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The Tap Archives, June 2016



June 1

After Cincinnati Zoo Incident, Finger Pointing But Few Answers

On Saturday, May 28, a three-year old boy fell into the moat of the gorilla exhibit at the famed Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden, resulting in a tragedy that has sparked intense passion and finger-pointing but few answers as to what should be done.

After the child fell into the exhibit, a 400-pound 17-year old gorilla named Harambe investigated and engaged with the boy. Whether or not the gorilla was attempting to protect or harshly play with the child – a distinction around which much online debate has emerged – the giant primate did drag the boy forcefully, leading to the Zoo's decision to kill the gorilla before any serious harm could be done.

Authorities deemed a non-lethal approach, such as using a tranquilizer, too risky as the time that the desired effect would take would allow the agitated Harambe to lash out. The celebrity zookeeper Jack Hanna is one of many industry professionals who have come out in support of the Cincinnati Zoo's actions.

Other conservation experts contend that there were alternatives, as Ian Redmond of the UK-based Gorilla Organisation explained to The Guardian:

Was a lethal shot the only option? No, I don't think so. Were other options tried? You could have offered the gorilla more fruit than he could ever normally imagine in one sitting and then the boy would have become less interesting to him. It seemed like no one was prepared to go into the enclosure.

The one thing that people can seem to agree on it that someone is to blame – the big question is who.

Many online commentators were quick to denounce the child's mother, calling her egregiously neglectful. Witnesses on the scene have claimed that moments before the child fell into the exhibit they overheard him comment to his mother that he wanted to enter the moat.

This anecdotal evidence has thrown fuel on the fire of outrage engulfing the internet. One change.org petition called "Justice for Harambe" has already received nearly 500,000 signatures and goes as far as to call for authorities to investigate the family's home life, as well as for the mother to be held accountable – whatever exactly that means.

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Other commentators, including Mary Elizabeth Williams at Salon, have derided the simplistic blame levied against the boy's family, remarking that "all the internet outrage in the world won't bring Harambe back, or make a hard decision a simple one."

Whether a response to the public's outcry or the result of carefully considered facts, Cincinnati police announced on Tuesday that they would investigate the boy's family and not the safety protocols of the zoo.

While the ease with which the child was able to enter to the enclosure does ring some alarms over zoo security, the fact remains that this is a first for the nearly 150-year old zoo. At the end of the day, zoos pose inherent issues when bringing human spectators face-to-face with wildlife in tight spaces.

Perhaps a better channel for people's passion is to do something proactive rather than chastise and attack a Cincinnati-area family, no matter how cathartic that may be. There are a number of excellent conservation nonprofits, such as those listed below, that could benefit from the support of those eager to keep endangered species – including silver back gorillas like Harambe – alive for generations to come.

The Nature Conservancy

World Wildlife Fund

Natural Resources Defense Council

The Sierra Club

Conservation International

June 2

Superbugs: 'End of the Road' for Antibiotics

Frightening news broke late this spring with the arrival of a superbug in the United States that one U.S. public health official says could lead to "the end of the road" for antibiotics.

A 49-year-old Pennsylvania woman contracted a strain of E. coli that withstands colistin – an antibiotic of last resort used to fight the most dangerous superbugs such as CRE bacteria that kill up to 50 percent of infected patients.

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Various government agencies on both the state and federal level are now working to figure out whether or not any of the Pennsylvania woman's close contacts may also have contracted the strain.

While scientists caution that there is no need for immediate panic in the Pennsylvania case, there is speculation that the colistin-resistant gene found in the bacteria known as mcr-1 could mutate in other, even more lethal strains of bacteria.

As a Department of Defense report notes, the strain "heralds the emergence of truly pan-drug resistant bacteria."

Each year, about 2 million U.S. citizens contract drug-resistant bacterial infections. Superbugs emerge through the process of evolution, through which the bacteria adapts to human-made drugs and develops immunity.

Another leading cause of drug-resistant bacteria is industrial farming. Large scale meat producers lean heavily on antibiotics in order to keep livestock alive in the oftentimes grotesque conditions of industrial feedlots. This essentially creates a breeding ground for deadly bacteria as strains evolve to combat increasing amounts of antibiotics applied by producers.

The approach to this issue requires unified efforts on a number of fronts stretching from animal rights to public health advocacy.

The time it takes for the federal government to move on health measures is alarming. In February, the Obama Administration requested nearly \$2 billion to fight the spread of Zika virus. It took congress more than three months to respond, returning with the offer of a paltry \$622 million.

This is simply unacceptable. Elected officials cannot tie up funding for public health emergencies for partisan ends. Good governance organizations and concerned citizens need to ramp up pressure to break the seemingly chronic deadlock in congress with regard to such time-sensitive, potentially catastrophic issues.

Additionally, animal rights and environmental groups need to keep working toward the reform of industrial meat production. Not only does the industry cause untold environmental damage, contributing immensely to climate change, but it also acts as an incubator for superbugs. While antibiotics use is declining, this unsustainable system warrants a speedy overhaul.

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June 6

John Oliver Buys, Forgives \$15 Million in Debt

Debt plagues large swaths of the U.S. public, preventing Americans from getting ahead as they work to pay off loans and other forms of debt. Credit card debt – also known as revolving debt – alone amounts to \$935.6 billion.

While some of us can afford debt free living, many U.S. citizens fall in debt to get by, working to pay off loans instead of saving to build lives for their families. Some programs aimed at alleviating these gargantuan burdens – such as Obama’s student loan forgiveness program – have provided some relief. Nonetheless, millions of Americans are still haunted by debt collectors.

John Oliver – the host of HBO’s “Last Week Tonight” and former correspondent for “The Daily Show” during the John Stewart era made history Sunday night in an investigative report that looked into the sleaziness of the debt-buying industry.

He also made a lot of debt-stricken families a whole lot happier.

Oliver revealed just how easy it is to get into the debt-buying business by doing it himself. In April, “Last Week Tonight” spent a mere \$50 to incorporate a debt-buying business Mississippi.

“We called it Central Asset Recovery Professionals, or CARP, after the bottom-feeding fish,” Oliver commented on the program.

For less than \$60,000, the show bought \$15 million worth of medical debt located in Texas. As part of the exchange, the satirical (though legally incorporated) CARP also acquired the names, addresses, and (disturbingly) social security numbers of all individuals with debt inside of the bundle.

Instead of collecting, however, Oliver and the show’s producers opted to break Oprah’s record for the largest one-time giveaway on television by forgiving all \$15 million. The show’s generousness – while a one-off affair designed to make headlines – nonetheless pushes us to rethink debt forgiveness as potential avenue for greater economic equality.

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June 6

Vindictive Paul LePage Harasses Environmental Nonprofit

Main Governor Paul LePage is no stranger to controversy. The Tea Party executive has stumbled into a number of embarrassing situations with his penchant for unfiltered, expressive, and often bigoted proclamations.

When discussing Maine's opioid epidemic, LePage blamed out-of-state drug dealers who travel to the state to sell heroine, claiming that "half the time they impregnate a young white girl before they leave."

He has also compared the IRS's actions to those committed by the Gestapo during the Holocaust, and suggested that Maine State Sen. Troy Jackson – a political rival – was the kind of person who would "give it to the people without providing Vaseline." The illusion to forced sexual penetration is jarring indeed.

Recent scare tactics deployed by the governor only further underscore his violent and unstatesman-like character, revealing him to be a strongman leader with little patience for dissent or the right of nonprofit groups to operate free of government harassment.

According to The National Resources Council of Maine (NRCM) – the state's largest environmental nonprofit – LePage has targeted the group's donors in a smear campaign. The governor's office has purportedly sent letters out to the group's supporters, imploring them to cease their financial assistance for NRCM for its opposition to LePage's thoroughly anti-environmental agenda.

Lisa Pohlmann – the organization's executive director – explained the atmosphere of intimidation resulting from LePage's anti-democratic behavior:

Over the past months the governor has produced and publicly displayed a wanted poster about NRCM, attacked us by name in dozens of speeches and radio addresses, and now this week has sent dozens of NRCM members a harassment letter about NRCM...We were founded by Maine people, and after working for 57 years in Maine we can say with total confidence that Gov. LePage is the most anti-environment governor in our history.

This isn't LePage's first assault on nonprofits. Last year, he attempted to increase taxation of nonprofit groups in order to cut taxes for large businesses. His proposed plan would affect food banks, Girl Scout troops, and veterans associations.

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The loose-cannon LePage appears to possess the mercurial characteristics of his preferred presidential candidate Donald Trump, who he endorsed earlier than many other GOP elected officials.

Common sense would have it that LePage's intimidation campaign could turn into a potentially ruinous scandal. Considering his political survival to this point, however, it may make no more a difference than his blatant racism.

June 7

Trey Pearson, Christian Rock Star, Comes Out

Trey Pearson – lead singer of the popular Christian rock band Everyday Sunday – made waves this month, advancing visibility of the LGBTQ community in a social sphere long-considered hostile to non-heteronormative lifestyles.

In a thoughtfully penned and emotionally riveting open letter, Pearson came out as gay.

“I never wanted to be gay. I was scared of what God would think and what all of these people I loved would think about me,” he wrote.

The 35 year-old singer has sold more than a quarter of a million albums with his band, and has toured all 50 states and 20 countries.

In a separate interview, Pearson remarked that accepting his identity as a gay man would not interfere with his longstanding faith: “There is absolutely no conflict with accepting who I am and following Jesus. God wants me to be healthy, authentic, whole, integrated and my truest self.”

The band performs for largely evangelical Christian circles, which are historically unaccepting of gay lifestyles. Those tendencies, however, may be changing, especially as more individuals such as Pearson break the mold for future Christians to openly practice their faith while being honest to themselves.

Read his full letter below:

To my fans and friends:

Most of us reach at least one pivotal moment in our lives that better defines who we are.

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These last several months have been the hardest — but have also ended up being the most freeing months — of my life.

To make an extremely long story short, I have come to be able to admit to myself, and to my family, that I am gay.

I grew up in a very conservative Christian home where I was taught that my sexual orientation was a matter of choice, and had put all my faith into that. I had never before admitted to myself that I was gay, let alone to anyone else. I never wanted to be gay. I was scared of what God would think and what all of these people I loved would think about me; so it never was an option for me. I have been suppressing these attractions and feelings since adolescence. I've tried my whole life to be straight. I married a girl, and I even have two beautiful little kids. My daughter, Liv, is six and my son, Beckham, is two.

I had always romanticized the idea of falling in love with a woman; and having a family had always been my dream. In many ways, that dream has come true. But I have also come to realize a lot of time has passed in my life pushing away, blocking out and not dealing with real feelings going on inside of me. I have tried not to be gay for more than 20 years of my life. I found so much comfort as a teen in 1 Samuel 18-20 and the intimacy of Jonathan and David. I thought and hoped that such male intimacy could fulfill that void I felt in my desire for male companionship. I always thought if I could find these intimate friendships, then that would be enough.

Then I thought everything would come naturally on my wedding night. I honestly had never even made out with a girl before I got married. Of course, it felt anything but natural for me. Trying not to be gay, has only led to a desire for intimacy in friendships which pushed friends away, and it has resulted in a marriage where I couldn't love or satisfy my wife in a way that she needed. Still, I tried to convince myself that this was what God wanted and that this would work. I thought all of those other feelings would stay away if I could just do this right.

When Lauren and I got married, I committed to loving her to the best of my ability, and I had the full intention of spending the rest of my life with her. Despite our best efforts, however, I have come to accept that there is nothing that is going to change who I am.

I have intensely mixed feelings about the changes that have resulted in my life. While I regret the way I was taught to handle this growing up, how much it has hurt me and the unintentional pain I have brought Lauren, I wouldn't have the friendship I now have with her, and we wouldn't have our two amazing, beautiful children. But if I keep trying to push this down it will end up hurting her even more.

I am never going to be able to change how I am, and no matter how healthy our relationship becomes, it's never going to change what I know deep down: that I am gay. Lauren has been the most supportive, understanding, loving and gracious person I could ever ask for, as I have come to face this. And now I am trying to figure out how to co-parent while being her friend, and how to raise our children.

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I have progressed so much in my faith over these last several years. I think I needed to be able to affirm other gay people before I could ever accept it for myself. Likewise, I couldn't expect others to accept me how I am until I could come to terms with it first.

I know I have a long way to go. But if this honesty with myself about who I am, and who I was made by God to be, doesn't constitute as the peace that passes all understanding, then I don't know what does. It is like this weight I have been carrying my whole life has been lifted from me, and I have never felt such freedom.

In sharing this publicly I'm taking another step into health and wholeness by accepting myself, and every part of me. It's not only an idea for me that I'm gay; It's my life. This is me being authentic and real with myself and other people. This is a part of who I am.

I hope people will hear my heart, and that I will still be loved. I'm still the same guy, with the same heart, who wants to love God and love people with everything I have. This is a part of me I have come to be able to accept, and now it is a part of me that you know as well. I trust God to help love do the rest.

– Trey

June 8

Kansas: Anti-Trans Bigotry Prioritized Over Education

While discussion around the nation has focused on North Carolina's so-called "bathroom bill" – the governor-approved legislation barring trans people from using public bathrooms corresponding to their gender – another state has slipped under the radar with regard to its own anti-trans actions.

The Kansas state legislature concluded its 2016 legislative session on Wednesday, June 1 with a resolution opposing the Obama Administration's federal guidelines stipulating restroom equality for transgender students in schools. Conspicuously absent from the legislature's final priorities was the impending crisis facing the state's struggling school system, which may not open for the coming school year pending a case before the state's Supreme Court.

Kansas has struggled to pay for state services since its governor, Sam Brownback, has crusaded for zero income tax and other policies designed to slash government revenue in the name of small government. As a result, education inequality has worsened, resulting in a case brought by four poor school districts alleging that the state government has actively neglected lower-income students.

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The state Supreme Court issued a demand that the government treat all districts equitably. In response, lawmakers effectively reshuffled funds without adding any revenue for school funding or fundamentally addressing the inequalities at the heart of the issue.

After all, with the continued implementation of the governor's stridently anti-tax agenda, where could lawmakers possibly find the additional public dollars necessary for effectively dealing with the discrepancies in educational funding?

The court maintains that the funding system is unconstitutional and thus void, meaning that the entire state's educational system is bereft of funding. If lawmakers do not successfully meet the court's criteria for a just and equitably funded educational system, the state's schools will not open for the next school year for want of a legally recognized framework.

Kansas consistently ranks among the bottom states for educational quality. With the highly partisan, bigoted shenanigans of today's Kansas state legislature, that's a very unsurprising fact.

What makes the present situation so infuriating is the insult to injury of the legislature's anti-transgender resolution. How, in a period of turmoil in which the very basic rights of the state's children are under threat, could elected officials prioritize state-persecution of a minority group?

That's the question worth asking Kansas' elected officials.

June 10

Gloucester's 'Angel Initiative' a Way Out for Heroin Addicts

Over the past two years, the United States' addiction to opioids has come into full view. With users injecting heroin on public transportation in Philadelphia and rural areas such as Vermont witnessing an influx of guns related to the drug trade, the larger ramifications of the opioid epidemic are emerging – and it is not pretty.

Deaths relating to drug abuse are surging, as people turn to substance abuse as a release from the stress of a stagnant economy and flat-lining social mobility. Nationally, 78 people die each day from opioid overdoses.

The cataclysmic rise in heroin use stems largely from widespread prescription pill abuse, a

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result of over a decade's worth of seemingly indiscriminate dissemination from the medical profession of powerful painkillers of the opioid family. After becoming addicted – and running out of prescribed pills – people from all areas, rural and urban, have found a cheap and readily accessible alternative in heroin.

The costs – both economic and social – are immense. But some cities and organizations are exploring ways outside of the failing war on drugs to deal with the issue, treating the the opioid epidemic as a public health emergency rather than a purely criminal matter.

Last year, the City of Gloucester in Massachusetts began the Angel Initiative – a program that permits users to turn in addictive substances in return for a dedicated volunteer to help them find services from housing to drug rehabilitation. Users can participate in the program without incurring any criminal charges relating to drug possession or use.

After a year in operation, the program appears to be working.

Compared to the first five months of 2015 in Gloucester, during which 5 heroin users overdosed, there has only been one overdose death related to heroin in 2016.

According to Gloucester Police Chief Leonard Campanello, the ripple effects of the program are also positive: “It appears that crimes that are ancillary to the disease of addiction—the crimes of desperation: shoplifting, larceny, smash and grabs—have declined since the beginning of the program.”

Indeed, drug-related crime in the city has dropped 27 percent.

But it remains to be seen if the Gloucester's model is adaptable to other cities. Gloucester is a small, ethnically and culturally homogenous city with just under 29,000 inhabitants. It has a high median income and a progressive sensibility – factors that may play into the success of a forward-looking program for which city officials were able allocate funding.

At the very least, however, the Angel Initiative serves as a reminder that an alternative to the ill-begotten war on drugs is feasible. Continuing to criminalize a public health emergency will only further exacerbate the dire conditions plaguing U.S. citizens caught in the throes of addiction.

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June 12

Orlando Shooting: Help Victims of Anti-LGBTQ Hate

Last night, a lone gunman committed the single largest mass shooting in the history of the United States, targeting the LGBTQ community in Orlando, Florida. At least 50 people were killed and more than 50 hospitalized when a man open fired at Pulse nightclub using an AR-15 assault rifle – a weapon commonly deployed by mass shooters of late.

As authorities pursue leads pertaining to the gunman's ideology and political orientation, the nation grieves for the victims of the Orlando shooting, killed at a popular gay bar while celebrating the nationally-recognized gay pride month.

According to media outlets, the perpetrator's father remarked that his son was angered at the sight of two men kissing. This horrific act of violence reminds us of the lingering societal danger of homophobia. Gay rights victories notwithstanding, the LGBTQ community is still vulnerable to the malice and caprice of bigoted individuals and hate groups.

Discussions regarding religious fanaticism and the seemingly endless torrent of gun violence in the United States are sure to follow. The way forward from this tragedy is uncertain. But there are ways that you can help immediately.

Equality Florida – the state's largest LGBTQ civil rights organizations started a GoFundMe campaign to raise money for the victims. Consider donating to not only lessen the tremendous burden on the victims and their families, but also to express solidarity against the wicked hate that precipitated this heinous act.

June 13

Congress Could Have Prevented Orlando Shooting

(The gunman who killed 50 people at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando used an AR-15 assault rifle, a military-grade weapon that the NRA wishes to keep legal for everyone to purchase)

The public's response to the tragic Orlando shooting on Sunday has largely been hopeful and loving. Already, Equality Florida has raised more than \$1 million through a GoFundMe campaign on behalf of victims and their families. Voices from around the world

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have spoken out against violence and fear and in solidarity with the LGBTQ community.

Other responses – however – leave something to be desired. Presidential candidate Donald Trump appeared to congratulate himself for crediting the attack to Islamic extremists. A rather tone-deaf move as investigators still navigated the crime scene identifying victims.

Also, many politicians struggled to name the LGBTQ community as the target, belying the very real, continued presence of homophobia in our society.

Remaining optimistic in the face of nihilistic murder is a powerful statement, and the country appears ready to embrace this path. There are, however, real steps that politicians can take to prevent bigoted individuals and hate groups from exacting the awful toll that we witnessed this week.

Congress, in fact, had an opportunity last year to prevent individuals such as Omar Mateen – the perpetrator of the Orlando terror – from acquiring the kind of military-grade weapons that were used to kill 50 innocents at the Pulse nightclub.

Shortly after the San Bernardino shooting late last year, Senator Diane Feinstein sponsored legislation to block suspected terrorists from buying weapons. Virtually all Republican senators, however, voted against the measure.

The NRA's influence among elected officials is well-known. Any attempt at even modest gun control – including the popularly supported, common sense effort to prevent suspected terrorists from buying weapons – is anathema to the extremist organization, which maintains a radical and uncompromising look at the second amendment.

As politicians begin blaming political correctness or targeting particular ethnic and religious groups over the Orlando shooting, remember that there was a very real chance to prevent this tragedy. An unstable and capricious individual such as Mateen hardly resembles the well-connected and resourceful terrorists that pull off carefully planned and coordinated attacks. The spontaneous, lone-wolf assault on Pulse nightclub is of a different mould – one that the United States can readily combat with the political willpower to move past the dangerous intransigence of the NRA.

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June 14

WNBA Turns 20 in Milestone for Female Athletes

The WNBA has reached a huge milestone this year as the league prepares to enter its 20th season.

For two decades, the WNBA has shown the nation's young girls that they, too, have the opportunity to show their stuff in paint on some of the nation's highest profile courts.

There are still more battles to fight for gender equity in sports – especially within the WNBA itself. While the average WNBA salary has improved over the years – it currently hovers around \$75,000 – the fact remains that female players are nonetheless paid a smaller share of overall league revenues compared to their male counterparts.

This arbitrary difference corresponds to the lingering gender pay gap that stretches across all industries. The high-profile character of WNBA stars, however, uniquely positions them to act as advocates on this important issue.

As fans look forward to seeing whether or not decorated college star Breanna Stewart – who is making her rookie debut after a string of wild successes with the Connecticut Huskies – can give Diana Taurasi a run for her money as the best WNBA player, we'll continue to bring you coverage on gender equity in sports.

June 15

Dems. Take Over Senate Floor in Push for Gun Control

In breaking news, Democrats have taken control of the Senate floor in a filibuster-style move designed to push the chamber to do something about the nation's epidemic of gun violence.

You can watch the takeover live here.

Spearheaded by Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut, this bold strategy emerges just days after the worst mass shooting in U.S. history. At the Pulse nightclub – a popular gay bar in Orlando, Florida – a lone gunman killed 49 people using an AR-15. This particular assault rifle was also used in the Newtown shooting, which occurred in Senator Murphy's home state in 2012, claiming the lives of 6 adults and 20 children.

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Upon embarking on the floor takeover, Murphy remarked:

This is a different moment today than it was at the end of last week. There is a newfound imperative for this body to find a way to come together and take action, to try to do our part to stem this epidemic of gun violence and in particular this epidemic of mass shootings. There is a fundamental disconnect with the American people when these tragedies continue to occur and we just move forward with business as usual. So I'm going to remain on this floor until we get some signal, some sign that we can come together on these two measures, that we can get a path forward on addressing this epidemic in a meaningful bipartisan way.

As we discussed on The Tap earlier this week, congress had an opportunity to prevent this week's massacre last year when a measure to ban weapon sales to suspected terrorists went before the legislature. Republicans tied the measure to legislation designed to repeal the Affordable Care Act in a deliberate torpedoing of even this moderate, widely supported gun control measure.

Corey Booker, Senator from New Jersey, has also taken the floor today in support of Murphy's filibuster. "What we're seeking is not radical," Booker said this afternoon, "What we're seeking is not something that is partisan. What we're seeking is common sense."

The Tap will continue to provide coverage on the fallout following the anti-LGBTQ massacre in Orlando and the ongoing debate on gun violence that is sweeping the nation.

June 17

Trump's Money Claims: Less Than Honest

Donald Trump – the presumptive Republican nominee for the 2016 presidential bid – lauds himself for his business acumen, a characteristic that has supposedly generated untold riches.

How large that wealth is, however, is still clouded in secrecy, as the Trump campaign insists that it has no intention of releasing Trump's tax returns – something every candidate in modern history has done.

Critic's view his bluster as a smokescreen for what may actually be a smaller pot, earned less by Trump's business smarts and more by the bizarre lifestyle brand he has cultivated.

As reports concerning Trump's casino empire in Atlantic City emerge, there seems to be a growing body of evidence to prove this assertion.

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Trump has bragged that his casinos and assets in the east coast gambling capital – which has been on a long, steep economic decline – triumphed over those of his competitors. Documents indicate otherwise, as Vox has helpfully broken down.

Trump considered financial success the enormous earnings he made, which stemmed largely from personal bonuses and salaries, paid for in part by selling junk bonds and bilking investors and shareholders of earnings. Indeed, his public company, according to Vox, “never turned a profit, leaving behind a trail of losses for shareholders and bondholders, and unpaid bills to contractors and subcontractors.” He may have earned money, but his businesses failed disastrously.

There seems to be a parallel between his suspect dealings in Atlantic City and his supposedly self-financed campaign. As it turns out, much of the funding he put toward his primary campaign was structured as loans to be paid back at a later date – presumably through further fundraising and financial support from the RNC.

Financial support from the Republican establishment – however – may not amount to much. Republican donors are allegedly nervous about supporting a Trump bid for the White House, which has many party officials wringing their hands as Trump continues to insult more demographics and double-down on certifiably racist policy proposals.

Their concerns are not unfounded. Trump’s flagrant bigotry and strong-man demeanor has sparked an exodus of moderate Republicans from the party.

If the GOP and its donors don’t show up for Trump, perhaps the bombastic candidate’s financial gymnastics won’t play out as well for his political campaign as they did for his abysmal casino ventures.

June 20

Brexit: Racism Fuels ‘Leave’ Campaign

As the United States’ most bizarre general election campaign in recent memory has steamrolled forward at a fever pitch, Americans could be forgiven for overlooking events in Britain which – depending on how they turn out – may shake up international markets and fundamentally alter geo-politics for years to come.

That ignorance was completely understandable, that is, until last week when Labour MP Jo Cox was murdered in public by a nationalist with links to neo-Nazi organizations.

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Cox was a passionate anti-racist campaigner, whose philanthropic work included stints at Oxfam and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The attacker, Tommy Mair, announced his name in court as “Death to traitors, freedom for Britain.”

His rhetoric appears to imitate that of the pro-Brexit camp, which is pushing for the UK to leave the European Union (EU) through a referendum on June 23. Largely spearheaded by far-right elements in Britain’s political scene, the “leave” camp has invoked Syrian refugees and Islam in its quest to stir nationalistic fervor and abandon the European project.

The great majority of social and economic experts agree that a Brexit would be catastrophic not only for the British Isles, but for the rest of the developed world as well – including the United States.

The political uncertainty that would follow the single largest split from the EU since the project began would curtail global investment and international trade. Brexit could decrease the net economic output of the world’s advanced economies by half a percentage point by 2019. The IMF predicts that the UK’s departure from the EU would result in a decline of economic growth by 5.6 over the next three years.

For the United States, the head researcher at FIS – Laurence Wormald – predicts that a Brexit would send the S&P spiraling by 5 percent, and that the volatility of the broader stock market could reach 40 percent.

The clearly negative implications of a Brexit, however, hasn’t stopped The UK Independence Party (UKIP) – perhaps the largest driver of the pro-Brexit campaigning – from continuing its crusade. The party’s leader, Nigel Farage, has stood by the racist remarks of party members, underscoring the very real undercurrent of xenophobia that is behind the “leave” campaign. J.K. Rowling – author of the Harry Potter series – has accused Farage of deploying “Nazi propaganda” throughout the public debate on the referendum.

In addition to the concrete damages to the global financial system, the departure of one of the EU’s largest members could spell doom for the multi-national body, which has been credited for cooling diplomatic tensions in the historically volatile region following the cataclysmic events of World War II.

The Tap will bring you further coverage of the vote’s results this Wednesday, and analysis on how those results will impact the Social Good moving forward.

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June 22

Orlando Shooting: ‘Angels’ Block Westboro Bigots

(“Angels” arrive on the scene to help block Westboro Baptist Church members from funerals for Orlando shooting victims)

The Westboro Baptist Church – a fringe, virulently bigoted and homophobic congregation based in Kansas – has made headlines throughout the years, picketing national tragedies in efforts to broadcast its hateful message.

Following the mass shooting in Orlando, it was safe to assume that the congregation would stage some form of action. The Pulse nightclub was popular with the local LGBTQ community, meaning that its clientele is one of the primary targets of the church’s animus.

But when the congregation showed up to protest funerals for the shooting victims, a number of community members and allies staged a massive counter rally in order to prevent the anti-LGBTQ protestors from reaching the mourners.

“Angels” from the Orlando Shakespeare Theatre donned large white wings to block Westboro members from view, while 200 people joined together to form a human chain.

This outpouring of love and humanity – significantly larger than the hate it stood opposite from – is a heartening display in the wake of tragedy, as well as a sign that the hate the precipitated the Orlando shooting has no place in our society.

June 24

Brexit: A Blow to the Social Good

To the shock of much the world, Britons voted to leave the European Union (EU) on Wednesday, marking the largest blow to the multi-national political body since its foundation.

Spearhead largely by the fringe rightwing, the “leave” campaigners imbued their rhetoric with racist undertones, invoking immigration and refugees as reasons for Britain to withdraw from engagement with the European continent.

While there are certainly problems with the massive bureaucracy of the EU, the consequences of leaving are already in full force. The British pound hit a 31 year-low, as Britain fell from its place as the world’s fifth biggest economy and the FTSE 100 in London

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To further compound the issues facing Britain, there are renewed separatist stirrings within Scotland. Additionally, Sinn Féin – the Irish Republican party – has called for polling in Northern Ireland to gauge interest in unifying with Ireland. Both the populations of Scotland and Northern Ireland voted in favor of staying within the EU.

While Northern Ireland is unlikely to leave Britain anytime soon, the great surge in interest that the Scottish National Party (the leading driver for Scottish independence) has enjoyed in the wake of this week’s referendum indicates that the country may buck Great Britain and rejoin the EU of its own accord. This hypothetical disintegration within Great Britain would leave a greatly diminished England, with significantly less economic and geopolitical might.

Brexit is bad news for the Social Good. The European project – while imperfect – represents an ideal in which nations work together to forge solutions to issues facing the globe. With the number of displaced people and refugees at world historic highs, the threat of climate change growing by the day, and regional instabilities in Eastern Europe, the fracturing cooperation among European nations is a dark omen for what lies ahead.

If Google searches count for anything, many Britons are already regretting their vote. It appears, in fact, that many voters didn’t fully understand the EU when they went to the polls. The energy behind the “leave campaign” was largely derived from racist fear-mongering, as well as a distrust of elites and experts who warned of the consequences of Brexit. As Britain progresses along the rough road ahead, perhaps enough of its electorate will have a change of heart and reembrace international cooperation – if only for Britain’s own wellbeing.

June 27

Brexit is Bad News for the Environment

As the world begins piecing together the ramifications stemming from Britain’s exit from the EU (also known as Brexit), one particular victim of the ensuing political chaos is becoming increasingly apparent: the environment.

Around 70 percent of environmental regulation currently in place in Britain is the result of EU legislation. As British officials begin slashing away the body of EU regulations left over from the country’s membership, important regulations designed to lower carbon levels or promote conservation could be thrown out. The climate skepticism of the “leave” campaign’s chief proponents is a worrying indicator that David Cameron’s successor may very well preside over a government that does just that.

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Boris Johnson – the former London mayor and leading “leave” member of the Tories – has published editorials dismissing climate change as a fabrication, and once argued that snow is evidence that climate change is a myth. Johnson could very well be top of the list of Tories to assume the role of prime minister.

The other primary driver for the “leave” campaign was UKIP, a rightwing nationalist party that has exercised xenophobia and racist fear mongering to achieve its political ends. Nigel Farage, the party’s leader, has openly expressed his desire to cut pollution limits on power stations.

Those in the “leave” campaign often cited the red tape of the EU as one of the primary motivations for Britain to leave the multinational body. Combined with their climate skepticism, they would likely enjoy seeing environmental regulations simply fall by the wayside along with the rest of the EU law that formerly applied to Britain.

Furthermore, Britain’s pledge in the Paris climate deal was included in the EU’s pledge. The nation would have to re-ratify the deal under David Cameron’s successor. If pro-Brexit politicians’ science-defying beliefs indicate anything, such a pledge may not be forthcoming.

Pro-environment forces in Britain will certainly keep up the fight for a cleaner, more secure future for the environment. Their job, however, may have gotten a bit tougher.

June 29

Berlin Joins Fossil Fuel Divestment Movement

The city of Berlin is doing its part to combat climate change, voting last week to purge the German capital’s pension fund of its investments in fossil fuels. Berlin’s parliament passed the legislation as part of the city’s long-term goal to become “climate neutral” by 2050.

The new policy will rid the \$852.8 million fund of investments in RWE and E.ON – two German companies – as well as the French company Total.

Berlin joins a group of other Western cities acting as examples for the divestment movement, which looks to eliminate investments in dirty energy in order to lessen the financial incentive of investing in fossil fuels.

Other cities that have taken a similar stand against dirty energy include Stockholm, Paris, Copenhagen, Oslo, Seattle, Portland, and Melbourne.

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According to the activist nonprofit We Are Power Shift, a group that promotes divestment as a strategy for fighting climate change, the divestment movement

...started on university campuses, but has spread to cities, faith-based institutions, foundations, pension funds, and more, all over the world. Our goal is to diminish the influence and power of the fossil fuel industry in the market, our political system, and in the social conscience overall.

Christoph Meyer – a leading campaigner with Fossil Free Berlin – remarked on the Berlin parliament’s decision:

Berlin’s decision to blacklist fossil fuel companies is the latest victory for the divestment movement, which serves to remove the social license from companies whose business model pushes us into climate catastrophe. We will keep a close eye on the administration to make sure it upholds today’s commitment and urge the city to now take quick steps to break its reliance on coal power.

While there is debate about the effectiveness of divestment, advocates see it as a strategy to speed up the process through which investments become “stranded.” As public attention grows and support for regulation intensifies, the idea is for investors writ large to grow weary of such ventures due to the prospect of further diminishing profits.

As more of the world’s biggest urban centers jump on board, it’s safe to say that this push is gaining more-and-more momentum.