

The 'Packsaddle Librarians'

They were known by various names — the book women, the book ladies, the packsaddle librarians.

From 1935 to 1943, they rode through the hills of Depression-era Appalachia, hundreds of miles a week on difficult trails through sometimes awful weather, circulating a few books, magazines and greatly

outdated newspapers to people living in isolated mountain cabins in areas where there were no libraries and few schools.

About 30 packhorse libraries reached between 100,000 and 600,000 people and also provided books for about 155 schools in the counties they served. The women were paid \$28 a month by FDR's Works Progress Administration and had to provide their own mounts — horses, mules, even donkeys. Sometimes they went by boat, and sometimes they walked.

And the women did something even more remarkable. They harvested knowledge as well as dispensing it. They collected recipes, folk remedies, local history lore, prayers and songs and other items and pasted them into scrapbooks, which they also circulated among their patrons. They even put together picture books for the children.

In 1956, Kentucky Rep. Carl D. Perkins, who had benefited from the program as a teacher in Knott County, sponsored the Library Services Act, which provided the first federal appropriations for library service.

I was raised in Eastern Kentucky, but too late to benefit from the book women's efforts. Until we were old enough for school, my brother and sister and I had to make do with the few books our parents could afford, which became worn and ragged and finally fell apart from overuse.

I've been an obsessive collector of books ever since. The overflow at my house is stacked up on one side of the staircase to the second floor, even though most of my reading these days is on an e-reader. One of the greatest discoveries in my Indiana teenage years was that the bookmobile came to within half a block of my house, delivering precious copies of science fiction by Robert Heinlein and Ray Bradbury and saving me long treks to the library.

In these days of the great political divide, we can't seem to talk about anything without rancorous argument, even books, and lately especially books. We are at odds over what is in them, where they are, who has access to them, what use might be made of them.

We lose sight of the big picture. Books are the repository of human endeavor, the complete record of all we have done, what we have dreamed and where we have failed. Books are the reason humanity can advance, learning from what has gone before, not having to start all over each generation. Without books, we would still be scratching in the dirt and ignorant of the stars.

And until we all start trying to learn and grow by listening to podcasts and watching YouTube videos, books are still the key to knowledge. They are just as important today in urban Indiana, as they were during the Depression in rural Appalachia. And sometimes, they can be just as difficult to access now as then.

Luckily, we have a modern equivalent of the book women, and her name is Dolly Parton. Bless her and the project she started in her home county in East Tennessee in 1995. Her Imagination Library gave each preschool child in the county one good quality, age-appropriate book a month, mailed directly to their home addresses.

The first book order sent out just over 1,700 books. But the program has since been replicated elsewhere, and today, the Imagination Library sends more than a million books a month to children around the world.

The participants include 56 providers in Indiana, cities and counties and school districts spread throughout the state. Gov. Eric Holcomb has included \$4.1 million in his budget proposal to make the program statewide for two years.

For a state that has \$6 billion in reserves, it's a puny percentage of a pittance. As a fiscal conservative, I normally look for ways to save money, but I can think of few initiatives for which such a great return can come from such a small investment.

At another time, in another context, we can put the books on our political agendas and argue away. But not now.

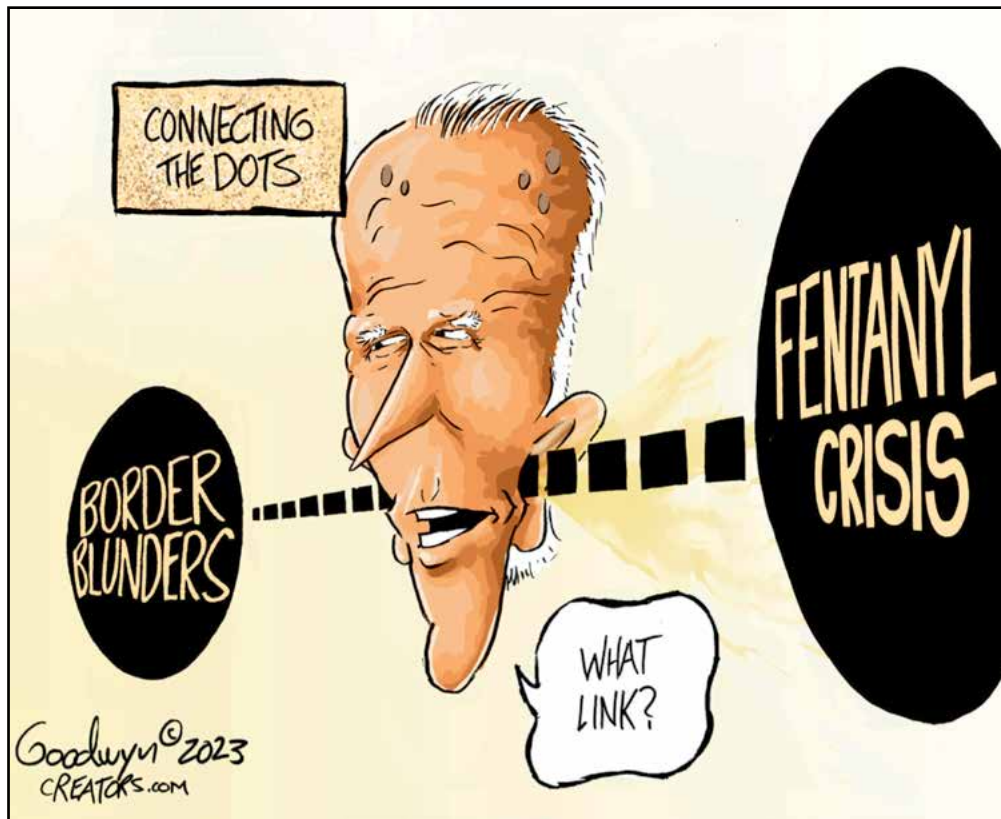
In fact, the only reason I can't wholeheartedly endorse the governor's plan is the fear that government might take something good and screw it up.

(Writer's note: If you want to know more about the Depression-era Packhorse Library project, I strongly recommend "The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek," Michele Richardson's meticulously researched and engagingly written 2019 novel.)

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Letter to the Editor

Waste in recent spending bill is outlined

To the Editor:
Biden walks, talks, and spends your money like a drunken sailor. Hardworking taxpayers are bearing the burden of his woke policies, including the cost of supporting millions of illegals he allowed into the country under the pretense of asylum.

I am not opposed to orderly, sustainable immigration of genuinely persecuted and well-vetted individuals who can be assimilated and become productive citizens.

However, I am convinced Biden's immigration policies are meant to form an easily manipulated, dependent voting block loyal to the Democrat party, using social programs and race baiting to maintain allegiance.

Unfortunately, I don't think Biden will allow many refugees from Marxist countries, because they recognize our budding Neo-Marxism and its dangers.

Senator Rand Paul has prepared his annual Festivus report, outlining waste in the recent \$1.9 trillion spending bill.

- Here are some items:
- \$475b annual interest payment on the federal debt
 - \$4.5b giving ineligible individuals fraudulent COVID Economic Injury Disaster Grants
 - \$1.7b maintenance of 77,000 empty federal buildings that can't be sold or transferred to others in a timely manner due to excessive, government-imposed restrictions
 - \$210m basic education projects in Jordan
 - \$175m expansion of a rarely used, unreliable Washington DC streetcar system

- \$168m helping illegal immigrants avoid deportation
- \$140m construction of an 800-room Broward County, FL luxury hotel using COVID relief funds
- \$50m boosting Tunisian travel sector during COVID
- \$31.5m purchases of luxury automobiles with defrauded COVID relief funds
- \$28m useless forest-patterned military uniforms purchased for Afghanistan military campaign
- \$17m unused hotel rooms for illegal immigrants
- \$9m yoga and concert park for woke Austin, Texas
- \$3m museum for Gandhi
- \$3m watching hamsters on steroids fight
- \$2.5m Super Bowl commercial reminders to fill out census forms
- \$2.3m injecting beagle puppies with cocaine
- \$2.1m encouraging Ethiopians to wear shoes
- \$1.1m training mice to binge drink
- \$1.6m upgrading turf on Whitewater Unified School District sports field in Wisconsin with COVID relief funds
- \$689k studying romantic parrot behavior
- \$675k studying social life and collective intelligence of ants
- \$520k studying racial aggression in mice (woke academia at their finest)
- \$200k radio campaign reminding drivers to stop at railroad crossings
- \$192k Starbuck espresso machines for Department of Defense
- \$187.5k verifying kids love their pets
- \$119k verifying if imaginary character Thanos can snap his fingers

while wearing the Infinity Gauntlet Senator Mike Braun and Representative Jim Banks faithfully opposed this bill.

Unfortunately, Senator Todd Young voted for it. Why? Ask him (young.senate.gov).

Young also voted for the Respect for Marriage Act, without the Lee Amendment providing well-worded protection of the religious freedom of individuals and organizations like Bible-believing churches that only acknowledge traditional monogamous marriages.

Young claims the amendment was unnecessary. Apparently, he thinks he knows more than Senator Mike Lee (R-UT), former clerk for Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito, about safeguarding religious freedom from the woke. I don't think so.

The woke demand everyone affirm their "progressive" ideology. It is "progressive" to deny the traditional, biblical definition of marriage. They are creating cunningly devised legal justification to enforce their ideology upon all.

Fundamentals of biblical Christianity including the patriarchal nuclear family and gender roles are under attack. God's good design and instructions for human flourishing is despised by the woke.

Christians ... don't confuse the embrace of the woke for a cuddle. Like a boa constrictor, they are slowly squeezing this nation into submission. They view Christianity as a hindrance to their new world order.

If you want a copy of Senator Paul's Festivus report, check out paul.senate.gov.

Robert Sparkman
Rome City

The haunting final sermon of Cardinal Pell

BY TERRY MATTINGLY

Cardinal George Pell had no way to know, as he rose to preach during a spiritual retreat in southern Italy, that this was his last sermon — opening with the biblical cry, "Repent, because the Kingdom of God is near."

Catholics should stay focused on truths proclaimed during the reigns of St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, he said, at the Shrine of St. Padre Pio in San Giovanni Rotondo.

These popes "were missionaries of the truth. We don't build the truth. We don't have the ability to change the truth. We can only acknowledge the truth, and sometimes the truth isn't all that pretty. Sometimes the truth is disconcerting, difficult," said Pell, three days before his death on Jan. 10, after routine hip surgery.

"These two Popes did not affirm that the teaching of Jesus was conditioned by the time, by the Roman Empire, by the pagans. They did not claim that the essential and central teaching should be updated, radically changed. They didn't say: 'We don't know what Jesus said because there were no tape recorders.' ... As for them, and also for us, Jesus remains the way, the truth and the life."

On this day, the burly 6-foot-4-inch cardinal faced a gathering of Catholic charismatics, not an audience of Vatican power brokers. Nevertheless, this final sermon — translated from Italian by Inside the Vatican magazine — touched on themes in his recent writings that fueled raging debates about Pope Francis and the modernization of Catholic doctrines and worship.

In that sermon, Cardinal Pell offered only one nod to Pope Francis, while noting the potential for future popes from Africa, Asia and the Global South. "Today we have a Pope from South America — praiseworthy and good," he said.

But after Pell's death, Italian journalist Sandro Magister revealed that the Australian cardinal — using the pseudonym "Demos" — had written a fierce March memo circulated to members of the College of Cardinals focusing on issues that loom over the next conclave to select a pope.

The Francis pontificate has been "a disaster in many or most respects; a catastrophe," this memo claimed. "The German synod speaks on homosexuality, women priests, communion for the divorced. The Papacy is

silent." Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg "rejects the Christian teaching on sexuality. The Papacy is silent. ...

"The Christo-centricity of teaching is being weakened. ... Sometimes Rome even seems to be confused about the importance of a strict monotheism, hinting at some wider concept of divinity; not quite pantheism, but like a Hindu pantheism variant."

After a litany of criticisms, "Demos" bluntly warned: "Schism is not likely to occur from the left. ... Schism is more likely to come from the right and is always possible when liturgical tensions are inflamed and not dampened."

The Catholic Left accused Cardinal Pell — who for three years served as finance minister for Pope Francis — of being a backstabber.

The Jesuit priest Thomas Reese, writing for Religion News Service, said that by "authoring an anonymous memorandum attacking Francis, Pell crossed a line. ... Pell for the first time in his life showed himself a coward. He was not willing to publicly stand behind his words." Reese noted that Pope Francis "stood by" Pell when he faced allegations of molesting two choirboys during his tenure as

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