



NEWSLETTER

August 2025 ISSUE#: HV018

Mercer We the People of Hopewell Valley is a steady source of news to heal the accelerating erosion of our fundamental freedoms nationally and locally.

Embrace our First Amendment

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 grievances.

Source: <https://billofrightsintstitute.org/primary-sources/bill-of-rights>

Kind regards,
Publius Bonhomme Richard, Publisher & Co-Editors

HOW TO CONTACT US:

Email us at: info@mercervethepeople.com

Please email us to be included for future newsletters.

Printed copies of the newsletter will be made available at Rosedale Mills and local library. Any other suggested location(s) please let us know.

Call for Contributors!

MercerWe the People of Hopewell Valley is looking for contributors to write articles, especially informing the community about what is happening at local meetings. If you're interested in writing for us about that or any other topic, whether it is monthly or as needed, please reach out to us at info@mercervethepeople.com

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PILOT

More Unanswered Questions

By John Galt

1. The Hopewell Twp committee continues to assert that the only way they can give funds from the Hopewell Parc payments is through bonding. The bonding process makes it binding and cannot be rescinded by a change in leadership. However, **what is stopping them from contributing some of the funds on an annual basis and earmarking it for the HVSD to cover the cost of educating the estimated 293 students resulting from the development?** They can include this in their budget. It is correct to say that this type of funding through the annual budget can be rescinded should a change in leadership take place. However, if new leadership pulled this funding it would be political suicide.
2. Were you aware? After the subdivision of the BMS property, in November of 2021, BieGene purchased 2 lots: one for manufacturing and one for R&D. They built a state-of-the-art R&D facility for cancer research on Block 46 Lot 8.012 which is assessed at \$198M. **At this assessed value the property taxes to Hopewell Twp are over \$8M/year. To date no property taxes have been paid on this lot because the Twp awarded them a PILOT based on gross revenues. Were you aware? Why were they granted a PILOT?**

If any of this is concerning, please voice your concern(s) at the next Township Committee meeting(s) in-person or by zoom: August 11, 2025, 6:30 PM <https://www.hopewelltwp.org/calendar.aspx?CID=32>

ELECTION 2025

Mercer County Republican Committee July 31st Meet & Greet Event For Jack Ciattarelli A Success!

By Beth Scheuerlein (State Committee-woman)

Despite the threat of flash flooding Thursday July 31st, the Mercer County Republican Committee (MCRC) Meet and Greet event for Jack Ciattarelli was a huge success. With over 200 people in attendance, the room was filled with energy rallying support for our next governor as well as all the candidates of Mercer County. The line up of speakers including most notably National Committeeman Bill Palatucci and Senator Anthony M. Bucco among others and ending with Senate Republican Leader Assemblyman John DiMaio who introduced Jack to the stage. Jack focused on key issues like over development, affordable energy, supporting law enforcement to restore law and order to name a few while connecting with the audience with his heartfelt humor. Chairwoman Patricia Johnson ending the evening with a story of Jack supporting the new EV tax for road maintenance out of fairness because gas cars pay a tax every time they fill up at the pump, demonstrating his transparency and commitment to all citizens of New Jersey.



Photo Courtesy of Beth Scheuerlein; Jack with the newly formed Mercer Garden State Federated Republican Women's club

Restore Balance and Common Ground in the
HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE

Steven NIEDERER

- ★ Offering a lifetime of local knowledge, public safety expertise, and deep-rooted values
- ★ Fostering a community that works for all its residents.
- ★ Preserving Hopewell's rural character
- ★ Supporting local agriculture
- ★ Ensuring responsible development

Steven Niederer knows Hopewell because he's lived it, served it, and continues to fight for it.



COMMUNITY ★ SERVICE ★ SAFETY

FAMILY & FRIENDS DAY

For Shaolin Brown
Candidate for Mercer County Clerk

Tuesday, August 12. 5:00 PM

NEEDLE CREEK BREWERY & FARM
91 TITUS MILL ROAD, PENNINGTON, N.J. 08534

FREE ENTRY

Farm Animals, Food, Dancing, Vendors & More

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FOR INQUIRIES, EMAIL SHAOLINBROWN8@GMAIL.COM

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Education

What's Happening In HVRSD Schools?

HVRSD Board Of Education Meeting July 21, 2025

By The Wall of Ed

Agenda: <https://go.boarddocs.com/nj/hvrSD/Board.nsf/Public#tab-meetings>

Meeting Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5c_oL7ZR9c

Next Meeting August 11th at 6:30pm at the HVRSD Board office: 425 S. Main Street, Pennington
July 21 2025 meeting summary to be provided in next newsletter.

Family Structure Matters to Student Achievement. What Should We Do With That?

By Robert Pondiscio originally published in *The Next 30 Years* (July 10 2025)

The most effective intervention in education is not another literacy coach or SEL program. It's dad.

A recent report from the University of Virginia—*Good Fathers, Flourishing Kids*—confirms what many of us know instinctively but rarely see, or avoid altogether, in education debates: The presence and engagement of a child's father has a powerful effect on their academic and emotional well-being. It's the kind of data that should stop us in our tracks—and redirect our attention away from educational fads and toward the foundational structures that shape student success long before a child ever sets foot in a classroom.

The research, led by my AEI colleague Brad Wilcox and co-authored by a diverse team that includes another AEI colleague, Ian Rowe, finds that children in Virginia with actively involved fathers are more likely to earn good grades, less likely to have behavior problems in school, and dramatically less likely to suffer from depression. Specifically, children with disengaged fathers are 68% less likely to get mostly good grades and nearly four times more likely to be diagnosed with depression. These are not trivial effects. They are seismic.

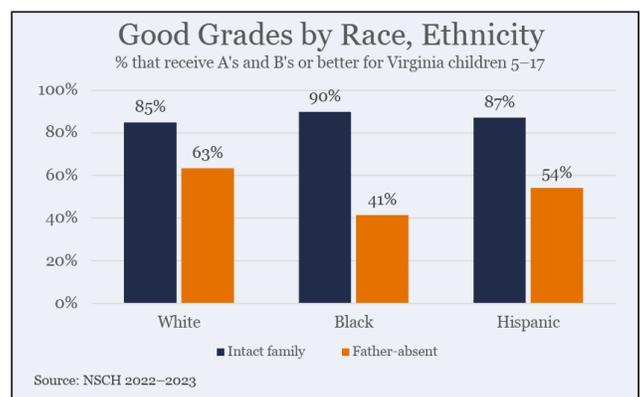


Figure 9 from Wilcox et al., *Good Fathers, Flourishing Kids*

Specifically, children with disengaged fathers are 68% less likely to get mostly good grades and nearly four times more likely to be diagnosed with depression. These are not trivial effects. They are seismic.

Most striking is the report's finding that there is no meaningful difference in school grades among demographically diverse children raised in intact families. Black and white students living with their fathers get mostly A's at roughly equal rates—more than 85%—and are equally unlikely to experience school behavior problems. The achievement gap, in other words, appears to be less about race and more about the structure and stability of the family.

This may be a surprising finding to some, but not to William Jeynes, a professor of education at California State University, Long Beach, whose meta-analyses have previously demonstrated the outsized academic impact of family structure and religious faith. (The new UVA report does not study the role of church-going.) As I wrote in *How the Other Half Learns*, Jeynes' work highlights how two-parent households and religious engagement produce measurable benefits in educational achievement. "When two parents are present, this maximizes the frequency and quality of parental involvement. There are many dedicated single parents," Jeynes has noted. "However, the reality is that when one parent must take on the roles and functions of two, it is simply more difficult than when two parents are present." Jeynes' most stunning finding, and his most consistent, is that if a Black or Hispanic student is raised in a religious home with two biological parents the achievement gap totally disappears—even when adjusting for socioeconomic status.

My colleague Ian Rowe has been a tireless advocate for recognizing and responding to these patterns. He has long argued that NAEP—the Nation's Report Card—should disaggregate student achievement data by family composition, not just by race and income. That simple step would yield a more honest accounting of the challenges schools are facing—and help avoid both unfair blame and unearned credit.

Yet this conversation remains a third rail in education. Many teachers and administrators are understandably wary of saying too much about family structure for fear of stigmatizing children from single-parent households—particularly in settings where single-parent households are dominant. Rowe has also faced resistance to his efforts to valorize the "Success Sequence," the empirical finding that graduating high school, getting a full-time job, and marrying before having children dramatically increases one's odds of avoiding poverty. But being cautious is not the same as being silent, and it's not compassionate to pretend these dynamics don't matter when the data so clearly shows that they do.

None of this absolves educators of their duty to reach and teach every child. But it does suggest we should be clear-eyed in how we interpret data and set expectations. Teachers, particularly those in low-income communities, often shoulder the full weight of student outcomes while lacking the ability to influence some of the most powerful predictors of those outcomes. That's frustrating—and understandably so.

Citing compelling evidence on fatherhood and family formation is not a call for resignation or excuse-making. It's a call for awareness and intelligent action. While schools can't influence or re-engineer family structure, teachers can respond in ways that affirm the role of fathers and strengthen the school-home connection. They can make fathers feel welcome and expected in school life—not merely tolerated. They can design family engagement activities that include dads as co-participants, not afterthoughts. They can build classroom cultures that offer structure and mentoring, especially to students who may lack it at home. And maybe—just maybe—the field can overcome its reluctance to share with students what research so clearly shows will benefit them and the children they will have in the future. Rowe takes pains to note his initiative to teach the Success Sequence is intended to help students make decisions about the families they will form, not the ones they're from. "It's not about telling them what to do," he says, "it's about giving them the data and letting them decide for themselves."

This leads to a final point, and for some an uncomfortable one: If we truly care about student outcomes, perhaps we should be willing to support the institutions that reliably foster them. And that includes religious schools.

Religious schools—particularly those rooted in faith traditions that emphasize marriage, family life, and moral formation—often create environments where the presence of fathers and the reinforcement of shared values are not incidental but central. A recent analysis by Patrick J. Wolf of the University of Arkansas, published in the *Journal of Catholic Education*, found that adults who attended religious schools are significantly more likely to marry, stay married, and avoid non-marital births compared to public-school peers. The effects are most pronounced among individuals from lower-income backgrounds.

In states with Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) and other school choice mechanisms, we have an opportunity—perhaps an obligation—to expand access to these institutions. That's not merely a question of parental rights or religious liberty. It's a matter of public interest. If these schools produce better education and social outcomes by encouraging family formation and reinforcing the value of fatherhood, the public benefits—even if instruction is delivered in a faith-based context. Said simply: The goal of educational policy and practice is not to save the system. It's to help students flourish.

So yes, let's fund fatherhood initiatives. Let's run PSAs about the importance of dads. But let's also get serious about expanding access to the kinds of schools—whether secular or religious in nature—that support the kind of family culture where children are most likely to thrive. Because if we follow the evidence where it leads, we must conclude that the biggest intervention in education is not another literacy coach or SEL program. It's dad.

Access the article: <https://thenext30years.substack.com/p/family-structure-matters-to-student>

Making Sense Of Mahmoud v. Taylor

By Robert Pondiscio originally published in *American Enterprise Institute* (July 3 2025)

Op-Ed

The Supreme Court's decision last week in *Mahmoud v. Taylor* was cheered by conservatives and religious liberty advocates. The 6-3 ruling found that a Maryland public school district violated the First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause by refusing to let parents opt their elementary school children out of lessons featuring LGBTQ-themed storybooks. The Court reaffirmed a bedrock principle going back a century to *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*: Parents cannot be forced to have their children exposed to material that conflicts with their religious beliefs, certainly not without notice and the opportunity to opt out.

But don't be surprised if Mahmoud proves to be less than the last word. Not because SCOTUS's legal reasoning is muddled—it's not—but because of the way reading is taught in many elementary classrooms. The gap between how courts think "curriculum" works and how it's actually implemented in elementary classrooms is vast. And that means schools will likely keep finding themselves on the receiving end of angry phone calls, and possibly lawsuits, from parents blindsided by what their children bring home in their backpacks.

In Mahmoud, the books in question weren't part of the Montgomery County school district's core curriculum. A few years ago, the MCPS school board "determined that the books used in its existing [English language arts] curriculum were not representative of many students and families in Montgomery County because they did not include LGBTQ characters," according to the majority opinion written by Justice Alito. The board decided to introduce "LGBTQ+-inclusive texts." Five books for younger students were at issue in Mahmoud: *Intersection Allies*, *Prince & Knight*, *Love, Violet*, *Born Ready: The True Story of a Boy Named Penelope*, and *Uncle Bobby's Wedding*.

As described in the majority decision, the school board suggested "that teachers incorporate the new texts into the curriculum in the same way that other books are used, namely, to put them on a shelf for students to find on their own; to recommend a book to a student who would enjoy it; to offer the books as an option for literature circles, book clubs, or paired reading groups; or to use them as a read aloud." This is easily recognizable as the "reader's workshop" model, which relies on students self-selecting books from a "classroom library" (not to be confused with a larger, stand-alone school library)—bins filled with dozens of books, even hundreds of them, on shelves in a child's classroom, sorted by reading levels, genres, or themes, and providing time for both independent and guided practice. In the workshop model, teachers lead "mini-lessons" on a reading "skill" or "strategy" from a common text. But students typically practice on books they choose themselves—on the theory that this generates kids' interest and engagement.

The workshop model also relies heavily on whole-class read-alouds, which is the principal source of the conflict in Mahmoud. The Court looked askance, for example, at a 2022 professional development session that advised teachers to correct students who make "hurtful comments" on transgender issues. "When we're born, people make a guess about our gender and label us 'boy' or 'girl' based on our body parts," they were advised by the district to explain. "Sometimes they're right and sometimes they're wrong." A guidance document also encouraged teachers to "disrupt the either/or thinking" of their students about biological sex. Initially, MCPS allowed parents to opt out of read-alouds featuring the controversial books, but later rescinded that option. It was this shift—the loss of notice and opt-out rights—that the Court found constitutionally unworkable: Parents were denied the opportunity to withhold consent on religious grounds.

What counts as "instruction"?

"The books are unmistakably normative," SCOTUS ruled. "They are designed to present certain values and beliefs as things to be celebrated, and certain contrary values and beliefs as things to be rejected." Neither did the justices accept Montgomery County's argument that its "LGBTQ+-inclusive" instruction was mere "exposure to objectionable ideas" or as lessons in "mutual respect." The storybooks "unmistakably convey a particular viewpoint about same-sex marriage and gender. And the Board has specifically encouraged teachers to reinforce this viewpoint and to reprimand any children who disagree. That goes beyond mere 'exposure.'"

The line the Court drew seems bright: If schools use contested materials instructionally—especially in ways that make exposure unavoidable—parents have a right to know and a right to say no. Montgomery County's approach and guidance seems heavy-handed and didactic. But in common practice, the line between "instructional" and "not instructional" is far from clear. Many elementary classrooms today don't assign novels or shared texts; the teacher teaches literacy skills, not books. A question surely on the minds of teachers, administrators, and school board members who've read the decision is one the Court left unaddressed and may not even be aware of: Is the line crossed only when controversial books are read aloud? Or is their mere presence in a classroom library enough to require parental notification, since students might choose them as part of their ELA instruction? No consideration in either the majority decision or the dissent authored by Justice Sotomayor seems to have been given to the difference between a classroom library or a school's main library, or (apart from a whole-class read aloud) how a controversial book might end up in a child's hands.

From a judicial perspective, it might matter whether a book is "assigned" and exposure compelled. But from a parent's perspective, it probably doesn't. If a first grader comes home with *It's Okay to Be Different* or *I Am Jazz*, parents are unlikely to

distinguish between something their child picked up on her own and something their teacher handed them. Nor should we assume that the difference is meaningful. The classroom library didn't build itself. Teachers or other school district personnel chose what went on those shelves. And students made their selections during instructional time, under adult supervision, as part of a structured literacy program. In other words, "We didn't assign it" may not be much of a defense.

Most non-educators—including parents, policymakers, and judges—think of "curriculum" as a list of books that every child reads. Something on the syllabus. A shared text. Yet that's not how ELA works in many classrooms anymore. Although the workshop model has come under fire in recent years, it's still a common, even dominant approach to elementary reading instruction across the country.

When a child chooses a book that contradicts the family's religious or moral beliefs, it may not have been "assigned" per se, but that doesn't mean it's neutral. It was placed there for a reason. And when it's chosen during class time, under the implicit encouragement of an adult, it becomes part of the instructional environment. But does Mahmoud require parental notification of its simple existence in that environment? SCOTUS appears not to have weighed this possibility, which is far more likely than a controversial book being chosen for a whole-class read aloud.

This is where Mahmoud and classroom practice potentially—and predictably—collide. The Court treated the issue as one of compelled exposure. But in an ELA class built on student choice, what counts as "compelled"? If you make available a limited, curated set of books, is that choice free or coerced?

In the final analysis, there is a foreseeable mismatch between the expanded, ambient definition of curriculum inside schools and the traditional, content-focused definition held by the public. The Court didn't resolve that mismatch. It barely acknowledged it and, indeed, might not be entirely cognizant of it. But it will almost certainly keep generating friction.

Access the article: <https://www.aei.org/op-eds/making-sense-of-mahmoud-v-taylor/>

The Family's View	<i>"My child brought home a book that conflicts with our religious beliefs. I had no idea this kind of material was being used at school. No one told me. Why is this even in the classroom?"</i>	That concern is legitimate, especially when the book was chosen during school hours, from a curated selection, and potentially discussed with a teacher—even informally.
The School's View	<i>"No one assigned the book. The student selected it during independent reading. It's part of a diverse, age-appropriate classroom library. We support student choice."</i>	Also a fair point—under current practice, especially in districts that use the reader's workshop model and emphasize engagement through student choice.

SCENARIO	Instructional control	PARENTAL NOTIFICATION	
		Advisable?	Required? (Post-Mahmoud)
Teacher reads LGBTQ-themed book aloud and leads discussion	High Structured, directed, instructional use	✔ Yes	✔ Likely required
Teacher recommends or guides student to LGBTQ-themed book during independent reading	Moderate Instructional influence	✔ Yes	⚠ Probably required
Book is available in classroom library, not promoted or assigned	Low Passive availability	⚠ ???	⚠ ???
Student checks out LGBTQ-themed book independently from school library	Minimal to none	✘ No	✘ Probably not required

Local News

A July 4th Gift To America: Get The US Out Of The UN

By Kevin Mooney originally published in *The American Spectator* (July 3 2025)

Senator Mike Lee's proposal to have the U.S. withdraw from intergovernmental body could use a jolt of Trumpian support.

Utah Sen. Mike Lee has a message for the United Nations perfectly timed for the July 4th holiday weekend and America's 249th birthday: Let's get out of the U.N. for good. But his plan needs greater amplification if it's going to succeed.

Lee's proposal, revealed in February, has not received the media attention it deserves in the runup to America's 250th anniversary next year. But here's hoping that will change starting now, a year ahead of time. This can be done with a little imagination, some Trumpian overtones, and a lot of fun. So, here's a suggested scenario that has The Donald standing in for Utah's senior Republican U.S. senator at a possible press conference.

July 4, 2025, the golf course in Mar-a-Lago:

"Hey Turtle Bay bureaucrats, get lost, why don't you — and take your limousines, your diplomatic immunity, your anti-Americanism, your antisemitism, and go set up shop in a third world outpost. And this time, do it without U.S. taxpayer support!"

I'll invite the president to circulate his own commentary, but I'll bet this hits close to the mark. Until then, it's up to our more reserved man from Utah to free the nation from globalist initiatives that bypass America's democratic institutions.

The Disengaging Entirely from the United Nations Debacle (DEFUND) Act is heavily focused on cutting financial ties between the U.S. and the U.N. While the U.S. is just one of 193 member nations, it finances one-fifth of the U.N. system, according to a summary statement of Lee's bill, with most of the contributions being voluntary. The Council on Foreign Relations, a U.S. foreign policy think tank, reports that the U.S. donated more than \$18 billion in 2022.

Lee has also made the point that "U.S. dollars are being used to make a mockery of [America's] values" with these

contributions. He cites several examples including contributions that have given refuge to terrorists through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the promotion of coercive abortions under the phony label of “reproductive rights,” giving political cover for China’s human rights abuses, and the U.N. support given to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for prosecuting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Lee has also balked at the “bloated, bureaucratic, supranational framework,” which is precisely the sort of arrangement America’s founders sought to avoid.

Previous efforts to have the U.S. withdraw from the U.N. have met with minimal support. This time around, Sens. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., and Rick Scott, R-Fla are serving as cosponsors. House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mike Rogers, R-Mich., and Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, have introduced companion legislation on the House side.

“If we engage with the U.N. in the future, it will be on our terms, with the full backing of the Senate and an ironclad escape clause.”

When he announced his legislative proposal, Lee made it clear he didn’t want U.S. taxpayers footing the bill any longer for policies that are diametrically opposed to American values.

“No more blank checks for the United Nations,” Lee said in a press release. “Americans’ hard-earned dollars have been funneled into initiatives that fly in the face of our values, enabling tyrants, betraying allies, and spreading bigotry. With the DEFUND Act, we’re stepping away from this debacle. If we engage with the U.N. in the future, it will be on our terms, with the full backing of the Senate and an ironclad escape clause.”

For all of us America Firsters, that’s one sure way to chart the right path forward.

Just as Thomas Jefferson took the lead to declare our independence from Great Britain in 1776, here in the 21st Century, Lee is taking the lead to restore American independence by having us withdraw from the United Nations.

The nuts and bolts of what Lee calls the DEFUND Act should attract attention in the Age of Trump.

Lee takes it all the way back to 1945 and revokes the “critical acts,” as he puts it, that glued the U.S. to the U.N. Then he proposes to halt “all forms of U.S. financial support to the U.N.” This would include any assessed and voluntary contributions. Withdrawing from the U.N. would also mean withdrawing from the World Health Organization (WHO) and other U.N. conventions.

Why now? Why did Lee pick this year as the appropriate moment to drop this bill?

In his public comments, Lee says the DEFUND Act “comes in response to years of unchecked bureaucratic expansion and financial misuse by the U.N. at the expense of American taxpayers.”

Trump has already made incremental, but significant moves in the direction of what Lee has in mind. In one of his first executive actions, Trump withdrew the U.S. from the U.N. Paris Climate Agreement and also revoked any financial commitments for the U.S. under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

I’ve made the case for Trump going a step further, calling the beast by its name, and describing the Paris Agreement as a treaty that is in need of U.S. Senate ratification under the U.S. Constitution. Only with a two-thirds vote can a treaty be ratified, which means a vote in the Senate would almost permanently close off any avenues for U.S. participation. Trump could also withdraw entirely from U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change.

But let’s not stop there.

Only this July 4th, let’s go long and throw deep and make plans to be completely free of the U.N. this time next year when America turns 250. Thanks, Sen. Lee.

Access the article: <https://spectator.org/a-july-4th-gift-to-america-get-the-us-out-of-the-un/>

Election Integrity

Court Issues Order In Mercer County Election Dispute, Setting Discovery And Deposition Guidelines

By Mark Demo

In a contentious case before the Mercer County Superior Court, several Mercer County voters have alleged significant voting rights violations during the 2022 General Election. In the November 2022 general election all voting machines throughout Mercer County failed on Election Day due to a botched software update by Dominion Voting Systems. The plaintiffs contend that their rights were infringed when the Mercer County Board of Elections and associated election officials incorrectly implemented policies that forced qualified voters to use provisional ballots after voting machines malfunctioned. They further allege improper ballot adjudication, rejection of valid votes, and breaches in ballot chain-of-custody procedures. Plaintiffs also assert violations of their statutory rights, such as the prevention of duly-appointed challengers from observing ballot counting and failures in conducting mandated logic and accuracy testing on voting machines.

Throughout the litigation, plaintiffs have argued that defendants' discovery demands were excessive and intrusive, potentially violating privacy and First Amendment rights. The defendants, in response, argued that plaintiffs had inadequately addressed their discovery requests.

Following negotiations during a hearing on July 18, 2025, the court issued an order establishing clear guidelines for depositions and discovery. Depositions are set to begin the week of August 18, 2025, with plaintiffs first deposing defendants, and formal notices will be reissued to clarify details.

The order also requires plaintiffs to respond in writing to the defendants' first set of interrogatories by July 25, 2025. The scope of electronically stored information (ESI) and other communications required from plaintiffs has been narrowed to include only those directly related to their personal voting experiences in the 2022, 2023, and 2024 General Elections. Communications unrelated to these elections or purely political expression are explicitly excluded from production.

Additionally, plaintiffs must provide certifications confirming their thorough search and production of relevant materials by August 4, 2025. The discovery deadline has been extended by thirty days, from September 4 to October 4, 2025.

This latest court order represents an effort to ensure a focused and efficient discovery process, balancing the need for comprehensive evidence gathering with the protection of individual constitutional rights.

Lawsuit Spurs Discovery Of Concerning Drop Box Video Discrepancies In NJ Elections Background Of The Original Lawsuit

By Mark Demo

Mark Demo, co-founder of Citizens for NJ Election Integrity, initially filed a lawsuit against Cherry Hill Township and its Records Custodian, Patti Chacker, alleging violations of the New Jersey Open Public Records Act (OPRA). The lawsuit emerged from the township's refusal to provide access to surveillance video footage from ballot drop boxes used during the 2024 General Election.

Legal Victory Leads to Broader Investigation

Demo successfully sued Cherry Hill Township, winning his case when Judge Sherri L. Schweitzer ordered the township to release the requested surveillance video footage. Judge Schweitzer ruled that municipalities cannot deny OPRA requests based on security concerns if they were previously aware of these requirements upon placing ballot drop boxes.

This legal victory led Citizens for NJ Election Integrity (C4NJIEI) to expand their investigation, requesting ballot drop box video footage from the first 10 days of the recent June primary election at seven high-usage locations across New Jersey. These included Camden County (Cherry Hill, Gloucester Township, Pennsauken), Burlington County (Mt. Laurel, Evesham), and Gloucester County (Washington Township, Monroe Township).

Findings and Public Concerns

The intent of the group's expanded investigation was to reconcile the number of individuals depositing ballots into drop boxes with the records maintained by county drop box logs and those reported to the state. While New Jersey permits individuals (bearers) to deposit multiple ballots, the group aimed to uncover potential discrepancies or irregularities.

Five municipalities (Cherry Hill, Gloucester Township, Mt. Laurel, Washington Township, and Monroe Township) denied OPRA requests for drop box video, citing security concerns because the drop boxes were located outside police stations or other municipal buildings. However, Pennsauken and Evesham provided the requested footage. Additionally, C4NJIEI discovered that many municipalities delete drop box video footage after 30 days, which in some cases means the footage is being erased even before election day.

Implications of Denials, Deletions, and Transparency Issues

Demo's lawsuit revealed significant transparency issues, including premature deletion of election-related video records. Recent guidance published in May of 2025 by the State of New Jersey indicate that drop box video should be maintained at a minimum for as long as a candidate for office can challenge election results, which in NJ is 32 days after election day.

Next Steps and Call for Greater Public Awareness

The findings, including the pattern of denials and premature video deletions, raise serious concerns about transparency and accountability in New Jersey's election procedures. C4NJIEI's efforts underline the need for greater public vigilance and awareness regarding ballot security and election integrity. Moving forward, C4NJIEI's continued investigations could prompt legislative or procedural changes aimed at strengthening public access and oversight of ballot collection practices in New Jersey.

About Citizens for NJ Election Integrity

Citizens for NJ Election Integrity is a non-partisan organization dedicated to ensuring fair and transparent elections in New

Jersey. The group advocates for electoral reforms, improved voter verification processes, and public education on election integrity. For more information, please visit <http://www.citizens4njei.org/>.

Media Contact: Mark Flaherty, Communications Director
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914-473-2038 • Mark.Flaherty@citizens4njei.org

For further inquiries or to schedule an interview, please contact C4NJEI at the information provided above.

ICYMI

Remarks Of Senator John F. Kennedy At Stadium, Carbondale, Illinois, October 3, 1960

Publisher Note: As you read JFK's speech, consider what George Santayana wrote in 1905: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." (published in "The Life of Reason, or The Phases of Human Progress". The twelfth chapter titled "Flux and Constancy In Human Nature").

SENATOR KENNEDY: Mr. Powell, many thanks; Governor, Congressman Gray, Senator Douglas, Otto Kerner, the next Governor, ladies and gentlemen: I am very grateful to the President and the Trustee of Southern Illinois University for their generosity in having us here today, and I am glad to see so many students who are also participating in the profession of politics. Prince Bismarck once said that one-third of the students of German Universities broke down from overwork, another third broke down from dissipation, and the other third ruled Germany. I do not know which third of the student body we have here today at Southern Illinois University, but I am confident I am talking to the future rulers of America in the sense that all future men and women have an opportunity and an obligation to participate in the discipline of self government. I come here as the Democratic candidate for the office of the President, and it is my hope that this campaign will serve a useful national function. My responsibility and the responsibility of the Democratic candidates is to present alternative courses of action to our present policy so that the people can make a clear choice, can make a judgment as to what they want their country to be, as to which direction they want their country to go.

I believe that there is a clear choice in 1960, as there was in 1948, as there was in 1932, as there was in 1912. I believe that the Democratic Party has one again an opportunity to be of service because I believe that the problems which the United States will face in the 1960's are entirely new, entirely different and require new people and new solutions. (Applause)

The hard tough question for the next decade and for this or any other group of Americans is whether this country, with its freedom of choice, its breadth of opportunity, its range of alternatives, whether that country and that system can successfully, over a long period of time, compete with a totalitarian state, where the total resources of the state, both human and material, are harnessed to the service of the state. How can we, over a long period of time, maintain our position, our strength, our leadership, relative to that of the Communist world? That is the question which faces both parties, and which faces America and which faces all who believe in the cause of freedom. It is for that reason, among others, that I find it particularly distressing that this country, after a recession in 1954, and a recession in 1958, is now moving a short time later, less than three years into a period of plateau, of standstill, with nearly 5 million Americans out of work and nearly 3 million Americans working only part time.

Last year, 1959, not a recession year, our economic growth was about one third that of the Soviet Union and one half that of Germany, Italy and France. We are going to have to have double the economic growth we had last year if every student here and their successors in the next ten years is going to find a useful job. We are going to have to find in the 1960's 25,000 new jobs a week for the next ten years if we are going to maintain full employment in the United States. And even when we have done that, there are still those eddies, still those islands of unemployment, because of technological changes, because of many conditions. And you have seen it in Southern Illinois, and I saw it in the textile towns of Massachusetts, and I spent a month in it with West Virginia and in Kentucky and parts of Pennsylvania.

The Federal Government is going to have to devise a better use of its monetary and fiscal powers if it is going to stimulate the growth of our economy. It cannot rely on a high interest rate policy which I believe stifles our expansion, and we have to pass once again and have a President who will sign the area redevelopment bill. (Applause)



Photo Courtesy of Publisher and JFK Library; JFK at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale IL October 3 1960.

I was the floor manager in 1956 for the first Douglas area redevelopment bill. I was a cosponsor of it the second time and a cosponsor the third time. Twice it has been vetoed and there is no indication in 1960 that if we elect a Republican President that he will sign a bill which I think will serve the general need. You cannot possibly agree that it is in the public interest to have communities which have 15, 18 and 20 per cent - in my own city of Lawrence, 30 per cent unemployed for three years. What do those Americans do? I saw them in West Virginia, over 100,000 families getting surplus food packages and no hope for the future. Unless the Federal Government is willing to devote its energies, unless it is willing to cooperate with local groups in this area, in the field of education, in the field of health, in the field of minimum wages, unless the Federal Government is able to use its powers affirmatively, I don't think then that we can look to the future with the confidence and hope that must be ours if we are not only going to endure but prevail.

I believe that the assignments facing the next President of the United States are more difficult than any since the administration of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt. In many ways, they are more difficult than any President has faced since the time of Lincoln. And in the time of Lincoln the issue was just the same as the issue that we face now. In his speech in his last debate, he repeated his house divided theme, and in that speech he said, "The question is whether this nation can exist half slave and half free."

Now the question is whether the world can, and I want to make it clear that I am not satisfied as an American with the drift of events, with a Gallop Poll which showed that a majority of people in ten countries in February believed that the Soviet Union would be ahead of us in science and military power in 1970. You cannot stand still against an adversary who is devoting all of his energies to a movement forward. Mr. Khrushchev spends a month at the United Nations and he is a busy man. He does it in order to further his cause. He knows that in the next decade people in Latin America and Africa and Asia are going to begin to make a judgment as to which side they are going to take, which side represents the best hope for them, which system travels better, Communism or freedom. Can our system help them solve their problems, or must they turn to the East? If you think American policy towards these areas has demonstrated any lack of understanding of the serious problems we face, I will name only one incident. We gave last summer at the time of the uprising in the Congo, we offered 300 scholarships to the Congo. That was more than the United States Government had given to all of Africa in 1959. There are seven students from that 300 here in the United States today from the Congo, even though over 800 applied. Two years ago, Guinea became free. Three years ago Ghana became free. Guinea and Ghana have both moved in the direction of associating themselves with the Soviet policy. Cuba is not the only example.

What I am concerned about is in 1970 I don't want to see independent country after independent country begin to move where Guinea and Ghana have gone, where the Congo almost went and may still go, where Cuba has already gone, because for a simple reason they feel that the Communists represent the future, they feel that we are identified with the past, they feel that we are identified with colonialism, they feel that we are identified with the kind of future which they do not want. Why? After all, what we want is their independence. I think it is because the United States in recent years has not demonstrated the vitality here in the United States. I believe that Franklin Roosevelt and Wilson and Truman were successful in their foreign policy because they were moving here at home. Because Franklin Roosevelt was a good neighbor to the United States, he was a good neighbor in Latin America. And what is true of Latin America is true of Africa and true of Asia.

Next spring India may have a financial crisis. But I don't hear anybody in this administration concerning themselves with the problems of India which may be the most serious postwar crisis that this country has faced. There is no use offering scholarships to the Congo in 1960. It takes years to educate a man or a woman and prepare them for self-government. There is no use suddenly coming at the point of Castro's pistol and offering economic aid to Latin America, which we did this summer when our relations with Castro became soured. These people know what is going on. Where have we been the last eight years? What new original concepts of government, what has been associated with American foreign policy to cause people around the world to believe that the Communist system and Communist countries which, 40 years ago, in the case of Russia, the sickest country in Europe, 10 years ago in the case of China was regarded as a country with no future, and now they move, and the question is whether they move fast enough. **I believe that this is a great country, but I believe it can be a greater country, and I believe it must be if it is going to maintain its freedom, and is going to maintain its position as the leader of the free world. No one is coming to our assistance if we fail. Only ourselves, and, therefore, I believe that the unfinished business of this society is to begin this country on the upward go, for every citizen to be willing to devote his time and his energy to the service of this country.**

I do not run for the Presidency saying life will be easy in the 1960's, but I do run for the Presidency with the strong feeling that the United States manifest destiny in 1960 is to serve ourselves and serve the cause of freedom. (Applause)

Thomas Paine in the American Revolution said, "The cause of America is the cause of all mankind." I believe in 1960 that the cause of all mankind is the cause of America. And I believe that once again the Democratic Party, which stretches back in history longer than any active party now in the world, stretching all the way back to Jefferson. I believe that once again it is going to be called upon for great public service and once again it is going to be given the opportunity to lead this country and start this country moving again. Thank you. (Applause)

Access the speech: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/carbondale-il-19601003>

The Graveyard Of Progressive Misadventures

By Victor Davis Hanson originally published in The Blade of Perseus (July 28 2025)

Sometime after the election of Barack Obama in 2008, the American Left began exploring, then embracing, and finally enacting agendas that proved not only unhinged and unworkable but also fatal to the left-wing project itself.

How did the party so alienate the middle classes when it once professed it was the sole party and protector of those in-between? How did the Democratic Congress sink to a 16 percent approval rating in a current liberal Quinnipiac University poll? How could 63 percent of registered voters view the Democrats unfavorably in a recent Wall Street Journal poll?

In sum: despise the middle class, then lose elections.

At the turn of the millennium, globalization generated massive wealth by opening a 6-billion-person consumer market to the rising global powers of Silicon Valley, media, academia, law, finance, and transnational corporations. The result was a Democrat Party increasingly dominated by a new and different sort of “committed” left-wing billionaire.

The Democrat Party, by the turn of the century, had become a home for the ultra-rich, the upscale professional classes, and the subsidized poor. And its new initiatives reflected the values, ideas—and pretensions—of the globalized bicoastal elites, from reimagining a sustainable green economy to “diversity” and apologetics for America’s culpability abroad.

In the ancient days of the 1990s, Bill Clinton ensured that the Democrat party was for strong borders, legal-only immigration, and protection of union jobs from cheap imported labor. Abortion was to be safe, legal—and “rare.” Now, abortion is often praised and worshipped by the left, as if it is integral to saving a warming planet.

Clinton’s 1992 and 1996 Democrat Party platforms would have been written off as racist and xenophobic.

Once illegal immigration began spiking under Obama, and the old union lunch bucket classes were nearly rendered inert by globalization, the mainstream party began pivoting to open borders.

It assumed that impoverished illegal aliens would soon become new progressive constituents to replace vanishing American working-class voters. “Demography is Destiny” and “The New Democratic Majority” became party mantras.

By 2020, the party was controlled by open-borders radicals. Illegal immigration was seen as an adjunct to new Diversity/Equity/Inclusion obsessions. Suddenly, an entire array of racialist compound nouns appeared—white privilege, white rage, white guilt, white supremacy—without any consideration that whites, in total numbers, comprise the largest group of poor people, or that poor white people usually have zero in common with elite white progressives.

In the Democrat bizarre world, the operating assumption seemed to be that if an illegal alien from southern Mexico set foot into the U.S., then he was immediately branded as a “minority” with legitimate grievances deserving of reparatory treatment from a country he scarcely knew and with which he had no prior experience, good or bad. It became so moral to break the law to welcome in illegal aliens and amoral to enforce the law and try to return the unlawful to their homes.

In response, colleges began granting reduced tuition to foreign nationals unlawfully residing in-state, while charging out-of-state American citizens the full costs.

Joe Biden’s open borders that had allowed somewhere from 10–12 million illegal entries were the final manifestations of the Democrat embrace of illegal immigration, as the foreign-born residing in the U.S. reached all-time highs, both in real numbers and percentages of the population. It was a suicidal party transformation—offending the middle classes and alienating minority Democrats who were left to cope in underserved communities with vast influxes of foreign nationals, half of whom originated outside of Mexico.

The Democrat Party had always claimed credit for landmark civil rights legislation that had morphed into affirmative action. And under Obama, it went further into equality-of-result “diversity/equity/inclusion.”

But in the process, the original paradigm of affirmative action—reparatory treatment for black Americans dealing with the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and what was increasingly now called “systemic racism”—devolved into claiming all who were not so-called “white” or “male” merited racial, ethnic, or gender-based preferences in hiring, promotions, and admissions. Caricature followed as the antebellum racist 1/16 one-drop rule returned, and fakers like Elizabeth Warren gamed the admittedly corrupt system.

The old relationship between class and race was forgotten. DEI quickly became an albatross around the New Democrat Party’s neck when the richest ethnic group in America, Indian-Americans (such as Zohran Mamdani, the “African-American” college applicant), professional women, upscale gays, and the transgendered were seen as making up the new victimized majority who had suffered from the victimizing minority of white males (many of whom were poor).

In short, under Democrat auspices, there were now too few victimizers for the increasing array of victims. Affirmative action had sunk into an absurd tribal caricature of civil rights that was not logical, fair, or popular. Certainly, the entire binary idea of Marxist oppressed versus oppressors was unworkable in a multiracial democracy.

Stranger still, as an offshoot of DEI, the left transformed the ancient recognition of gender dysphoria (a rare biological condition by traditional medical accounts affecting about .1% of the population) into the new civil rights cause célèbre. For

the elites, the trans cause emerged as the unquestioned successor to civil rights, women's lib, and gay marriage—as if to assume in Soviet style, “Give me a new liberal crusade, and then I'll find an oppressed group.”

On some campuses, ten to twenty percent of students claim they were open to “transitioning.”

But what followed was incoherent. The transgendered were to be defined as no different from their adopted biological kindred sex. Indeed, transgendered biological males began competing in women's sports, though transgendered biological women rarely competed in men's athletics.

Biological men began undressing in female locker rooms, as students and professors began listing their “preferred pronouns.” Few cared that the trans sports movement was antithetical to the landmark efforts of women to attain sports parity. It was transphobic to object to sexually explicit transgender burlesque among audiences of teens and children. Polls showed that 70-80 percent of respondents disapproved of biological men competing in women's sports and drag shows with underage audiences.

Bill Clinton had also once campaigned on “100,000” new police officers and tough sentences for violent juvenile offenders. But as liberals morphed into progressives and wokesters, crackpot “critical legal theory” and “critical race theory” began to dominate left-wing criminology.

In big blue cities, crime itself was suddenly defined as socially constructed: it was illegal to shoplift sneakers or candy bars only because rich white men did not need to steal either, and therefore shoplifting itself was not really a crime.

Career criminals must not be indicted, convicted, and imprisoned for their most recent violent crimes, given that a violent, racist, and systemically unfair society itself was culpable for making them violent and career criminals in the first place.

One result was a crime wave that hit major blue cities—exacerbated by the COVID lockdowns, the death of George Floyd and the subsequent four-month-long 2020 riots. “Defund the police” became a Democratic mantra—at least until it threatened to wreck the party and alienate the minority base itself.

Democrats used to talk about “ecology” and “conservation” and were noted for “recycling,” saving “endangered species,” spearheading “anti-pollution efforts,” and ensuring “open spaces.” Yet from the Obama era to the end of the Biden administration, all that prior stewardship was seen as little more than boring, so-so half measures.

Instead, civilization itself was now said to be near extinction, requiring Draconian measures from on high to save the planet.

So global warming morphed into “climate change,” as pollution was redefined not as noxious fumes but as heat itself and the release of natural carbon dioxide. And “climate change” demanded that the middle classes would have to curb their appetites, transition to costly wind and solar “renewables,” and forgo the formerly bountiful and cheap power from natural gas, nuclear, and coal generation.

Stranger still, the elite architects of “fundamentally transforming” society were themselves exempt. It was as if their big SUVs, private jets, 5,000-square-foot homes, heated pools, and air-conditioned estates were necessary accoutrements enabling our left-wing elite to hammer out a new era of “limits” for everyone else. The high-flying multimillionaire Al Gore and billionaire John Kerry, along with the usual Hollywood celebrities and nepo babies, needed the old perks of affluence in order to better reduce affluence for everyone else. As a general rule, the most iconic pontificators about rising oceans and a sizzling planet were the most likely to own a seafront estate or an air-conditioned mansion.

Universities were always bastions of liberal ideology. But now they also went with the new hard-left trend and became not protectors of free speech, not refuges for oddball, unpopular, and eccentric thinkers, and not custodians of age-old scholarship, the teaching of the Western canon, and disinterested science. Instead, life was too short in the woke mind to waste such a valuable progressive asset on real research and apolitical instruction.

So rather abruptly, universities became extensions of the new progressive Democrat woke project. Civil rights legislation and eventual Supreme Court decisions were simply ignored as race and gender now defined the identities of students, staff, and faculty. SATs and comparative ranking of high school GPAs were deemed inherently racist and unfair.

“Theme houses” became little more than racially segregated dorms. “Affinity” graduations were unapologetically racially separated.

Israel was no longer a liberal Democrat's admirable oasis in a sea of Middle East autocracy, terrorism, and religious fundamentalism, but became a “settler colonialist” oppressor. Jews on campus were harassed with impunity and became inseparable from demonized “Zionists,” who themselves were no longer immigrant generations escaping the trauma of the Holocaust to the biblical land of the Jews but Western colonial interlopers and oppressors.

Palestinian terrorists were “freedom fighters.” Foreign students were no longer rare on American elite campuses, where once meritocracy had made room for thousands of rural and small-town high schoolers to enroll in bicoastal elite colleges.

Instead, one million strong foreign students—mostly left-wing and the majority from illiberal regimes, like Communist China and Middle East autocracies—often made up 20-30 percent of top college enrollments, given they were gouged by campuses to pay 110 percent of costs. Some often spearheaded pro-Hamas demonstrations and changed the campus dynamics of protests.

For the new Democrats, the evolving university, like the new media and new corporate boardroom, was seen as an invaluable extension of the party itself, even as their new and woke explicit biases polled terribly and offended the majority of still-silent Americans. It is no surprise that in current polls, the Ivy League now polls as dismally as the media, and its graduates seem to be less impressive to employers year by year.

So, these same Jacobin transformations infected foundations, the media, and corporations, rendering them deeply unpopular embarrassments rather than enablers of the Democrat Party.

In sum, almost every new issue the new Democrat Party embraced proved an anathema to the middle class. Yet the party seemed almost uniquely prescient in foreseeing that progressive policies would bankrupt the country, hopelessly divide it, and leave it unworkable. Being talked down to by neurotic and dysfunctional elites only made the messengers force multipliers of their toxic messages.

If the Democrats were not addicted to woke, they would relegate all these suicidal policies to their graveyard of political misadventures, alongside the failed visions of George McGovern, Jimmy Carter, Barack Obama, and Joe Biden.

But like all addicts, they can survive neither with nor without their fixes.

Access the article: <https://victorhanson.com/the-graveyard-of-progressive-misadventures/>

Trump Proclaims Made In America, Captive Nation Weeks

By Theodore Bunker originally published in Newsmax (July 25 2025)

President Donald Trump released two proclamations on Friday aimed at promoting American workers and reiterating his administration's commitment to helping citizens living under restrictive governments.

In the proclamations, Trump declared that this week, July 20, 2025, through July 26, 2025, is Made in America Week and Captive Nations Week. These proclamations celebrate American manufacturing and construction work and those who live under "oppressive regimes" around the world.

"In 1959, President Dwight D. Eisenhower first proclaimed Captive Nations Week to counter the emerging threat of communism and declare America's resolve to defend the fundamental rights of free speech, religious liberty, and self-government," Trump said in a statement. "As President, I continue that work today, as far too often, oppressive regimes still silence dissent and persecute their own citizens for practicing their faith."

In his proclamation declaring Made in America Week, Trump wrote, "I call upon all Americans to pay special tribute to the builders, the ranchers, the crafters, the entrepreneurs, and all those who work with their hands every day to make America great."

Access the article: <https://www.newsmax.com/us/donald-trump-proclamation-made-in-america/2025/07/25/id/1220118/>

Saakashvili: Trump's Doctrine All About Transformative Resolve

By Mikheil Saakashvili originally published in Newsmax (July 24 2025)

OPINION

President Trump has made it unmistakably clear.

He's done playing games with Vladimir Putin.

His recent announcement of new military support for Ukraine and the imposition of secondary tariffs on entities doing business with Russia signals a new era of American foreign policy — decisive, forceful, and unyielding.

I write not merely as a witness to this pivotal moment in history, but as a political prisoner of Vladimir Putin — unjustly confined in my beloved homeland of Georgia.

My faith is tested daily, yet my courage and resolve remain unbroken.

I know what we are fighting for.

I believe in the enduring power of America and in the restoration of Western ideals—principles President Trump is reclaiming with unapologetic strength.

His decision last month to strike Iran's nuclear facilities was not merely a tactical maneuver—it was a global declaration. A statement, not in words alone but in resolute action: the era of American timidity has ended.

This decisive strike marked the dawn of a new epoch — one defined by strategic clarity and moral leadership.

Under President Trump, U.S. foreign policy has entered what I call Trump Time: rapid, unrelenting, and unambiguous.

And the world has taken note. There is, once again, a sheriff in town.

Contrast this with the sterile diplomacy and deferential posturing that characterized prior administrations.

They introduced an ideology of retreat — where apology became central to diplomacy and disengagement a strategic goal. In place of deterrence, there was capitulation.

The now-infamous “reset button” with Moscow effectively surrendered the post-Soviet space to the Kremlin’s imperialist ambitions.

When Russia invaded Georgia in 2008, U.S. support helped us survive as a nation-state — but it was not enough to stop further Russian aggression.

When Russia annexed Crimea, President Obama responded with words but no action.

That inaction sent a dangerous signal. Obama’s abandonment of missile defense in Eastern Europe, his hollow red lines in Syria, and his diplomatic courtship of Tehran all sent a clear message: the United States would not act.

When President Obama publicly declared that America would not go to war over Ukraine “under any circumstances,” he effectively opened the door for Putin’s full-scale invasion in 2022.

But that door was firmly closed during Trump’s first term when he reinstated missile defense systems in Poland and Romania, reversed Obama-era arms embargoes on Ukraine, and delivered Javelin anti-tank weapons to Kyiv.

These were not symbolic gestures — they were lifelines to nations resisting tyranny.

Unfortunately, President Biden came to office and reversed Trump’s strategy, reintroducing the strategic incoherence of the Obama years.

In the lead-up to the 2022 invasion, the Biden administration repeatedly assured Moscow that any U.S. response would be limited to sanctions—assurances interpreted not as deterrents, but as a green light.

And so, Putin acted.

These failures of will were epitomized by two defining moments: the catastrophic withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and the delusional nuclear agreement with Iran in 2015.

Together, they marked the lowest point of American credibility and prestige in recent memory.

Then came President Trump again — returning to a foreign policy mired in self-doubt and reshaping it with startling speed.

For the first time in decades, the authoritarian axis — Beijing, Tehran, and Moscow—faced a United States no longer afraid to act.

The Iranian regime responded with its usual duplicity: diplomatic gestures masking nuclear ambition. Trump countered not with rhetoric, but with a clear deadline.

When that deadline passed unmet, he acted. Iran’s nuclear infrastructure was reduced to rubble. No war. No apologies. Just results. The Trump way.

Putin also miscalculated.

He now confronts a reinvigorated NATO, thanks in large part to Trump’s relentless pressure.

As the 47th U.S. commander in chief, Trump achieved what no other had dared — demanding and securing NATO commitments to raise military spending to 5% of GDP. That’s not appeasement. That’s leadership.

I have known Donald Trump personally, long before he entered politics.

He’s not an ideologue — he is a strategist.

He is not bound by the rigid conventions of diplomacy, which makes him unpredictable to his enemies — and reliably strong for his allies.

“Make America Great Again” was never a slogan of isolationism.

It was a call to reaffirm American leadership — not through occupation, but through inspiration. America is at her greatest when she stands with the oppressed, when she confronts the autocrats of Moscow and Tehran, and when her president speaks with moral clarity on behalf of those in Tbilisi, Kyiv, and Tehran who long to be free.

President Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize for rhetorical aspirations.

President Trump, by contrast, has earned it through action.

Were I not imprisoned, I would be in Oslo today, standing vigil to nominate him.

President Trump’s legacy will not simply be the transformation of American foreign policy. It will catalyze the transformation of authoritarian regimes in Russia, Iran, and China.

His legacy will be nothing less than the restoration of American greatness — and the rebirth of democratic resolve around the globe.

Let history record this truth: Donald Trump did not merely speak of greatness — he acted to make America great again.

Mikheil Saakashvili is a political prisoner in the country of Georgia, where he previously served as president. A prominent advocate for democratic reform across the post-Soviet space, he also served as Governor of Ukraine's Odesa region and has been a vocal opponent of Russian aggression and authoritarianism.

Access the article: <https://www.newsmax.com/politics/georgia-oslo-putin/2025/07/24/id/1219907/>

Public Corner

Public Local Meetings

Interested in attending public meetings? Here are a few in your area for this month.

<https://www.mercercounty.org/i-want-to/calendar-meeting-list>

HVRSD School Board Meeting

Monday August 11, 2025 at 6:30 PM
425 S Main St. | Pennington, NJ 08534
Or Livestream on YouTube

Municipal Township Meetings

<https://www.hopewelltpw.org/calendar.aspx?CID=32>

Monday, August 11, 2025 6:30 PM
Meetings are in hybrid format- Township Municipal Building & Zoom

Township meetings will be held at HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL SERVICES BUILDING 201 Washington Crossing - Pennington Road, Titusville, NJ 08560

In case you are unable to attend Township Committee mtgs, the recordings are available. Per the township clerk's office Kathy, they are "usually," available within a few days of the meeting.

Happy viewing click here:

https://videoplayer.telvue.com/player/k83q0qZsxB_6dlk4EjvYfv9xDQOqNH9z/videos?autostart=true&showtabssearch=true

Or: <https://www.hopewelltpw.org/> select bottom right "Township Video Channel" link.

Board of Elections Meeting

There is no scheduled August meeting. Instead they have a special recruitment meeting on August 12th. Please find details below. Board of Elections Meetings will be at 930 Spruce St., Lawrence, NJ 08648

Special Recruitment Opportunity with Pay!

Please Join Us at the Mercer County Board of Elections to Celebrate National Election Board Worker Recruitment Day on Tuesday, August 12, 2025

Mercer County Office Park
1440 Parkside Ave., Ewing, NJ 08638
4:30 PM (Program at 5:30 PM)
Join Us and Bring a Friend!

This event is a great opportunity for anyone who may be interested in becoming an Election Board Worker for the first time or who is thinking about serving again!

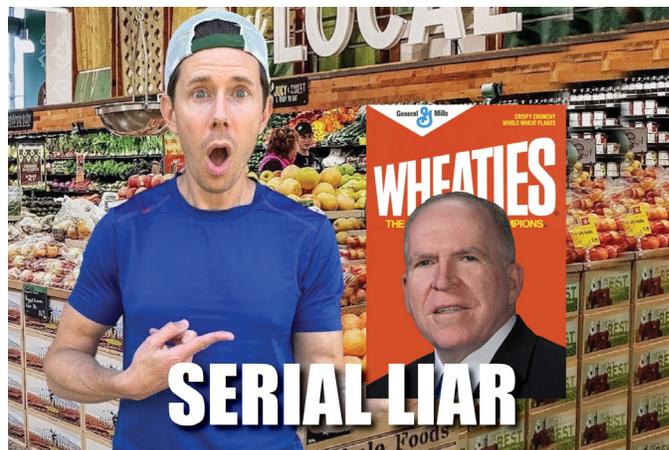
Mercer County Board of County Commissioners

Meeting Schedule -- August 2025
Tuesday August 12, 2025 6:00 PM Agenda Meeting
Thursday August 14, 2025 6:00 PM Formal Meeting

Agenda and Formal Meetings will take place at the Mercer County Administration Building, Room 211, 640 South Broad St., Trenton, NJ unless otherwise stated.

In order to encourage full participation of these meetings, please submit any requests for accommodations of people with disabilities to the Clerk to the Board, Mercer County Administration Building, PO Box 8068, Trenton, NJ 08650

(609) 989-6584 {V/TTY} {Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 101-336}



Meme Maker's Conviction Thrown Out In Free Speech Win

By Catherine Salgado originally published in PJ Media (July 9 2025)

A man whom the Biden administration prosecuted over a satirical meme online just won a victory in court, as his outrageous and anti-constitutional conviction was thrown out.

Douglass Mackey announced on X on July 9, "BREAKING: THE SECOND CIRCUIT

COURT OF APPEALS HAS THROWN OUT MY CONVICTION FOR LACK OF EVIDENCE[...] THE CASE HAS BEEN REMANDED TO THE DISTRICT COURT WITH ORDERS TO IMMEDIATELY DISMISS[...] HALLELUJAH!" This is not only a victory for Mackey personally but for the First Amendment and all those who believe in the right to free speech.

Mackey followed up his initial announcement by thanking God and triumphantly announcing his intent to sue the Justice Department. "UNANIMOUS DECISION by both Republican and Democrat judges," he reported ecstatically. "I would like to thank God, thank my family, thank my beautiful wife, attorney Andrew Frisch, the incredible attorneys at Jones Day, and YOU—the friends who prayed and donated and spread the word since day one."

Furthermore, Mackey is already excited to exercise his Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms once again, and he asked for help raising money to pay off his legal debts.

Mackey also linked to the court's official decision, which states:

Defendant-Appellant Douglass Mackey ("Mackey") appeals from a judgment of conviction entered on October 25, 2023 after a jury trial in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York (Donnelly, J.). Mackey was convicted of conspiring to injure citizens in the exercise of their right to vote in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 241 based on three memes he posted or reposted on Twitter shortly before the 2016 presidential election. These memes falsely suggested that supporters of then-candidate Hillary Clinton could vote by text message. On appeal, Mackey argues, inter alia, that the evidence was insufficient to prove that he knowingly agreed to join the charged conspiracy. We agree.

The conviction is therefore reversed.



Photo Courtesy of <https://knowyourmeme.com/news/trump-internet-troll-and-meme-creator-douglass-mackey-charged-with-election-interference-for-fake-hillary-clinton-ads-sentenced-to-seven-months-prison> (October 19 2023)

Mackey was convicted in 2023 of election interference in the 2016 election because he shared a satirical meme to his nearly 60,000 followers, saying "Avoid the line. Vote from home. Text 'Hillary' to ..." with a fake number. It is important to emphasize that the Biden DOJ did not have any evidence that anyone actually took Mackey's meme seriously and tried to vote from home. So the entire case was based on the unproven argument that someone, somewhere, could just possibly have misunderstood a funny meme and tried to vote from home instead of at a polling place, which supposedly made Mackey a dangerous criminal.

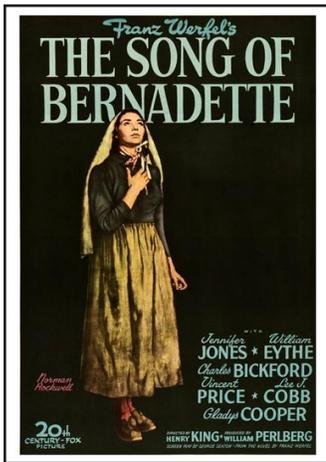
Since his conviction left him facing up to 10 years in prison, it's no wonder Mackey is so relieved at the new decision. But what is incredibly disturbing is that anyone in America was convicted of a crime and faced a decade of jail time over a satirical post on a social media platform (Twitter). The previous decision attacked the First Amendment and set an extremely dangerous precedent.

Fortunately, God is good, as Mackey wrote, and justice has finally prevailed. Our right to free speech is no longer at the sole mercy of petty tyrants in the federal government and judiciary.

Access the article: <https://pjmedia.com/catherinesalgado/2025/07/09/meme-makers-conviction-thrown-out-in-free-speech-win-n4941580>

At the Movies, Bookstores

The Song Of Bernadette (1943)



The Song of Bernadette • Release Date: December 25 1943 • 2h 36m

Cast: Jennifer Jones, William Eythe Charles Bickford, Vincent Price, Lee J. Cobb

Directors: Henry King

Producers: William Perlberg

Production Co: 20th Century Fox

'The Song of Bernadette' is a dramatic film made in 1943, directed by Henry King and starring Jennifer Jones in the title role. It tells the story of Bernadette Soubirous who, when a young girl in the mid nineteenth century, experienced visions of the Virgin Mary, and who was canonized in 1933.

The movie was based on the popular 1941 novel of the same name by Franz Werfel which had spent over a year on The New York Times Best Seller list.

The movie was a box office hit and was warmly received by the critics. It was nominated for ten Academy Awards, with Jennifer Jones winning a Best Actress Oscar for her portrayal of Bernadette.

Opening title cards: This is the story of Bernadette Soubirous who lived in Lourdes, a village in southern France close to the Spanish border. For those who believe in God, no explanation is necessary. For those who do not believe in God, no explanation is possible.

Plot

The action of the film takes place in 1858 near Lourdes in France, where Bernadette, an adolescent peasant girl, played by Jennifer Jones, has a vision of "a beautiful lady" in a cave near the river. Although only Bernadette can see the vision, many local townspeople believe her and assume that it is the virgin Mary.

Some political and religious officials, try to set up Bernadette as a fraud for concocting such a story but she is believed by the priest Dominique Peyramale, played by Charles Bickford.

Eventually, Bernadette is declared a saint, and becomes a nun at a convent, where she must deal with jealousy from others who resent her revered status.

Access article: <https://www.hollywoodsgoldenage.com/movies/bernadette.html>

Watch full movie: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rc1hA8TpqWU>

We the People of Interest

American Virtues – 2025 Commencement Address

Victor Davis Hanson

Wayne and Marcia Buske Distinguished Fellow in History, Hillsdale College

Originally published in Hillsdale College *Imprimis* July/August 2025 | Volume 54, Issue 7/8. The following is adapted from a speech delivered on May 10, 2025, at Hillsdale College's 173rd Commencement Ceremony.

Before we begin, let me offer a brief contemporary observation. Has anyone noticed how the eyes of the nation have now turned to Hillsdale? This recent interest surpasses even the past considerable attention that Hillsdale has garnered.

One reason for this, of course, is that Harvard University suddenly wishes to be free of Washington, D.C.—at least as long as the current administration remains in office. And yet, in its confusion, Harvard still wishes to maintain over \$9 billion in federal subsidies.

In answer, the public has been directing Harvard to consult Hillsdale, whose model disavowal of federal funding is long-standing and principled. Hillsdale's declination of government money does not hinge on any particular administration, Republican or Democrat, being in power. Instead, Hillsdale has taken the position that the federal government should not dictate to private colleges, and that to ensure its independence, Hillsdale will neither seek nor accept taxpayer subsidies.

Another reason for the attention being given Hillsdale is that the Department of Education, in seeking to restore civic and classical education, looks in Hillsdale's direction. If, in the past, Hillsdale was an atoll of common sense—a sanctuary of all that remains good in the largely lost and aimless landscape of American higher education—today it is more the nation's guide to the rediscovery of personal integrity, gratitude to the old breed that came before, and happiness and hope about the future. In other words, Hillsdale College has become the nation's 21st-century example of what higher education should be—and might still become.

So today, I would like to reflect on these three sometimes-forgotten American virtues—honor, tradition, and optimism—which are embodied on the Hillsdale campus and will serve to guide today's graduates in the years ahead.

For 21 consecutive autumns, Hillsdale has graciously hosted me as a visiting professor of history and classics. Looking back on my first time here, in 2004, I was immediately struck by three observations that seemed unique in my decades-long associations with a number of other college campuses.

First, on my first full day here, I realized that I had left a bicycle unlocked on campus overnight. I walked to campus that morning expecting my bike to be either vandalized or stolen, yet there it was in the center of a now crowded campus—just as I had left it. That was something I couldn't imagine happening on a modern college campus. I had certainly never seen anything like it in California where I had then been teaching for over two decades.

Second, that same day, when I visited the bookstore to check on the book orders for my two classes, I scanned the shelves and was equally stunned. I did not see a single course listing with the usual faddish "studies" suffix. There were no therapeutic course titles like peace studies, environmental studies, leisure studies, film studies, ethnic studies, gender studies, or sexual studies. Instead, there were courses listed in all classical aspects of philosophy, literature, languages, history, mathematics, and science. Here at Hillsdale I found only the disciplines that have endured for centuries and that, ironically, have encompassed and grounded the content of the "studies" classes not found on the Hillsdale campus.

What a strange thing, I thought, given the current landscape of higher education, for this contemporary American college to trust in the brilliance of some 2,500 years of prior Western educators—who in Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem founded the disciplines and boundaries of their all-encompassing knowledge. And how much odder that at Hillsdale, almost uniquely, these classes remain constant and unchanged from their inception—even as academia as a whole believes that modernistic courses and novel therapies are needed to explain a supposedly new and ever-changing human nature.

And my third observation upon first arriving here was that students, faculty, and staff at Hillsdale College are happy. They smile. They say hello to strangers. They shake your hand. A shared confidence is entirely natural here. It is innate to the point that when I, the stranger, initially remarked on the rare upbeat mood of the campus, people here thought I was the strange one for expecting anything else.

We might shrug over how trivial this observation seems. But in fact, it is a glimpse into the fundamental Hillsdale notion of confidence in our civilization and the need for fellowship and positivity to preserve it. Such happiness is quite different from what one finds on most other campuses, where the youthful frown is now the normal expression. People pass each other by



Photo Courtesy of Hillsdale College

with a cold absence of greeting—as if proof of pseudo-sophistication. They often express a dourness of contrived seriousness and maturity. Students elsewhere seem to think that they alone—unlike electricians, farmers, and assembly line workers—bear the weight of global grievances and imperfections, past, present, and future. But not at Hillsdale.

Behind these three seemingly mundane observations of a bicycle left alone overnight, a bookstore unaffected by academic fads, and a buoyancy within the Hillsdale community remain larger truths.

Honor

You students of the Class of 2025 have been instructed in, have absorbed fully, and will pass on a code of honorable conduct that has become a natural part of who you are. And it will remain with you on the long road ahead. Hillsdale has taught you not to worry if you are not one with the current majority of youth, because you are certainly one with most of the past—and future—generations. Your confidence in your code of ethical comportment and personal standards will be your legacy to help guide future cohorts to come. Because your values are real, permanent, and ancient, you will not be won over by those who justify their lapses of behavior by situational ethics or feelings of victimization. Without such individual vows of honesty and compassion for others, civilization in aggregate cannot be sustained. It instead descends into the age-old banes of tribalism, disunity, and chaos.

Students at Hillsdale do not steal bicycles because their personal code of honor forbids it; because they are concerned that the poor victim would suffer without his property; and because they know that if this was common practice, then their own culture and civilization would crumble—as indeed it has in many places in America today.

Much of our society's current crisis derives from this personal refusal or inability to respect the property of others, to tell the truth, to stand up to the bully, to protect the weaker, and to end each day in contemplation that you were more a moral force for the common good than either a neutral observer or on the wrong side of the ethical ledger. When individual behavior and decorum falter, so does a country, which is, after all, only the common reflection of millions of its individuals.

Tradition

The character of the Hillsdale student is nurtured and sustained by tradition—a word derived from the Latin noun *traditio*, meaning a transmission or handing down. So often in the age of presentism, we in our narcissism and arrogance confuse our technical and material successes with automatic moral progress. We seem unaware that thinkers of the past—as early as the Greek poet Hesiod, some 2,700 years ago—worried about just the opposite: they worried that material progress and greater wealth would result in moral regress, given the greater opportunities to gratify the appetites with perceived fewer consequences and to use sophistry to excuse the sin.

Likewise, without traditional reverence for the past, an ungrateful nation not only suffers a loss of knowledge but is plagued by hubris—so often the twin of ignorance—believing that it alone has discovered ideas and behaviors unique to itself and its own era, when they are in fact ancient. This closed mindset seeks a kind of perfection, a heaven on earth, instead of the good—and it ends up obtaining neither.

Are we not instead the sum total of all those who came before us, who for the most part here in America left us a constitutional system and infrastructure that allowed us to start our lives both materially and civically, in terms of freedom, far ahead of those in the past and those elsewhere today? Key to the endangered idea of reverence for the past is a recognition that it is neither fair nor just to dismiss easily those of earlier generations based solely on the standards of the present. Instead, we must remember the different circumstances faced by previous generations—circumstances like incurable illnesses, short life expectancy, and work entailing existential danger and physical drudgery. Yet our ancestors were able to endure suffering and challenges that we now can scarcely imagine.

The Hillsdale reverence for the Western tradition and the American past is a reminder that we should not easily condemn and erase the dead, lest we and our times be judged capriciously by future generations and found wanting—whether for the medievalism of our dangerous cities, the electronic cruelty of the Internet, or the fragmentation of the family.

Optimism

I wish to end on a happy note, in the manner I first encountered the Hillsdale College community.

Your generation is now witness to a counterrevolution of sorts. Millions of Americans are asking for a reexamination of our culture and society with an eye to restoring ancient decency and looking to the good of past generations. Critical to this restoration is your optimism. Such positivity is the child of gratitude for all that we have inherited and all that we wish to enhance and pass on to others not yet born. With optimism and confidence in the citizenry, a civilization grows rather than shrinks. It becomes secure, not depressed or beset by self-loathing. It looks to the future with reverence for the past, rather than with shame or hatred.

Of course, it is now chic to be moody and pessimistic and uncool to be upbeat and cheerful. But the strength of this country—even in its darkest days like those of April 12, 1861, or December 7, 1941, or September 11, 2001—has always been its singular ability to remain not just unshaken, but confident in its values, its resilience, and its inherent strength to overcome all challenges.

In this current counterrevolution of sorts, it is neither the duty nor the desire of Hillsdale to become a political player. Nonetheless, the nation looks for guidance and the reassurance of the old wisdom. Therefore it is only natural, as I have said, that Hillsdale College and its moral and intellectual architecture have become preeminent to a degree scarcely imaginable in the past.

So you, the Class of 2025, as Hillsdale graduates, will be asked by your peers to provide guidance as never before. And I am confident that by your education, your code of comportment, your reverence, and your optimism, you will become natural leaders and exemplars in whatever paths you follow—in the era to come that will be America's greatest renaissance and also, I think, its most decent.

Thank you, and may God bless you all.

To access article: <https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/american-virtues-2025-commencement-address/>

Victor Davis Hanson is the Wayne and Marcia Buske Distinguished Fellow in History at Hillsdale College, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, a professor of classics emeritus at California State University, Fresno, and a nationally syndicated columnist for Tribune Media Services. He has written for several publications, including *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Claremont Review of Books*, *The New Criterion*, and the *Daily Telegraph*. A recipient of the National Humanities Medal and the Bradley Prize, he is the author of numerous books, including *A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War*, *The Second World Wars: How the First Global Conflict Was Fought and Won*, *The Case for Trump*, and *The End of Everything: How Wars Descend into Annihilation*.

California Patriot Profile: Victor Davis Hanson: America's Watchman in a Cultural Storm

By Jon Fleischman originally published in The Blade of Perseus (July 25 2025)

So Does It Matter?

Roots and Scholarship

Victor Davis Hanson was born in 1953 in Selma, California, where he spent his childhood among the working orchards of the San Joaquin Valley. This environment of hard work, rich soil, and deeply rooted traditions would profoundly influence his lifelong perspective on what makes America strong. Following his undergraduate studies in classics at UC Santa Cruz and doctoral work at Stanford, Hanson deliberately returned to California's agricultural heartland, where he dedicated two decades to teaching Greek and Roman history at California State University, Fresno.

Hanson witnessed firsthand the decline of family farming, which provides much of the foundation for his cultural observations. His book *Fields Without Dreams* chronicles not merely the economic collapse of small agriculture but the devastating cultural consequences when bureaucratic policies destroy the backbone of rural America. For Hanson, this represents far more than market forces—it signals the unraveling of something essential to the American character.

Currently, Hanson holds the position of Martin and Illie Anderson Senior Fellow in Classics and Military History at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. From this platform, he applies lessons from ancient civilizations to diagnose what has gone wrong in modern America's departure from its founding principles. His regular involvement with Hillsdale College, both as visiting professor and frequent speaker, reflects his admiration for institutions that maintain their commitment to constitutional education.

Through works such as *Carnage and Culture* and *The Dying Citizen*, Hanson draws extensively from Greek and Roman precedents to argue for Western civilization's core elements: individual liberty, civic responsibility, and the earned nature of true citizenship.

Writing and Recognition

Hanson has found his voice through publications resisting contemporary journalism's overwhelming leftward drift—outlets like *National Review*, *The Daily Signal*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *American Greatness*. His writing stands out for its intellectual honesty and willingness to challenge elite assumptions while warning of the long-term dangers posed by cultural decay.

His observation in *The Dying Citizen* strikes at the heart of his concerns: "Sometimes citizens can do as much harm to their commonwealth by violating custom and tradition as by breaking laws." This insight captures Hanson's understanding that constitutional government depends not merely on legal frameworks, but on the character and habits of the people who sustain it.

Through *The Victor Davis Hanson Show*, which he co-hosts alongside Jack Fowler and Sami Winc, he combines current events analysis with historical perspective. Whether examining California's regulatory disasters or assessing the international consequences of American weakness abroad, Hanson consistently draws from enduring principles and maintains an unapologetic love of country. His influence extends through social media, particularly his X account.

The Claremont Institute recognized Hanson's contributions by presenting him with its distinguished Statesmanship Award, acknowledging his sustained intellectual leadership in defending Western civilization.

Diagnosing the Decline

Perhaps no contemporary scholar has diagnosed America's cultural deterioration with greater precision than Hanson. He observes progressive ideology systematically replacing merit with identity politics, long-standing traditions with abstract theory, and personal accountability with activist demands across institutions from universities to major corporations.

Hanson has consistently highlighted how weak immigration enforcement and the collapse of civic education threaten national unity. His book, *Mexifornia*, compares what occurs when successful assimilation—once a defining strength of American society—gets abandoned in favor of politics based on grievance and division.

Despite these concerns, Hanson maintains hope, particularly in institutions that resist prevailing currents. He points to Hillsdale College and the Hoover Institution as crucial refuges for rational discourse and moral clarity. He puts it, "The nation's health depends on those who still believe in the Republic."

Drawing inspiration from historians like Thucydides and observers like Tocqueville, Hanson argues that civilizational decline need not be inevitable, though the temptation toward decadence remains constant. "America, then, is only as good as the citizens of any era who choose to preserve and to nourish it for one more generation," he writes in *The Dying Citizen*.

His recent commentary noted a troubling 2024 Gallup poll showing that merely 36% of Americans retain confidence in higher education—a damning reflection of how far the academy has strayed from its proper educational mission toward political indoctrination.

So, Does It Matter?

It matters. In this era of mounting debt, suppressed speech, uncontrolled borders, and widespread historical ignorance, Victor Davis Hanson serves as a crucial voice, summoning Americans back to the foundational principles established by the Founders.

What Hanson offers transcends commentary; he issues a clarion call for intellectual, cultural, and civic engagement. His work reminds Americans that liberty represents not an inheritance but an achievement that requires constant vigilance and defense, often demanding significant sacrifice. He speaks directly to those who feel displaced in their nation, question whether constitutional principles still hold meaning, and refuse to abandon faith in the American experiment.

Victor Davis Hanson matters precisely because he refuses to forget what made America exceptional in the first place. More importantly, he challenges the rest of us to remember as well.

Access the article: <https://victorhanson.com/california-patriot-profile-victor-davis-hanson-americas-watchman-in-a-cultural-storm/>

'A Voice Told Me Not To Be Afraid': The Story Of Lourdes' 72nd Recognized Miracle

By Solène Tadié originally published in Catholic News Agency Newsroom (July 26 2025)

Antonia Raco, a 67-year-old Italian woman long affected by an incurable neurodegenerative illness, was officially introduced to the press on July 25 in Lourdes, where her healing was recognized as the 72nd miracle attributed to the intercession of the Virgin Mary since the apparitions of 1858.

Diagnosed in 2006 with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) — a progressive and fatal condition — Raco experienced a recovery that defied medical explanation.

First announced by the Sanctuary of Lourdes on April 16, the recognition marked the culmination of 16 years of medical, canonical, and pastoral inquiry. Raco, a mother and active parishioner from Basilicata in southern Italy, had been living with the disease for several years when she traveled to Lourdes in 2009.

"I had wanted to go to Lourdes since I was a child," she recalled. That wish came true that summer, when she and her husband, Antonio, traveled to the shrine with the Italian pilgrimage association Unitalsi.

The experience, however, was not exactly as she had once imagined: She arrived in a wheelchair, already struggling to breathe and swallow.

On the second day, sanctuary volunteers brought her to the baths. "We prayed together. That's when I heard a beautiful young female voice say three times: 'Don't be afraid!'" she recounted during the press conference in Lourdes, held in the presence of religious and medical authorities.

Raco wore the white veil and uniform of the Hospitallers of Lourdes — the volunteer caregivers she now joins each year, assisting the sick with the same compassion once shown to her.

"At that moment, I burst into tears and prayed for the intentions I had brought with me."



Photos Courtesy of Archives of the Bureau des Constatation Médicales de Lourdes

She described a sudden, sharp pain in her legs during immersion, as though “they were taken away from me.” She did not disclose what had happened to anyone during her stay and returned home in a wheelchair.

It was there, in her living room with her husband, that she again heard the same voice urging her, “Tell him! Call him!” Obeying the voice, she called out to her husband, who had just stepped into the kitchen. “Something has happened,” she told him.

In that moment, she stood unaided for the first time in years. Overcome with emotion, the couple embraced, crying together as they realized she was cured.

Though overjoyed, Raco was initially unsure of how to speak about her experience. She eventually confided in a parish priest in her diocese of Tursi-Lagonegro in Basilicata, who urged her to undergo medical evaluation.

Soon after, the local archbishop who had accompanied the pilgrimage that year, Francesco Nolè, visited her and, after hearing her story, told her: “Antonietta, the Lord has entered your home and given you a gift — but it is not for you alone. It is for all of us.”

The road to recognition took more than a decade of thorough medical evaluation and expert review. “There is no cure for ALS,” noted Professor Vincenzo Silani, a leading neurologist involved in the investigation. He was among those who confirmed both the diagnosis and the inexplicability of Raco’s recovery. “Patients are doomed to get a little worse every day.”

Dr. Alessandro de Franciscis, the permanent doctor at the Lourdes Sanctuary, reminded the audience that the Church considers a healing miraculous only if it is sudden, complete, lasting, medically inexplicable, and not attributable to treatment or gradual recovery.

These criteria, which continue to guide the Church’s discernment today, were first established by Cardinal Prospero Lambertini, later Pope Benedict XIV.

Debate within the International Medical Committee of Lourdes (CMIL) was initially inconclusive when the case was first presented in 2019. But a new international consensus on the diagnosis of ALS, published in 2020, provided the framework for reassessment. In 2023, Silani reevaluated Raco in Milan and confirmed the definitive cure.

Finally, in November 2024, a secret vote was held among 21 members of the International Medical Committee of Lourdes: 17 voted in favor of an unexplained, complete, and lasting cure — meeting the two-thirds majority required by Church criteria.

Following the positive medical vote, the case was referred to the current bishop of Raco’s home diocese, Vincenzo Carmine Orofino, who formally recognized the miracle on April 16 of this year.

Bishop Jean-Marc Micas of Tarbes and Lourdes, who participated in the scientific process without voting, praised the rigor and transparency of the medical discussions. “What impressed me most,” he said, “was the freedom of the experts. They are not there to defend a cause but to seek the truth.”

He also reminded the participants that miracles never impose faith. “Even the Resurrection did not force anyone to believe,” he said. “A miracle is a sign — a gift to be received in the light of faith.”

Closing the press briefing, the rector of the sanctuary, Father Michel Daubanes, expressed deep emotion and gratitude as he recalled the honor of announcing the miracle during the 6 p.m. rosary on Holy Thursday, April 17, just minutes before it was proclaimed at the cathedral of Tursi-Lagonegro.

“We often say: ‘If I saw a miracle, I would believe.’ But the truth is: If I believe, I can see miracles,” he reflected. “This healing is not just a story from the past. It is a living testimony that continues to bear fruit.”

Access the article: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/265585/a-voice-told-me-not-to-be-afraid-the-story-of-lourdes-72nd-recognized-miracle>

Additional information on The Sanctuary of Lourdes website: <https://www.lourdes-france.com/en/antonietta-raco-72nd-lourdes-miracle/>

Mercer We the People of Hopewell Valley Newsletters:

Access previous issues at: <https://hvragep.org/mercere-we-the-people/>

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