

Freedom's View

A Commentary on Government from Atop the Capitol

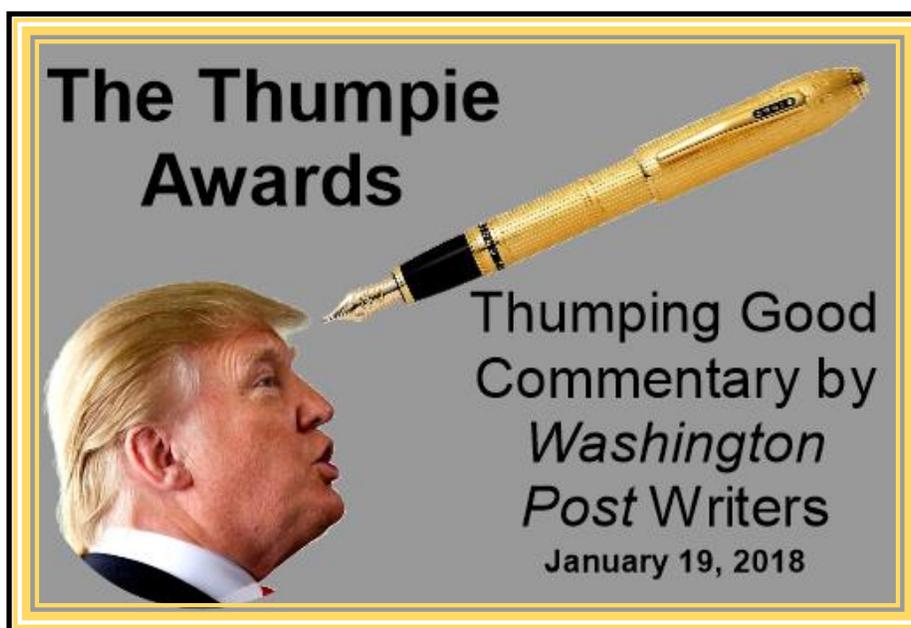
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ON THE EVE OF TRUMP'S SECOND YEAR, WE CELEBRATE



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WASHINGTON, DC
by Armed Freedom

Already, you have may have noticed Edition 44 is something of a departure from our usual ones, all of which seek to put a Whoopee Cushion on the seat of Trump's government and his GOP allies in congress. Sometimes our editions take a somewhat more serious turn and attempt to educate. This edition is, for the most part, one of those. Volume 1 deliberately ends with Edition 44, in *homage* to Barack Obama, whose well-informed, no-drama approach to governing we sorely miss. Volume 2 begins after tomorrow.

The response of *The Washington Post* to the past twelve months Trump has been in office was to produce *extraordinary* investigative, reality-based news reporting, and *sparkling* commentary. Because of these labors, we have gained insight, and even taken hope. Clear-eyed realists all, their insightfulness signals the birth of something new. We now want to honor a few of them by awarding each a *Thumpie*.

(Oh, before I forget . . . we purchased the golden pens that are *The Thumpies* at Amazon.com.
Amazon is owned by Jeff Bezos, owner of *The Washington Post*.)

AN AMBIGUOUS YEAR

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.”¹

What a Dickens of a time these past 12 months have been! Writers search for the right descriptive adjectives to describe the period January 20, 2017 through January 19, 2018. We'll just repeat our contention that it was, in part, a year of *esquivalience* run amok.² Neither the Trump administration nor the GOP congress distinguished themselves by actually attending to their tasks of governing with a due regard for enshrined American traditions. As Trump and the acquiescent GOP congress applied their torque wrenches to them, the bolted-down infrastructure of Constitutional and traditional understandings essential to the functioning of our democracy were beginning to loosen.

“All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it's not only around us; it's *within* us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We're also feeling the birth pangs.”³

However, as each issue of *The Week* says, “It hasn't been all bad.” While there has been an enormous amount of amygdala-induced reactivity in the body politic, it's pre-frontal lobes may actually be growing in size and activity.⁴ To put it in language an English Major might appreciate (if *not* the sentence's contorted structure): Much of the worst-of-times news that prior to this year was inconceivable in the United States, has served to awaken the Gulliver-like body politic from its tied-down, often apolitical slumber: a Zombie-like state, perhaps induced by its Lilliputian preoccupations of posting cute kitten videos, minute-by-minute check-ins on social media's gossip, and endlessly watching TV Reality Shows.

Dickens and Paul said it better. But it was up to a German mathematician to give us a three-dimensional object that expresses the wisdom of both those writers. In 1858, August Ferdinand Mobius discovered the “Mobius shape.” He took a narrow strip of paper and, after giving one of its ends a half-twist, made it into a ring. Experiment with it. Start with a strip of paper and on one side write, “It is an awful time; the pain is too great; we're all going to die.” On the other side write, “It is a great time; we're ‘pregnant’ with possibilities; we're going to give birth to something wonderfully new.” Next, tape the ends together, being sure first to give one end a half-twist. Next, touch the Mobius strip with a pen and draw the paper through until you eventually meet the line where you started. Cut the strip where you'd taped it. The line is now on *both* sides! The Mobius is the shape of our experience. Your pre-frontals will love it! ~ *Armed Freedom*

¹ Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities, Book the First, Chapter 1.*

² *Esquivalience* (“the willful avoidance of one's official responsibilities; the shirking of duties”) was a focus of Edition 43.

³ Paul of Tarsus, *Romans, Chapter 8, Verse 22.* Translation and subsequent paraphrase: *The Message*, by Eugene H. Peterson.

⁴ The *amygdala* is an almond-shaped tissue in the mid-brain that initiates sending alarm signals to the entire body in preparation for taking defensive action. The pre-frontal lobes of the brain help to make complex plans, reality-based decisions, and regulates emotional expression.

AND THE AWARD GOES TO . . .

Good commentary's first requirement is to have feet planted firmly in evidence-supported reality. Without reporters tirelessly working to uncover such realities in human affairs, commentary might only be the ravings of a lunatic. While the latter can sometimes be elected to high office, commentators need the stable footing provided by the reporting staff in order to keep their balance. We give thanks for *Washington Post* reporters who have done *extraordinary* investigative work these past twelve months. Printing the realities they have uncovered, however unsettling they may be, is essential to the functioning of our democracy. They are, therefore, *a gift* to this republic. *Kudos!*

Freedom's View trades mainly in satirical, but occasionally straight-forward, commentary. Therefore, it is a large, but still select, group of *Washington Post* commentators that we now wish to thank and honor.

A self-described "obsessive reader of *Freedom's View*" suggested a name for our award. He wrote that his wife, "when disapproving of some fool thing I'm thinking of doing, makes a circle with her thumb and index finger, much as one might in preparation for flicking a bug off the kitchen table. Approaching my head, she tells me, 'I'm going to thump you in the forehead if you do that!'" We liked his suggestion so much we have named our award "The Thumpies."

They are presented to *Washington Post* commentators who thump all of us on the forehead with needed wake-up calls and who, on a number of occasions, also have thumped Trump and the GOP well and good. Their pens are, indeed, mightier than the sword of his *fake news*.

Winners of *The Thumpie*



E. J. Dionne – for his columns that merge empirical data with progressive thought. He frequently - and refreshingly – makes a case for the important contributions more-enlightened expressions of Christianity can make to our political conversations, and argues well for their notice by liberals.



Petula Dvorak – for her columns that sometimes take your breath away with their very intimate focus on local issues, and which often shed considerable and compelling light on those wider issues that President Trump and the GOP congress are negatively impacting.



Michael Gerson – many progressives' favorite conservative, for his eloquent and articulate columns - often presented with passionate conviction – which explicate the consequences for people of faith who get too cozy with the President, especially a great many Evangelicals.

The Thumpie Awards - (continued)



Glenn Kessler – for his Fact Checker blog that exposes Trump’s and the GOP’s own outrageously fabricated *fake news* they present as truth. If commentators often speak truth to power, Kessler’s evidence-based journalistic investigations undergird the commentary of our other winners. He is *also* a commentator, since  his *opinions* of the egregiousness of their prevarications guide the number of Pinocchios he will award. He will receive none from us.



Dana Milbank – for his columns that, with the sensitive nose of a bloodhound, sniff out the sad and funny outrageousness of Republicans, usually finishing the job with a sloppy wet-licking all over their faces. He is an inspiration to *Freedom’s View* in his unerring ability to accurately land a pie in their faces while unashamedly wearing his own red nose and clown shoes.



Kathleen Parker – for her columns that . . . aw, shucks, y’all . . . you *do* know how she’s always sayin’ something smart(-alecky), soulfully real, and puts a very much-needed smile on our faces! Her snarky Southern humor prepares the way for her making you think - or gasping - as you realize she’s, as often as not, talking about *us*.



Alexandria Petri – former stand-up comic, competitive whistler, and prize-winning punster, she is the youngest columnist ever hired by the *Post*. Even though – or perhaps especially because – she claims Shakespeare as one of the several influences on her craft, she claims the goal of her writing is “to be weirder than everybody else and hope that no one stops me.” So far, to her credit and our delight, no one has. But so that our old, less-nimble neurons can more-readily follow her narrative, we hope Alexandra minds her columns’ flow. But this frustration belongs more to us than to her. We are delighted to award her a *Thumpie* for her admirable work. Most especially, we honor her column that Trump’s White House *mistook for real news*, subsequently including it in the President’s Daily Press Briefing. Alas, poor Spicer, we knew you well! So, at least in this one instance, Trump’s complaint about *The Post* printing “fake news” is *true* - but only in the “weirder than anybody else’s” sense of that word . . . except for Trump’s. His is, of course, weirder. Wonder not should the Alt-Right Nazis begin singing “Trumpland, Trumpland *über alles!*” Deliciously, Trump’s petard will have hoisted him up there.



Catherine Rampell – for this super-smart Millennial’s columns analyzing and skewering the GOP’s more hare-brained legislative efforts to reform the tax code, health care, and their “*give-us-more-money-for-the-military-since-the-growth-from-our-tax-reform-will-trickle-down-as-a-Golden-Shower-to-bless-millions-of-hard-working-Americans*” budget proposals. That the GOP’s policies move millions of those Americans toward or into poverty is a concept escaping their comprehension. But not hers!

The Thumpie Awards - (continued)



Eugene Robinson – for his columns on many things Trumpish, all of which are evidence-based, argued eloquently, and often illustrated by anecdotes from his own life. As an African-American man who has experienced, early in his life, being amongst “a handful of black students on a previously all-white campus,” he brings this distinctive background to his Pulitzer Prize-winning work – frequently with the playfulness his photo suggests.



Jennifer Rubin – for her columns critical of Trump from a principled conservative who is clearly no stranger to compassion. While mourning the loss of the GOP’s mind and soul, her columns repeatedly are fierce protestations that Trump and the GOP have no clothes – and that the view from the rear, so to speak, is disgusting. Perhaps as much for her as for her readers – but then we failed the mind-reading course - she also offers practical ways of taking care of ourselves in these stressful times, including among them, specific creative ways of pushing back.



Philip Kennicott – A *Summa cum laude* philosophy major from Yale and writer for *The Post* since 1999, he is the current Culture Critic whose Pulitzer Prize-worthy January 12, 2018 column, “What did the men with Donald Trump do when he spoke of ‘shithole countries?’” appeared in *The Post*’s Lifestyle section, rather than on the Op-Ed page where it belonged. He studied classical piano, became an editor of classical music magazines and chief classical music critic of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* prior to coming to *The Post*, where he also served as its architecture critic. Bringing soul and sensitivity likely formed in part by his experience in the musical arts, his column combined that with a philosopher’s skills at pursuing the logic of an argument to its conclusion. His column is a *must read* and we are honored to present him with a *Thumpie*.

We have listed Kennicott out of alphabetical order since his column was a meditation on Lord Acton’s wise statement: “All that is required for the triumph of evil is that good (people) do nothing.” Leonard Cohen’s great “Anthem” agrees:

I can't run no more
 With that lawless crowd
 While the killers in high places
 Say their prayers out loud
 But they've summoned, they've summoned up
 A thundercloud
 And they're going to hear from me
 Ring the bells that still can ring
 Forget your perfect offering
 There is a crack, a crack in everything
 That's how the light gets in.

We offer our thanks to all the *Thumpie Award* winners for speaking up so well. In these worst of times, the very fact of their columns’ presence reveals the best of times that exists within the darkness. *They have let the light get in.*