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OUR VIEW



Audie Dennis (left) from Active Lifestyles, presents a check from the proceeds of the Joplin Memorial Run in 2022. GLOBE | ROGER NOMER

Congrats, Audie Dennis

Congratulations to Audie Dennis on being named Joplin's Outstanding Citizen of the Year. It is a deserved honor, and while there's a lot we could talk about regarding the part he has played in the community, we think it is especially fitting now, given his role as founder of the Joplin Memorial Run, the last of which is May 18. That's what we want to talk about. The run gave us a way to honor the victims of the 2011 tornado and to come together as a community, and each year the run has been another step on the road to Joplin's recovery. Ruth Sawkins, of Rufus Racing, who has worked with Dennis, said: "Audie was insightful enough to see in the moment the opportunity." Over the years, tens of thousands have participated in the annual memorial run, and hundreds of thousands of dollars have been raised for, among other things, building two new homes for tornado survivors, putting a new roof on Stained Glass Theatre and installing a playground for the rebuilt Bill and Virginia Leften Center for Autism. And, of course, placing the memorial sculpture at the Harry M. Cornell Arts & Entertainment Complex. Sawkins praised Dennis for his passion and dedication to the running community, but also to making sure the 161 victims of the storm are remembered. "He has always had such a commitment for the people," Sawkins said. "He has given a lot of himself." There's a way you can join the chamber in honoring Dennis — sign up for this year's run, either as a participant or a volunteer. There's still room for the former and a need for the latter. A Walk of Silence honoring the victims of the 2011 tornado will be held at 7 p.m. Friday, May 17. Races will be held May 18 and include: **• THE FREEMAN HALF-MARATHON.** The entry fee is now \$82, but it will go to \$85 on May 5. **• THE SPARKLIGHT 10K,** which costs \$55 now and goes to \$60 on May 5. **• THE LIBERTY 5K,** which is now \$45 and goes to \$50 on May 5. **• THE SIGN DESIGNS KIDS MILE RUN,** which is \$20 and will remain that cost. Race officials initially said they were expecting upward of 2,500 runners this year, but have shot past that. Thank you, Audie Dennis, for the good you have done for this community.



Court must protect public's right to enjoy their community parks

Public parks belong to the public, right? A billionaire can't cordon off an acre of Golden Gate Park for his private party. But can a poor person — or anyone who claims they can't afford a home — take over public spaces where children play and families experience nature?



FROMA HARROP

Columnist

That is the question now before the Supreme Court in *Grants Pass v. Johnson*. Before going into particulars, note that both Republican and Democratic politicians think the answer should be "no." That leaves activists who support the right of "the homeless" to take over public property. They want a "yes." The case is a challenge to a ruling by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, in San Francisco, that cities cannot evict homeless campers if there are more of them than the local shelters can accommodate. It stems from an ordinance issued by Grants Pass, Oregon, that strictly limits the opportunity to erect a home on public spaces. It forbids even wrapping oneself in a blanket while sitting or lying in public. A conservative Ninth Circuit judge, Daniel Bress, issued an angry response to the ruling that, critics say, has actually encouraged the sprawling tent encampments tormenting the nine Western states in the court's jurisdiction. It's been noted that in the four years since the decision, homelessness in the states the Ninth Circuit covers grew by about 25% while falling in the rest of the country. Bress urged the judges to just look out the windows of their San Francisco courthouse. They will see, he said,

"homelessness, drug addiction, barely concealed narcotics dealing, severe mental health impairment, the post-COVID hollowing out of our business districts."

Gavin Newsom, Democratic governor of California, joins in the criticism. The *Grants Pass* decision, he says, has "impeded not only the ability to enforce basic health and safety measures, but also the ability to move people into available shelter beds and temporary housing."

The debate over the rights of the homeless has always stumbled over an agreed definition of the homeless population. Some may be families unable to meet rising rents. Some are mentally ill. Some are addicts, while others are "drug tourists." Some reject the accommodations at shelters, preferring to sleep under the stars. Is the solution to let any of these groups take over parks where children play? Is it to let them visit squalor on the very business districts cities need to pay for public services, including theirs? The city of Los Angeles holds that homeless camps deny pedestrians and the disabled use of the streets. Cities in Arizona have argued that the law is simply unworkable. The enormous encampment in Phoenix has reportedly cost Arizona millions of dollars and years of litigation. Drawing lines isn't always easy. Can a city criminalize

We don't pretend here to have an answer for the homeless problem. Because the population is diverse, the answers must also be diverse. But one answer can't be to strip away the public's right to use the public spaces that ultimately belong to them.

public urination by someone who doesn't have access to a toilet? What about lighting a fire to cook on? Addiction is not a crime, though it is constitutional to punish someone for using illegal drugs. It may be necessary to dust off a term coined by John Galbraith in the 1950s, though in a way the economist did not intend. It's the existence in this country of what he called "private affluence, public squalor." While the urban rich may have five acres at their country house for their kids to play on, their housekeepers' children have only public parks as their green playground. We don't pretend here to have an answer for the homeless problem. Because the population is diverse, the answers must also be diverse. But one answer can't be to strip away the public's right to use the public spaces that ultimately belong to them.

FOLLOW FROMA HARROP on Twitter at @FromaHarrop.

YOUR VIEW

Homelessness report to city misses the mark

The March 18 report to the city (on homelessness) had a lot of cut-and-paste, internet links and national information, and less about Joplin, possibly because the number of responses to the local survey was low compared to the population. It is disappointing most recommendations, such as the one-stop shop (navigation centers), increased case management and the need for better data accountability, were already identified by community members. The rationale for paying almost \$100,000 for this assessment is to allow the city to apply for funding. If the use of expected funds does not create meaningful changes, the assessment is an expensive failure.

I hoped to learn more for that price. What would be helpful ways to increase affordable housing? Per the report, cost of rents in Joplin increased 200%, much higher than the national trend. Are the corporate-owned rentals increasing the cost of all rentals? If so, can that be balanced by how permits are issued? Who are the leaders focused on local sustainable housing? Years ago, Kansas City passed an incentive for the arts where developers pay a portion of the cost of the project to fund the arts. Could Joplin do something similar with historical restoration (funded mostly through grants) and new business construction to create a funding stream for affordable housing.

I did not see use of enforcement of city ordinances as deterrent to crime. Ordinances are already in place. Would exploring the relationship between the arrest, conviction and sentencing help decrease repeat offenders? A return to drug and/or mental health courts?

As a therapist in Joplin for many years, I see residents who suffered childhood trauma, substance abuse and have a mental health diagnosis who are employed with sustainable housing and health care benefits. While not all homeless or other underfunctioning persons are able to work traditional jobs, most can contribute in a manner that gives them dignity. One such initiative is a peer mentor program where those who have been there help others using free lunch sites to teach skills needed for success? Shelters are necessary. The solution is not more shelter space but reducing the need for space. Extensive entitlements impair individuals building on their strengths. I found the Sharity assessment to have missed this reality. Diminishing a person's capability because they have struggles is disrespectful to them and the community we all share.

Kathy Martin
Joplin

Verse

'Rejoice always.'

1 Thessalonians 5:16

Write us

We reserve the right to edit letters for length, clarity, good taste and libel. **Email:** letters@joplinglobe.com **Fax:** 417-623-8598 **Mail:** Letters to the Editor Joplin Globe 117 E. Fourth St. Joplin, MO 64801

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A history of Missouri House speakers, pros and cons

The House Ethics Committee investigation of Speaker Dean Plocher reminds me of the recent history of House speakers who ended their time in office under a legal or ethical cloud. Over the years, I've covered more than my share of House speakers who ended their tenure under a cloud of suspicion — with three forced to resign early. In 1976, Democrat Richard Rabbitt resigned to run for lieutenant governor. But it turned out he was under federal investigation that ultimately led to conviction for seeking funds for support of legislation backed by transportation interests. In 1996, Democrat Bob Griffin resigned as House speaker shortly before federal indictments were issued involving efforts for special interests. His 15 years as speaker set a Missouri record for a House speaker that will not be repeated without repeal of legislative term limits. Griffin was one of the most



PHILL BROOKS

Columnist

powerful and effective speakers I have covered. In 2009, legislative term limits forced House Speaker Rod Jetton out of office after serving a full four-year term as speaker. However, he subsequently was investigated for a pay-for-play scheme involving legislation affecting adult entertainment businesses. No indictments were issued, but he did plead guilty to a sexual assault charge. Plocher recently hired Jetton to be his chief of staff. In 2011, Republican Steve Tilley resigned as speaker five months before his term as speaker would have ended, citing a desire to spend more time with family and to become a lobbyist. However, he subsequently faced FBI scrutiny for his lobbying

efforts, but was not charged with a crime. In 2015, Republican House Speaker John Diehl resigned just months into his speakership after reports he had been sending sexually inappropriate text messages to a 19-year-old legislative intern. Diehl resigned after he failed to win support from a closed-door caucus of fellow Republican House members. Diehl's tenure as speaker lasted less than six months. Obviously, criminal investigations and loss of support from party colleagues were significant factors for those who resigned before their terms in office expired and/or who dropped future political aspirations. But what remains is that they ultimately recognized it was time to go. I would be remiss if I did not list the speakers I've covered who left without being under a cloud of scandal. In 1977, Democrat Ken Rothman described himself in a St. Louis Post-Dis-

patch article as a "reform candidate" when he ran for governor. He sure was. He cited his leadership in getting the state's Sunshine law requiring open government meetings and records and campaign finance restrictions. Realize, when Rothman was speaker, there was a strong conservative faction of legislative Democrats that Rothman was able to win over for governmental accountability measures. In 2000, Democrat Steve Gaw completed eight years as speaker. His Facebook page stands as a reflection of his legislative service: "I am a tree planted by the water bearing fruit when possible." I remember him as a moderate and a public policy wonk, particularly on utility issues. He ultimately became chair of the utility-regulating Public Service Commission. In 2003, Catherine Hanaway became the first woman Missouri House Speaker after she orga-

nized a campaign that won GOP control of the House that Republicans continue to hold today. As a former federal prosecutor and journalism graduate, she was a tremendous source for reporters. She was completely candid with reporters and did not resist tough questions. So often in my interviews with Hanaway, she would respond to a question with "that's a gotcha-question." She usually was correct, but she always answered my "gotcha questions." Ron Richard was one of the most effective legislative leaders I've covered. He won support in a Republican-controlled legislature for an increase in the state's motor-fuel sales tax. Beyond his ability to forge agreements, he also was a devoted historian about the General Assembly and its traditions.

PHILL BROOKS has been a Missouri Statehouse reporter since 1970, making him dean of the Statehouse press corps.

Big change coming downtown, but you won't see it

When my friend Natalie opens the blinds in her downtown Joplin loft each morning, her home is almost always flooded with light. Living a few stories up from street level with an unobstructed view has its advantages, after all.

The recently renovated apartment Natalie calls home offers more than just great lighting and fantastic views, however. There's nearby parking, as well as coffee shops and restaurants within walking distance. The building itself, replete with exposed brick walls, high ceilings and massive windows, is full of historical charm.

There's ample space for a home office, and plenty of room to stretch, dance, meditate and connect with her online followers.

And compared to her previous home in Austin, Texas, it's also more affordable, which means that Natalie, who works remotely for a cyber-security company and also teaches online health and wellness courses, has a bigger budget for world travel — something she often wisely takes advantage of.

Natalie's lifestyle might sound like a dream, but rest assured that



KIMBERLY ZERKEL

Columnist

it is a reality many young professionals are currently living across Joplin.

It was my reality, as well — one that I'm reminded of as I look out of Natalie's window and see my former downtown loft across the street.

Not only did moving to Joplin from larger cities provide both my friend and I the opportunity to have more apartment space, but it allowed me to save and purchase a home — a goal which would have been difficult or perhaps even impossible had I remained in California.

Low cost of living is one of the reasons The Wall Street Journal named Joplin as the second best city in the United States for remote work ("Top 10 Places for Remote Workers," February 2023).

This high ranking was also due in part to our city's low unemployment rate. We came in second only to our neighbors in Springfield, who won first place due to proximity to an airport with more flight options, access to

a wider range of amenities — and available high-speed broadband internet.

But thanks to a recent city-approved agreement with the company Allo Fiber for the construction of fiber-optic broadband service in the city, the competition between Joplin and Springfield might be getting a little stiffer.

The arrival of fiber optic — buried cables made of tiny, bundled glass fibers that transmit data through pulses of light — is on its way to Joplin.

My limited understanding of the technology is this: Fiber optic is used to provide internet connection, telephone service and even cable television access.

It is considered to be faster, more efficient and more reliable than traditional cable, which transfers electric pulses through copper wiring.

It can be more affordable to upgrade over time and, because it's buried, is less susceptible to severe weather.

These elements make it crucial for Joplin's remote workers, whose entire livelihood relies on a steady connection.

"This is going to be a

game-changer for me and for so many others who work from home," says Natalie. "It's not just that faster upload and download times make our workday easier. With buried fiber optic, I don't have to worry about not being able to work because of weather or power lines going down."

With more diverse housing, including downtown apartments, becoming available — such as the newly completed Pennington Lofts, which will host First Friday WineShare on May 3 — and the arrival of fiber optic, Joplin is poised to become not only more attractive to remote workers from other cities, but a place that our current high school and college students, who now have global jobs at their fingertips, might be more inclined to call home for a lifetime.

When Troy Bolander, director of Planning, Development and Neighborhood Services for the city of Joplin, began advocating for fiber-optic broadband, however, he couldn't have foreseen the need to bolster our remote worker economy.

Rather, it was in response to the May 2011 tornado, which devas-

tated, among so many countless things, Joplin's data infrastructure.

"We didn't want to build back the same," Troy says. "We wanted to build back better."

The nearly 13-year journey of bringing fiber optic to Joplin, which, Troy points out, exists in rural communities and larger cities but has been overlooked in towns such as Joplin due to size — has been paved with careful consideration and studies showing that our current system was inadequate.

Far beyond bolstering a downtown remote-worker population, upgrading proved necessary for online learning, telehealth, and the future of our local economy, including jobs in transportation and industrial manufacturing.

Put plainly, in a world where the information superhighway exists, a town having fast and reliable internet access is as essential as paved roads.

Troy further emphasizes this fact by saying, "History has shown that cities must be connected to be successful."

WRITER KIMBERLY ZERKEL can be reached at news@joplinglobe.com.

House Speaker Mike Johnson should be celebrated as a hero

Author Herman Wouk captured well how to understand heroism. "Heroes are not supermen; they are good men who embody — by the cast of destiny — the virtue of their whole people in a great hour," observed Wouk.



STAR PARKER

Columnist

We have today an American hero in the name of House Speaker Mike Johnson.

Anyone with eyes open knows the world today is a very dangerous place.

Johnson, a conservative Republican and a devout Christian, knows that the way for it to become even more dangerous is for the leader of the free world to withdraw from its responsibilities as such.

In the face of threats from some within his own party, in the face of the possibility of a purge like that which happened to his predecessor Kevin McCarthy, Johnson stepped up, rounded up 101 Republican votes in the House and, together with Democrats, passed a \$95 billion military aid bill for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan.

As a Christian, Johnson understands that there is no understanding of what freedom is without appreciation that there is good and evil in this world.

Our tendency in our country is to emphasize individual rights when we think about freedom.

But the equal and opposite side of rights is responsibilities. Without responsibility, whether as individuals or as a nation, freedom is gone.

As President Ronald Reagan famously observed, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free."

Speaking to reporters after the vote, Johnson noted that this is a "critical time" and that "Xi (China) and Vladimir Putin and Iran really are an axis of evil."

This is not a matter of our nation aspiring to be the world's policeman. It is matter of knowing that the force of evil cannot be ignored and the price of believing that it can be ignored only grows and becomes increasingly more dangerous.

Is this a matter of focusing abroad at the expense of what is happening at home?

Johnson has done us all a favor through his principles and courage. We have great challenges at home, but we cannot ignore what's happening around us.

Certainly not.

If a hero, in the words of Herman Wouk, embodies the "virtue" of his or her people, how do we define the virtue of the American people?

It's about the principles of a free nation under God.

We also face great danger at home as we have departed from these principles.

The \$95 billion that will go in aid abroad is peanuts compared to what we waste at home in spending programs that do nothing.

The Biden administration has appropriated \$80 billion to the IRS to bolster tax collection.

But at the same time, Biden has submitted a 2025 budget to Congress that increases federal spending by an estimated \$800 billion.

We are now trillions of dollars in the red as result of bankrupt entitlement programs that are basically socialism. These programs are gushing red ink because they are not about, and never have been about, American principles of freedom and personal responsibility.

We, of course, need to assure that those who immigrate to our country come to embrace the principles that make our country great.

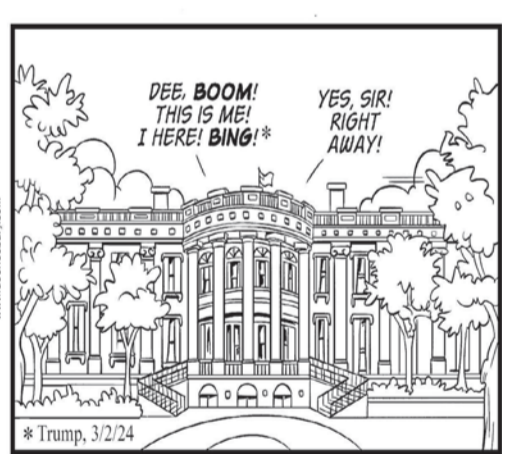
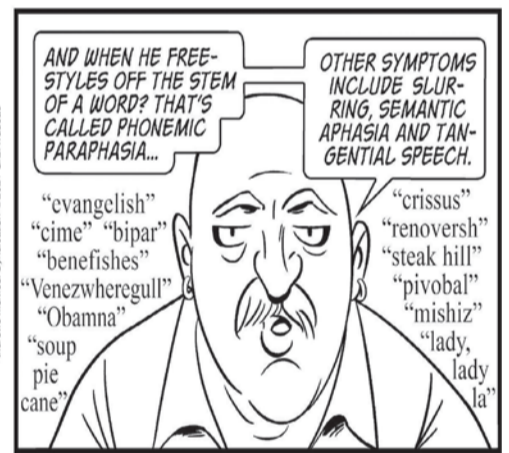
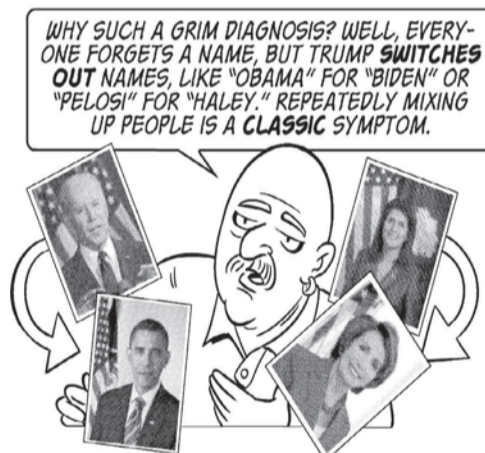
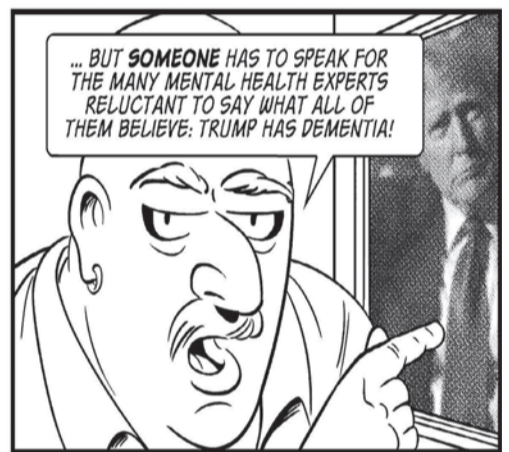
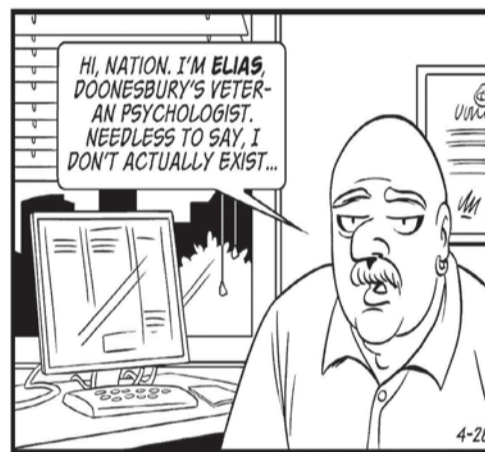
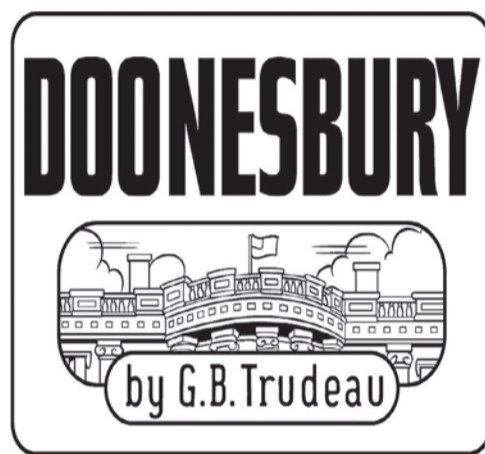
But Republicans need to contend with a president and his party who have long abandoned those principles.

Enough Democrats do seem to understand the importance of defending our principles abroad, and here Republicans and Democrats must work together.

So it's not a matter of either/or. Freedom is about knowing that we have choices, that there is good and evil, and we must fight evil everywhere by choosing the good.

Johnson has done us all a favor through his principles and courage. We have great challenges at home, but we cannot ignore what's happening around us.

STAR PARKER is president of the Center for Urban Renewal and Education and host of the weekly television show "Cure America with Star Parker."



Biden must find the strength to stand strong against his left wing

On May 13, 1939, the Hamburg America Line passenger ship MS St. Louis left Hamburg, Germany, for Havana, Cuba, with a manifest of 937 passengers. Most were Jewish refugees escaping Nazi Germany. She dropped anchor in Havana Harbor on May 27, but a previous change in Cuban immigration policy invalidated the majority of the passengers' visas and by the end of the ship's five days in port, only 28 were allowed to disembark — 22 Jews, four Spanish citizens and two Cuban nationals.

Capt. Gustav Schroder then set his ship toward the American coastline, where he would circle off the Florida coast in hopes the United States would accept the remaining 907 refugees still aboard — refugees who could see the flicker of the lights of Miami, some even sending cables to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who responded to none.

The Coast Guard was ordered to prevent the ship from landing and what is now known as the "Voyage of the Damned" began heading north. When the Canadian govern-



GEOFF CALDWELL

Columnist

ment refused entry, the St. Louis arrived at the Port of Antwerp on June 17, 1939. (Schroder had refused to return the ship to Germany, knowing too well his passengers' fates if he did.) England accepted 288 with France, Belgium and the Netherlands agreeing to take the rest. Then came

the Nazi occupation and post-war research shows 254 of those returned to Europe perished in the Holocaust.

For as much good as this country has done for the world, our history also has its stains. The MS St. Louis is one of them.

Just shy of nine years later, the war over and the world rebuilding, at eleven minutes after midnight on May 14, 1948, President Harry Truman took a step toward addressing Roosevelt's stain and put the United States on record as the first nation to acknowledge the new, independent state of Israel.

In 1962 President John F. Kennedy, in a private meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir, is quoted as telling her, "The United States has a special relationship with Israel in the Middle East, really comparable only to that which it has with Britain over a wide range of world affairs." He backed that up by selling Israel the advanced Hawk anti-aircraft missile system.

While there have been ups and downs in the relationship over the years, all in all it has remained strong and kept the only democracy in the region from being overrun by hostile neighbors.

Two of the most surprising events in recent years came during the Trump administration.

First was officially recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital city and moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem — a move that saw the new embassy open 70 years to the date after Truman's acknowledgment.

Second, the Abraham Accords, and the normalization of relations between Israel, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan and the United Arab Emir-

ates — the first step in seeing the more moderate Arab states aligning with Israel against the most dangerous nation in the region: Iran.

The U.S.-Israel relationship took a giant leap backward with the election of President Joe Biden and an immediate pivot back to the Obama-era appeasement of Iran — appeasement that has left Saudi Arabia and other nations wondering if the U.S. can still be trusted. Prior to the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas terrorist attacks, Saudi Arabia and Israel were in talks to normalize relations — normalization that would crush Iran's dreams of hegemony over the region. Talks are now on hold as Israel fights for its survival.

In the immediate aftermath of the Hamas atrocities, Biden was steadfast and strong. Today? Not so much. Yes, he still says the words but here at home he's starting to waver.

While antisemitism and violence against Jews has erupted on university campuses and streets and bridges in cities across the country have been blocked by pro-Palestinian (some even pro-

Hamas), Biden has been sliding more and more into trying to have it both ways.

As of this writing, he still has not denounced the new rash of protests and violence over the past week. He had a chance on Wednesday while making remarks on his signing of a \$95 billion foreign aid bill, yet he instead chose to just walk away.

This nation is in the grip of the largest wave of anti-antisemitism since the pre-World War II days of the St. Louis disgrace, and instead of a Truman or Trump we're stuck with a spineless, empty vessel so afraid of his left wing base that he can't even offer up his most repeated line of late, "don't."

Biden's concern for how he'll be seen by history is well known. But unless he finds the strength to stand up to the antisemitic wing of his party, he'll find his portrait wearing the stain of Roosevelt instead of standing triumphant with Truman.

GEOFF CALDWELL lives in Joplin. He can be reached at gc@caldwellscorner.com.