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OUR VIEW: MENTAL HEALTH

Growing needs met with short supply

An in-depth report in last Sunday's Free Press on the mental health landscape made it clear that the need for mental health services is growing due in part to pandemic-related stress while the system to respond to it is being strained.

Why it matters:

Mental health treatment can be life-changing and the lack of treatment can be devastating.

The system had flaws to begin with. The pandemic has wrought significant challenge to healthy minds. There has been a vast increase of mental health needs — from young people who've been isolated from school and normal social development, to middle age people and seniors.

Isolation, depression and anxiety increased as our social order turned upside down with the pandemic. Kids couldn't go to school, seniors had to isolate and

everyone had to change the way they worked and the way they played.

Local practitioners find themselves busier than ever, while at the same time dealing with their own pandemic-related mental health stressors. Minnesota's mental health services are understaffed and underfunded and in need of more attention. Sue Abderholden, statewide director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, says the mental system isn't broken — it was never really built to serve the need.

There's a shortage of practitioners. And clinics and hospitals have dropped mental health services due to low reimbursement rates that the insurance companies don't want to raise. Government has been slow with solutions also.

There are 23,431 mental health care providers in Minnesota. That comes out to about one provider for every 240 people. Of course, there are more providers located in the metro areas, making access for people in rural areas difficult. One provider in The Free Press report told of a man who traveled from Gaylord to attend a Mankato support group.

People who live in rural areas of Minnesota travel an average of 77 minutes to get to a mental health provider, compared to 24 minutes for metro area patients, according to a report from the Minnesota Department of Health.

In a sign of progress, it appears the stigma of dealing with a mental health issues is slowly easing, mostly led by young people, many of whom may have been on "meds" since their teenage years. In another sign of progress, state officials quickly equalized reimbursement rates for telemedicine when the pandemic hit.

But there's plenty of hill left to climb.

The Free Press will continue with its occasional series "Hidden Crisis" and explore problems of access, knowledge of services, reimbursement, growing the supply of providers and stigma issues in future installments.

We aim to inform community and state policy leaders on problems with the mental health system and advocate for solutions, but the first step is getting everyone with a stake in mental health — all of us — to realize the scope of the problem.

OTHER VIEW

A flawed recall process

New York Daily News

Though we made an exception for Brexit, we don't generally make endorsements in races thousands of miles away. So even though we respect California Gov. Gavin Newsom for trying in good faith to slow the spread of COVID, while anti-maskers and vaccine-hesitant residents of his fine state make the job far harder than it ought to be, we'll stay out of recommending how Golden Staters ought to vote in the Sept. 14 recall election.

But the way the recall process works is an undeniable horror.

Voters are presented with two questions. The first is

up-or-down: whether to let Newsom stay on. If a bare majority say yes, that's all she wrote. If they say no, the second ballot question comes into play: Who should replace the governor? Voters then choose from among 46 candidates, not including Newsom: Democrats, Republicans, Greens, a Libertarian, and 10 people with no party ID. Whoever wins a plurality in the second tally becomes governor.

The result is that Newsom could have 49.9% support among voters and be replaced by someone winning a tiny slice of the popular pie in what can charitably be called a freak-show carnival.



A possible change in California

LOS ANGELES — Slightly more than a month since Larry Elder became a Republican candidate to replace Democrat Gavin Newsom as California's governor, the electorate that in 2018 elected Newsom is already voting on whether to truncate his term by a recall vote. Elder's campaign is a one-man band. Newsom's is primarily big battalions: government employees unions focused on preserving their parasitic relations with government.

Under a two-step process, Californians can take a mulligan, voting to remove an official they recently chose, and simultaneously electing a replacement from an array of self-selected candidates. If Newsom, 53, loses in the first step — voting ends Sept. 14 — Elder, 69, is heavily favored to win the second. Recall election polls, which depend on guesses about turnout, show the first-step vote within the margin of error.

From his house high in the Hollywood hills, with a glass wall providing a panoramic view of the city, Elder, clad in jeans and an open-collared shirt, is a picture of relaxation. After 27 years blanketing California with talk radio, he campaigns using that medium, a smattering of television and all forms of social media to spread an orthodox conservative-libertarian message. Newsom's message is that Elder's "assault on California values" risks upending progress. Well.

California has the nation's highest cost-of-living-adjusted poverty rate and one-third of the nation's welfare recipients. In 2020, when home building increased 6.1% nationally, in California, where regulations have congealed construction, home building declined 3.7%. In Texas, the median price of a home is 3.5 times the

state's median household income; in California, it is almost 10 times. The median home price in San Antonio is \$226,665; in L.A., \$898,692. The state has more than half the nation's unsheltered homeless.



GEORGE WILL
Washington Post

A Californian earning \$58,000 annually pays a marginal tax rate double that of an Arizonan earning \$500,000. California lost a net 70,000 residents in 2019, and in 2022, for the first time ever, it will lose a congressional seat.

California's native-born population has been declining since the 1990s. Migration from the state has increased every year but one since 2011. In the past decade, 687,000 Californians have moved to Texas.

Of the nation's 10 largest school districts, only in Los Angeles', the second largest, have students gone an entire year without in-school instruction. Even before covid-19, only 30% of eighth graders (19% of Hispanics, 10% of Blacks) read proficiently, with comparable numbers for math. To finance the demands of government employees unions, California has the nation's highest sales tax and gasoline tax (triple the national average). Soaring energy prices, partly a result of quixotic attempts to fine-tune the planet's climate, inhibit the creation of industrial jobs. Hence, many who are fleeing the state are under 35 with annual household incomes under \$50,000. Among the nation's 53 largest metropolitan areas, San Francisco and Los Angeles rank 52nd and 53rd in birthrates. Since 2010, California's median age has risen 50% faster than the rest of the nation's.

Newsom would have to be a prodigy of perversity to have made this mess more than slightly worse

since 2018. He should be removed not because he is remarkable but because he is banal — a fungible cog in a typical blue state political machine.

Elder's constituency consists of the dissatisfied. Newsom's base, those government employees unions, are government lobbying itself to do what it wants to do: expand. Progressives want to discredit Elder, but because he is Black, their explanation of everything — "systemic racism" — is unhelpful.

He rose from South Central L.A. to Brown University and the University of Michigan Law School, practiced law and founded a search firm for attorneys, before finding his vocation: decanting into millions of listeners the thoughts derived from Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, Thomas Sowell, Walter Williams, William F. Buckley Jr., Daniel Patrick Moynihan and others.

The pandemic, having concentrated minds on the power of teachers unions to prevent teaching, has opened many minds, especially among California's Hispanic plurality, to Elder's plans for schools: Public education money would flow to parents, who could spend it on public or private schooling. And unions could no longer protect the incompetent 5% (a conservative estimate of 15,000) of the state's 300,000 public school teachers. In the previous decade, about two teachers a year (0.0007%) were fired for poor performance.

Having altered the recall rules in June to schedule the vote quickly, Newsom belatedly recognized Elder's strength. His tampering with the process might end his governorship that began with a boast that was an inadvertent warning: "California is what America is going to look like."

George Will's email address is georgewill@washpost.com.

The falling dots had names

Last week, at least two men fell from a U.S. military plane as it climbed into the skies above Afghanistan.

In video taken from the ground, they are so small you almost have to squint to see them. They seem roughly the size of a period, the end to some sentence no one wrote. But no, we are told those figures are Afghan men, plunging to their deaths.

One can only marvel at the desperation captured in footage of the chaos at the airport in Kabul as the United States began evacuating its personnel from Afghanistan. People climbed on a jet bridge like ants on sugar. Dozens ran down the runway alongside the taxiing plane. And then there were the men who clung to the airship as it lifted from the ground.

I know I'm supposed to think of all this in big-picture terms, to understand that while what happened was surely tragic, the real issue is what it means for foreign policy and domestic politics. But just now, that question feels greasy and unclear. Sometimes, the big picture is overwhelmed by the small one. Tiny dots of men plummeting down the sky.

It is a grisly, miserable bookend to an image that began this misadventure, 20 years ago: tiny human dots plummeting down the side of a burning New York skyscraper, collateral damage in an asymmetric war between Islamic fundamentalists

and the West. Twenty years later, the people who leapt from the World Trade Center are a defining memory of that awful day. But do we remember — did we ever even know — their names?



LEONARD PITTS
Miami Herald

Probably not on both counts. Individual lives tend to get ground up in the giant gears of geopolitics and history. Last week, the process was under way even before the bodies hit the ground, the punditocracy united in debating the question that, for many, was foremost in importance: Who gets the blame for this debacle?

Does it go to the Bush, Obama or Trump administrations for mishandling the war? To the Biden administration for bungling the pullout, creating a deadly calamity by misreading the speed with which Taliban forces would overrun the nation? To Afghanistan's hapless government, which spent over \$2 trillion American dollars and over 2,000 American lives to install, maintain and defend? Should it go to the Afghan army, 300,000 men trained and equipped at a cost of \$83 billion, which melted away like a sandcastle in the waves when faced with a ragtag force one quarter its size? Or to U.S. military leaders who kept assuring us things were going well when, clearly, things were not?

Well, the answer is: Yes, all of the above. The answer is also, who cares? Not that those are not critical ques-

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tions. Not that they do not demand answers and accountability. Not that there are not grave geopolitical implications here.

And yet ... when you are a girl now forced at gunpoint to hide your face, your aspirations, your very self, beneath a veil to appease some fanatic's version of faith, when you are an ordinary man stranded with your family at a Taliban checkpoint for lack of some document, while the Americans whose mission you served fly off without you, when you are chasing a transport plane on a runway, when you are tumbling through space, the ground coming up fast ... yeah, the answer is also, who cares?

Our hubris and our failures, they echo. They ramify. That was the story of last week, of tiny dots that fell from a U.S. transport plane as it cleaved the sky. Reports identified them as Fida Mohammad and Safiullah Hotak.

Just so we all know: The dots had names.

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The Free Press

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