

THE CHRONICLE

TELEGRAM
Founded July 24, 1829

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ANOTHER OPINION

Credit Trump for pushing vaccines

Twice in recent days, former president Donald Trump has spoken out more aggressively about the value of vaccines. Reluctance to get the shot still grips millions of Americans, and Trump's public comments might help persuade the holdouts among his followers, many of whom are suspicious of evidence that the coronavirus vaccines are safe and effective.

On Sunday night in Dallas, during the final stop of a live interview show with former Fox News host Bill O'Reilly, Trump said he had gotten a booster. The audience booed him. "Don't! Don't! Don't! Don't! Don't!" Trump told the crowd, waving off their reaction with his hand. In an interview Dec. 21 with conservative Daily Wire host Candace Owens, who is a leading purveyor of anti-vaccine conspiracy theories, Trump took credit for the vaccines as "one of the greatest achievements of mankind." He added, "Look, the results of the vaccine are very good, and if you do get it, it's a very minor form" of COVID. "People aren't dying when they take the vaccine."

Trump can justly claim credit for having launched Operation Warp Speed, the successful crash effort to develop and manufacture the coronavirus vaccines. His latest comments properly drew nods of approval from President Joe Biden and the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki.

We should not forget Trump's disastrous 2020 response to the pandemic, from his denial that the virus would spread, to his support for useless drugs, to his calls to "liberate" states from lockdowns and his destructive political meddling in public health agencies. The Dec. 17 year-end staff report of the House select subcommittee on the coronavirus crisis, chaired by U.S. Rep. James Clyburn, D-S.C., documents some of Trump's "critical failures." These include his embrace of Scott Atlas, the Hoover Institution neuroradiologist and Fox News commentator who, before vaccines, argued that viral spread would create "herd immunity" and who was against lockdowns and other restrictions.

The panel released a revealing email from Deborah Birx, the White House coronavirus response coordinator, on Aug. 25, 2020, refusing to attend a White House roundtable organized by Atlas. "I can't be part of this with these people who believe in herd immunity and believe we are fine with only protecting the 1.5M Americans in LTCF [long-term care facilities] and not the 80M+ with comorbidities," Birx wrote, warning of hundreds of thousands more deaths if mitigations such as masks and social distancing were not advanced. Of the Atlas group, she wrote, "They are a fringe group without grounding in epidemics, public health or on the ground common sense experience."

They were also advising the president of the United States, whose response to the pandemic was marked by deception and personal irresponsibility, including testing positive three days before a presidential debate and not saying so, carrying on his campaign and schedule, and endangering all those with whom he came in contact. Adding his voice to the drive to assure Americans get vaccinated — and specifically targeting many of his reluctant supporters — will not erase the record, but it is overdue and welcome.

— *The Washington Post*



When Christmas comes late

Friends, maybe you've heard me tell this story before but I think this year merits a reminder. It's my favorite Christmas story of all time, though it hasn't a thing to do with snow or Santa or magical moments.

It's just a story about love, a love that sickness and circumstances may have delayed but could not diminish.

The way I heard it, this story started in the dark mountain hollows of eastern Kentucky, all hills and no hope. A young couple were facing a lean Christmas. He had fallen sick and couldn't work. In those days, there were no such things as disability, or paid time off, or unemployment benefits. No safety net to catch those hardworking men and women who were the only things standing between their children and the wolf at the door.

Certainly not in the hills of Appalachia, where men still crawled, hunched like bugs, into decaying holes in the bellies of mountains to scrape out coal, or drove school buses through creeks and houses while Americans were blasting into space.

The couple had four children, a boy and three little girls. There was a present for the boy, and one for the baby. But there was only money for a small rag doll each for the two middle girls, ages six and eight.

The couple felt they had failed their children. They had wanted to buy each

girl a beautiful doll, stiff with newness in a fancy box, with layers of lace like icing on a wedding cake. But then illness came and made their choices for them, and meager rag dolls it was.

Of course the girls never realized what they missed. They were good-hearted and used to living close to the bone. Rag dolls played just as good as pretty dolls, especially if you never realized what you could have had.

Years passed. More children came. The family moved off the mountain to the bustling industry of Cleveland. Some Christmases were big and some were small but none ever matched the desperation of the rag doll year.

They counted themselves blessed.

The girls grew up, had children of their own, even grandchildren. They never remembered the year they opened only rag dolls.

Until one hot summer day in 1999.

That was each of the sisters came home to find an unusual package at their doorsteps: a faded pink rectangle box. On the lid was the scrawled chicken scratch of an old man whose handwriting was gnarled by arthritis and working on machines for more

than 70 years.

"Merry Christmas 1964."

There was no other note. No name. But then, none was needed.

Inside was a beautiful doll with a hand-painted porcelain head. Her dress was intact, if yellowed a bit with age, its layers of lace like icing on a wedding cake.

They were old, very old, but they were the top of the line models in 1964. Still in pristine condition and in their original boxes, as if they'd been waiting somewhere all this time for their owners to show up.

"He never got over it, not being able to give his girls those dolls that Christmas," my momma said.

This is a true story, readers. This happened to my parents long before I was born, but I was around for the second part, after they stumbled across the dolls at a flea market. "When he found those dolls, he had to get them for his girls. All these years and he never got over it."

I keep thinking of this story this year because I know there are a whole lot of families out there whose holidays might not look like they dreamed, either.

May you, too, know the love of a parent — or anyone — that never stops thinking about you. And may you give that kind of love away, too.

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RINI JEFFERS

Joe Manchin alone isn't to blame

The Democrats should have listened to Joe Manchin. As their "Build Back Better" agenda assumed legislative shape, the Democratic senator from West Virginia kept telling them what he didn't like about it.

On Nov. 1, he decried the bill's "shell games" and "budget gimmicks" and called it "a recipe for economic crisis." He wanted to set up and fully pay for a few programs for 10 years. The bill House Democrats passed sets up more programs, but for only a few years; after that, the Democrats were counting on political pressure to get them extended, and maybe paid for. They appeared to think Manchin's conditions were just a negotiating position — even after he said that he would be comfortable if no bill at all got passed.

Last Sunday, Manchin announced that he could not support the current legislation. Democrats should have realized long beforehand that he wasn't bluffing. The fact that President Joe Biden lost West Virginia by 39 points last year should have been evidence enough. Democrats should have agreed to what he wanted.

He was, after all, right about the best way to structure the bill, as even some progressives conceded. If Democrats wanted a larger tax credit for children, they should have included a 10-year enlargement and ditched other parts of the bill — as Manchin said. If they weren't willing to sacrifice other initiatives, they should have left an expanded credit for another day. But the bulk of the Democratic Party in D.C. wasn't willing to set priorities.

Democrats still aren't listening. Instead of telling him that they will accept any version of the bill he wants, they're throwing a tantrum.

White House communications director Jen Psaki snarked that Manchin should "reverse his position yet again, to honor his prior commitments." Representative Pramila Jayapal of Washington state, who also leads the Progressive Caucus, is accusing him of

"betrayal" and insinuating, dubiously, that a lot of West Virginians will feel the same way.

Her Minnesota colleague Ilhan Omar says Manchin is acting out of "corruption and self-interest." None of this is going to get progressives a 50th Senate vote for what they want — and that's assuming they have 49 to start.

It's not just Manchin the Democrats are refusing to hear. Biden tried to garner support for the bill by saying it "is what 81 million people voted for." A large segment of those voters, though, just wanted Donald Trump out of office.

Biden understood this political reality well in 2020: It's why his convention speech dwelt far more on his character and Trump's than it did on their policy differences. He campaigned for a mandate not to be Trump, and he got it. Only then did he try to convert his win into a mandate for the grab-bag of unrelated progressive policies that became Build Back Better.

Progressive activists are reacting to the failure of the bill by complaining about the structure of American government. Never mind that Democrats have been able to build governing majorities in that structure in the not very distant past. Never mind, either, that the last two years have seen several large spending bills enacted with strong bipartisan support, especially in the Senate.

Build Back Better was unusual in seeking to realize an expansive partisan agenda in a very narrowly divided Congress. Neither Bill Clinton nor Barack Obama tried to enact such large and far-reaching changes in spending when they had much larger margins.

The next stage of grief will be despair



RAMESH PONNURU

over the future of the Biden administration, if not that of democracy itself. Democrats have managed to make the bill a serious test for Biden's presidency without ever having conveyed to the public what it's even about.

But Democrats are going further, saying that Manchin has crippled Biden politically, both because they hope it will get the senator to change his mind and because they really are that worked up about what they see as his obstinacy.

Clinton managed to get re-elected after his health-care initiative collapsed — and that was a long-drawn-out collapse, complete with an address to a joint session of Congress. Clinton's comeback, however, involved moving rightward and scaling back his ambitions. His greatest legislative accomplishment following the health debacle was a center-right retrenchment of welfare policy. He said the era of big government was over, which was not really true but signaled that he would not repeat his mistakes.

The Clinton example of success after legislative defeat is, then, not one today's Democrats are especially interested in learning from. Let's see how well yelling at Senator Manchin works instead.

Ramesh Ponnuru is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist. He is a senior editor at National Review and a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.



LEONARD PITTS,
CATHERINE
RAMPELL AND
MARC THIESSEN
ARE OFF TODAY.



TIM CHURCHILL

