

Progressivism explains much of what the new book 'Abundance' deplures

Many years ago, after reconstruction of Manhattan's West Side Highway took 35 years, Daniel Patrick Moynihan noted that the more challenging construction of the George Washington Bridge took just 39 months. Moynihan, New York's four-term Democratic senator, lamented that whereas Americans once celebrated people who built things, "in the 1970s, civic reputation began to be acquired by people who prevented things from happening."

Many decades later, two center-left journalists, Ezra Klein (the New York Times) and Derek Thompson (the Atlantic), know that this problem has worsened, and that solving it is a prerequisite for reviving the Democratic Party. In their book "Abundance," they properly applaud what Democratic Gov. Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania did when, in 2023, a tanker-truck explosion collapsed a bridge in Philadelphia's section of Interstate 95, a crucial artery for East Coast commerce.

If all the environmental, diversity, equity, inclusion of minority-owned firms, and other laws, rules, and procedural fetishes had been adhered to, just issuing the construction contract would have consumed 12 to 24 months. Because Shapiro shredded laws and red tape, I-95 was reopened in 12 days.

Government, Klein and Thompson demonstrate, is one reason the median home price, which was 2.2 times the average annual income in 1950, is now six times this. And as Democrats anguish over a CNN poll showing the Democratic Party with an anemic 29 percent favorability rating, Klein and Thompson say liberals should be angry about the condition of the states and cities that liberals govern. "Liberals should be able to say: Vote for us and we will govern the country the way we govern California! Instead, conservatives are able to say: Vote for them and they will govern the country the way they govern California!"

California's housing affordability problem is the nation's worst, but 30 percent of all American adults are "house poor" — spending at least 30 percent of their incomes on housing — partly because of what the authors call "lawn-sign liberalism." You know the multicolored signs: "Kindness is Everything," "No Human Being is Illegal." Klein and Thompson: "Those signs sit in yards zoned for single families, in communities that organize" for anti-growth regulations requiring larger lots, more parking, etc. Since 2015, Texas, which now has 9 million fewer residents than California, has authorized construction of twice as many homes as California.

What Klein and Thompson call environmentalists' "trade-off denial" helps to produce this: Whereas the Empire State Building was built in 410 days (1930-1931), in 2023 in San Francisco it took, on average, 523 days to get clearance to construct housing, and 605 days to secure permits.

What the authors call "ev-



GEORGE WILL

The Washington Post

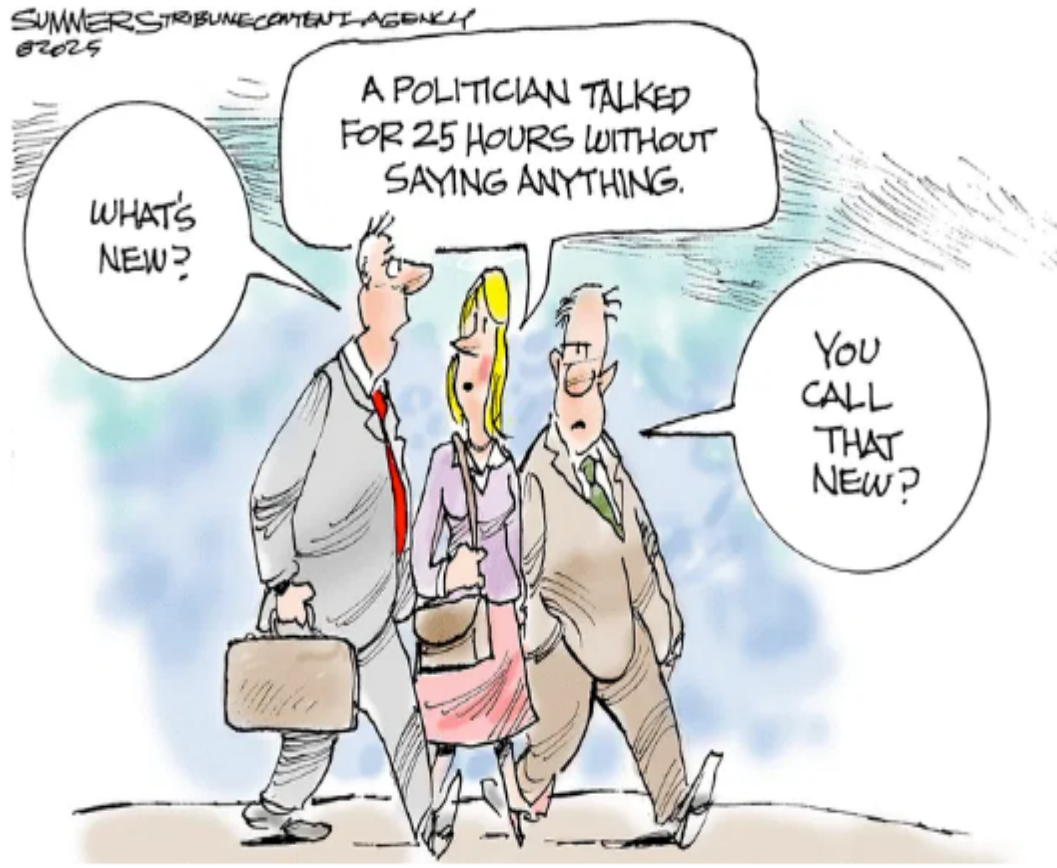
everything-bagel liberalism" overloads public projects with goals that should be extraneous: environmental fastidiousness, "equity" strategies (the "e" in DEI), child care for construction workers, etc. These make the bagel become (if not a chimera, like California's tragi-comic high-speed rail) ludicrously over budget and overdue.

Writing in Foreign Affairs, Jason Furman, former chair of Barack Obama's Council of Economic Advisers, says Joe Biden's "muscular" governing was enfeebled by government: Despite a more than \$500 billion infrastructure law, "the costs of construction have left the United States building less than it was before the law's passage." This is partly because of maddeningly slow permitting, and because Biden, even more foolishly than Donald Trump, "enforced 'Buy American' rules for government procurement."

Progressivism explains much of what "Abundance" deplures. The opposite of abundance is scarcity, in which progressives see opportunity. They (mistakenly) think scarcities justify rationing; hence detailed government supervision of society; hence the administrative state, which is a full-employment program for lawyers, and a reason America has so many. And a pesky perennial — human nature — guarantees a steady supply of people who derive pleasure from regulating others. Hence a steady supply of progressives.

Klein and Thompson face facts: "Almost every part of America shifted right" in 2024, and the shift was largest in blue states and blue cities. Nearly every California county shifted right. On the other coast, Queens and the Bronx did by 21 and 22 points, respectively.

The authors robustly defend government, especially its indispensable support for innovation-through-science. They say, however, that this is "a molten moment when old institutions are failing, traditional elites are flailing, and the public is casting about for a politics that feels like it is of today rather than of yesterday." They might ruefully sympathize with this from a president's inaugural address 44 years ago: "In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem."



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Public health is lost without evidence-based science

As a physician internist with 40 years experience practicing and teaching medicine, I never expected the need to advocate for accepted scientific principles in the practice of medicine. Alas, that time has come. Many times, over the last four decades, I have written publicly about the need for aggressive personal and public preventive health practices. Life expectancy in this country has lengthened dramatically in the last century primarily because of these preventive measures. They include clean water, adequate sewage disposal and vaccination against potentially lethal infectious disease. More recently seat belt legislation and tobacco cessation efforts have been useful also. We have become unaware of what it means to live in a time when the prevention of infectious disease was not taken for granted.



JOSEPH G. WEIGEL, MD

Lake Cumberland Regional Hospital

Any reading of the history of polio, yellow fever, and cholera among many other diseases would make one aware that we do not wish to revisit these times.

The practice of medicine, and specifically public

health, is lost without evidence-based science. The idea that non-scientifically oriented persons would spread misinformation to serve an agenda is both malicious and dangerous. The public must consider carefully just what their agenda might be. I, too, want America healthy but in thoughtful proven ways.

I have no political agenda. I do have a people agenda. Let's all be very careful and thoughtful about the public health measures we pursue.

Joseph G. Weigel, MD, MACP

Program Director, Internal Medicine
Director, Medical Student Education
Lake Cumberland Regional Hospital

COLLEGE SPORTS



Then

Now

LETTERS FROM READERS POLICY

The Commonwealth Journal welcomes letters from readers and will print them on a first-received, first-published basis. All letters for publication must contain the name, address and telephone number of the writer. Letters submitted for publication must not contain material that is deemed offensive or libelous by the Commonwealth Journal. All letters become the property of the Commonwealth Journal. We reserve the right to edit and/or reject any and all letters. In the

case of frequent writers, we reserve the right to limit their number of published letters. The viewpoints of advertisers or community columnists do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Commonwealth Journal. The Commonwealth Journal does not endorse political candidates, nor does it run letters of endorsement. E-mail Letters to the Editor to scornelius@somerset-kentucky.com.