

The Last Word™

Issue #612

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Our Annual Back-to-School Issue!

The stage is set for roos

About Tennessee: It got goed.

From August 10 to 15, I pulled one over on the Evil Empire by going on a trip that centered primarily on Townsend, Tennessee. We had 8 people: 7 humans and one amazing urinating dog. Just like the Mystery Machine!

Many a bunker blast was detected. This includes a silent-but-deadly that filled a gift shop in Gatlinburg. This also includes a series of loud-and-proud air biscuits that I overheard after I went to bed one evening. It was as uproarious as you might imagine!

Now, back to work—the dreaded word that frightens billionaires far and wide.



Schooling our rulers on homeschooling

As an intelligent person likes to say: Play stupid games, win stupid prizes. Local politicians keep picking fights with us, and then they wonder why we unload on them and air their dirty laundry afterward. Maybe they have a humiliation fetish.

It's not just a roast, where people say and do things that are lighthearted in comparison. It's utter, complete *humiliation*.

And we usually don't go after easy targets. For example, Up with People would be an easy mark, because its songs are so childlike and hokey, and some of its members look so silly singing them. But some of these songs have a positive message, and we don't want to undercut the positivity, so we ridicule Up with People only sparingly. We prefer tough targets, and we know from experience that many of the politicians and big corporations we assail do not have good intentions.

The latest party to whine about the stupid prizes awarded via its stupid games is our schools. A

July story said Kentucky schools are fretting that they're losing gobs of students to homeschooling. They blame parents trying to evade a new law against truancy.

Uh, ever think the rise in homeschooling is because our schools are putting out such a shitty product?

The truancy law took effect a year ago and says a certain amount of unexcused absences will require schools to notify the county attorney so the student can face possible court action. It makes it easier for young people to be sent to juvenile detention—which violates a federal law that says juveniles may not be locked up for committing a status offense. (Of course, Kentucky already defied that law with regularity.)



Our schools closed for 2 years over COVID, yet they have the nerve to accuse everyone else of truancy. You can't have it both ways. This brings to life George Orwell's warnings about doublethink. School must not be too important if they can just close for 2 years.

By any raw measure, Kentucky is a high-regulation state regarding homeschooling. Some states have *more* regulations, but Kentucky still has pretty many. On the other hand, homeschooling shouldn't be completely unregulated. There should be rules to prevent abuse and educational neglect. Yet authorities usually look the other way over abuse and neglect under the guise of homeschooling. Instead, they go after legitimate homeschoolers.

Numerous sources say Kentucky considers homeschooling to be equivalent to a private school. Yet that policy only applies when it suits the purpose at hand. While the state recognizes diplomas from private schools, it does not recognize homeschool diplomas, so homeschool grads have to get a GED, which could delay their entry into college. Also, if their local public school district has more days of school than the state requires, homeschoolers are required to follow the local district and have just as many days—up to and including year-round school. This is despite the fact that year-round school was one of the factors that drove so many families to homeschooling instead.

Schools have also been retaliating against families who start homeschooling by going to court to pursue past unexcused absences, when those absences should have been excused.

School officials have no business complaining if people don't want to use their failed, gimmick-ridden schools. So what's the solution? Our answer would be to improve schools—and stop tearing down so many. But that's not the solution our proprietors prefer. Instead, they're pushing for new rules that would effectively bar some families from homeschooling. It is generally held that families have a right to direct children's education, as long as no neglect or abuse is taking place. Yet some new proposals seem to target parents who themselves were neglected or abused by public and private schools—allowing the vicious cycle of poor education to continue.

As far as we're concerned, most American schools have forfeited claims that they care about education. We wouldn't even trust them with a pile of barber hair.



We hung up on Verizon (a street story from the editor)

Given the sharp practices of Verizon of late, we'd be better off using an old minicassette answering machine like it's 1994. (That was around the time I had my old apartment and left a message that only said, "The mayflies are back! Circus Vargas, Circus Vargas!") T-Mobile gunked things up too, but not quite so spectacularly. Plus, UPS didn't help matters.

A few weeks ago, I ditched Verizon as my cellphone carrier. Why? Because I say so.

Seriously, I got quit of Verizon because it was no longer reliable for voicemails. First, I stopped receiving notifications when I got a voicemail. At first, I thought that was only for voicemails of numbers I blocked, like the many numbers WellCare uses. But it was afflicting legitimate calls too.

Several people told me they were having the same problem. I also looked at Verizon's "community forums" and found a growing number of complaints about the same thing. Verizon would usually respond with a standardized form reply. When pressed on this, Verizon's usual advice was to "clear the cache." This is equivalent to the useless "reinstall Windows" trope.

Verizon also recommended restarting the voicemail app. But there is no separate voicemail app, and there's no voicemail settings under the phone app. Plus, numerous websites kept talking about a "visual voicemail" app, but that has absolutely nothing to do with what I use. Several sites gave instructions that involved other apps and features that did not exist. Some websites say to look for voicemail under settings, but there's no voicemail under settings either.

I did clear the cache, but it didn't fix my voicemail. Imagine that!

When others reported this too, Verizon just threw up their hands in their next reply. They didn't know how to fix it.

Later, I found that nobody was able to leave me voicemails *at all*. It wasn't just notifications anymore. Multiple people told me they left voicemails, but they weren't on my voicemail system.

After that, I went on Verizon's troubleshooting website. When I clicked on the picture for my

phone, all that came up was a circle that spun endlessly. I then went to their site with their customer service chat room, but—you guessed it—their chat bot just sent me back to their broken troubleshooting site.

I called their customer service phone number. Their automated voicemail texted me a link to what was supposed to be a website to get more help. But that link consisted of nothing but some gibberish code.

So, by the end of the day, I had tried getting help from Verizon's forum—which didn't provide any solutions. Then I had tried getting help from Verizon's troubleshooting site, chat room, customer service line, and web link—none of which even worked. They were batting 5 out of 5—peeps. One useless forum, and 4 broken sites or phone lines. And we're still counting, so read on.

So no more Verizon for me. Now I'm glad I didn't get them for Internet too—especially after I read about how they blocked websites based on content like Zoomtown did.

This ranks up there with Facebook not fixing its notifications that have been broken since about 2018. Or YouTube not fixing the size of its videos after just as long. Or Microsoft not fixing Outlook losing e-mails, which has been going on even longer. Or Twitter not fixing its embedded timelines after 2 years (which has had the hilarious positive side effect of school districts also having broken timelines).

I signed up for T-Mobile instead, and T-Mobile had to send a new SIM card. I paid extra so it would be delivered the next day to minimize the number of lost voicemails. T-Mobile's warehouse in Jeffersonville, Indiana, got the SIM card ready for UPS to take, but UPS didn't even bother to show up to pick it up until the day after I was supposed to get it. I paid extra to have it shipped in a day, but it took 2 days for the SIM card to travel only 90 miles, because UPS chose not to pick it up from T-Mobile on time.

After I finally got my SIM card a day late and set up my new T-Mobile account, I could no longer receive incoming calls at all, even though I could make outgoing calls. Later, I stopped receiving text messages too. I called up T-Mobile, and they said it was because I needed a port-out PIN, and that Verizon was supposed to have given me one. But they hadn't. I went on Verizon's site to get one, and it said to go to "account", then "my devices", then "transfer your services." But there was no "transfer your services."

I called Verizon again, and there was no option on their automated voicemail for anything that had even remotely anything to do with porting numbers or port-out PIN's, and there was no option to talk to a live representative.

Shit gets real

So I actually visited the nearest Verizon store to try to get a PIN. The man there said the real problem was that Verizon had only "half-ported" my number. He also said that—although Verizon still had half my number—it was now T-Mobile's responsibility. So I went to the T-Mobile store across the street, and they had no idea what the problem was. The man there worked on it for a good half-hour and couldn't figure it out. T-Mobile showed that the number had already been ported. This pointed suspicion back at Verizon.

Later, I found several websites that said others had experienced the same problem with Verizon "half-porting" their number. Most said it takes an unknown amount of time to resolve, and one said it takes all the way until the end of Verizon's monthly billing cycle. One person had to make numerous calls to Verizon and spend hours on the phone—but that was back when their phone center worked at all. Some folks said Verizon took almost a week to even *start* porting.

Look on the bright side. All of this was immediately before my Tennessee trip. This meant WellCare was unable to ruin the trip with their spam calls this time. So the joke's on WellCare.

When I got back from vacation, the phone situation still wasn't cleared up after a week. So I went to a different Verizon store, and the man there repeated the claim that it was now T-Mobile's responsibility. Then I went to a different T-Mobile store from before. Two men there were the folks who finally fixed it—but not without much frustration.

They tried bringing up my T-Mobile account but couldn't find any record of it. They were completely baffled. We called T-Mobile customer service from the store. After we were on hold for 20 minutes, the customer service rep finally answered but then hung up right away. So the store employees called up a special line for store personnel, and the woman at the other end kept repeating



the same information over and over—namely that I needed a port-out PIN, which we had already established had not been provided. We got nowhere with this call.

We were in the T-Mobile store for about 2 hours before the guys there were able to get on Verizon's site and wheedle a port-out PIN out of Verizon. It was like trying to get your dog to poop. Verizon had withheld my PIN to try to keep me from switching. At least the employees of the T-Mobile store were finally able to stop Verizon's attempted swindle. They accomplished much more than anyone else in this saga did.

Once I got this PIN, Verizon finished porting my number. This shows that completing the porting was Verizon's responsibility after all. Also, the fact that everything—including my voicemail—worked fine after I was fully switched to T-Mobile proves that it was indeed Verizon that was botching voicemails and notifications. This reams a cavern through the claims of those who speculated that it was just my phone.

It also turned out that when I tried to switch, Verizon somehow toyed with the settings on my phone so it wouldn't ring when I got a call.

T-Mobile still needs to get its poop in a group too. While the store employees ultimately solved our issue, T-Mobile's customer service line is a complete disaster. Its website is confusing too—but nowhere near as horrible as Verizon's.

An observation about Verizon Internet we can't fit anywhere else: An online commenter said they canceled their Verizon Internet and went to a Verizon store to turn in the equipment. But the store said they had to do it over the phone. Verizon's phone rep said to just throw away the equipment. Two months later, long after the equipment had been discarded, Verizon tried getting it back and threatened to send the case to a collection agent.

Do all telcoms these days act like this? May 1 and 1 and 1 be 5? Do people pop? Inquiring minds want to know!

Psychiatric tyranny on the march in Illinois

In a state led by a Fred Flintstone look-alike, this sounds like a page right out of history—maybe something we would have had to discuss 30 years ago—but unfortunately this is a brand new story.

Illinois has just become the first state in the country to require students to take a mental health exam for school. This is a new law that will take effect next year and will apply to all schoolchildren from 3rd through 12th grade.

The law also requires schools to connect families with a portal linking them to psychiatric “treatment”—letting abusive programs recruit in Illinois schools.

A few legislators opposed the bill, not just because of its most obvious totalitarian implications but also because it will violate confidentiality laws and insurers might use the data to deny coverage.

This stinks of TeenScreen, a far-right program backed by the George W. Bush regime, which called it a “model” initiative and demanded its expansion. The program was such a disaster that the Obama administration discontinued it in 2012.

The new Illinois law also stinks of the longstanding practice in Kentucky of abusive psychiatric facilities recruiting in schools. These facilities share some of the same web of high-ranking employees as schools do. The law also reeks like the ink on Donald Trump's recent executive order that aims to illegally institutionalize the homeless.

In recent years, efforts like this have been endorsed by some of the usual suspect organizations. Their stances on other matters are also increasingly at odds with science or basic American law. This has undermined medicine and other aspects of life, and much of it is motivated by politics or money.

Some of their scientific “facts” even contradict what is said by their counterparts in other



countries. It's impossible for every set of statements to be true, even though they all come from professional organizations. This is like how YouTube kept taking down videos if their opinions on COVID disagreed with American health officials. YouTube cited a rule against statements that contradicted health authorities. But the information in these videos was completely in line with Swedish, Nicaraguan, and perhaps Icelandic officials. America was the outlier.

Meanwhile—there's enough meanwhiles in our articles lately for, well, some of our other articles—Arizona, Michigan, and Texas are enacting new rules allowing people to be locked up in a psychiatric facility just for denying that they have a mental illness. Texas was egged on by right-wing think tanks such as the Cicero Institute and Texas Public Policy Foundation. Texas lawmakers are so incompetent that they made a clerical error when drafting the new law that actually makes it weaker than they wanted. For its part, the Cicero Institute is known primarily for its efforts to criminalize the homeless and gut successful “housing first” policies.

Marco Rubio, another fascist

Marco Rubio is a spoiled brat who built his political career as one of the leading gangsters of the Tea Party.

Perhaps less widely known is his link with a right-wing think tank called America 2100 that has whipped up irrational fears and conspiracy theories against immigrants, gays, and human rights activists. This included videos that promoted xenophobic attacks that were similar to some outrageous claims made against Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, last year. (Jimmy Dore actually helped debunk the most ridiculous of these xenophobic canards.)

The videos were not attributed to any individuals, but operatives who were involved with making them attacked the *Guardian* for reporting on America 2100.

America 2100 was founded in 2023 by Rubio's former chief of staff Mike Needham, and one article said America 2100 vowed to perform “the work of codifying and institutionalizing the ideas Rubio helped pioneer.” Needham was also an architect of the Tea Party-induced government shutdown of 2013.

One observer said the think tank's videos sported “fascist overtones.” This was accomplished by creating from whole cloth a past that did not exist and lamenting how bad things have become.

Given Rubio's right-wing extremism, it shouldn't be surprising that Rubio has colluded with far-right activist Laura Loomer to prevent injured children from Gaza from being evacuated to the U.S. for medical care. Loomer also helped force the resignation of FDA head Dr. Vinay Prasad, a leading critic of COVID totalitarianism. But after only a few days, Prasad returned to this post. Tough luck, Lockdown Laura.

In the crazy, jumbled world of Marco Rubio, everything old is stupid again.

Woke Inc.

Stop the presses, because we've found a rare exception to the right-wing ideology sported by the media, big corporations, schools, and other major institutions.

These entities have been wrong about everything. *Every. Single. Thing.* They're right-wing on economics. They're right-wing on foreign wars. They're right-wing on civil liberties. No major exceptions can be found on these issues.

They might have a few stances in these categories that are debatable on whether they're truly right-wing, but we think they lose on those too. There's a precious few big issues where we drift slightly back and forth, but the Evil Empire won't accept our solutions, because that would squeeze Big Pharma's bottom line. We can think of maybe a couple minor matters that are also debatable, but our overlords' stances were really motivated by money, and we were glad when they shut up about them, because we didn't want our side being blamed for them.

Yet now we've found an unearthly ru-zone where they've actually abandoned their right-wing record outright and leapfrogged to what is essentially the other end of the horseshoe. And—surprise, surprise—this too is fueled by where the money is. The best part is that they've adopted the supposedly progressive positions that are *least* popular.



The matters we're talking about here are social issues that allow them to weaponize identity politics. The establishment used to be conservative beyond description even on these items. But lately they've jumped to the other extreme.

It appears as if the process got under way in the wake of the Occupy movement, when big corporations finally had to start explaining themselves. Captains of industry began to practice wokewashing. From our perspective, they were trying to take advantage of our progressive inclinations so they could protect their money.

We've fought for liberal values since this zine's inception. Our *priority* is usually economic populism, but our actual *stances* apply to social issues too. Yet it doesn't go to an extreme that is analogous to what the far right did. About 10 years ago, someone on Daily Kos—a once-great progressive website that later sold out in typical fashion—posted a diary about “bizarro liberalism.” This was about what our side would be like if we were as extreme as the other side. Here's an example: At the time, we had a very strong and principled movement to restore voting rights to those convicted of nonviolent felonies, but if we practiced “bizarro liberalism”, the *only* people allowed to vote would be convicted felons.

The point of this exercise was to poke fun at the conservative intelligentsia by showing what we would be like if we were just as immoderate. But these days, the historically right-wing corporate imperium actually displays “bizarro liberalism” regarding a select group of issues. You can't make this up.

There was a scene on *The Simpsons* in 2006 in which Lisa was in a new math class where the teacher asked the class, “What does a plus sign smell like?” Lisa was the voice of reason, as she asked why the class wasn't learning important coursework instead. These days, many of our classrooms are *exactly like* that class on *The Simpsons*! A humorous cartoon show actually foretold reality.

Statues of questionable historical figures should not be given a place of honor in public parks financed by public tax dollars, and many of these figures deserve the scorn that some have given them. Yet the reasonable solution for the statue quandary would be to simply give the statues to museums or historical societies that could provide context to educate visitors about what these figures did. Instead, however, some cities have begun *melting down* these sculptures. History shows that official efforts to *destroy* completed works never ends well. Besides, you can't just pretend history never happened.

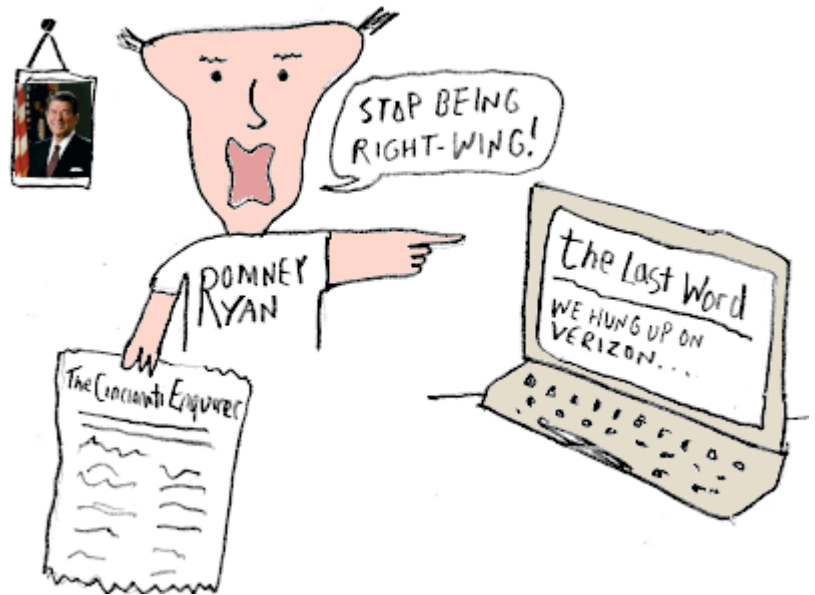
This is very dangerous ground, and we shouldn't feel guilty about pointing this out. That's because our government and corporate rulers don't truly care about the causes they claim to care about. Instead, they weaponize feelings for their own gain. At the end of the day, there's lots of money involved. It's about public relations, which fattens their coffers. They might take positions that are less popular than *economic* progressivism, but these stances do more to guard their dough.

This also isn't the first time or first country where government officials have tried appealing to a young, idealistic fan base while ultimately doing the opposite of what they claimed. That's a very chilling parallel.

There are a host of astonishingly ignorant policies that have fallen under this branding but are at loggerheads with principles we've held throughout our adult lives. Plus, there are people who not only defend these policies but unfairly question the ethics and motives of those who dissent.

And you can bet your bizcream there's money involved in each and every case. Our favorite public figures, organizations, and commentators already sold us out because of money. Now folks on the right are seeing their media outlets and companies sell them out too—also because of money.

Medical and legal organizations have become particularly corrupted. They've gone where the boodle is, even if it's at odds with their past stances.



Woke Inc. heads north

It isn't just the good ol' U.S. and A. but Canada too. Conservative parties have been disastrous

on climate justice and the rights of minority groups, yet Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston—a member of the Conservative Party—has stuck his toes into “bizarro liberalism” on these matters. In the name of fighting the climate crisis, he recently issued a ukase banning people from entering wooded areas at all. The order carries stiff fines and applies to public land as well as private property even with permission from the owner. Houston’s order is despite his general hostility to the environment and the rights of the indigenous Mi’kmaq people: Just months ago, he reversed the bans on fracking and uranium mining without Mi’kmaq consultation.

You might call the aforementioned trends Woke Incorporated. We call it ham-handed and phony. Who has a better record? This zine has consistently represented solidarity and equality for 32 years, while our political foes jump willy-nilly between extremes whenever there’s some payout for themselves or their cronies.

Strangely, the dominant media culture is allied with fascist parties around the world on economic issues, but is now aligned with North Korea’s ruling party on many social issues.

These fair-weather “progressives” have never lifted a finger to help reverse Ronald Reagan’s ruinous Social Security cuts and lower the retirement age back to 65. They won’t help repeal the property requirement that some cities in Tennessee now have for voting. They’ve done precisely zero about past and recent Medicaid cuts. As much as they ramble about renaming various landmarks, they’ve never tried to remove Reagan’s name from anything, even though Reagan supported apartheid South Africa and Francisco Franco. They spend more effort trying to cancel Abraham Lincoln, one of our best Presidents. The failures of our fair-weather “friends” shouldn’t be surprising, as they were Republicans until only a few years ago. The same can be said of those whose only known stances involve extreme identity politics. They completely ignore bedrock economic pillars and the “one person, one vote” principle. These folks are such a self-parody that they can’t possibly be real.

The revelations in this article are not a defense of social conservatism, and some recent right-wing policies are cause for unshirted outrage. But the ideas we put forth are not now and never have been a point-for-point mirror image of the right, as that would indeed be “bizarro liberalism.”

Whatever the weather, weaponizing identity politics is loldumb regardless of who does it. Somebody needed to say this. Might as well be us. This weaponization is even stupider when you consider the record of some of those who are doing it now.

It shouldn’t take any guts to point out all of this, because it should be obvious.

Library incident was one for the books

Years ago, we saw a website that listed “taboo” activities involving books, including eating them. In last month’s issue, we talked about Pee Drinker, but the schoolmate in this story might as well be called Book Eater. That’s because he almost wound up accidentally eating books because he didn’t know how to act right.

This incident is another from the Brossart abyss and took place during the same school year as Pee Drinker guzzling a Coke that was in a urinal. That was the year when I was forced to spend most of each day in the school library. When the school said I had to study alone in the library most of the day, my folks still didn’t take the hint that it was a shitty school. For the life of me, I don’t know why.

Anyway, Book Eater was a senior at the time. I had run-ins with him constantly throughout my 3 years at Brossart. The school wouldn’t do anything to this loser even when he started a fight during mass. One day, he showed up in the library while I was there. He immediately started harassing me.

But I waited until he was behind a tall shelf full of books to unleash my secret weapon!

I snuck over to the opposite side of the shelf from him. Then I reached up to the very top row of books. It was higher than almost any person was tall.

You can see exactly where this is headed.

I shoved an entire row of books right onto his bulbous noggin! He was behind the shelf, so I couldn’t see the look on his face, but it had to have been priceless!

I didn’t *see* him, but I sure as hell *heard* him!

Put yourself in his jackboots. Imagine browsing a library shelf when a whole row of books suddenly tumbles onto your head! The difference is that he deserved it.



The elderly library nun heard the commotion and made us pick up the books. But shoving books onto Book Eater's head was well worth having to help clean it up.

Right after that, I walked past an aisle of books where Book Eater was browsing, and he gave me the dirtiest scowl!

In 7th grade at Cline, I punched a kid in the face because he kept harassing me. Like the time someone clogged a toilet with an Ernie and Bert flashlight, that episode was talked about for a long time. Pushing books onto Book Eater should have been just as celebrated.

Steve Kroft bubbled



(Fair use, so tough toilets.)

60 Minutes is kind of like the over-the-air equivalent of MTV. It used to be very popular, but now nobody knows what it airs.

I remember this CBS news show being very interesting viewing back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, before it ran a piece that needlessly embarrassed a private citizen. I still watched it for years after that, even though that piece helped damage the program's luster.

The show used to have a lot of good stories exposing government or corporate scandals or official racism. I remember it having a couple of interesting pieces about art thefts. One was about a man who had a weird obsession with stealing fine china that was on display at an art museum. Another was an interview with a con man who kept denying pilfering paintings from a museum even though he was once caught in an almost identical theft attempt.

But let's talk about longtime *60 Minutes* correspondent Steve Kroft. The man from Kokomo, Indiana, retired a few years ago, and he left a long legacy. Like Adam Schiff, he always looked like he was about to burst out laughing.

And one day, Steve Kroft bubbled – using bubble gum! Yes, it was while he was conducting an interview for *60 Minutes*!

For a long time, I've insisted that this really did happen, as I remember seeing it. I recalled that it was with a green wad of gum, and he was facing to the left. Yet some people thought I made it up.

But once again, YouTube saves the day. This very incident has been posted there by the *60 Minutes* peeps, and it happened exactly the way I said it did. Fast-forward to 16:43...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOYfNTC-UaY>

Steve's bubbling occurred during an interview with Jon Stewart. Although the tag says it's from 2002, it apparently first aired in 2001.

This is one of the biggest Snuffleupagus moments we've ever had. I insisted it was real, everyone denied it, but I was proven right after many years.

Have some gum! You'll be glad you did!

We're not pining for Pinecone (another street story)

This has truly been a summer of corporate scams, and Pinecone Research is only adding to the burgeoning stack of worries.

Pinecone is an outfit that allows folks to earn small rewards for filling out surveys on consumer products. Somewhere along the line, it was taken over by NielsenIQ and has declined ever since. Until 2021, NielsenIQ was in turn part of Nielsen Media Research, a monopoly that controls the business of measuring TV and radio audiences throughout the country. Nielsen Media Research should already be

the target of antitrust suits because of the way it gerrymanders geographic boundaries for TV and radio markets, but now we've had personal experience with the Pinecone scam.

We've filled out Pinecone surveys for years. Now that's ended with the discovery that it was deducting reward points that we earned from surveys. Back in March, Pinecone began a new policy of deducting points if they weren't redeemed within a year. (Prior to this, you'd only lose points if there was no activity on your account at all.) But Pinecone never told us, and we lost many of our points. Apparently, it didn't tell a lot of people, judging by the reams of complaints we've seen from people who say Pinecone didn't tell them either and that they were cheated out of their points. One complainant lost points redeemable for almost \$400. Another lost 10 years of points.

There are also complaints from multiple people claiming Pinecone did not credit them at all for surveys they completed. One person said Pinecone did not give them their points because their answers were not of good enough quality. In other words, Pinecone simply didn't like the answers.

When I discovered Pinecone was stealing my points, I quickly redeemed as many of the remaining points as I could. But the website only allowed me to do it in increments. While I was busy with this process, more of my points happened to expire. I still have a few points left that aren't enough to redeem, as you need a certain number of points to redeem them at all. There's no way to cancel my account so I can get the value of those points.

You used to be able to redeem points by adding the value directly to your PayPal account, but Pinecone has become so disreputable and deceitful that even the embattled PayPal has dropped them.

There are more people reporting missing points than you can shake a stick at. This proves Pinecone never told anyone about this change, and that it's not something we just overlooked.

It's a tragedy for me to see the dream is over.

The first time...People chewed gum at school...

This is a story of the first time I can remember anyone getting in trouble for chewing bubble gum at school.

It happened in 5-year-old kindergarten. I knew you weren't allowed to chew gum at school. It didn't matter whether you bubbled. Anyway, while the kids were all playing, the teacher found a bubble gum wrapper on the floor of the classroom. She warned the class that there was an Allowed Cloud against gumming.

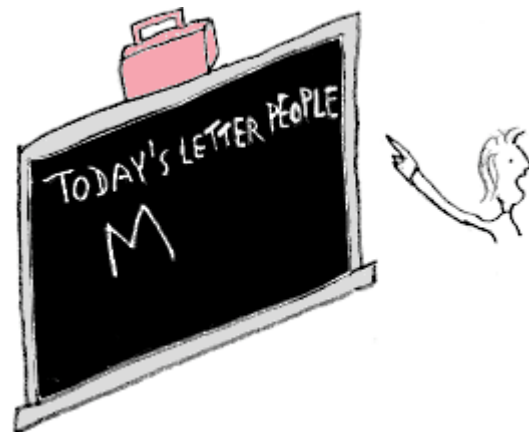
But everyone just ignored her.

No individual suspects were ever indicted for this incident. I got an image in my mind of specific classmates walking around bubbling, because they were in the vicinity.

Also in kindergarten, somebody somehow placed another child's lunchbox on the top of the frame of the chalkboard. I don't know how a 5-year-old accomplished this, as it was about 15 feet off the ground. The teacher admonished the class that we'd have to stack up 100 chairs to retrieve it.

The first time I remember a *specific* student getting in trouble for gumming in school was during that summer class between kindergarten and 1st grade. An older student had been talking about Dubble Bubble all morning. Later, he bubbled as the teacher was giving a lesson, and he got skeeped at.

School must be where the roughs congregate.



The decline of a university

For a school that pretended to be a fairly mainstream institution, it sure is hard to get into Northern Kentucky University these days—or stay there.

That may be for the better. With the school's decline, we wouldn't want to go there now. It wasn't great even when I went there, unless you liked being talked down to by high-ranking school officials. I'm thinking of one in particular who—when he wasn't throwing temper tantrums—talked to you like you were 3. The upper echelons of academia are dominated by simpering cranks these days—much more so than before—and there are no words sufficient to describe how bad it's become.

Many American colleges and universities have a policy that they will not hire anyone for a major administrative post if they understand the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights. This is *literally* true, an *actual* policy at these schools. Much of this is to appease foreign dictatorships whose ween they

suck and whose bastepaste they ingest. It's as bad as ABC's support for murderous thugs like El Salvador's dictator Nayib Bukele. I'm not saying this is policy at NKU, but make no mistake, NKU *is* far worse than it used to be.

This trend is represented by a few high-ranking officials who smirked and grinned in their condescending, scolding videos. It rubs off on the whole school community. I attended NKU in the days of hacky sack, group hugs, and student activism, but if you look at the school now, you'll see a completely different, more conformist, wealthier, seemingly much smaller clientele. Its official enrollment numbers have risen back to what they were before, but students are far less socially active on campus—with almost no gatherings—and many probably don't come to campus much at all. Instead, they just take class from behind a laptop. My famous 2022 video showed the campus to be completely dead even on a regular school day.

Before going into more detail about recent developments, here's a solution. Instead of the gaping money pit of big universities, more of our tax dollars should instead go to community colleges and trade schools. Not that they're perfect either, but at least they haven't spit on the people as spectacularly as major universities have. In addition, we need to stop tearing down primary and high schools—something Campbell County is proficient at.

Now, back to NKU. Even in my day, admission was not guaranteed to those who enrolled. But under today's rules, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have been able to get in—at all. The new standards say you need a certain high school GPA to even be “considered.” If it was based on only my junior and senior years of high school, I don't think I'd be automatically excluded. But if you threw in my disastrous time as a sophomore—maybe even a freshman—you could probably forget it.

Let this sink in: Under current rules, I likely wouldn't have been able to attend the only public university in northern Kentucky. Period. Full stop.

Some of this is an indictment of a certain high school (hint: it's Brossart), as my grades were markedly better during the rest of high school. That doesn't excuse NKU's abandonment of much of its earlier customer base.

Even if your GPA is high enough to be “considered” by NKU, admission is not assured. Plus, if it's too low, you will be admitted only “conditionally” and be required to enroll in a special program and attend its workshops. If your high school report card is full of B's, you might not be safe, and I'm pretty sure I wasn't even close to a B average in high school.

Ominously, NKU's admission standards also warn that “any student with previous disciplinary issues at another institution” is subject to review before admission. Uh-oh. I *guarantee* that NKU isn't looking for offenses that actually should be disqualifying, such as serial bullying. As has been the case for the past 40 years, you can bet your bottom dollar the intended target is actually the victims, not the perpetrators.

NKU was known since its inception as a commuter campus, which was convenient for local residents. But now this claim has also been dashed. The school now requires most freshmen under 21 to live on campus, unless they live with their parents within a certain distance of the school. Those who do not obey this rule are fined the cost of what their housing fees would be—which run in the thousands per semester.

This rule appears to have been first enacted in 2020 and remains today. Considering the COVID pandemic—for which NKU imposed draconian, outright fascist rules—you'd think the school would have wanted everyone as far from campus as possible in 2020. That they required students to be *on campus* shows the school really didn't care about COVID at all and imposed the COVID rules just to control people. The timing is also interesting in another way, which suggests we can't rule out the theory that COVID was *intentionally* leaked so people wouldn't notice counterrevolutionary changes in society. After all, COVID *did* shift the public's attention away from assorted forms of democratic backsliding at the time. There's no disputing that. Another example of this backsliding is Google prioritizing search results from established news sites over independent bloggers.

If the housing rule had been in effect when I attended NKU, I would have been fined for getting a new apartment while I was a freshman. What would be the point of me living on campus? I grew up only a mile from the school, and the apartment I got was just as close. Also, I did have a life outside of school. I worked, I played, I kicked ass. When I was eventually forced out of school—which I already



had a gut feeling was going to happen—at least I still had a place to live.

My stance probably would have been “what they don’t know won’t hurt them”, as I probably wouldn’t have told the school that I began to live alone. I don’t know how long that would last today, with everyone encouraged to tattle on their neighbors.

If you require students to live on campus, you’re no longer a commuter school—by definition.

What universities today are doing is as if they have a Dungeons & Dragons wisdom score of 3 but pretending like they have an intelligence score of 18. And it’s powering lots of 2,000 horsepower mouths. It’s about exclusion and keeping a few legacy families in charge of society.

Students are expected to compete fiercely to get into a university, but now they can’t even get into what is supposedly a mainstream university in their area. Then they’re shunned because they don’t have a degree. Luckily, there is also a community college now. Considering NKU’s decline, going to community college instead of NKU might not be such a big loss. On the other hand, don’t expect community college to offer as many courses or amenities, as lawmakers refuse to equitably fund them.

StubHub flubs

Here’s more news you can use about the unusual glut of scams that seems to be barreling our way lately.

This ranks up there with the story from a decade ago about the couple who ended up with “wasted Rockettes tickets” because Delta canceled their flight to New York. In the latest story, a feller wanted to take his family to New York to see a Broadway play. So he bought 4 tickets for the play from StubHub.

At 4 PM on the evening of the play—just before the play started—the fam was notified that the tickets would not be delivered. So he purchased *new* tickets from StubHub—thereby wasting \$600.

When he got to the theater, he was told these tickets were counterfeit. Seven other parties were also complaining about the same problem. The woman at the ticket counter said, “This happens every night.” She even handed out cards with StubHub’s phone number because it happens so much.

Then StubHub gave the family new tickets. But those were counterfeit too.

So the family had no choice but to head back home from New York without seeing the play.

It’s not just StubHub, and it’s not an entirely new problem, though it has worsened over the years. Someone said they ordered tickets to a David Bowie concert through an unspecified source back in 1996, and they weren’t delivered until after the show was over.

Did Dusty Lenscap become President of the World when nobody was looking?

Laboring against yellow unions

When you maliciously harm children and refuse to fight for workers, you have to face the music from us. We don’t like certain organizations very much right now—and never will again. Certain acts are so far beyond the pale as to be permanently disqualifying.

A *yellow union* or *company union* is a labor union that is disproportionately influenced by an employer instead of properly representing workers. Such unions are banned by federal and international law. Yet they’ve become dominant in many fields of employment in America.

These yellow unions are hostile to workers—especially teachers.

We strongly support unions that rejected COVID fascism. Indeed, some small teachers’ unions were on the people’s side during COVID—but these unions only covered single school districts. By contrast, major national and statewide teachers’ unions didn’t lift a finger to help teachers who were punished for not following COVID orders. There were cases like this in Ohio, Mississippi, and likely elsewhere.

Some of these big unions actually were very conservative before—and were even described as such in news articles—but the 2020s have exposed a broader problem. A decade ago, we went to rallies opposing union-busting “right-to-work” laws, but nowhere did we sign up for supporting company unions.

Some big teachers’ unions have hamstrung public education even on issues other than COVID. Last month, we mentioned that Democrats in Hawaii blocked a popular proposal to establish local school districts. Hawaii is the only one of the 50 states that has only one district covering the whole state. This consolidation of power weakens local control and limits options for families. But the Democrats’ stance was inspired by a long-running effort by the Hawaii State Teachers Association. Some years ago, the union began fighting against a move to create an elected school board for each

county or island, and it continues to do so.

Major teachers' unions infamously blocked the reopening of schools during COVID or rendered these schools inoperable. The excuses for it were idiotic. The Chicago Teachers Union posted on Twitter that reopening schools was "rooted in sexism, racism and misogyny." No proof of this charge was provided. They just wanted to throw some accusation at the wall in the hopes it would stick. This is despite the fact that people we meet on the ground who supported normal reopening have also fought against racism and sexism. So what the CTU posted was defamation. Meanwhile, one of the CTU's top officials vacationed in Puerto Rico while most schools were closed. The fact that she would go on vacation at all proves the union damn sure wasn't worried about COVID.

As late as 2022, New York State United Teachers posted a ridiculous harangue lamenting the growing public opposition to COVID restrictions in schools. NYSUT grumbled about parents who stood up for their children against school administrators who bullied them for not wearing masks. The New Jersey Education Association demanded COVID protocols long after vaccines were made available. Serial liar Gov. Phil Murphy—also known as Plastic Surgery Phil—was happy to oblige. Much of this was egged on by an incompetent CDC. The NJEA had even demanded that schoolchildren be forced to wear masks at outdoor bus stops and on playgrounds. We *guarantee* you nobody would have obeyed this in our day. Imagine it's 1979, and your teacher shows one of those reel-to-reel films with distorted music. Now imagine that all the people in the film walking down the street are wearing a surgical mask or an N95 with their bumblebee striped shirts and Farrah cuts. Doesn't that sound ridiculous?

What these unions did during COVID was bad for children. The well-being of children is a mighty high priority for us, and we don't like people who try to harm our most vulnerable. To be sure, teachers were harmed too. Without a doubt, many teachers in schools where these unions were present lost their jobs when parents pulled their kids out of these schools.

Some of the COVID restrictions were so laughably ridiculous that if you believe they actually worked, you must have the brains of a rock.

It isn't just educators' unions, and it isn't just COVID. While some unions representing amusement park workers supported reopening the parks like normal during COVID, some other unions became establishment shock troops. An SEIU chapter donated \$1 million to Gavin Newsom's fight against a recall effort, even though Newsom had cut state workers' pay. In 2021, unions and the Democrats connived with Republicans and Big Business to defeat an affordable housing referendum in Cincinnati. Some of the unions' excuses for opposing the measure sounded like they were straight out of the pages of the Tea Party. Nevada's influential culinary union has opposed universal healthcare.

Though some unions opposed COVID vaccine mandates, there were rumblings that other unions encouraged members to rat each other out for not getting the vaccine.

During the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-20, unions fought against restrictions that weren't even as severe as those during COVID. But this strong record is now in shards. To hear yellow unions tell it, you'd think the COVID pandemic was still going on even now.

The AFL-CIO used to participate in protests against the fascist World Economic Forum back when few people heard of the WEF. Yet now the WEF claims the AFL-CIO as an active partner. Longtime American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten—a leading proponent of COVID school closures—recently announced the AFT is teaming up with the WEF to design a school curriculum.

Events of recent years have helped separate the wheat from the chaff. Now it's easier to see which unions are valuable and which are company unions. Unions are supposed to represent real working-class interests and economic advancement instead of ruling-class wokewashing psy-ops.

It actually became much worse after more states passed anti-union "right-to-work" laws. Major unions fought harder to keep America closed during COVID than they did against these union-busting laws. Make no mistake, we should repeal misnamed "right-to-work" laws for workers in both the public and private sectors. But at the same time, we should also enact new safeguards against yellow unions that have promoted authoritarianism, years-long school closures, and the WEF.

My Little Pony, My Little Pony...What's a backpack all about?

We've managed to pare our batch of school stories we gleaned from the public Internet down to less than 1,300 pages. Maybe someday we'll find more.

One online commenter said there was a young'un in their math class in middle school who

would always read books about sex during class. And he would always “fart constantly and bash his math book into his face and laugh maniacally.” A student at another school indulged in “shitting in the urinals for fun.” He also “peed on a lot of stuff” and claimed to have made a bomb out of a Lego block. At yet another school, a middle schooler made a fake bomb out of an old iPod and stuffed it into some girl’s backpack.

One person said there was a girl at their school who made a phony Myspace account impersonating a fictitious boy. But nobody was fooled. The girl then claimed she was in a relationship with this made-up boy. When Facebook came along, she kept photoshopping herself onto photos of celebrities and claimed she met them. Again, nobody was fooled.

Another person said he had a college roommate who kept bringing up loogies and wiping them all over his shirt and pants. At another school, a student always carried around a tablet computer so he could watch porn during class. Another dipped tobacco in class and flung tobacco all over the ceiling.

A 5th grade girl was sent to the hall for a time-out. So she jumped onto the teacher’s desk and kicked everything onto the floor. A 1st grade boy shit in a My Little Pony backpack. Another commenter said a schoolmate used to walk up and down the aisle of the school bus, collect bubble gum from anyone who was chewing, and cram all the chewed gum into his mouth. Another student ate entire bottles of Elmer’s glue, ink sticks from pens, and used wads of gum from underneath desks, and he would lick bus tires.

Another ate a chunk of a bus seat on the way home from school. He had once put glue on someone’s chair in kindergarten. Another pupil liked to eat pencils, paper, money, and Legos. He once ate a math test. Another brang a live squirrel to school in his backpack.

Another student ate a piece of dog crap on a dare. Another dipped her sandwich in a toilet and ate it. Another left milk in his locker through spring break—thereby stinking. Another put all of his schoolbooks in the oven during home ec and got expelled. At the same school, a student built a fake bomb out of a Fruit Roll-Up.

Still another shit his pants and then tried to flush the soiled trousers down the toilet—which flooded the restroom. At another school, someone apparently pulled a prank that caused the printer in the library to keep printing out photos of Osama bin Laden. A classmate responded by eating the pictures and headbutting the printer.

One student defecated in his hands and used it to write “shit” on the bathroom wall. The school held a hilarious assembly for the entire student body about it. Another was expelled for snorting crushed-up Skittles. One day, a student kept farting really loud and yelling out, “Stink!” One other time, he kept yelling, “That was a fart!” Another pooped on a staircase, loudly boasted about it to the whole class, and was instantly expelled. Another peed in the sink in the classroom because the teacher wouldn’t let him use the restroom.

A middle school student swallowed nickels because he thought it would let him poop out 5 pennies. Another student ate a Skittle off the floor. During a field trip to see a play, a pupil jerked his gherkin during the play. At yet another school, a student ate steel wool (like an S.O.S. pad) in chemistry class.

One commenter admitted to getting suspended for pooping on a rock on the bike path behind the school. This commenter was also part of group of students who were banned from school property before and after school hours for showing up in the cafeteria at 6 PM and having a water balloon fight using condoms.

One respondent talked about being on a team with another student for a freshman project that was part of a competition. They had to explain their project before a panel of judges. During the presentation, the second student released a big, loud fart and blamed the first student. Needless to say, they didn’t win the competition.

On a field trip to an aquarium, a student picked a brochure that was covered with shoe prints off the ground and ate it. For the next half-hour, aquarium employees tried to get him to spit it back out.



An elementary school child threw up on his seat in class and didn't tell anyone for 3 days—which stunk up the whole room. A student stuck the metal edge of a ruler in an electrical socket on a dare, which blasted him across the room. A group of students ate a Bible during English class. A student at another school kept throwing perfectly good condoms on the floor in the hallways. He grew up to work for a state senator. A 4th grader stole the classroom's set of markers and kept them in his bookbag all year. He was finally caught when he ate the blue marker. When he was caught, he threw the remaining markers at the teacher one by one and yelled out each color.

A teenage student used scissors to cut up his Underoos in the middle of class. A student shit in a hallway and “left it there to be discovered.” Another crapped his pants and shoved the feces through the slits of someone's locker. Another coated the floor with soap and slid around on it on a “wet floor” sign. Another shit on the bathroom floor and placed paper over it to hide it. Whoever picked up that paper was in for a rude discovery!

One student used to climb into the ceilings at school instead of going to class. She had a chair, backpack, and Nintendo DS up there. She never got caught. One student was angry that his girlfriend dumped him, so he headbutted the glass trophy case and shattered it. Another would snort Doritos and once rolled up a copy of an ESPN magazine and smoked it. Another vomited and put it in his pocket. Another used shit to draw a penis on the restroom wall.

A student who sat next to the radiator in class used to pour correction fluid (like Liquid Paper) in the radiator and sniff the fumes. Another kept peeing on the radiator in the boys' restroom, stinking up the whole school. And a girl brang a dead bat to school in a Ziploc bag.

The Red Hand Gang it is not.

Flock flocks to AI

We're old enough to remember when America had groups that fought for civil liberties. Now America's dominant organizational structure has staked its whole miserable reputation on claiming those who fight for basic freedoms are uneducated oafs, so now we have to rebuild from scratch again. Every generation has to win back its liberties.

Now Flock Safety—proprietor of the spy cam that the city of Bellevue placed outside my window—is using artificial intelligence to report people to police if this AI model thinks their activities are “suspicious.”

The cameras aren't just illegally recording our movements anymore. Now they're using AI to judge whether these movements indicate criminal involvement. A Flock press release gloats that “suspect vehicles” are identified if they dare to travel across state lines.

Flock also now offers a “convoy search”, which tracks people's associations by noting what other vehicles are seen together with theirs. Mercy sakes alive, looks like we got us a convoy!

In other words, Flock does not investigate on suspicion but *generates* suspicion. And it's using a flawed AI algorithm to help them do it.

We don't know any details about this algorithm. Flock uses the excuse that it's a private company to keep it a secret. Yet the company's product is being used by public police departments. Because the algorithm is secret, there's a chance that some neighborhoods might be disproportionately targeted based on demographics.

We can notch a victory though, as the town of Greers Ferry, Arkansas, has finally agreed to remove a Flock camera that was aimed at a retired couple's house. This is one of very few instances in which a Flock cam has ever been taken down. In addition, major cities like Denver and Austin have backed out of contracts they had with Flock because of the ongoing abuses. Scarsdale, New York, terminated its Flock contract because over 400 residents signed a petition against Flock. Flock's dictatorial bombast has been all for naught in those cities.

A pool restroom had poopy toilet paper everywhere

Back in July, someone put the *poo* in *pool*.

It wasn't in the usual way. Usually, when we're talking about Ziegler Pool in Cincinnati, this means someone shit in the pool. But this time was diff, Biff.

It was a beautiful day in the neighborhood, and I used this popular public swimming pool. When I had to use the restroom, I noticed something funny in one of the stalls. It was both weird funny and tee-hee funny.

Why, there was a huge pile of toilet paper on the floor—and somebody had wiped their ass

with it. That means the toilet paper was used. It was dead. You couldn't use it now. Toilet paper is a disposable product—like food or post-1980s electronics. It is not designed for repeated use. You can't even recycle it (except in that town in Louisiana that kept running untreated waste from toilets back into the city water supply, causing strands of used toilet paper to get caught in home water filters).

The toilet paper pile remained on the floor for at least a few hours, smiling its ass off at all comers.

A half-baked story about bread

Bread? You gave your girlfriend *bread* for Christmas?

This story is about bread. Not Bread, but bread.

Let's take a trip back to the bubble gum bustin' year 1990. I was a junior in high school, and Christmas was coming. This is yet another anecdote about our old pal who always goofed off at school and on the school bus. Sadly, he left this world last year.

One morning during the 1990 holiday season, we were on the bus, which took a rather circuitous route to school. My classmate always had to transfer from another bus at the Fort Thomas IGA. As he was getting on our bus, we overheard a conversation among the bus monitor, driver, and the driver and monitor of the other bus. This inspired a response from my classmate.

According to this exchange, somebody gave bread to someone as a Christmas gift. This wasn't any sort of special bread. It was just a loaf of Butternut or something they got somewhere like Circle K. I don't remember exactly who gave bread to who. I think some dude might have given his girlfriend bread for Christmas. Or maybe one of the bus drivers gave bread to one of the other bus drivers. In any event, our old pal thought it was the most hilarious thing ever.

So he asked, "They got *bread* for Christmas? *Bread?*"

For many miles, until we got to school, he kept saying in a funny, high-pitched voice, "*Bread? Bread?*" He had a goofy grin on his face and kept stabbing the air with his finger, as he was poking fun at the whole situation.

The bus driver and monitor kept trying to justify this choice of a gift: "Don't you like bread?" They always asked weird questions like that. It's like when a little kid talks about falling off their Green Machine and an adult asks, "Did you cry?"

This was also around the time a different kind of "loaf" appeared on the floor of the school bus.



More greed caused by Spectrum

As the pipeline from your wallet to Spectrum's rectum continues to widen, more horror stories about this monopolistic company have emerged.

Not long ago, someone posted online that Spectrum has an exclusive partnership with their apartment complex for Internet service, so they can't sign up with a competitor. However, partnerships like this are illegal—both for cable TV and for Internet. Even if the rest of your locale has a cable TV monopoly, federal rules say you can use that company instead of the one your apartment complex uses, assuming it uses a different company.

Someone actually replied, "Your apartment complex chose Spectrum and you chose your apartment complex." It doesn't work that way, dumbass. Someone else said, "You got yourself to blame for this." We don't remember ever voting for the Spectrum Referendum, do you?

A couple other respondents said Spectrum has a deal with their city to be the only Internet provider in town. While this is common in the corrupt cable TV industry, this is the first time we've ever heard of anything like this regarding Internet. One person had already ordered Internet from Verizon just before this deal took effect, and Verizon canceled the order. This was after Spectrum had 15 outages in just one month in that area. Oh well, Verizon probably would have just "half-ported" it anyway.

A commenter on another thread correctly observed in 2022 that the FCC looks the other way: "FCC corruption causes them to not crack down on the ISP cartel."

It's a far cry from the days when the much-ballyhooed "information superhighway" first sprawled before a mainstream audience and promised open Internet access. Today's Internet makes the

Usenet Cabal look like virtuosos of online democracy. Our area never got to fully enjoy those days, because Simon Leis gunked up everything (and the local media cheered him on), but it's worse now.

And we started the investigation...

We'd like to investigate a locally prominent major corporation further because of allegations that have been made. Investigative reporting is our *job*. But sometimes we hit a dead end.

A longtime employee of this company has charged that high-ranking managers physically assaulted him on repeated occasions. The company refused to act on these complaints. I personally had dealings with one of the alleged assailants a long time ago, and I firmly believe that someone as spoiled as him would rise to a high-ranking corporate position just after college and abuse workers. He grew up without ever hearing the word *no*. He's worse than J.R. Ewing.

Yet our probe has reached a standstill. We can't find any new information about this scandal. This corporate giant has had plenty of scandals, sometimes affecting me personally, but our investigation has plowed into a hammerhead – probably because of a cover-up.

If the accusations are true, this shows once again the perils of hiring people for important positions because of their connections instead of experience or knowledge.

Wow! More kidney stones! Ew!

You're not gonna believe this, but a pair of kidney stones emerged on August 22. Another topped the charts on August 24.

They were as smooth as a billiard ball. As smooth as Boss Hogg's head. As smooth as a gumball melting in the sun. As smooth as the outside of Oscar the Grouch's trash can. As smooth as Casey Kasem voicing a ketchup commercial and saying, "It's sloooooow good!"

Does that rule or what?

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