

The Norwalk Patriot

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The high cost of assisted living

■ Assisted living facilities are attractive options for seniors who want to retain a level of independence. But their growing costs make them unaffordable for many.

By Jordan Rau
KFF Health News

Assisted living centers have become an appealing retirement option for hundreds of thousands of boomers who can no longer live independently, promising a cheerful alternative to the institutional feel of a nursing home.

But their cost is so crushingly high that most Americans can't afford them.

These highly profitable facilities often charge \$5,000 a month or more and then layer on fees at every step. Residents' bills and price lists from a dozen facilities offer a glimpse of the charges: \$12 for a blood pressure check; \$50 per injection (more for insulin); \$93 a month to order medications from a pharmacy not used by the facility; \$315 a month for daily help with an inhaler.

The facilities charge extra to help residents get to the shower, bathroom, or dining room; to deliver meals to their rooms; to have staff check-ins for daily "reassurance" or simply to remind residents when it's time to eat or take their medication. Some even charge for routine billing of a resident's insurance for care.

"They say, 'Your mother forgot one time to take her medications, and so now you've got to add this on, and we're billing you for it,'" said Lori Smetanka, executive director of the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, a nonprofit.

About 850,000 older Americans reside in assisted living facilities, which have become one of the most lucrative branches of the long-term care industry that caters to people 65 and older. Investors, regional companies, and international real estate trusts have jumped in: Half of operators in the business of assisted living earn returns of 20% or more than it costs to run the sites, an industry survey shows. That is far higher than the money made in most other health sectors.

Rents are often rivaled or exceeded by charges for services, which are either packaged in a bundle or levied à la carte. Overall prices have been rising faster than inflation, and rent increases since the start of last year have been higher than at any previous time since at least 2007, according to the National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care, which provides data and other information to companies.

There are now 31,000 assisted living facilities nationwide — twice the number of skilled nursing homes. Four of every five facilities are run as for-profits. Members of racial or ethnic minority groups account for only a tenth of residents, even though they make up a quarter of the population of people 65 or older in the United States.

A public opinion survey conducted by KFF found that 83% of adults said it would be impossible or very difficult to pay \$60,000 a year for an assisted living facility. Almost half of those surveyed who either lived in a long-term care residence or had a loved one who did encountered unexpected add-on fees for things they assumed were included in the price.

Assisted living is part of a broader affordability crisis in long-term care for the swelling population of older Americans. Over the past decade, the market for long-term care insurance has virtually collapsed, covering just a tiny portion of older people. Home health workers who can help people stay safely in their homes are generally poorly paid and hard to find.

And even older people who can afford an assisted living facility often find their life savings rapidly drained.

Unlike most residents of nursing homes, where care is generally paid for by Medicaid, the federal-state program for the poor and disabled, assisted living



Gabe Enamorado and Juliana Canty, of Stay Arts, say the gallery has a few months before it may close due to lack of funding. (Photo by Alex Dominguez)

residents or their families usually must shoulder the full costs. Most centers require those who can no longer pay to move out.

The industry says its pricing structures pay for increased staffing that helps the more infirm residents and avoids saddling others with costs of services they don't need.

Prices escalate greatly when a resident develops dementia or other serious illnesses. At one facility in California, the monthly cost of care packages for people with dementia or other cognitive issues increased from \$1,325 for those needing the least amount of help to \$4,625 as residents' needs grew.

"It's profiteering at its worst," said Mark Bonitz, who explored multiple places in Minnesota for his mother, Elizabeth. "They have a fixed amount of rooms," he said. "The way you make the most money is you get so many add-ons." Last year, he moved his mother to a nonprofit center, where she lived until her death in July at age 96.

LaShuan Bethea, executive director of the National Center for Assisted Living, a trade association of owners and operators, said the industry would require financial support from the government and private lenders to bring prices down.

"Assisted living providers are ready and willing to provide more affordable options, especially for a growing elderly population," Bethea said. "But we need the support of policymakers and other industries." She said offering affordable assisted living "requires an entirely different business model."

Others defend the extras as a way to appeal to the waves of boomers who are retiring. "People want choice," said Beth Burnham Mace, a special adviser for the National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care. "If you price it more à la carte, you're paying for what you actually desire and need."

Yet residents don't always get the heightened attention they paid for. Class-action lawsuits have accused several assisted living chains of failing to raise staffing levels to accommodate residents' needs or of failing to fulfill billed services.

"We still receive many complaints about staffing shortages and services not being provided as promised," said Aisha Elmquist, until recently the deputy ombudsman for long-term care in Minnesota, a state-funded advocate. "Some residents have reported to us they called 911 for things like getting in and out of bed."

'Can You Find Me a Money Tree?'

Florence Reiners, 94, adores living at the Waters of Excelsior, an upscale assisted living facility in the Minneapolis suburb of Excelsior. The 115-unit building has a theater, a library, a hair salon, and a spacious dining room.

"The windows, the brightness, and the people overall are very cheerful and very friendly," Reiners, a retired nursing assistant, said. Most important, she was just a floor away from her husband, Donald, 95, a retired water department worker who served in the military after World War II and has severe dementia.

She resisted her children's pleas to move him to a less expensive facility available to veterans.

Reiners is healthy enough to be on a floor for people who can live independently, so her rent is \$3,330 plus \$275 for a pendant alarm. When she needs help, she's billed an exact amount, like a \$26.67 charge for the 31 minutes an aide spent helping her to the bathroom one night.

Her husband's specialty care at the facility cost much more: \$6,150 a month on top of \$3,825 in rent.

Month by month, their savings, mainly from the sale of their home, and monthly retirement income of \$6,600 from Social Security and his municipal pension, dwindled. In three years, their assets and savings dropped to about \$300,000 from around \$550,000.

Her children warned her that she would run out of money if her health worsened. "She about cried because she doesn't want to leave her community," Anne Palm, one of her daughters, said.

In June, they moved Donald Reiners to the VA home across the city. His care there costs \$3,900 a month, 60% less than at the Waters. But his wife is not allowed to live at the veterans' facility.

After nearly 60 years together, she was devastated. When an admissions worker asked her if she had any questions, she answered, "Can you find me a money tree so I don't have to move him?"

Heidi Elliott, vice president for operations at the Waters, said employees carefully review potential residents' financial assets with them, and explain how costs can increase over time.

"Oftentimes, our senior living consultants will ask, 'After you've reviewed this, Mr. Smith, how many years do you think Mom is going to be able to, to afford this?'" she said. "And sometimes we lose prospects because they've realized, 'You know what? Nope, we don't have it.'"

Rating the Cost of a Shower, on a Point Scale

To consistently get such impressive returns, some assisted living facilities have devised sophisticated pricing methods. Each service is assigned points based on an estimate of how much it costs in extra labor, to the minute. When residents arrive, they are evaluated to see what services they need, and the facility adds up the points. The number of points determines which tier of services you require; facilities often have four or five levels of care, each with its own price.

Charles Barker, an 81-year-old retired psychiatrist with Alzheimer's, moved into Oakmont of Pacific Beach, a memory care facility in San Diego, in November 2020. In the initial estimate, he was assigned 135 points: 5 for mealtime reminders; 12 for shaving and grooming reminders; 18 for help with clothes selection twice a day; 36 to manage medications; and 30 for the attention, prompting, and redirection he would need because of his dementia, according to a copy of his assessment provided by his daughter, Celenie Singley.

Continued on page 2

Weekend at a Glance

Friday 70°

Saturday 71°

Sunday 73°

ON THIS DAY

1859:

Charles Darwin's "On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection" was published, introducing the theory that populations evolve over the course of generations through a process of natural selection.

1877:

Shortly before her death, Anna Sewall published her only novel, "Black Beauty," the first major animal story in children's literature.

1917:

Nine members of the Milwaukee Police Department were killed by a bomb, the most deaths in a single event in U.S. police history until the September 11 terrorist attacks.

1963:

Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby fatally shot Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of President John F. Kennedy.



1969:

The Apollo 12 command module splashed down safely in the Pacific Ocean, ending the second crewed mission to land on the Moon.

1971:

A man later known as D.B. Cooper hijacked a plane shortly after departing from Portland, Oregon, and later parachuted out of the aircraft with the ransom money; he was never identified or caught.

1991:

Queen frontman Freddie Mercury died of AIDS-related bronchial pneumonia at age 45.

2001:

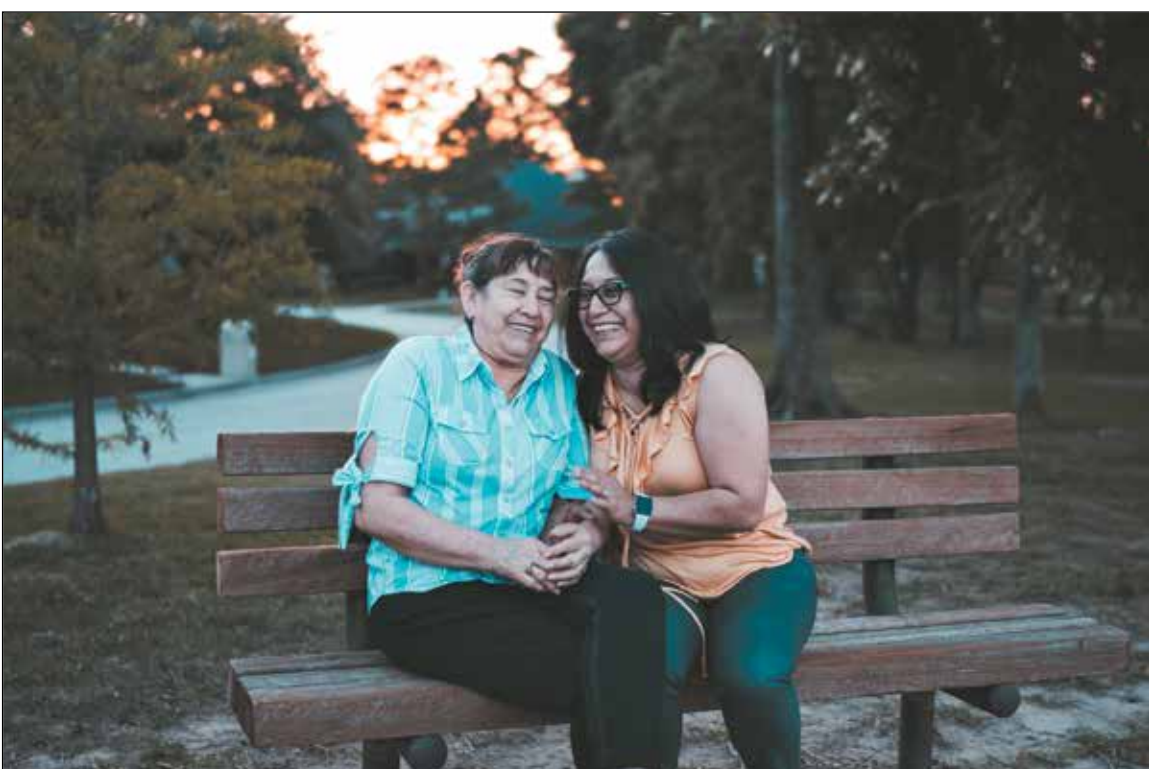
Turkey ratified changes to the country's legal code that made women equal to men before the law and no longer subject to their husbands.

2015:

The only copy of Wu-Tang Clan's new double album "Once Upon A Time In Shaolin" was sold at auction for \$2 million; only one physical copy of the album was created, with no ability to download or stream it digitally.

BIRTHDAYS

Basketball hall of famer **OSCAR ROBERTSON** (85), retired Dodgers great **STEVE YEAGER** (75), "Grey's Anatomy" star **KATHERINE HEIGL** (45) and "Modern Family" star **SARAH HYLAND** (32).



Assisted living gets more costly

Continued from page 1

Barker's points fell into the second-lowest of five service levels, with a charge of \$2,340 on top of his \$7,895 monthly rent.

Singley became distraught over safety issues that she said did not seem as important to Oakmont as its point system. She complained in a May 2021

letter to Courtney Siegel, the company's chief executive, that she repeatedly found the doors to the facility, located on a busy street, unlocked — a lapse at memory care centers, where secured exits keep people with dementia from wandering away. "Even when it's expensive, you really don't know what you're getting," she said in an interview.

Singley, 50, moved her father to another memory care unit. Oakmont did not respond to requests for comment.

Other residents and their families brought a class-action lawsuit against Oakmont in 2017 that said the company, an assisted living and memory care provider based in Irvine, California, had not provided enough staffing to meet the needs of residents it identified through its own assessments.

Jane Burton-Whitaker, a plaintiff who moved into Oakmont of Mariner Point in Alameda, California, in 2016, paid \$5,795 monthly rent and \$270 a month for assistance with her urinary catheter, but sometimes the staff would empty the bag just once a day when it required multiple changes, the lawsuit said.

She paid an additional \$153 a month for checks of her "fragile" skin "up to three times a day, but most days staff did not provide any skin checks," according to the lawsuit. (Skin breakdown is a hazard for older people that can lead to bedsores and infections.) Sometimes it took the staff 45 minutes to respond to her call button, so she left the facility in 2017 out of concern she would not get attention should

she have a medical emergency, the lawsuit said.

Oakmont paid \$9 million in 2020 to settle the class-action suit and agreed to provide enough staffing, without admitting fault.

Similar cases have been brought against other assisted living companies. In 2021, Aegis Living, a company based in Bellevue, Washington, agreed to a \$16 million settlement in a case claiming that its point system — which charged 64 cents per point per day — was "based solely on budget considerations and desired profit margins." Aegis did not admit fault in the settlement or respond to requests for comment.

When the Money Is Gone

Jon Guckenber's rent for a single room in an assisted living cottage in rural Minnesota was \$4,140 a month before adding in a raft of other charges.

The facility, New Perspective Cloquet, charged him \$500 to reserve a spot and a \$2,000 "entrance fee" before he set foot inside two years ago. Each month, he also paid \$1,080 for a care plan that helped him cope with bipolar disorder and kidney problems, \$750 for meals, and another \$750 to make sure he took his daily medications. Cable service in his room was an extra \$50 a month.

A year after moving in, Guckenber, 83, a retired pizza parlor owner, had run through his life's savings and was put on a state health plan for the poor.

Doug Anderson, a senior vice president at New Perspective, said in a statement that "the cost and complexity of providing care and housing to seniors has



increased exponentially due to the pandemic and record-high inflation."

In one way, Guckenber has been luckier than most people who run out of money to pay for their care. His residential center accepts Medicaid to cover the health services he receives.

Most states have similar programs, though a resident must be frail enough to qualify for a nursing home before Medicaid will cover the health care costs in an assisted living facility. But enrollment is restricted. In 37 states, people are on waiting lists for months or years.

"We recognize the current system of having residents spend down their assets and then qualify for Medicaid in order to stay in their assisted

living home is broken," said Bethea, with the trade association. "Residents shouldn't have to impoverish themselves in order to continue receiving assisted living care."

Only 18% of residential care facilities agree to take Medicaid payments, which tend to be lower than what they charge self-paying clients, according to a federal survey of facilities. And even places that accept Medicaid often limit coverage to a minority of their beds.

For those with some retirement income, Medicaid isn't free. Nancy Pilger, Guckenber's guardian, said that he was able to keep only about \$200 of his \$2,831 monthly retirement income, with the rest going to paying rent and a portion of his costs covered by the government.

In September, Guckenber moved to a nearby assisted living building run by a nonprofit. Pilger said the price was the same. But for other residents who have not yet exhausted their assets, Guckenber's new home charges \$12 a tray for meal delivery to the room; \$50 a month to bill a person's long-term care insurance plan; and \$55 for a set of bed rails.

Even after Guckenber had left New Perspective, however, the company had one more charge for him: a \$200 late payment fee for money it said he still owed.

POET'S CORNER

Murder Most Foul

excerpt

Freedom, oh freedom Freedom above me
I hate to tell you, mister, but only dead men are free
Send me some lovin', tell me no lies
Throw the gun in the gutter and walk on by
Wake up, little Suzie, let's go for a drive
Cross the Trinity River, let's keep hope alive
Turn the radio on, don't touch the dials
Parkland hospital, only six more miles...
Play me a song, Mr. Wolfman Jack
Play it for me in my long Cadillac
Play me that "Only the Good Die Young"
Take me to the place Tom Dooley was hung
Play "St. James Infirmary" and "The Port of King James"
If you want to remember, you better write down the names
Play Etta James, too...
Play "Merchant to Venice"
Play "Merchants of Death"
Play "Stella by Starlight" for Lady Macbeth
Play "Merchants of Death"...
They killed him on the altar of the rising sun...
Wolfman Jack, he's speaking in tongues
Play darkness and death will come when it comes
Play "Love Me Or Leave Me" by the great Bud Powell
Play "The Blood-stained Banner"
Play "Murder Most Foul"

Bob Dylan, Rough and Rowdy Ways, Universal Music Publishing Group, 2020

Bob Dylan generated an enormous amount of attention in 2020 when he released this 17-minute track on the assassination of President Kennedy, Dylan's first new song in eight years. The litany of songs seems to be an attempt to heal. Kennedy died Nov. 22, 1963. Poetry Matters is curated by Lorine Parks

CALIFORNIA High-Speed Rail Authority

Los Angeles to Anaheim Project Section
HSR Intermediate Station Option
Norwalk/Santa Fe Springs and Grade Crossings Information Session
December 11, 2023

Join us at the upcoming In-Person Information Session

Monday, December 11, 2023
6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

The meeting will be conducted in English, Spanish, Korean, Tagalog and American Sign Language (ASL).

The California High-Speed Rail Authority's (Authority) Los Angeles to Anaheim (LA-A) Project Section is reaching a new milestone in the environmental process and is moving closer to connecting Los Angeles and Anaheim to the Central Valley and San Francisco with a one-seat high-speed train ride. The Authority is committed to environmentally clearing the LA-A Project Section by late 2025.

This approximately 33-mile section connects Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS) to the Anaheim Regional Transportation Intermodal Center (ARTIC) using the existing passenger and freight rail corridor. The Authority recently released a Supplemental Alternatives Analysis (SAA) identifying a new build alternative, the Shared Passenger Track Alternative, to be studied within the environmental document. This alternative is largely similar to the 2018 High-Speed Rail (HSR) Project Alternative but includes some changes, such as a potential reduction in train operating frequency, and considering either one or no intermediate HSR stations in Norwalk/Santa Fe Springs.

For more information and to access the SAA, please visit the LA-A Project Section web page at <https://bit.ly/3tRDPnk>.

Join us at the upcoming in-person information session to learn more about the station option being evaluated in Norwalk/Santa Fe Springs, potential grade crossings in Santa Fe Springs, and to provide your input.

Monday, December 11, 2023 | 6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
City of Norwalk Rich Rehearsal Hall (MPR) 13200 Clarkdale Avenue, Norwalk, CA 90650

LANGUAGES AND OTHER NEEDS

All requests for reasonable accommodations and/or language services must be made three working days (72 hours) in advance of the scheduled meeting date by calling (877) 669-0494.

Todas las solicitudes de adaptaciones razonables y/o servicios lingüísticos deben realizarse tres días hábiles (72 horas) antes de la fecha programada para la reunión llamando al (877) 669-0494.

所有合理住宿和/或语言服务的请求必须在预定会议日期前三个工作日(72小时)致电(877)669-0494提出。

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<https://bit.ly/3tRDPnk>

The environmental review, consultation and other actions required by the applicable federal environmental laws for this project are being or have been carried out by the State of California pursuant to 23 U.S. Code 327 and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) dated July 23, 2019 and executed by the Federal Railroad Administration and the State of California. Under that MOU, the Authority is the project's lead agency under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

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Congress needs to get its act together

We can't allow dysfunction in Congress to become normalized.

By Douglas Heye

Douglas Heye is the ex-deputy chief of staff to former House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, a GOP strategist and a CNN political commentator.

In a Senate hearing last Tuesday, Republican Sen. Markwayne Mullin of Oklahoma rose to challenge Sean O'Brien, general president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, to a "stand your butt up" stand-off.

On the House side, House Oversight Chairman Rep. James Comer called his Democratic colleague Rep. Jared Moskowitz of Florida a "liar" and a "smurf," while Moskowitz suggested Comer needed a "mental health day."

GOP Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene tweeted emojis of basketballs and baseballs to suggest what her Republican colleague, Rep. Darrell Issa, um, does not have (I think you get the picture).

And Tennessee Republican Rep. Tim Burchett accused former Speaker Kevin McCarthy of elbowing him with a "clean kidney shot," a charge McCarthy denies.

These events — all of which happened before lunch was over — are more and more typical of daily life in Congress.

Apologies won't be forthcoming, as they could be portrayed as showing weakness. But whether silly or serious, these actions demonstrate why we've seen a dramatic uptick in another recent congressional trend: retirements.

Since the Nov. 7 elections, more than half a dozen members of Congress and one senator announced their retirement. Some of this is natural.

Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia headed for the exit, while Democratic Rep. Abigail Spanberger of Virginia announced her run for governor in 2025 in lieu of seeking reelection. Both faced exceedingly difficult paths to reelection. But more and more, we are seeing members, fed up with congressional shenanigans, pull the plug and point the finger at their colleagues.

"Congress is not the institution that I went to 19 years

ago. It's a very different place today. We're spending more time doing less and the American people aren't being served," New York Democratic Rep. Brian Higgins said earlier this week after announcing he's stepping down next February. "There was a time where leadership could discern what was serious and what was not. Unfortunately, those days are over."

His Republican colleague Rep. Debbie Lesko of Arizona announced last month she won't seek reelection, saying, "Right now, Washington, DC is broken; it is hard to get anything done."

Republican Rep. Victoria Spartz of Indiana, who initially announced her retirement a mere 25 months after taking office, last month released a statement teasing immediate retirement if no debt commission were formed by year-end, saying, "I will not continue sacrificing my children for this circus with a complete absence of leadership, vision, and spine," adding, "I cannot save this Republic alone."

Retirements happen in Congress usually for one of three reasons — a member thinks, after a long career, it's time; they're running for a higher office and/or announcing a retirement to avoid losing in what looks to be a wave year unfavorable to their party.

Often these retirement announcements happen after Thanksgiving or Christmas holidays, when members have had time with their family (and away from Washington). This cycle, no electoral "wave" appears on the horizon to scare a large block of members from their seats like animals scurrying before an earthquake.

No, their message is clear. More members of Congress are simply saying, "Take this job and shove it."

The actions of the House of recent weeks — three weeks of stalled legislating because of multiple rounds trying to replace a deposed speaker surely play a role. The House's 10 consecutive weeks in session — which ended Wednesday in a whimper as a procedural vote to advance an appropriations bill failed and members were sent home — have surely raised political temperatures and tempers. But the reality is that Congress has become a terrible workplace, and members and staff are feeling those effects.

As a former House leadership staffer, I remember well walking out of my office in the Capitol as fireworks went off at midnight and Dec. 31, 2012, became Jan. 1, 2013. We were trying, unsuccessfully, to pass an extension of the Bush tax cuts, with Republican infighting ensuring our own defeat.

"I gotta get outta here," I sighed to myself.

Since then, it's only gotten worse, and every step of the way, the word "fight" was a rallying cry.

We fought an impossible fight to end Obamacare in 2013, which led to that year's government shutdown and more losing by infighting. Then came Donald Trump, the ultimate "fighter," regardless of results. The Covid-19 pandemic, which further divided Congress. And the Jan. 6 attack on the US Capitol.

It's exhausting to think about, much less live, as a member of Congress. And when you talk to congressional members and staff, they're likely to be exhausted. And miserable.

Add to that a 15-round speaker vote in January (which nearly had its own fistfight) and all legislative activity put on hold for a political vanity effort to depose a speaker for the first time in our nation's history for the unforgivable act of trying to keep the government open.

Commenting Tuesday on the day's events, Rep. and former Speaker Pro Tempore Patrick McHenry said, "There are dumb days on Capitol Hill and there are dumber days on Capitol Hill. And this is one of the dumbest I've seen in quite a long time."

Is it any surprise members want to leave?

Worse? Their replacements. Recruiting quality candidates has become harder. People running to become famous as troublemakers are more likely to win. It's a bipartisan problem, but a much more acute one for Republicans.

There's a political challenge here. It's massively easier to identify problems than solutions. And proposed solutions — changing our political and media incentive structure so new members do not become celebrities while hardworking members remain obscure (have you ever seen Florida Rep. Gus Bilirakis on TV?), improving how district lines are drawn and candidates chosen and turning state and local parties away from becoming baskets of extremism — seem unattainable. Far from being attacked, bipartisan answers, when possible, should be celebrated.

For now, hopefully, there is a respite from the insanity. The House passed a stopgap bill to keep the government open. The Senate will next need to approve the measure. Members can go home and temperatures can come down. Speaker Mike Johnson provided members of the Republican conference with wise counsel: "You have to be wise about choosing the fights."

But don't be surprised if we see more congressional retirements in coming weeks.

Good riddance, George Santos

Santos is a habitual liar without morals; citizens deserved better.

By Julian Zelizer

Julian Zelizer is a professor of history and public affairs at Princeton University. He is the author and editor of 25 books, including The New York Times bestseller "Myth America: Historians Take on the Biggest Lies and Legends About Our Past."

A damning report by the House Ethics Committee seems to have done what criminal indictments could not: bring the turbulent saga of Republican Rep. George Santos of New York to the conclusion an increasing number of observers have been hoping for. He has announced he will not seek reelection next year.

While this seemingly interminable drama has at last come to a head, the hard truth here is that at this point, Santos' exit hardly matters, at least when weighed against the reality of the party he's leaving behind.

The report details "substantial evidence" that one of the nation's most famous liars had violated federal laws. The committee was in unanimous agreement that they would send the material to the Department of Justice. Although the committee did not make any recommendations, the evidence could be enough to finally obtain the support of two-thirds of the lower chamber needed to support expelling him from office. If he were to be expelled, he would be the only member in US history to meet that fate who has not been convicted of a crime or fought for the Confederacy.

At the same time that he announced he would not run for reelection for a second term, since "my family deserves better than to be under the gun from the press all the time," Santos made sure to tell supporters on X (formerly Twitter) that the report was a "disgusting politicized smear that shows the depths of how low our federal government has sunk. Everyone who participated in this grave miscarriage of Justice should all be ashamed of themselves."

Santos seems to have learned from former President Donald Trump that when in trouble, the response is to try to discredit everyone who has exposed the problem.

The report doesn't come as much of a surprise. It only adds to the long list of news stories that have uncovered how much of what Santos told voters was not true. He fabricated a record, a whole fake life really, to become one of the handful of Long Island Republicans who helped swing control of the House from the Democrats to the

GOP.

In an age where lying and misinformation has become a normalized part of national politics, many observers rightly wondered if there would be any accountability. Given that Republicans can't afford to lose any seats because of their slim hold on power, a number of House Republicans determined that protecting Santos took priority over any kind of punishment (though both Democrats and Republicans ultimately called for his resignation).

Given the evidence that has been presented by the Ethics Committee, the odds have increased that the indictment could turn into a conviction, and this is more than most Republicans are willing to swallow.

Putting morals aside, many legislators in the GOP can see that this would be a good story to deal with as they try to protect their majority going into 2024. Nor does Santos have the same kind of standing and support as Trump. Today, the odds became pretty good that enough Republicans might join Democrats in voting to expel Santos.

Indeed, New York Republicans are calling for his expulsion: The Ethics report "is in alignment with my long held belief that this fraudster," said Rep. Anthony D'Esposito, "has no place serving in the People's House and I once again call on my colleagues to join me in advocating for George Santos' expulsion from Congress."

Now that Santos is on his way out, the most pressing concern is what, if anything, the nation can learn about improving the state of American politics. While it would be tempting to cheer the outcome as evidence that the system is working, and that the truth still has a place in national politics, that would be an overly optimistic interpretation of events.

The Santos story, as dramatic as it has been, is just one piece of a much bigger puzzle that has allowed US democracy to descend into a morass of disinformation and falsehood.

In certain respects, Santos stepping aside — before being ejected or convicted — allows the GOP to sidestep the question of what has happened to their party. Santos may be bowing out, but Trump is still their 2024 presidential frontrunner. Four indictments aside, as well as numerous civil suits, Trump remains popular and enormously powerful despite a fact-checking record so long that it should find a place in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Santos choosing not to run again does nothing to curtail or ameliorate a massive and toxic conservative media eco-system — from cable television to social media — that is virtually filter-less and allows all kind of lies, such as election denialism, to circulate at the speed of sound. It does nothing to change the hearts and



minds of an electorate that seems so dug into its partisan outlook that anyone can say anything and as long as they don't threaten the party nobody will touch them.

Like Trump, Santos is a symptom, not the cause of what has been happening to the Republican Party. Eliminating him from the caucus will not solve the problem at the core of the party. Trump remains front and center as he continues to spread lies about the election that he lost. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia has been constantly throwing out egregious falsehoods such as saying on CBS "60 Minutes" that Democrats are pedophiles. Lying in the GOP has become a national pastime.

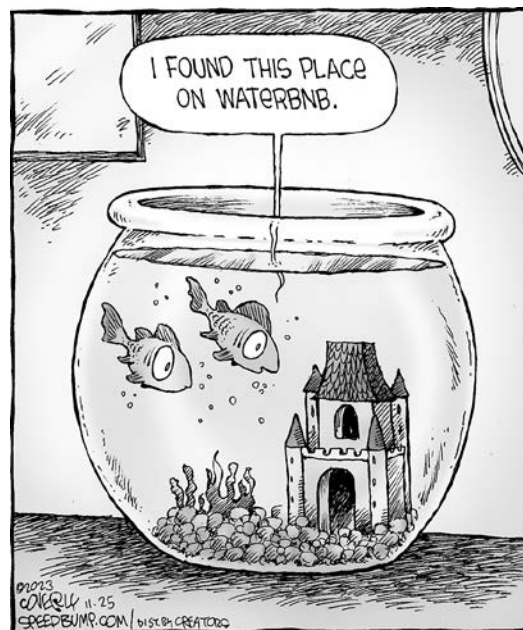
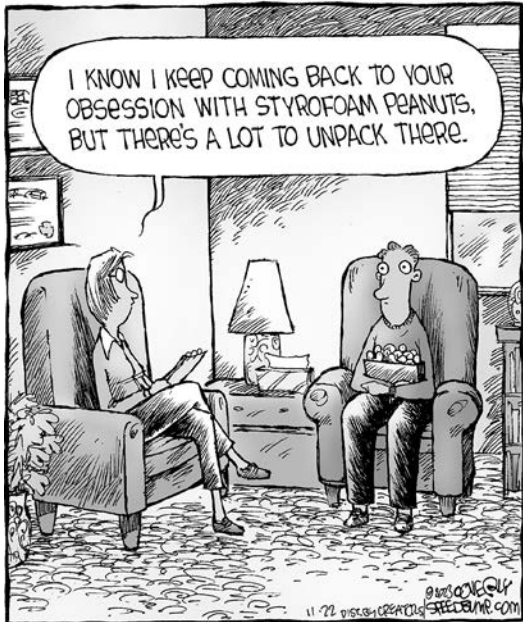
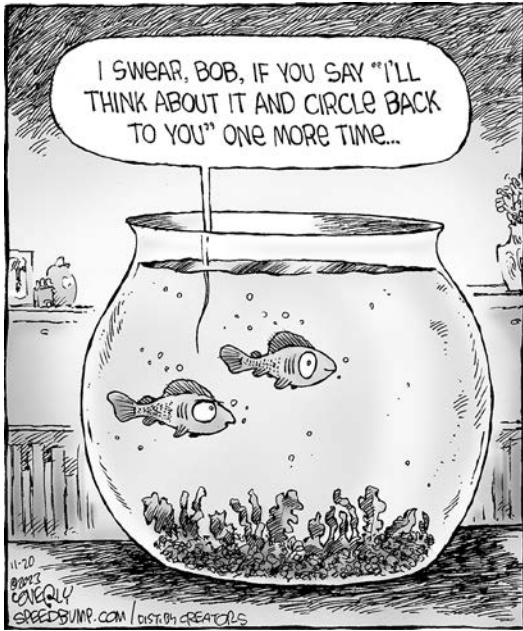
Santos's story is only relevant in that it took so long for him to fall. The fact that he lasted until now, and that there was a serious chance he could survive the kind of record that makes Jon Lovitz's Saturday Night Live character Tommy Flanagan — that's the ticket — look honest is remarkable. Lovitz portrayed a pathological liar who ended his elaborate lies by saying "that's the ticket."

When Santos attacked Lovitz after he came back to play the congressman, the comedian posted on social media: "Thanks the review and advice! You're right! I do need to step my game up! My pathological liar character can't hold a candle to you!"

It took the serious possibility of federal crimes and expulsion to finally shake him. Now it wouldn't be completely surprising to see him reemerge as a commentator on Fox News.

A healthy political party wouldn't allow this behavior to thrive. Santos's downfall should be a moment for Republicans to engage in some introspection, rather than celebration, to think about how they reached this point.

SPEED BUMP DAVE COVERLY



Norwalk Community Calendar

MONDAYS

1st Mon., 6 pm - Public Safety meetings - Council Chambers
 2nd Mon., 7 pm - Relay for Life meetings - Mr. Rosewood Family Restaurant

TUESDAYS

9:00 a.m. - 1 pm - Farmers Market - Norwalk City Hall
 1st & 3rd Tues., 6 pm - Toastmasters Meetings - Registrar Recorder/County Clerks Office
 1st & 3rd Tues., 6 pm - City Council - Council Chambers
 3rd Tues., 5:45 pm - Housing Authority - Council Chambers

WEDNESDAYS

1st & 3rd Wed., 7 pm - Lions Club - Bruce's Restaurant
 2nd Wed., 10:30 am - Norwalk Woman's Club - Faith Church
 2nd & 4th Wed., 1:30 pm - Alondra Senior Citizens - Social Services Center
 2nd & 4th Wed., 6 pm - Soroptimist International - Via Zoom
 2nd & 4th Wed., 7:30 pm - Planning Commission - Council Chambers
 4th Wed., 11:30 am - Coordinating Council - Arts & Sports Complex

THURSDAYS

7 pm - Boy Scouts Troop 924 - Norwalk United Methodist Church
 2nd Thurs., 6 pm - 605 Kiwanis Club - Mr. Rosewood Family Restaurant
 2nd Thurs., 7 pm - American Legion Post No. 359 - 11986 Front St.
 2nd Thurs., 7:30 pm - Golden Trowel - Norwalk Masonic Lodge

SATURDAYS

9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. - Farmers Market - Norwalk City Hall

SUNDAYS

12:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m. - Food Pantry - 12201 Firestone Blvd., Norwalk, CA 90650

Would you like an event listed in the community calendar?
 E-mail news@thedownypatriot.com

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PUZZLE OF THE WEEK

THE NEWSDAY CROSSWORD

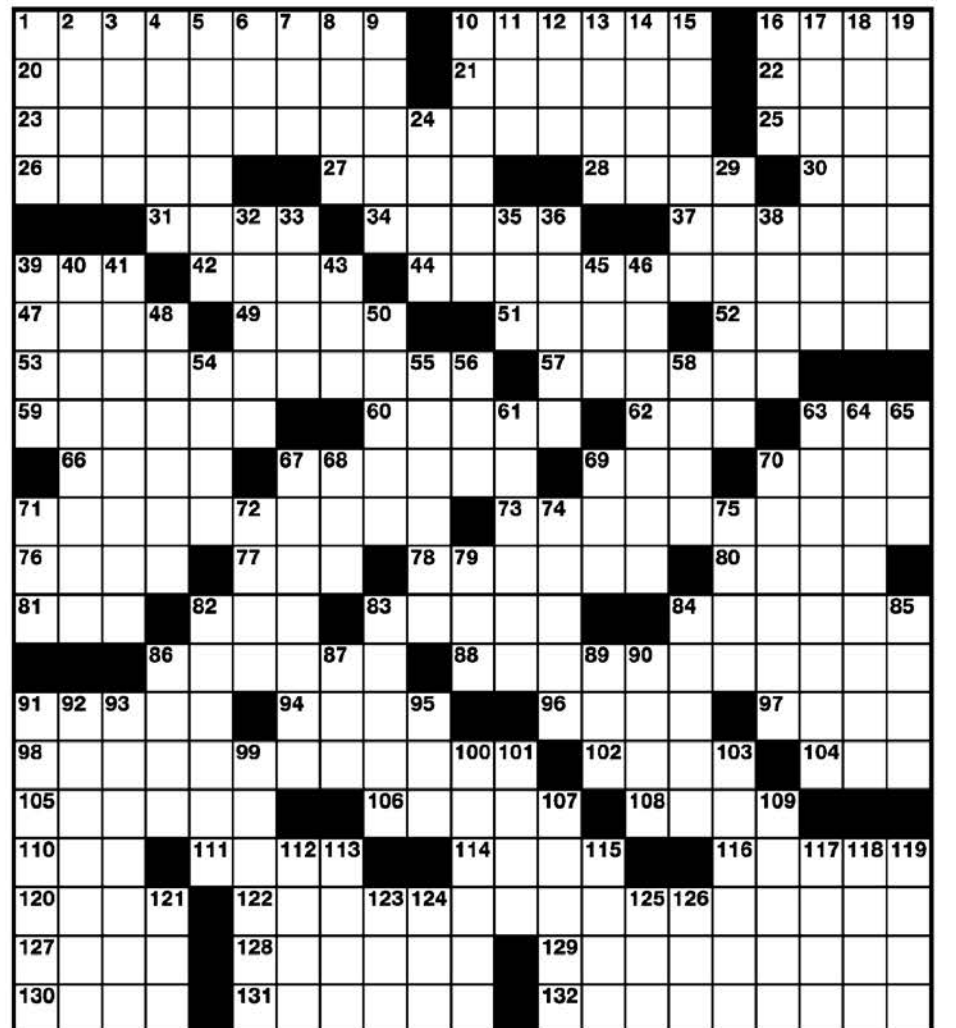
Edited by Stanley Newman (www.StanXwords.com)
MANY THANKS: For the upcoming week
 by Kevin Christian

You can contact puzzle editor Stanley Newman at his e-mail address: StanXwords@aol.com. Or write him at P.O. Box 69, Massapequa Park, NY 11762, Please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you'd like a reply.

You can contact puzzle editor Stanley Newman at www.StanXwords.com

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| 10 River through Vienna | 82 Animation artwork | 11 Donkey | 12 Federal medical research agcy. |
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| 59 Olympic swimmer Dara | 130 Culprit, for short | | |
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| 62 Did nothing | 132 Unemotional nature | | |
| 63 Tai ___ (martial art) | | | |
| 66 African Queen screenwriter | | | |
| DOWN | 1 Neighbor of Chile | | |
| 67 Parisian pal | 2 Each, informally | | |
| 69 Peach center | 3 Denny's rival | | |
| 70 Goat bleats | 4 Direct elsewhere | | |
| 71 YOUR BASIC THIRST QUENCHER | 5 "Sad" modern music | | |
| 73 YOUR WELLNESS | 6 Patel of <i>Slumdog Millionaire</i> | | |
| 76 Short news piece | 7 Mine resource | | |
| 77 ___ Holiness (papal title) | 8 Cost to ride | | |
| 78 OK to ingest | 9 Regional botany | | |
| 80 Bad habit | | | |

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MORE OF STAN'S CROSSWORDS! Play FREE from Stan's archives of Easy, Hard and Sunday puzzles at: tinyurl.com/stan-newman-crosswords

How watching football became a Thanksgiving tradition

By Leah Asmelash

Thanksgiving, for many in the US, usually means a few things: food, family... and football.

Every year, millions tune in to watch the annual Thanksgiving NFL games — 2022's matchup between the Dallas Cowboys and the New York Giants garnered an audience of 42.1 million people, becoming the most-watched NFL regular season game in history. (By comparison, 33.8 million tuned in to President Joe Biden's inauguration).

But how did America's favorite sport become so linked to the holiday?

The tradition actually started with college football

Football started out as an amateur sport — played mainly in elite northeastern colleges like Harvard, Princeton, Yale and Columbia, said Matthew Andrews, a history professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The Thanksgiving tradition began back in 1876, when the Intercollegiate Football Association began hosting their championship game on the holiday. But the tradition didn't begin to pick up steam until 1880, Andrews said, when the association moved the end-of-season game to New York.

It's this game, Andrews said, that took football from a sporting event to a social one.

"This game was sort of the unofficial start of the winter holiday social season," he said. "People from the different colleges and universities would flood New York City, and there would be pregame Wednesday

night dinners and Friday and Saturday night there would be post-game balls and trips to the theater. And that's when it really takes off, in the 1880s and the 1890s."

And so, by the mid-1890s, college football and Thanksgiving day were synonymous.

Not everyone approved of the new tradition

Thanksgiving didn't really become an annually celebrated holiday until 1863, when Abraham Lincoln encouraged its recognition as a way to promote unionism during the Civil War, Andrews said. The rise of Thanksgiving, then, is almost congruent with the rise of football: the holiday helped fuel the popularity of the sport, Andrews said, and in turn football made Thanksgiving a little more secular and more widely appealing.

And their alliance makes sense, Andrews said. Professional football didn't exist yet, so the sport was intrinsically tied to communities at the high school and college level, which can foster fierce loyalties. School colors are often linked to football teams, and landmark events like homecoming are typically tied to a football game.

"Football is the sport around which communities revolve," Andrew said. "This holiday in which we're celebrating community, I think it makes sense that football would seamlessly fit into that culture."

But that doesn't mean everyone celebrated the shift.

In 1893, the New York Herald condemned the rise of football on Thanksgiving, arguing that the sport was



ruining the holiday.

"Thanksgiving is no longer a solemn festival to God for mercies given," the paper printed. "It is a holiday granted to the state and nation to see a game of football."

NFL teams began playing on Thanksgiving to increase their popularity

At that point, football was still an amateur sport. When the NFL was founded in 1920, no one was really interested in professional football, Andrews said.

So, the league started scheduling games on Thanksgiving — drawing on pre-existing traditions to help establish the league into American consciousness. In the first decade, the NFL would schedule as many as six games on Thanksgiving, a far cry from the three games they schedule

now. It was all an attempt to bring interest and notability to the sport, Andrews said.

"Of course they played on Thanksgiving, because by 1920 Thanksgiving meant football and football meant Thanksgiving," Andrews said. "The NFL would've been missing a critical opportunity to popularize the game if they had not played on Thanksgiving day. It almost would've been un-American."

And the strategy worked. The Detroit Lions, who play every year on Thanksgiving, first began that tradition in 1934 — done in an effort to increase their brand and put fans in the stands.

By the 1970s, Thanksgiving and NFL football were inseparable

Still, professional football hadn't really exploded in

popularity just yet. Baseball was still the most popular sport in the US. But by the 1960s, that had begun to shift, Andrews said.

It's during that shift that the Dallas Cowboys, who also play every year on the holiday, started their Thanksgiving tradition. At the time, the Cowboys were a new team looking to build their brand and their fanbase. So in 1966, they began to host a Thanksgiving game, Andrews said, bringing instant exposure to the team.

By the 1970s, the Cowboys were the most famous football team in the US, and Thanksgiving and professional football were intrinsically linked. And still, per tradition, the Lions and the Cowboys continue to play every year on the holiday.

But eventually, other teams complained, arguing that they didn't "get a piece

of that Thanksgiving pie," Andrews said. As a result, in 2006, the NFL added a third Thanksgiving game to the lineup, featuring rotating teams.

And these Thanksgiving games are important to fans. In 2021, the Thanksgiving matchup between the Raiders and the Cowboys was the fourth most-watched telecast of the year, behind the Super Bowl and the AFC and NFC Championships. Aside from the presidential inauguration, the top-10 most watched telecasts that year were all NFL games. That dominance continued in 2022, according to Statista, when the eight of the top 10 most-watched telecasts were NFL games, including a Thanksgiving game.

"Right or wrong, football is a religion in this country," Andrews said. "And so football on Thanksgiving is sacred."

Downey files restraining order against critic

By Alex Dominguez
Staff Writer

DOWNEY - The City of Downey has filed a temporary restraining order against regular gadfly Armando Herman.

Under the court order, Herman is to stay 100 yards from Mayor Claudia M. Frometa, Mayor Pro Tem Mario Trujillo, and Councilmembers Hector Sosa and Timothy Horn, as well as refrain from contacting, threatening, or harassing them.

He is still able to participate in City Council

meetings by submitting written comments in accordance with the city's meeting rules.

The two parties were due in court Wednesday morning.

Herman, 56, of Hacienda Heights, is a regular antagonist at Downey and other official board meetings, known for his over-the-top behavior, name calling, and vulgar outbursts during public comment periods, which he says is protected under the First Amendment.

He took the city to court in 2017 after being tossed out by then Mayor Fernando Vasquez; the case was later

settled for \$5,000.

In a text message to the Downey Patriot, Frometa said that "local governments, council members, and residents should not continue to be held hostage at the hands of those who wish to inflict verbal abuse, personal threats, anti-Semitic and hateful speech in the name of the First Amendment."

"The type of threats, intimidation, and verbal assaults we have endured over the past many years cannot continue to be tolerated nor justified," she said. "Any reasonable judge would agree this type of threatening

behavior in the name of free speech is an assault on our freedoms and a threat to our personal safety."

Herman was recently barred from attending Los Angeles County Board of Supervisor meetings for a period of three years, after officials accused him of sending vulgar, threatening emails to four of the five of its members, according to the Los Angeles Times.

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