private well was impacted by a (Livestock Waste Control Facility)," she wrote.

And she noted that any investigation isn't guaranteed to identify the source of high nitrate for a simple reason: Groundwater moves.

Jones, the Iowa water expert, suspects that any mystery about high nitrate isn't one regulators are clamoring to solve.

"The uncertainty about individual operations ... the industry uses that ... to avoid responsibility and make the case that it can't be regulated," he said.

Problems in Hastings

In 2006, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife employee reported that workers at a Hastings-area hog farm were pumping hog waste onto a nearby federal wetlands area. In a separate incident, state regulators alleged, farm employees used a PVC pipe to drain a storage pit into a freshwater channel.

The operation near Hastings, named Inland Foods, eventually entered a court-ordered agreement with state regulators and paid a civil penalty. Inland Foods is one of a dozen Pillen Family Farms livestock operations that have violated state regulations in the past three decades, NDEE documents show. Current executives at Pillen Family Farms didn't respond when asked about specific violations of state rules.

In a statement, Sarah Pillen touted the company's general environmental protection measures, describing them as "far beyond regulatory requirements." The company works closely with state regulators, she said. In the company's history, she said, it has never had a permit revoked.

In 2011, state regulators recommended the installation of monitoring wells on the Hastings-area farm. The nitrate readings came back high. An

inspection then suggested the hog farm violated state rules by housing more hogs than allowed.

High nitrate on site has continued. A downstream monitoring well detected a level of 77.8 parts per million in May. A 2021 NDEE report concluded that "this facility is impacting groundwater quality with a depth to water of 85-100 feet."

Marty Stange, Hastings' environmental supervisor, said high nitrate levels may not reflect the hog farm's manure management. Local construction projects might have altered groundwater flow, he said.

The *Flatwater Free Press* found no public record suggesting that NDEE further investigated or acted on its 2021 report. An NDEE spokesperson declined to specifically discuss the Inland Foods hog farm.

Generally, the NDEE can order livestock operations it believes is impacting groundwater to increase monitoring, plant trees or relocate lagoons, Felix said.

State rules require hog barns to document where manure is applied. This is meant to prevent overapplication, when leached nitrate can kill fish, cause algae bloom and threaten drinking water.

But Anthony Schutz, a UNL law professor and board member of the Lower Platte South NRD, said such paperwork doesn't guarantee good stewardship. It's nearly impossible for NDEE inspectors to watch every acre.

"You keep a bunch of records. You do a bunch of monitoring. You follow all of the rules that are in the permit. But it turns out the rules in the permit don't actually require you to not pollute. And so you wind up with ... where we are today," said Schutz.

Some Nebraskans, including grassroots organizers and those who farm near large livestock operations, say the state needs to hold these operations more accountable.

As governor, Pillen could strengthen rules and "stop the bleeding," said Graham Christensen, an Oakland-area farmer who focuses on regenerative agriculture and runs a consulting firm. He could tap into federal funding to promote farming practices that can reduce nitrate leaching, such as planting cover crops, Christensen said. He could step up state regulations such as requiring buffer strips when manure is applied. "He's ignoring the issue. He's not wanting to meet with anybody on this thing. He's not publicly addressing our concerns," Christensen said.

But many others inside Nebraska's ag industry are dubious of increased regulation. Osceola farmer Kevin Peterson owns a 4,800-head hog farm and serves on the state Environmental Quality

Council, a board that adopts some NDEE regulations. He thinks the current regulations, and a heavy emphasis on education, are working as intended.

After all, overapplying manure is expensive, he said. And Nebraska farmers are increasingly heeding the nitrate problem and taking voluntary action to address it, Peterson said.

"It's a lot easier to envision a robber baron sitting in the office ... twisting his evil mustache and thinking about how they could destroy the environment in order to make an extra penny," said Peterson. "I've yet to run into any of those folks ... I do not think Governor Pillen is one of those."

There's little debate on one point: The state regulatory framework over hog barns like Jim Pillen's hasn't changed much since Pillen became governor.

This April, the NDEE published a letter to Nebraskans concerned about the feedlots, hog barns and chicken farms that surround small towns like Platte Center.

The document summarized the agency's response to 11 different points of concern over water quality and waste control, after some commenters said the agency didn't adequately address concerns raised in the rule-making process.

There's a spot in the document where the NDEE listed any changes it has made in the permit rules in response to these concerns.

In all 11 areas where potential change could occur, the state agency responded with a single word: "None."

Sky Chadde, of Investigate Midwest, contributed to this story.

[Investigate Midwest](#) is an independent, nonprofit newsroom that covers the agriculture industry.

[The Flatwater Free Press](#) is Nebraska's first independent, nonprofit newsroom focused on investigations and feature stories that matter.

Union Activity is Good for the Nation

By John Markey

As we near the end of this powerful year of labor action, another major strike reaches a settlement. The UAW has settled with the big three automakers, though the agreement must still be ratified by the union members. The UAW won a 25% wage increase over the 4½ year contract, cost of living adjustments and the reopening of a recently closed Stellantis (formerly Chrysler) plant in Illinois.

Also won by the union was an end to lower wage tiers. Autoworkers hired after the 2008 Republican recession, when the concession was made, earn roughly half of what those hired before the recession earn. These tiers damage solidarity and drive resentment among workers. Ending the wage tiers is incredibly important for the UAW, and it is justice in the workplace.

Meanwhile, screen actors are still on strike and both Las Vegas culinary workers and Portland teachers are on the verge of going on strike. The Portland teachers are fed up with class sizes, pay and lack of resources.

I believe all this union activity is good for the nation. From the passage of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, until the Reagan Administration, unions were strong. During this time, the rich got richer, but so did everyone else. Workers at all wage levels gained at the same rate.

In the decades since, we have developed a wealth gap that would make the robber barons of more than a century ago jealous. Some key takeaways from a report just released by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis: The top 10% in America own 70% of all household wealth, while the bottom 50% own a paltry 2.5% and Millennials and Gen Z on average own about 70% of the wealth that Gen X owned at the same stage in life.

Children can no longer expect to do better, or even as well as, their parents. I'm afraid that 40 years of trickle-down economics has lowered the economic expectations of younger generations.

Nancy Pelosi — The Greatest Speaker of All Time

By Dennis Crawford



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is the most consequential female political leader in U.S. history. Since 2003, Pelosi has won many victories for the Democratic Party and progressive causes. Pelosi has been demonized by the radical right for years because she has been a very effective advocate for progressive causes. If she wasn't good at what she does, the GOP would have simply ignored her.

Pelosi's first big challenge as Democratic House leader was when George W. Bush introduced a plan to privatize Social Security and turn it over to Wall Street in 2005. At that time, the (phony) conventional wisdom from the "liberal" mainstream media was that Social Security was going broke and the Democrats had to work with the Republicans in cutting benefits.

Pelosi was under tremendous pressure to come up with her own plan. In response to this pressure, Pelosi was asked when she would come up with a Democratic plan. She defiantly responded, "Never. Is never good enough for you?" Pelosi's courage in standing up to Bush, Wall Street and the press was a key factor to the demise of Bush's plan.

The defeat of the GOP's Social Security privatization scheme marked a turning point in

Bush's presidency. Due to the Democratic victory on this critical issue, Bush's approval ratings dropped below 50% for the first time during his presidency and he never recovered. The Democrats rode that momentum to win a huge victory in the 2006 mid-term elections in which they regained control of the House and the Senate.

Pelosi and the Democrats governed effectively during the time of divided government in 2007–08. (They didn't shut down the government or threaten to default on the debt.) The last federal minimum wage increase passed with bi-partisan support and Bush's signature in 2007. After the economy collapsed in 2008, Pelosi worked with Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson to save the banking system from a meltdown by helping pass the controversial TARP bill. (A major factor that turned a recession into the Great Depression was when Hoover allowed the banking system to disintegrate beginning in 1930).

After the big Democratic victory in 2008, Pelosi helped engineer the greatest Democratic legislative victories since Lyndon Johnson's Great Society in 1965–66. When the Democrats had the majority in both Houses in 2009–10, Pelosi supplied the necessary Democratic votes to pass the 2009 Recovery Act, an Affordable Care Act with a public option, cap and trade legislation and Wall Street reform. (The public option had to be dropped from the Affordable Care Act when Scott Brown won the special 2010 Massachusetts Senate election due to Democratic voter apathy.)

The years following the 2010 mid-terms were fallow ones for the House Democrats. However, Pelosi led the Democrats out of the wilderness again in 2018. In the 2017–2018 cycle, Pelosi recruited a diverse set of candidates that consisted of both progressives and moderates. Those Democrats went on to win 40 seats in the House. It was the best showing in the mid-terms for the Democrats since 1974.

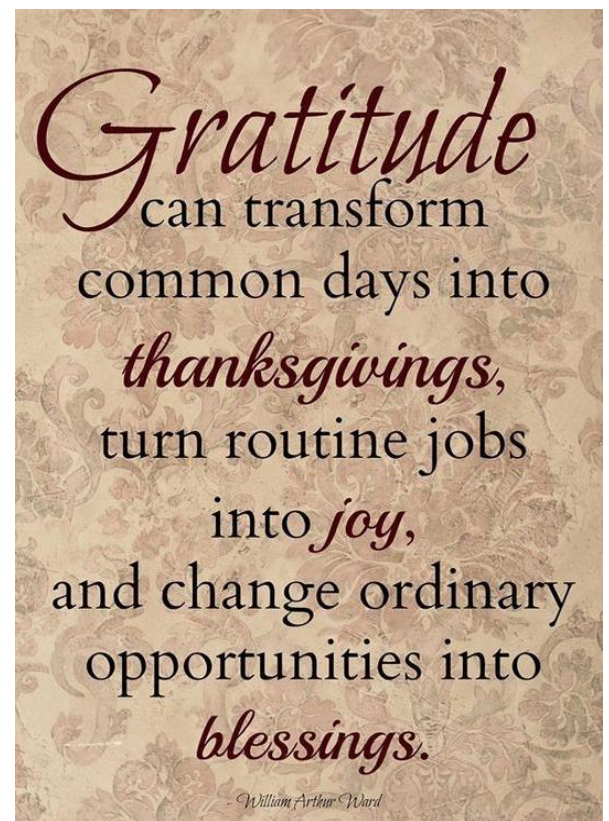
That 2018 triumph laid the foundation for Pelosi's most significant accomplishments as Speaker in 2021–2022. While presiding over a narrow Democratic majority, Pelosi helped President Joe Biden pass the most ambitious and far-reaching legislative agenda since Lyndon Johnson.

Thanks to her leadership, the House passed the American Rescue Act, a bi-partisan infrastructure bill, the first gun reform bill since 1994, a veteran's health bill, landmark climate change legislation and prescription drug pricing reform.

The highlights of Biden and Pelosi's accomplishments are as follows:

- Lowest poverty, uninsured rates in US history.
- New business starts at record levels.
- American manufacturers have now added enough jobs to regain all that they lost during the pandemic. Manufacturers have a net gain of 67,000 workers above pre-pandemic levels.
- In 2021, the U.S. economy added over 6.5 million jobs, the greatest year of job growth in history.
- The unemployment rate has nearly been cut in half.
- Jobless claims are at their lowest point since 1970.
- Under Democratic leadership, the U.S. has added 10 million jobs — the highest number of jobs added in any president's first 18 months. Not only is the unemployment rate at a historic low of 3.7 percent, but more Americans are now employed in the private sector than at any time.
- Deficit reduced by a record \$1.5 trillion.
- Because of the infrastructure package, repairs have started on over 65,000 miles of roads and 1,500 bridges.
- The American Rescue Plan led to a record 14.5 million Americans signing up for healthcare coverage for this year through the Affordable Care Act.
- Child poverty has been cut in half since President Biden took office. While Donald Trump was in office, child poverty was at 9.7%. Since President Biden took office, child poverty has been reduced to 5.2%.
- President Biden and the Democrats in Congress have capped insulin costs at \$35 a month for Medicare recipients.
- The Inflation Reduction Act will now save 13 million Americans an average of \$800 annually on health insurance premiums.

At the end of the day, Nancy Pelosi will be seen as a towering figure in American history. She will go down in history as the greatest Speaker of the House in U.S. history, topping Henry Clay and Sam Rayburn. The United States is a much better and stronger nation thanks to Pelosi's skillful leadership.





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