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OUR VIEW



Gentry Ingle, from Jefferson Elementary School, celebrates correctly spelling "individuality" during the 2022 spelling bee at Thomas Jefferson Independent Day School. GLOBE FILE

Spelling bee competitors holding back barbarians

Twitter makes us cringe. Sometimes. No, not the politics. We're talking about the spelling. The grammar. The punctuation. (More accurately, the lack of it.)

Texts 2.
U know what we mean.
You've CN (seen) it B4.

We know people get in a hurry, and we know autocorrect has a mind and will of its own. We also know people can be just ... well ... plain lazy. But still, the shortcuts we have developed writing in this age of screens and 280-character limits will become bad habits that creep into our formal and professional writing.

Imagine students learning this: "Th qck brwn fx jmps vr th lz dg."
There's a term for that kind of writing; it's called "disemvoweling."
Imagine reading Thomas Jefferson this way: "Whn n th crse of hmn vnts ..."
Or reading Abraham Lincoln this way: "4 scr & 7 yrs ago, r fthrs ..."

It loses all of its heft, its power to inspire. Journalist Edward R. Murrow said of Churchill: "He mobilized the English language and sent it into battle."
Today, we'd get this: "Lt us thr4 brce orslvs 2 do R duty and so br Rslvs tht, if the Brtsh Empr and its Cmnnwth last 4 a 1000 yrs, mn wll stll sy: Ths was thr fst hr."
Their finest hour. Not ours.

The English would be doomed today, just as their language appears to be under attack.

Well, the antidote to all of this as at hand, taking place Monday, when more than 40 young people will gather at Thomas Jefferson Independent Day School to do battle on behalf of the English language.

They are the participants in The Joplin Globe's annual spelling bee, a tradition since 1977.

If, like us, you are weary of the desecration of the English language, and the violence done to it in the name of efficiency ... or just plain laziness ... come out for the event, which will start with a welcome and some practice rounds at 8:45 a.m.

These contestants are some of the best and brightest, defending the integrity of a language that has inspired and uplifted us via the words of William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens and J.R.R. Tolkien.

How bright are some of these young men and women who will be on stage?

Last year's winner was Saket Bodanki, of College Heights Christian School, who correctly spelled "scuttlebutt," which means rumor or gossip, and finished up with "abstractive."
In 2019, the winning words in the Globe's Spelling Bee were "tergiversate" and "oleiferous." (The former means to make conflicting or evasive statements, the latter means to produce oil. We had to look them up.)

The spelling bee is a favorite moment for the Globe, a moment when get to see young people shine.

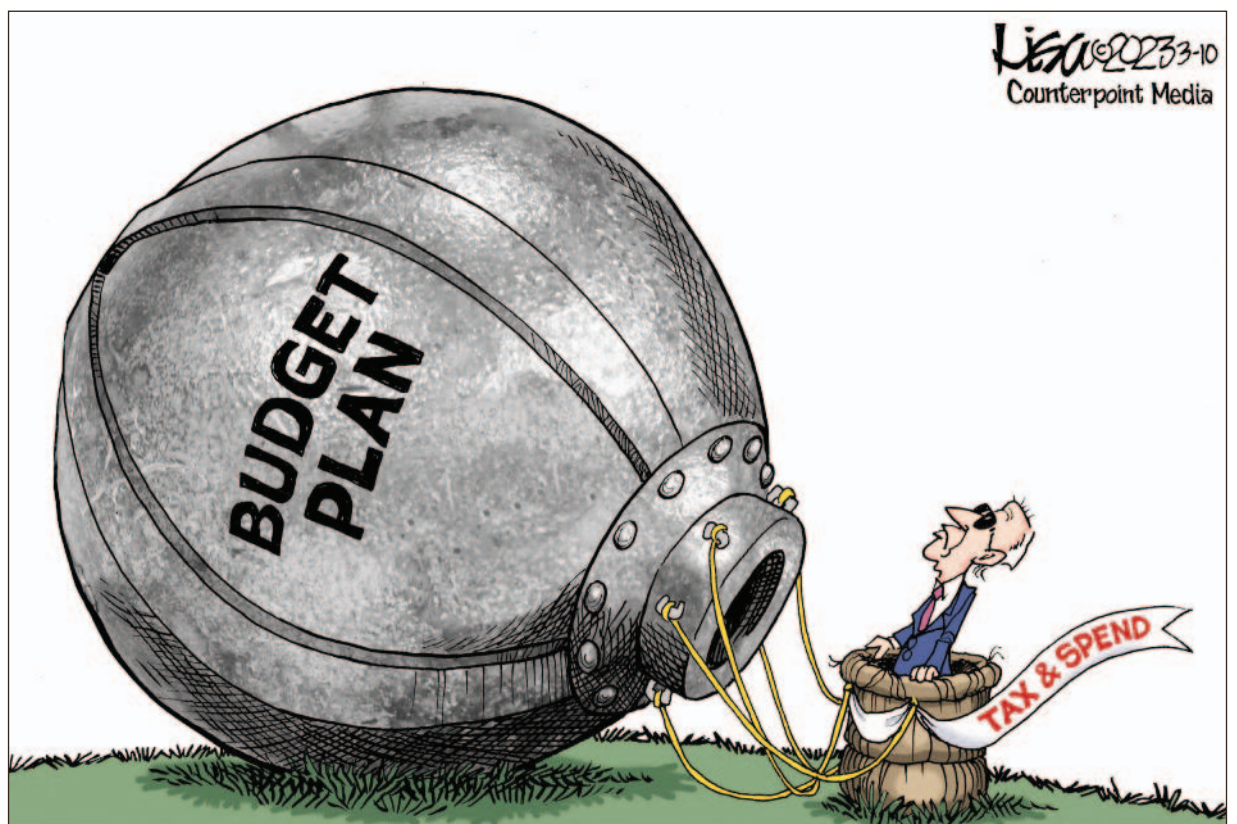
But, please, turn your phones off when you come in, not only because it's polite and would be a distraction to the competitors, but because of the wreck these modern communication devices are making of our ability to communicate.

Yes, the barbarians are at the gate. But, as you'll see Monday, our cultural inheritance is in good hands.

Verse

'And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

Matthew 25:40



What's next in your news feed?

What's next in your news feed? Artificial intelligence has one answer. Recently, I learned about a new journalism app: Artifact. Opening it for the first time, you might find the app mundane. However, the questions it asks about the future of journalism are profound.

How will we perceive bias in journalism if artificial intelligence increasingly serves us the news we read?

Artifact's pitch lured me in. First off, I don't have a news app that I like. Artifact also aims to encourage users to read journalism from a wide variety of sources, something I aspire to, as I bop from app to app. The model sounds similar to other apps that aggregate the news, whether it be Twitter, Apple News+ or Flipboard.



ERIC THOMAS

Guest columnist

The difference on Artifact is this: Machine learning tailors its recommendations for further reading. The app aims to satisfy your interests based on your reading habits.

Its co-founder, Kevin Systrom, explained the app this way on the Hard Fork podcast: "Artifact is a hyper-personalized newsfeed driven by the latest in machine learning. It's like TikTok for text. There's a lot of text out there on the web, most of it news, blogs, articles. And we take all of that, we understand it, using machine learning. And then we say, 'Hey, user, you signed up for Artifact. What are you into?' And then we start matchmaking, and we present you a feed of stuff."

Recently, the app smartly scraped national news stories that I have read (mostly) without running into paywalls or hiccups. One huge drawback is the lack of local news. You cannot find content from any Kansas newspaper or news outlet.

Having read 50 articles, I am intrigued but not converted. The founders promise that "machine learning," already 2023's phrase of the year, is the sparkle dust that will transform the experience.

"And at first you're just, like, OK, it's a newsreader," Systrom continues. "But if you use it for — I don't know — a week or two, or depending on how heavily you

use it, it becomes really different. And that's because it starts to understand what you like and you don't like."

The artificial intelligence of Artifact also aims to amplify the most expert and trustworthy writers on a news story.

"I want a great post from an epidemiologist on Substack who nobody knows to become the de facto thing that everyone reads if it's great," Systrom told Hard Fork. "And then I want people to be able to discuss it and post about it and say what they think about it and debate and argue or whatever."

The vision is an enlightened and thronging town square, but one officiated by artificial intelligence.

The disconnect is obvious: Artificial intelligence would moderate not just the journalism we consume, but also the discussions we have about it. Perhaps one of our most human pursuits — explaining the world to one another — erodes into a predictive computer model anticipating what we will read and how we will react.

Another goal for Artifact? To use the app's artificial intelligence to generate journalism based on other stories available in the news media.

Paired with a deluge of other news about artificial intelligence, this app made me wonder. We often label a newspaper or website's editorial judgment: "The New York Times is a cesspool of progressive dribble." "The New York Post is owned by corporations that guide its conservative politics."

Will our trust in journalism stabilize once machine learning is the only hand steering us to one story or another? The introduction of apps like Artifact suggests that their developers believe so.

Of course, our reading habits online are already being steered by algorithms and the suggestions of advertisers, whether on Facebook or Twitter.

However, I predict that we see

the same bias in the news when it's artificial intelligence that curates news for us. The algorithms of one app might provide us news we find distasteful ("Too Democratic!"), while another might cater to our sensibilities ("Finally, an app that gets it right!").

The phrase "artificial intelligence" will signal empirical authority to some people. RobotNews™ will be trusted news. Many will perceive apolitical computer code as serving up facts and headlines without preference for red or blue politics.

That perception would ignore the mistakes that artificial intelligence makes, especially at this moment.

Kevin Rouse has reported how, in addition to producing glaring factual errors, some machine learning can be steered toward hallucinations. It seems a dangerous way to get the news.

"If you have people who are asking a chatbot, 'What's the Deep State?' or it's having conversations about lizard people, or if it's having conversations about vaccines and other sensitive topics, you can easily see how people might actually take that thing seriously," Rouse said on The Daily.

No doubt, American journalism has always been political. Even during colonial times, the British monarchy mandated that publishers print sympathetic news.

More than 100 years ago, major cities had many newspapers to give voice to various partisan points of view, including voices that campaigned for racial equality, powerful unions and immigrant rights. Other voices sought to limit those rights.

The politics of those bygone publications, seen through their mastheads, were a list of names. Often we knew those people.

In this dawning age, to understand why we are reading the news we are reading, we might need to be familiar with a line of computer code, rather than an old-fashioned human being.

ERIC THOMAS directs the Kansas Scholastic Press Association and teaches visual journalism and photojournalism at the University of Kansas. This column first appeared in the Kansas Reflector.



Reducing incarceration could help fellow Kansans

Industrial engineers are system engineers. We work to understand where pain occurs in processes so people can function more easily.

A maxim that resonated with me when I studied industrial engineering was the notion that “to err is human.” Those who make mistakes should neither be blamed nor punished. Instead, we strive to look at the entire system and improve the process.

People make mistakes. We all do.

In December, I wrote an opinion piece in hopes of inspiring Kansans to become informed and engage with their state legislators. During the first half of the Kansas legislative session, I’ve learned some of the legislative committees are downright fun to watch. The House Judiciary Committee is amazing in the way it takes such a heavy topic and transforms it into a warm, informative platform where lawmakers and citizens alike work together to improve our laws. However, there is much work to be done.

For example, did you know that if Kansas were a country, we would incarcerate more people



SUSAN QUINN

Guest columnist

per capita than any other country in the world? That isn’t to say that we incarcerate more people per capita than any other U.S. state, but we live in Kansas and should start problem solving at home. In Shawnee County, where I live, taxes for policing and incarcerating people make up about half of our local county taxes. We simply cannot afford it. Most people in Kansas jails haven’t been convicted; they are awaiting trial.

From 1980 to 2015, incarceration in Kansas has exploded. The number of Kansas women who are incarcerated in jail has grown more than 1,232% and in prison by 644%. Although women are incarcerated far less often than men, when comparing Kansas’ rate of incarceration for women, we are far out of line with global norms, locking up women at 8 to 10 times the rates of our closest international allies.

However, violent crimes have not increased in Kansas over the

same span. They have remained relatively stable, at about 400 per 100,000.

Here’s what else I learned: The vast majority of prisoners leaving incarceration won’t have valid driver’s license. According to the Kansas Department of Corrections, a study of 860 people leaving incarceration in 2022 showed just 46 with valid driver’s licenses. That’s 5%.

How are you to reintegrate into society if you have no valid driver’s license? It is nearly impossible to live anywhere in Kansas without a valid driver’s license. Without the ability to drive a car legally, how would you get by?

Sure, you are able-bodied. And you want to work so that you can reintegrate into society. But how do you get to work? And who is going to hire you when the first checkbox on the job application is “Have you ever been convicted of a felony?” Do we want to decrease the number of crimes people commit or do we want revenge?

Violent criminals should be incarcerated. Frankly, those who exploit others for sex also need to be incarcerated. At least until we can determine what works to decrease violent crime.

For everyone else though, we cannot afford the luxury of revenge. Who exactly are we avenging when we put someone behind bars for having drugs in their possession? If someone is taking drugs, that’s a health issue. They are unwell. When someone is unwell, you send them to a hospital to get help. You do not send a person to jail or prison for a broken leg. That won’t help them heal.

Think about all the extra money we’d have if we incarcerated fewer people. We might be able to afford to expand Medicaid. We could help localities invest in affordable housing and support the new opportunities the Commerce Department is bringing to our state through APEX.

There have been bright spots. I learned that with funds from the Second Chance Act, Salina recently created affordable housing opportunities for those reentering their community from jails and prisons.

If you didn’t know about the Second Chance Act, don’t feel bad, I didn’t either. You are fortunate that your world isn’t shaken with worry over incarceration. The act was signed in 2007 by President George W. Bush in

hopes of supporting local governments and nonprofits to work to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for people leaving incarceration.

There’s another law you should know about: the First Step Act. President Donald Trump signed it in 2018. That one is more complex, but it’s also a step in the right direction. Over the past couple of years, it’s made a difference for incarceration rates.

Now I’m more informed. Will it make a difference? Maybe. While I followed along with House Bill 2073, an effort to eliminate fines and fees for juveniles, I was disappointed to see it stopped by House and Senate leadership. There’s always next year. Watch with me as the young people from Progeny learn whether their efforts will make a difference. Then, let’s do this for adult offenders so they can reintegrate.

Alexander Pope created the maxim: “To err is human; to forgive, divine.” As people come back to our communities, let’s support their efforts to rejoin us.

SUSAN QUINN is an engineer in northeast Kansas. This column first appeared in the Kansas Reflector.

Lying by major news source creates danger for the U.S.

The recent revelation that multiple hosts on Fox News deliberately misled their audience — reporting and promoting the lie that there was rampant voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election when they knew there was none — may not be surprising but is definitely damning.

Every American who cares about the role of the press in our daily lives should be alarmed and outraged.

According to sworn statements in depositions for a lawsuit filed by Dominion Voting Systems, Fox News owner Rupert Murdoch admitted he and other executives were aware of the deceptive practices and blatant lies. Yet they allowed them to be continually broadcast.

We are all aware of the divisiveness such misrepresentations and lies have caused, from the threats and financial costs many secretary of state offices and local election officials incurred to the greatest tragedy of all — the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

The nation is still dealing with and reeling from the negative effects of those election lies. There is a school of thought that would like to make a distinction between pure reportage of news events and the interpretation or discussion of those events, which Fox News has alluded to in its defense.

But bottom line: No matter what, shouldn’t all of it be based on facts and truth?

Since this nation was founded, the press has always consisted of three main dimensions: Reporting the facts and events; the interpretations of what those facts and events mean; and thoughts or opinions regarding them.

Saying only reportage should be based on facts and truths — but interpretation, analysis and opinion/commentary are not — is a false and misleading distinction.

With the advent of cable news and 24/7 coverage, many platforms for reporting, analyzing and discussing the news and events of the day have emerged. One would think that is a good thing. There is



JANICE ELLIS

Guest columnist

more time to gain a complete and better understanding of what can be complex and complicated issues.

But too often, those valuable platforms have been used to distort, create and promote rumors, innuendo, conspiracy theories and downright lies.

When trust in the press is at an all-time low, what is the public to do when some of the news media outlets deliberately and knowingly become propaganda machines whether for a political person, political party, interest group or downright greed.

With the recent revelations about Fox News, it appears that all of the above forces and motives were in play.

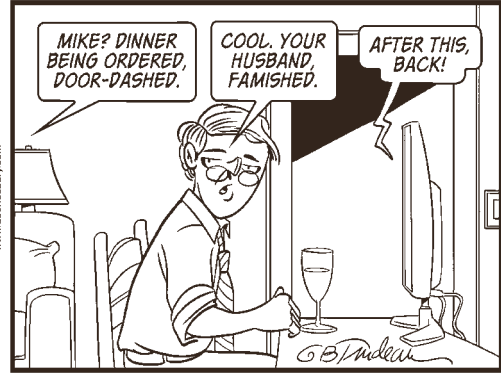
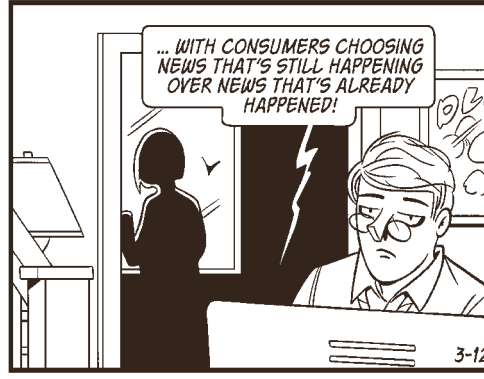
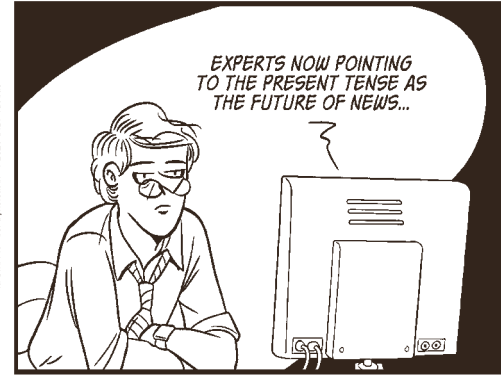
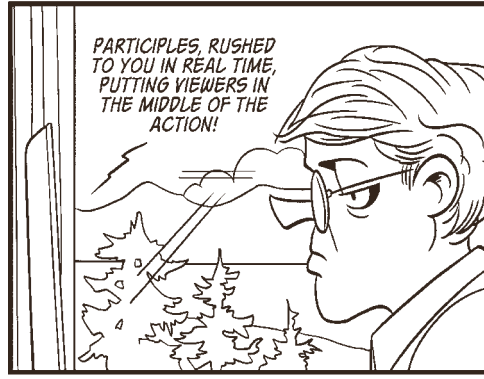
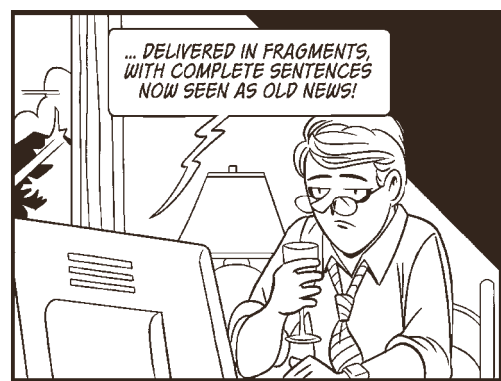
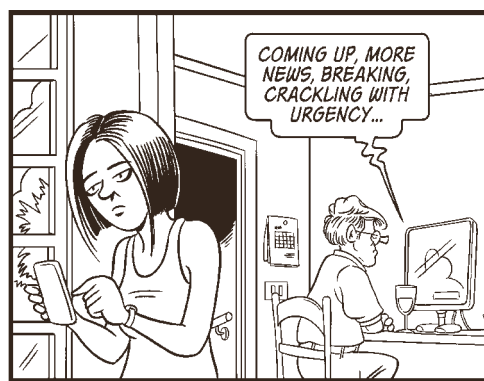
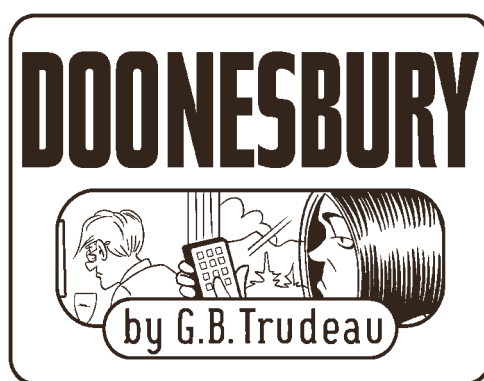
What a miscarriage and disregard of the awesome role and responsibility of the press. What a danger to a healthy democratic republic such as the United States. If facts and truths are expendable in our public discourse and the press cannot be relied upon to hold government, politicians, elected officials and businesses accountable in all areas that define the quality of life for American citizens, what possibly can be the country’s future?

America is at critical crossroads in many areas. As we try to gain a better understanding of the issues at hand, sadly we must remain mindful that all news sources are not truthful.

The Fox News revelation happens to be our most serious wake-up call.

The real question is: Will it be forgotten and ignored once it stops making the headlines?

JANICE ELLIS has lived and worked in Missouri for more than three decades. She is the author of “From Liberty to Magnolia: In Search of the American Dream” and “Shaping Public Opinion: How Real Advocacy Journalism Should be Practiced.” This column first appeared in the Missouri Independent.



Editorial cartoon highlights cultural divide in United States

Mike Smith’s editorial cartoon (Globe, March 6) summed up perfectly the cultural divide facing us today.

On the left, a news anchor, in front of derailed tanker cars, smoke leaking skyward says, “First there was the derailment.” On the right, the same anchor with a train labeled “culture war” barreling down the tracks in the background with the caption, “Now we have a runaway train.”

The left panel is referring to the Norfolk Southern derailment that has left the residents of East Palestine, Ohio, and surrounding areas with questions beyond end and no answers — a one-two punch of corporate indifference and government incompetence not seen since the Deepwater Horizon debacle of 2010.

Depending upon your politics, the right panel could be taken two ways.

It could represent the left’s year’s long assault on the American family, foundational principles, basic common sense and the damage to come if the train is not stopped.

Another interpretation is that Smith was saying that those of us who still believe in that American family, those foundational principles and basic common sense are literally just a train wreck waiting to happen. That it is us, not the left, who have started this “culture war” and it is us, not the left, who are out of control.



GEOFF CALDWELL

Globe columnist

I wanted to believe the former but a quick internet search revealed that Smith’s intent was indeed the latter.

Over the years, I’ve seen hundreds of editorial cartoons portraying Republicans as subhumans underserving of our space upon this planet. And while the artists are many, their themes are all eerily the same.

Republicans/GOP are ignorant, racist rubes who just can’t wait to take the nation back to Jim Crow and keep women barefoot and pregnant at home. Gun violence/crime are the result of those same ignorant, racist rubes standing in the way of “reasonable” gun control. If only guns were gone, peace and good would reign throughout the land. Societal decay and soft-on-crime DA’s, city councils and state legislatures have nothing to do with it. Social justice, not criminal justice, is now the law of the land.

Climate change is “settled” and anyone daring to disagree with that narrative is a “denier” and as such a heretic deserving of maximum punishment. Spanish Inquisition techniques are not out of the question.

Antifa is just an “idea” where “mostly peaceful” citizens gather



to speak their minds in a “mostly peaceful” manner. And if you dare call out the burnings, lootings and shootings? You’re the fascist.

Education is public schools only. The U.S. Department of Education and its experts are the only path to learning, and what they say is gospel. Parent’s objecting to little Susie being exposed to “gender fluidity” in third grade or Johnny’s class being divided into “oppressors” and “oppressed” aren’t just bad parents, they’re parasites on humanity and Sally and Johnny should be removed from the home.

And on and on it goes. You’re either with the narrative or you’re an enemy to be destroyed.

Smith is right on one thing though. There is definitely a culture war and it is barreling down the track. He’s just on the wrong side of that track.

The pandemic gave parents across the nation a glimpse into just what was being pumped into their children’s minds under the guise of education. And now that that glimpse has exposed an entire network of classroom social engineering schemes to tens of thousands of parents from Virginia to California who are

Howard Beal “mad as hell” and are certainly not going to take it anymore.

But the push back isn’t stopping at the schoolhouse door. The curtain has been pulled back on the entire progressive wing of the Democrat party and “woke” has taken on a whole new meaning.

From forcing girls and young women to not just compete against but also share locker rooms with biological males, to attacks on pro-life groups and people of faith, to the coddling of criminals over the rights of victims, the sleeping giant that is the American family, founding principles and common sense has awoken.

In one of the latest examples of the return of common sense, Wednesday, the Senate voted to agree with an earlier House vote and blocked the controversial District of Columbia’s updated criminal code by an 81-to-14 margin.

While not an end to the left’s war on society, the fact that on March 8, 32 Democrats and independent Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona broke from the crazies and joined Republicans in a bipartisan vote of common sense is a good first step — a first step back to a time when not all Republicans were ignorant rubes and not all Democrats were progressive nut-jobs. Here’s to more steps to come.

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