

# **HERMIT HERALD**

## **ISSUE 110**

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### **QUOTE FOR THE DAY**

**“Security is mostly a superstition. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.”Helen Keller**

### **OUR COVID 19 FEARS: THE TROLLEY PROBLEM**

**Going back to mid-March, Astra-Zeneca had announced some clotting problems in patients who had received the vaccine. Specifically, out of 34 million who had received the vaccine, 169 had suffered clots to the brain and 53 others had clots in other parts of the body. This comes out to one adverse reaction for every 145,000 doses. This caused a halt in the use of that vaccine which, on a country by country basis, has been restarted and/or halted again. This has been a major global shock as the company had promised to deliver three billion doses this year.**

**Then, this past week, we learned that there have been problems with the one shot Johnson and Johnson (J&J) vaccine where six women have suffered clotting episodes. Of the total 6.9 million who have received the shot, the risk is one in 1,115,000. But, given that only women have thus far been affected, the odds are higher. 1.4 million women received the shot indicating a risk of one in 230,000. Public support for the J&J vaccine has plummeted from 57% to 32%.**

**Isn't it interesting that, while the risk of getting Covid 19 is hugely higher than getting clots from the vaccine, collectively, we humans, seem to say, "I have control over whether or not I get the virus and can take steps to protect myself, while I have no control over the effects of the vaccine and cannot even countenance odds of one adverse reaction in 230,000 doses."**

**Now the problem, how do the health officials weigh the individual risks as opposed to the collective benefit? Ethicists describe it this way, according to columnist, Max Fisher.**

**“Imagine standing at a railway switch. If you do nothing, a trolley barreling down the track will hit three people in its path. If you pull the lever, the trolley will divert to an alternate track with one person. Which option is morally preferable: deliberately killing one person or passively allowing three to die?” A Gordian knot, so to speak.**

## **TEN BILLION DOLLARS STIMULUS AID FOR NY**

**The reader will probably recall that part of the 1.9 trillion dollar stimulus package to which the Republicans objected was relief checks, which came to be called, “Blue state bail outs.” Well, like it or not, NY and other large states got around ten billion each. Then, on April 10<sup>th</sup>, we pick up the papers to learn that New York is going to provide \$2.1 billion for undocumented immigrants which, “riles the Republicans and worries some Democrats”, but not the progressives. These payments can be as much as \$15,600 to undocumented immigrants who lost work during the pandemic. Obviously, these folks will have to prove that they have not received financial assistance from other government programs,**

**but implementing and monitoring this program is fraught with problems. The first and most obvious is that a lot of these people have been working “off the books” odd jobs, deliveries, house/apartment cleaning, etc – all for cash payments only.**

**The conflicts are obvious. On the one hand, from a humanitarian stand point, many of these people do need assistance. On the other hand, NY has essentially violated Federal law by becoming a sanctuary city, and they take 20% of their stimulus money for this program?**

**Then, let’s have a look at our hundreds of thousands of legal citizens who work in entry level jobs (\$18,000 a year at McDonalds). OK- they got a stimulus check- big deal- probably spent it the day they got it to pay back rent.**

**According to the NY Times, “Groups that support undocumented people said they plan to make sure that excluded workers who survive on a patchwork of jobs, or who are paid in cash or under the table and cannot easily provide proof of employment will not be left out.” It’s hard to argue against the fact that**

**something should be done, but the control and fairness issues are a real conundrum.**

## **RUSSIA AND UKRAINE**

**So, president Biden throws a bunch of new sanctions at Russia for meddling in the 2020 election and their cyber attacks in the United States while, in nothing I have read, touches on what the Russians are doing on their own border with Ukraine (actually, not on the border, but about 100 miles inland). Anyway, as reported in the last issue, the Russians have the biggest military build up since they went into Crimea in 2014 (40,000 troops reported last HH issue – today – 100,000.)**

**And now – another issue- hard to believe the NY Times totally missed this one- Putin is closing the Strait of Kerch (more on that in a moment) to all foreign warships until October. Wow! I know nothing of maritime law, but how can he do that?**

**To orient you geographically, picture, if you will, an hour- glass: In the top portion is the Sea of Azov. At the neck is the Strait of Kerch**

**(1.3 miles long and 9.3 miles at its widest). At the bottom of the hour- glass lies the Black Sea.**

**On the left hand side of the neck is Crimea (kind of strategically important –yes?) because Russia is on the right side of the bottleneck.**

**The Biden administration had planned to send the USS Roosevelt and the USS Donald Cook into the Black Sea in response to Moscow’s increasing military presence near Ukraine. “Russia warned the U.S. on Tuesday, to stay away from the area, ‘for their own good.’”**

**Guess what? We took our orders from Putin and pulled back the two destroyers. Our official statement:”We have no desire to be in an escalating war with Russia. The White House doesn’t want things, ‘spinning out of control.’”**

**In review; the wanna be, break away, districts of Donetsk and Lugansk have 28,000 pro Moscow rebels, Russia has 100,000 troops and vast military equipment near Ukraine’s border and Putin has decreed that no naval vessels are permitted to pass through the Strait of**

**Kerch until October. All of that, and the U.S. actions seem to say, “Sounds good to us.”**

**Not even the top Russian analysts can predict where this is going – preparations for an invasion? Or, more probably, a show of force, with Putin demonstrating he can, and will do, anything he wants. No line in the sand here. Wonder if Putin will allow the crews of the USS Roosevelt and Donald Cook to take shore leave at the Blue Planet Kite Beach resort on the Caspian Sea?**

## **AFGHANISTAN**

**No blame for the administration here. Both Trump and Biden correctly wanted out from the country’s longest war. Mr. Biden’s final pull out date set for 9/11/21. Here’s an interesting bit of history; Barely two months after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in October of 2001, the Taliban’s spokesman sued for peace on December 7<sup>th</sup>. “Tomorrow the Taliban will start surrendering their weapons. I think we should go home.” The NYT article continues, “But, the United States refused the group’s surrender, vowing to fight on to shatter the**

**Taliban's influence in every corner of the country." That was the start of our 19 year disastrous experiment at "nation building."**

**In announcing the pullout, Mr. Biden's tone underscored what a humbling moment it was for the United States. According to the article, "So many of the objectives cited by the military and other proponents of a continued presence in Afghanistan- transforming the country into a stable democratic ally, weakening the Taliban, fighting corruption and the drug trade- had either proven beyond the abilities of the U.S. and its allies or had yielded only partial or tenuous gains."**

**I'm all good with the foregoing until Secretary of State Blinken has a news conference with Afghan president Ghani. "I want to demonstrate with my visit the ongoing commitment of the United States to the Islamic Republic and the people of Afghanistan." Excuse me! I believe that line was taken from page one of the mushroom growers' instruction book. "Rule #1: keep them in the dark and cover them with s - - t."**



## **MISCELLANEOUS LITTLE KNOWN STATISTICS**

**BERNIE MADOFF: 80% of the cash bilked from clients by the recently deceased Bernie Madoff have been recouped (source- U.S. Attorney's office Southern District of NY.) OK, the guy was a crook, but a 150 year jail sentence when apparently his clients are only out 20% of their investments? There have been plenty of downturns where our favorite, honest, brokers lost 20% in our portfolios.**

**HUNTER BIDEN: receives \$2million advance for his memoir – a bomb – now looking like a \$1,8 million loss for the publisher.**

**COVID- 19 VARIANT: B.1.1.7 which has been raging through Europe and now parts of the U.S. is 60% more contagious than the original and 66% more deadly.**

**RACIAL PROBLEMS: Incontrovertible that the U.S. is in the midst of a prolonged reassessment of our problems with and recognition of racism in America. It's important to make certain our strong feelings match up with reality to help with a clear eyed**

**assessment of what steps have to be taken. From a recent article on the topic, “Psychologists tell us that we are frequently motivated by subconscious emotions telling ourselves a story that makes sense of our feelings. We reach for vivid images that are easily recalled and reinforce our emotion-laden stories, rather than paying attention to what the data say. When it comes to racism, ideology, media exposure and peer influences skew our picture of reality.”**

**For instance, “53% of those reporting ‘very liberal’ points of view estimated the number to be 1,000 or more deaths of unarmed blacks by police, in 2019, when the actual number was only twelve.” That’s twelve too many, but it’s not 1,000.**

**According to the Washington Post database, this year, to April 12<sup>th</sup>, 52 black people were shot by police, just three of whom were unarmed, and 109 white people were shot in the same time period, only five of whom were unarmed. The FBI, Uniform Crime Reporting program notes that Blacks, being 13.4% of the**

**population, account for 33% of non-fatal violent crimes.**

**Our new Attorney General, Merrick Garland, is revitalizing, “Consent Decrees” which will give the government much more muscle in reforming and reeducating police departments. But that’s only one side of the equation. There are too many guns and too much criminal behavior out there. The country has a very long way to go.**

### **\$2.3 TRILLION INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM**

**Americans broadly support it. Survey Monkey reports that, while only 3% of Republicans support it, 7 in 10 Independents like it and Democratic approval runs about 93%. The sticking point remains how to fund it, and that is the source of Republican resistance.**

**President Biden states that his \$2.3 trillion plan is, “projected to cut poverty in the black community by 37%.” Wouldn’t that be great. But, please, Mr. president show me the math. Unfortunately, this is the part of the program dedicated to bridges, roads, electric grids, etc, leaving to bring up the rear what I believe to**

**be of the greatest necessity: education, housing, healthcare and recreational facilities in our most disadvantaged communities. Will there be any funding left for them?**

## **AMERICA ON DRUGS**

**In 2 decades, we have lost 2,400 of our finest in Afghanistan. Last year we lost 38,800 in auto accidents and last year we lost 87,000 to drug overdoses – what a tragedy!**

## **TO WORK OR NOT TO WORK ?**

**Yes, that is the question. The fear that the effort to make certain everyone has a safety net has created some real disincentives. With figures being translated into work week, hourly numbers, we find that, in New York where the minimum wage is \$15 per hour, unemployment and other government benefits are \$20 per hour. In Ohio, where the minimum wage is \$8.80, unemployment and other benefits are \$11 to \$18.55 per hour.**

**Your faithful scribe, PB**

