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Democratic women legislators forge historic resistance as GOP takes federal control

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National Correspondent

In a historic shift following the 2024 elections, a record-breaking number of Democratic women will serve in state legislatures starting in 2025, solidifying state-level Democratic power amid a looming federal Republican trifecta under the incoming Trump administration. The legislators, many in leadership roles, will spearhead resistance efforts while shaping the Democratic Party's future leadership pipeline.

State legislatures, widely recognized as the bedrock of American governance, now host 1,584 Democratic women lawmakers, outnumbering their Republican counterparts by nearly two-to-one. Women will hold roughly one-third of legislative seats nationwide, with at least 19 states increasing the total representation of women. The milestone



The legislators, many in leadership roles, will spearhead resistance efforts while shaping the Democratic Party's future leadership pipeline. (Photo via NNPA)

marks a stark contrast to Congress, where the number of women legislators has declined for the first time since 2016.

Notably, Democratic women will serve as House speakers in eight states, including Hawaii, which will

see its first woman in this role. Additionally, for the first time in U.S. history, three states will boast majority-women Democratic legislatures. Nearly 100 women will hold

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People In The News ...



Nikki Giovanni



Juan Soto

NDG Quote of the Week: "Next to God we are indebted to women, first for life itself, and then for making it worth living."

- Mary McLeod Bethune

Nikki Giovanni

Nikki Giovanni, the groundbreaking poet, author, and professor whose work embodied the spirit of the Black Arts Movement and beyond, died on Monday in Blacksburg, Virginia. She was 81. Her wife, Virginia C. Fowler, confirmed the cause was complications from lung cancer.

Born Yolande Cornelia Giovanni Jr. on June 7, 1943, in Knoxville, Tennessee, Giovanni spent her formative years in Cincinnati, Ohio, but returned to Knoxville every summer with her sister to visit their grandparents. These visits helped shape her sense



of identity and belonging, themes that would become central to her work.

She graduated with honors in history from Fisk University, a historically Black college in Nashville and her grandfather's alma mater. While at Fisk,

Giovanni's defiant spirit and intellect were evident. Expelled briefly due to issues with authority, she returned after a period of reflection and was readmitted with the help of a supportive Dean of Women. This early experience of rebellion and reconciliation laid the groundwork for her unapologetic approach to life and art.

A Voice of Rebellion and Resilience

Giovanni rose to prominence during the 1960s as a fierce voice in the Black Arts Movement, alongside literary giants such as Amiri Baraka, Audre Lorde, Ntozake Shange, and Sonia Sanchez. Her early works,

including "Black Feeling, Black Talk" (1968) and "Black Judgement" (1968), were steadfast in their militancy and pride. Her poetry grappled with the injustices faced by Black Americans, including the brutal murder of Emmett Till and the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, which killed four Black girls.

At a time when mainstream publishers showed little interest in the work of a young Black woman writing what they labeled "militant" poetry, Giovanni took matters into her own hands. She self-published her work, founding a company to distribute her col-

lections. "No one was much interested in a Black girl writing what was called 'militant' poetry," she once wrote. "I thought of it as good poetry."

Her boldness paid off. In 1972, at just 29 years old, she sold out Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, reading her poetry to a crowd of more than 1,000 alongside the New York Community Choir. The following year, for her 30th birthday, she filled the 3,000-seat Philharmonic Hall, where the choir joined her again, along with Melba Moore and Wilson Pickett. The audience erupted joyfully when she recited her now-iconic poem, "Ego-

Tripping." The piece, a celebration of Black female strength, begins with the lines:

*"I was born in the congo
I walked to the fertile
crescent and built
the sphinx..."*

And concludes triumphantly:

*"I am so perfect so divine
so ethereal so surreal*

I cannot be comprehend-

ed

*except by my permission
I mean...I...can fly
Like a bird in the sky..."*

- A Prolific Career

In addition to her poetry, Giovanni wrote children's books, essays, and a mem-

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Juan Soto

Former Washington Nationals phenom Juan Soto bet on himself — and won big. The superstar outfielder signed a 15-year, \$765 million contract with the New York Mets, making it the largest deal in professional sports history. The contract includes a \$75 million signing bonus and no deferred payments, unlike previous offers he received from the Nationals. With opt-out clauses starting after year five, the Mets can keep Soto in Queens by increasing his salary by \$4 million annually, potentially pushing the deal beyond \$800 million.

Soto's decision comes after he turned down a 15-year, \$440 million extension from the Nationals in 2022, a gamble that has now paid off handsomely. His new contract dwarfs the \$700 million deal signed by Shohei Ohtani last year, which included significant deferrals that reduced its present-day value.

Despite the staggering headline number, taxes and fees will significantly reduce Soto's net earn-



ings. Federal taxes at 37%, combined with New York's state and city taxes totaling nearly 15%, will take a major chunk of the contract. According to the Black Press USA's unofficial calculation, adding the 5% agent fee for Scott Boras, Soto will net around \$350.5 million — still a massive figure.

At just 26, Soto's resume speaks for itself: a World Series champion at 20, four-time All-Star, four-time Silver Slugger, and one of the game's most disciplined hitters. His career .421 on-base percentage leads all active players since his debut, and his .953 OPS places him among the game's elite. With 201 home runs,

592 RBIs, and more than 36 WAR, his combination of power and patience at the plate has drawn comparisons to Barry Bonds.

A Transformative Signing for the Mets

Soto joins a Mets team coming off an unexpected run to the National League Championship Series. His addition signals a serious push for a championship. Longtime Mets broadcaster Gary Cohen called the signing "the biggest and most important transaction the Mets have ever made."

"The only one even in the same ballpark is the Mike Piazza trade in 1998," Cohen said on SNY. "The Mets have never dipped this deeply into free agency for a player of this caliber and age. Juan Soto just turned 26. He's arguably the best hitter in baseball. This changes the conversation around the Mets entirely."

Soto's presence in the lineup, likely hitting alongside star first baseman Pete Alonso, positions the Mets as immediate favorites in the National League East, regardless of future moves this offseason.

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The North Dallas Gazette, formerly Minority Opportunity News, was founded in July 1991, by Mr. Jim Bochum and Mr. Thurman R. Jones. North Dallas Gazette is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Minority Opportunity News, Inc.

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Healing our communities and curbing division through nonviolence education and training

By Dr. Tangier Scott
President & CEO
Florida Martin Luther
King Jr. Institute
for Nonviolence

(BPRW) The great, late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said that "Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon. Indeed, it is a weapon unique in history, which cuts without wounding and ennobles the man who wields it."

Although Election Day has come and gone, the concerns and issues of the potential post-election anger and violence are still with us. However, we must not allow violence to define our society. It is crucial for our community to embrace King's philosophy of nonviolence, fostering dialogue and understanding as we work towards meaningful social change.

Recognizing the trend that violence was on the increase in America, as a result of domestic violence, workplace, and schools, the State of Florida created the Florida Martin Luther King, Jr. Institute for Nonviolence as its response to the significant public need to develop methods, to curb the use of violence, and to encourage the nonviolence management of social conflict by law enforcement.

On May 13, 1993, House Bill 1283, sponsored by Florida State Representative James Bush III, District 109, and co-sponsored

by Senator Daryl Jones, District 40, was signed into law by Governor Lawton Chiles. This act of the Florida Legislature established the nation's second governmental response to the demand for nonviolence social change.

The idea of the Institute was orchestrated by the Metro-Miami Action Plan (MMAP) under the direction of then the Executive Director, Sherwood DuBose. He currently serves as the Board's Chairperson of the Criminal Justice Sensitivity Action Committee, with the assistance of the Miami Dade Commission, Miami-Dade Police Department, City of Miami Commission, City of Miami Police Department, Miami-Dade Corrections Department, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolence Social Change, Inc., and others.

The Florida Martin Luther King, Jr. Institute for Nonviolence focuses on Kingian Nonviolence training, a philosophy and methodology espoused by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It provides the knowledge, skills, and motivation necessary for participants to pursue peaceful strategies for solving personal and community problems. This approach addresses all forms of violence.

Since its inception, the Institute has had phenomenal success, as a result of certifying over 200 co-

trainers, trained approximately 10,000 individuals locally, in various states and internationally. In 2023, 22 Shelby County School Resources Officers were certified in nonviolence education and training. As a result, there has been a reduction in how conflict is managed within the Shelby County School system.

The Institute's successes and the experience it has garnered are directly related to the expertise and experience of its staff and associates. The Institute's President/CEO is Dr. Tangier Scott. She has a wealth of knowledge as a Manager and Adjunct Professor. The Board consists of professional individuals with a wide variety of experience and expertise.

Recently, our country has seen conflict escalate by law enforcement in alarming numbers, from the death of George Floyd, Brianna Taylor and more. More recently, outrage erupted in Minneapolis after a white man shot his Black neighbor just steps away from his door. Initially charged with attempted murder, first-degree assault and felony harassment and stalking, enhanced for racial bias, the suspect was not arrested until days later. Before this incident, the victim had filed at least 19 reports with the police, but no action had been taken.

Another case involved

a Miami Dolphins player, who was stopped by a Miami Dade Police Officer, and the situation escalated, whereas he was handcuffed by the officer. In addition, another player was also handcuffed. Questions remain why this officer with a history of reprimands is still on the force. Situations like these allow the community to come together for open dialogue to acquire skills for constructive confrontation that is a necessary ingredient for social change.

In a time where violent incidents continue to capture headlines, the work of the Florida Martin Luther King, Jr. Institute for Nonviolence remains more crucial than ever in providing education and training to continue curbing community division through Nonviolence education and training.

Dr. Scott is a lifelong educator, teacher, administrator, mentor and friend. Equipped with a Doctor of Education degree from Nova Southeastern University, and Master and Bachelor of Science degrees from Florida International University. She is a former administrator who has worked with the FLMK Institute. Her wealth of knowledge, and her "know how" insights are on instrumental to the future of this mainstay organization.

Keep up with the news

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Health Care Outrage: Anthem's anesthesia limits under fire after CEO assassination

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National
Correspondent

The assassination of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson on a busy Midtown Manhattan Street has intensified scrutiny of Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield's controversial new anesthesia reimbursement policy, set to roll out next year in several states. As outrage grows among medical professionals and policymakers, connections between systemic health-care grievances and the brazen attack have sparked heated discussions across the country.

Anthem's Policy Under Fire

Anthem's plan will limit reimbursement for anesthesia services during surgeries based on predetermined time limits, using metrics known as "Physician Work Time values" from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). If an anesthesiologist's care exceeds the allowed time, Anthem will deny payment for the additional time, according to notices issued to providers in states including New York, Connecticut, Missouri, and Colorado.

"With this new policy, Anthem will arbitrarily predetermine the time allowed for anesthesia care during a surgery or procedure," the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) said in a statement. "If an anesthesiologist submits a bill where the actual time of care is longer than Anthem's limit, Anthem will deny payment. Anthem



Anthem's plan will limit reimbursement for anesthesia services during surgeries based on predetermined time limits, using metrics known as "Physician Work Time values" from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). (Image via NNPA)

will not pay anesthesiologists for delivering safe and effective anesthesia care to patients who may need extra attention because their surgery is difficult, unusual, or because a complication arises."

Dr. Donald E. Arnold, ASA president, condemned the policy in a strongly worded open letter to Anthem's parent company, Elevance Health Inc. "The Anthem policy provides no justification for paying for anesthesia services for only a portion of a patient's surgery," Arnold wrote, calling the policy "inappropriate and misguided." He emphasized the potential dangers for patients, especially those requiring extended or complex surgical procedures.

"This egregious policy breaks the trust between Anthem and its policyholders who expect their health insurer to pay physicians for the entirety of the care they need," Arnold added.

Fallout from UnitedHealthcare CEO's Assassination

Thompson's targeted killing has cast a shadow over the healthcare indus-

try. The 7 a.m. attack unfolded outside the Hilton Midtown as Thompson prepared to attend his company's annual investor conference. Surveillance footage shows the gunman, a masked figure in a hooded jacket, shooting Thompson multiple times, even clearing weapon jams with apparent ease before fleeing. Investigators have since linked the attack to potential grievances within the healthcare system.

A shell casing found at the scene bore the word "depose," and a live round ejected during the incident was inscribed with "delay." Police are investigating whether these cryptic messages reference the industry phrase "delay, deny, defend," often associated with controversial insurance practices.

The NYPD has released photos of a person of interest who was captured smiling at the front desk of a nearby hostel. Law enforcement officials described the suspect as a "light-skinned male" wearing a cream-colored jacket, black face mask, and a distinctive gray backpack. They have

offered a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the suspect's arrest.

Thompson's widow, Paulette, revealed to NBC News that her husband had received threats before his death. "There had been some threats... a lack of coverage? I don't know details," she said. "I just know that he said there were some people that had been threatening him."

Growing Pushback from Policymakers

Meanwhile, Anthem's

policy has already been halted in Connecticut following public outcry. "After hearing from people across the state about this concerning policy, my office reached out to Anthem, and I'm pleased to share this policy will no longer be going into effect here in Connecticut," Comptroller Sean Scanlon announced.


New York Governor Kathy Hochul also criticized the policy, calling it "outrageous." She posted on X, "I'm going to make

sure New Yorkers are protected."

Patient Safety in Jeopardy

Critics argue that Anthem's policy prioritizes profit over patient care. "The proposed Anthem policy reflects a significant disconnect between Anthem, its patients, and their needs," said Arnold, who warned that the policy could jeopardize patient safety during more pro-

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Democratic governors double down on Trump strategy; pick party leaders

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National
Correspondent

While officials and residents of the District of Columbia gear up for a MAGA Republican takeover of the federal government, a large group of Democratic governors met in California to solidify a defense against certain attacks from Donald Trump's incoming administration, a GOP majority in the House and Senate, and a hostile U.S. Supreme Court.

Democrats elected Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly to serve a full term as Chair of the Democratic Governors Association (DGA) for 2025. The decision came during the DGA's annual meeting in Los Angeles, where Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear was also elected as Vice Chair for



A large group of Democratic governors met in California to solidify a defense against certain attacks from Donald Trump's incoming administration. (Image via NNPA)

2025 and Chair-Elect for 2026.

Kelly began 2024 as DGA Vice Chair and assumed the Chair role in August after Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz joined the Democratic national ticket. Under her leadership, the DGA successfully held onto every Democratic governorship in the 2024 election cycle. This included critical victories in battleground states such as North Carolina, where Josh

Stein won, and Washington, where Bob Ferguson secured his governorship.

"I'm proud of the DGA's success in 2024 and look forward to building on our momentum to win both competitive races in Virginia and New Jersey next year," Kelly said. "As Democratic governors, we're delivering real results for the people of our states and making lives better for millions of Americans by focusing on

the issues that matter most. We're keeping our foot on the gas and ready to get to work in 2025."

During her time as governor, Kelly has focused on bipartisan progress. She attracted over \$20 billion in new business investments and created over 70,000 full-time jobs, including the largest economic development project in Kansas history — a \$4 billion initiative promising up to 4,000 new jobs. Kelly balanced the state budget, fully funded public schools, improved infrastructure, and brought Kansas back from years of fiscal mismanagement.

Beshear's election as Vice Chair and Chair-Elect follows his historic reelection in 2023, which he won in deep-red Kentucky by a significant margin. His focus on economic growth

has led to over 1,000 private-sector projects and more than 57,500 new jobs, including the state's largest economic project—a Ford battery plant in Glendale. Beshear's administration also legalized sports betting and prioritized infrastructure development.

"In Kentucky, we've shown that when you focus on the challenges families face every day, Democrats can win anywhere," Beshear said. "I'm excited to build on that record to help elect and re-elect Democratic governors across the country."

The DGA's annual meeting took on added significance with a gathering of prominent Democratic leaders, some of whom are considered potential 2028 presidential candidates. Governors Gavin Newsom of California, Gretchen

Whitmer of Michigan, JB Pritzker of Illinois, Roy Cooper of North Carolina, and Tim Walz of Minnesota attended the Beverly Hilton alongside a packed crowd of donors, strategists, and lobbyists.

Despite the speculation, Kelly remained focused on near-term goals. "Trust me, we're not thinking beyond '26 at this point," she said.

The meeting also highlighted Democratic governors' plans to navigate the challenges of a second Trump administration. Some governors are preparing to push back against potential policies that threaten civil rights and democracy. "You come for my people; you come through me," Pritzker asserted. In states like New York and Califor-

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GIOVANNI, from Page 2

oir, "Gemini: An Extended Autobiographical Statement on My First Twenty-Five Years of Being a Black Poet (1971)." She was known for her candid reflections on race, gender, and identity, blending the personal with the political in provocative and deeply human ways.

Giovanni's interview with James Baldwin on the television program Soul! in 1971 remains a touchstone in American cultural history. Their two-hour conversation, filmed in London, explored the intersections of race, gender, and societal expectations. At one point, she posed a raw question about the cycle of violence affecting Black families: "What do you do about a man who is mistreated in

the world and comes home and brutalizes his wife? Where does that leave his daughter?" Baldwin's response: "Sweetheart. Our ancestors taught us how to do that."

An Educator and Mentor

In 1987, Giovanni joined the faculty at Virginia Tech, where she became a University Distinguished Professor. She remained there for 35 years, influencing generations of students with her wit, wisdom, and unwavering commitment to truth. Even in academia, her rebellious spirit shone through. Giovanni famously supported her student, Seung-Hui Cho, before he committed the tragic mass shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007. She had him removed from her class when she

sensed his troubling nature.

Giovanni earned seven NAACP Image Awards, a Grammy nomination, and the distinction of having three of her books listed as New York Times and Los Angeles Times Best Sellers—a rare feat for a poet.

Giovanni described herself as a dreamer. "My dream was not to publish or to even be a writer," she remarked. "My dream was to discover something no one else had thought of. I guess that's why I'm a poet. We put things together in ways no one else does."

A Legacy of Dream and Defiance

Giovanni's poetry was a lifeline for many, especially young Black women who saw their power and potential reflected in her verses. She wasn't just a poet but a cultural force who celebrat-

ed Blackness, womanhood, and the art of dreaming. "I'm a writer. I'm happy,"

she demanded.

Nikki Giovanni leaves behind her son, Thomas,

and her granddaughter. Her father, mother, sister, and aunt preceded her in death.

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Two Irving ISD students earn prestigious QuestBridge scholarships

(Irving ISD) Two Irving ISD seniors are among the 2,627 scholars nationwide to receive a 2024 QuestBridge National College Match to some of the nation's top universities.

Matched students receive early admission and full four-year scholarships valued at more than \$325,000. The generous financial aid package covers the full cost of attendance including tuition, housing and food, books, supplies and travel expenses.

Learn more about Irving ISD's 2024 QuestBridge Scholars below:

Newly named Irving ISD Student Influencer Jada Arredondo can now add QuestBridge Scholar to her list of school achievements. Thanks to QuestBridge, Arredondo will head to Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Va., next fall on a full-ride scholarship.

She has kept busy over the past four years, serving on the Irving High School campus improvement committee, varsity tennis team and as student council president and Green Team vice



Irving ISD

president and co-founder. Arredondo is also involved in Academic Decathlon and AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination). Being heavily involved on campus has not only added to her high school experience, but it has also opened doors to various opportunities, like attending Camp RYLA (Rotary Youth Leadership Award), interning in Washington, D.C., through the CHCI (Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute) and attending the Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) program at the University of Southern California (USC) this past summer.

Arredondo plans to major

in economics or finance in college, and she's considering going to law school or starting a family real estate or consulting business post-undergrad. When reflecting on her journey, Arredondo credits her success to her faith in Jesus Christ, believing that her achievements are a reflection of His guidance and purpose in her life.

When we last interviewed MacArthur High School senior Mahriz Zain, he dreamed of being matched with any of the top 20 colleges in the United States. His dream turned into reality on Monday, December 2, when he was notified that he matched with Duke Univer-

sity, thanks to QuestBridge.

Zain, who plans to pursue a degree in finance and/or data science, has set ambitious career goals that include financial advising, venture capitalism and philanthropy – what he describes as his long-term end goal. His passion for these fields can be seen in his involvement at school, where he serves as president of both the Technology Student Association (TSA) and Business Professionals

of America (BPA), as well as secretary of MacArthur's SkillsUSA chapter. Outside of school, he is committed to community service, volunteering at the Irving Arts Center and engaging in various research projects.

Looking ahead, Zain aspires to use his education and experiences to give back through philanthropy. He hopes to provide opportunities for success to others, much like QuestBridge has done for him.

GOVERNORS, from Page 5

nia, governors are laying the groundwork to defend against federal overreach. New York Gov. Kathy Hochul and Attorney General Letitia James announced plans to counter any regulatory threats from Washington, and Newsom called a special legislative session to prepare for potential clashes with the Trump ad-

ministration.

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee pointed to past experience resisting Trump policies. "We've already taken considerable efforts to prevent him from abusing our state financially and targeting us," Inslee said. "You can't say we're 'Trump-proofed,' but we've made significant progress."

As Democratic governors prepare for the 2025 and 2026 election cycles, their strategy blends defense against federal policies with a focus on delivering results at the state level.

"We will continue to do what we do, which is work with whoever we need to work with to get what we need for our states," Kelly said.

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President elect's immigration reforms to present staffing and economic, among other challenges

By Lori Lee
NDG Contributing Writer

After focusing much of his presidential campaign on immigration reform, and now making early appointments to U.S. Customs and Homeland Security divisions, the public can anticipate President-elect Trump to attempt mass deportation efforts in the early days of his presidency. Yet, will he have the resources and the legal standing to accomplish this goal?

In a November Ethnic Media Services briefing, Jeremy Robbins, executive director of a bipartisan group of CEOs and mayors, the New American Economy, said most of those who have been deported recently are already in detention or have already been in contact with the government in some way. This condition simplifies the task of deportation and is much easier than seeking out immigrants in American communities to be deported.

The truth is, the two branches of the Department of Homeland Security that search for unauthorized people do not currently have the capacity to carry out a mass deportation effort, said Robbins. The investigative work alone would be extremely expensive, demanding high numbers of staff and monetary resources.

The act of holding immigrants in custody as the courts decide whether they should remain in the country is challenging in itself, considering our current detention capacity for immigrants is around 50,000. Deporting millions of people would require the construction of new detention facilities to handle a higher volume as well as a new



Image via NNPA

set of judges to help make decisions. This, given the remarkable backlog of over a million cases and a timeline of around five years to decide current asylum cases.

On top of detention and court costs is the price of getting people to their home countries, along with the added challenge of finding countries that will accept them. If done all at once, Trump's proposal would cost about \$315 billion, said Robbins, while a million people a year would amount to about \$88 million annually, over a decade costing American taxpayers nearly a trillion dollars. This, despite recent discussions over drastically cutting the cost of government.

The Biden Administration has already deployed existing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) resources to the maximum extent, having been quite aggressive considering its limited resources, added Greg Chan, Senior Director of Government Relations for the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

Added funding to support

this process was proposed by Democrats in a bipartisan bill, which was voted last this May. As NBC reported, the measure would have raised the standards to qualify for asylum and authorized officials to quickly expel those who fail to meet that new standard. It would have also given the president power to shut down the border when migration levels exceed certain levels.

It was only after Republicans negotiated and signed off on the proposal, that they were given instructions from Donald Trump to block the effort, NBC reported, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska being the only Republican Senator to vote in favor of the bill.

According to Julia Gillard, Associate Director of the US Immigration Policy Program at the Migration Policy Institute, the highest number of deportations occurred under Obama in 2009, at 238,000. To accomplish the volume Trump seeks would require a huge infusion of resources, of staff, added detention facilities, immigration court proceedings, and more planes and buses to scale up to needed

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Texas and SMU punch their tickets to the College Football Playoff

By Jamal Baker
NDG Contributing Writer

The University of Texas and Southern Methodist University have kicked the door in and made their presence known in their first seasons as members of the SEC and ACC. They have not quite grabbed a plate and kicked their feet up—losing each of their conference championship games, but have arrived, nonetheless. Texas, formerly a member of the Big 12, fell to Georgia 22-19 in an overtime thriller in the SEC Championship. SMU won the American Athletic Conference championship last



NDG Composite Image

year before losing a heart-breaker to Clemson 34-31 in this year's ACC championship. Both will quickly look to bounce back as they have amazing opportunities to compete for a championship in the College Football Playoff.

The Longhorns enter the

tournament as a fifth seed and will host Clemson in the first round at 3 p.m. CT on Saturday Dec. 21. in Austin. Texas will be making their second straight College Football Playoff appearance with hopes of building off last year's success.

"We're fortunate that we've earned the right to be in the playoffs and compete with Clemson. Dabo and I go way back, and he's done a great job. He modernized a lot of the coaching philosophies that a lot of us use today," Longhorns' head coach Steve Sarkisian said.

The Texas versus Clemson matchup will be the first time the two teams have ever competed against each other. The Longhorns will need to get redshirt freshman Arch Manning involved to add a new element to an offense that has the ability to explode at any given moment. Current starter Quinn Ewers

has done an admirable job at the helm, but his lack of mobility limits the variance of the offense. Employing a more balanced two-quarterback system gives Texas their best shot at winning the championship.

SMU edged out Alabama in the College Football Playoff rankings to claim the eleventh seed and will play No. 6 Penn State at 11 a.m. CT on Saturday Dec. 21 at Beaver Stadium in Pennsylvania.

"SMU played a game against Clemson and lost by three. For us, it just came down to watching the games. We watched those games together, see-

ing the outcome of those games and how those teams played. They earned the right to be in those conference championships, and we value watching those games and seeing the results and the outcome," College Football Playoff selection committee chair Warde Manuel said.

The Mustangs have a chance to write a Cinderella story, earning their first playoff berth in school history. The Dallas program has returned to college football relevancy after receiving the "death penalty" in 1987. With Christmas

See **PLAYOFFS**, Page 11

De Beers Group and Signet Unveil 'Worth the Wait' Campaign

A peek into a different kind of diamond engagement ring campaign, celebrating the authenticity of natural diamonds with an ad featuring real world couples.

De Beers Group and Signet Jewelers, the world's largest retailer of diamond jewelry, just unveiled their new 2024 campaign entitled "Worth the Wait" – eschewing the expected traditional fantasy narrative for diverse, real-world couples. Designed to draw parallels between the transformative journey of natural diamonds and the dynamic evolution of contemporary relationships, the advertising demonstrates how just as diamonds undergo a transformative process to become polished gems, couples undergo their own transformations as they solidify their bonds.

Designed to reflect the beauty and resilience of natural diamonds, these commercials draw insight from the lengths young adults now go to in order to find the right long-term partner, taking into account the rising age of couples getting married and the growing focus on individual mental and emotional health before finding life partners. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Americans are delaying (or putting off altogether) getting married for longer than ever before. In 2023, the median average age of men marrying for the first time rose to 30 years of age, while the median average age of first marriage for women rose to 28 years old. This is in stark contrast to the 1950s, when the median age for men to marry was 22, and the median age for women was 20 years old.

Still, for all the hopeless romantics out there, there is hope. Marriage rates are expected to rise in the US over the next few years, driven primarily by the Black, Hispanic and non-white communities, according

to U.S. Census data. Through the "Worth the Wait" campaign, De Beers Group and Signet celebrate the unique paths that couples are now following before saying "I do," and letting them know their needs and aspirations are being seen and understood.

The evolving focus on developing as an individual before taking the big step of getting married is being noticed across the country by individuals and experts alike. "I think everyone my age feels that it's most important to feel secure within yourself in order to feel secure in your relationship. My generation seeks relationships where each partner has their own independence and internal strength," noted Sophia Pasquale, a 22-year-old based in Chicago, IL.

"This generation is a little bit more open to having really meaningful conversations. Even just the way that we view therapy these days versus back then is different," states Elisa Del Castillo, a New York City-based matchmaker and dating coach. "I know, with Latinos, I can say from my own experience, you don't go to therapy, or you don't really talk about it. And now it's something that people encourage... People are a lot more open to really diving deeper and diving into the hard stuff."

And where once marriage vows primarily focused on honoring and obeying, vows now reflect a more nuanced insight into relationships with a focus on truth, communication, and growth – both individually and together. Mark Corser of Washington, DC, included in his own vows this year: "I promise to live in truth with you always, and to communicate without fear or judgment" – as did his wife.

This sentiment has also been reflected in religious faiths, where many couples have traditionally gone to seek marriage counsel as well as spiritual counsel. "If you want somebody to make the commitment for the long term, then you have to commit to working on you and they have to commit to working on themselves," says Chicago-based pastor and relationship coach Jermone Glenn. "If I don't see you putting in your

individual work even after we're married, then I don't have any hope that our work [together] is getting better. Keep working on yourself, so you can be a better self for your partner."

The "Worth The Wait" campaign, which celebrates the hard work couples are doing in the hopes of having successful, lasting marriages, will run nationally across various platforms, including social media and online, and will be further supported by brand partners Zales, KAY Jewelers, and Jared Jewelers. As part of their commitment to ethical practices, Signet and De Beers Group emphasize transparency and responsible sourcing. "Across Signet's banners, we are working to educate customers on their choices and provide transparency as an industry leader in responsible sourcing efforts," said Jamie Singleton, Signet Jewelers Group President and Chief Consumer Officer.

CEO of De Beers Brands, Sandrine Conseiller, expressed excitement about the campaign's modern approach: "We're excited to launch this campaign as part of our refreshed approach to natural diamond category marketing to connect a new generation of consumers to the wonder of natural diamonds. While the campaign draws on our track record of iconic natural diamond advertising, it brings an entirely fresh approach grounded in deep insights about the relationships of today's diverse couples."



Film Review: 'Wicked' is a charming adaptation of the popular stage classic

By Dwight Brown
NNPA Film Critic

(***/2) “Are we all born wicked?” It’s a trick question. The answer you give reflects your view of humanity.

In fact, that query is the theme of this charming and fanciful adaptation of the Broadway musical *Wicked* (2003). That show was based on a novel by Gregory Maguire (1995), which was inspired by L. Frank Baum’s book *The Wizard of Oz* (1900), which spawned the classic family movie *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). In the earlier two works, a young girl from Kansas meets two witches: Glinda the Good and the Wicked Witch of the West. The more recent works reconstruct the witches’ backstory. The characters are so iconic and vibrant in this witches’ brew that all these filmmakers need do is just tell the story. But they’re far more ambitious than that.

Casting Ariana Grande as the dismissive, dimwitted and wealthy Glinda Upland works to the film’s advantage. She’s funny and sarcastic as the very popular blonde. Her perfect counterbalance is the exceedingly green Cynthia Erivo as Elphaba. Often ostracized, but very intelligent, she has quick retorts to any derogatory remarks hurled her way. The two disparate souls meet their first day at Shiz University in the fantastical land of Oz. They’ll be studying magic and spellcasting.

Glinda holds court and is admired by other students. Some make fun of Elphaba, who bristles. Glinda joins in the derision. “It seems the artichoke is steamed!” For a while, the spoiled brat reigns supreme. After Elphaba comes under the guidance of Shiz University’s regal headmistress and Dean of Sorcery Studies, Madame Morrible (Michelle Yeoh), the green girl becomes the envied power



Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande in *Wicked* (Image via NNPA)

broker.

Each will become a witch. Their destinies play out over 160 entertaining minutes as directed by Jon M. Chu (*Crazy Rich Asians*, *In the Heights*), who makes all on view a joy to watch. A spectacle. Not in a bombastic way (e.g. Baz Luhrmann’s *Moulin Rouge*). More like the animated and colorful dreamworld of a *Harry Potter* movie. Hard for kids and families to take their eyes off the screen. Real hard. Credit Chu and his brilliant tech team.

Cinematographer Alice Brooks (*In the Heights*) lights and catches the enchanting visuals like she’s painting a storybook. Sets and props—dorm rooms, *Wizard of Oz*’s chambers, the train that takes the two witches to meet the Wizard—contribute to the fairytale feel, courtesy of production designer extraordinaire Nathan Crowley (*The Dark Knight*). Erivo, Grande and the rest of the cast’s cartoonish look are augmented by costume designer Paul Tazewell’s (*Hamilton*) quirky clothes. And editor Myron Kerstein (*In the Heights*) cuts scenes so tight, time whizzes by. Except for a few song/dance routines. Some songs are catchy and others not (music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz).

Chu masterfully develops the script (screenwriter Winnie Holzman from the Broadway show) into a lively fantasyland. He stages the energized characters well as they dance in perfect sync (choreographer Christopher Scott’s, *In the Heights*). Action scenes with flying menacing monkeys and weapon-carrying soldiers attacking Elphaba are thrilling. But not enough to scare kids. As the film progresses from school to a rendezvous with the Wizard (Jeff Goldblum) and a perilous climax, Chu whips the joy, fear and courage into a frenzy. When Elphaba floats up high in the air, long black dress billowing, broom stick in hand and singing the film’s showstopper song “Defying Gravity,” it’s a big rush. “No wizard that there is or was, is ever gonna bring me down.” An unforgettable image.

Three distinct, interwoven plotlines will entertain children, romantics and adults: Kids will like the budding friendship between the over-confident student and the humble one who grows stronger. Those into romance will appreciate the someone-who-loves-someone-else triad. Prom queen-like Glinda + fellow student Fiyero (Jonathan Bailey, *Bridgerton*) + smart nerd girl Elphaba = love and discord.

See FILM, Page 14

Wicked
THE TONY AWARD-WINNING MUSICAL COMEDY

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NDG Book Review: 'Affrilachia is a quick, but insightful read

By Terri Schlichenmeyer

An average oak tree is bigger around than two people, together, can reach.

That mighty tree starts out with an acorn the size of a nickel, ultimately growing to some eighty feet tall, with a canopy of a hundred feet or more across. And like the new book, "Affrilachia" by Chris Aluka Berry (with Kelly Elaine Navies and Maia A. Surdam), its roots spread wide and wider.

In 2016, "on a foggy Sunday morning in March," Chris Aluka Berry visited the Mount Zion AME Zion Church in Cullowhee,



North Carolina for the first time. The congregation was tiny; just a handful of people were there that day, but a pair of siblings stood out to him.

Ann Rogers and Mae Louise Allen lived on opposite sides of town, says Berry, and neither had a driver's license. He sur-

mised that Church was the only time the elderly sisters were together then, but their devotion to one another was clear.

As the service ended, he asked Ms. Allen if he could visit her again. Was she willing to talk about her life in the Appalachians, her parents, her town?

She was, and arrangements were made but before Berry could get back to Cullowhee, he learned that Ms. Allen had died. Saddened, he wondered how many stories are lost each day in mountain communities where African Americans have lived for more

than a century.

"I couldn't make photographs of the past," he says, "but I could document the people and places living now."

In doing so, he also offers photographs that he collected from people he met in "Affrilachia," in North Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee; at a rustic "camp" that was likely created by enslaved people, at churches, and in modest houses along highways. The people he interviewed recalled family tales and community stories of support, hardship, and home.

Says coauthor Kelly

Elaine Navies, "These images shout without making a sound."

If it's true what they say about a picture being worth a thousand words, then "Affrilachia," as packed with photos as it is, is worth a million.

With that in mind, there's not a lot of narrative inside this book, just a few poems, a small number of very brief interviews, a handful of memories passed down, and some back-stories from author Chris Aluka Berry and his coauthors. The tales are interesting, but scant.

For most readers, though, that lack of narrative isn't

going to matter much. The photographs are the reason why you'd have this book.

Here, there are pictures of life as it was fifty years or a century ago, group photos, pictures taken of proud moments, worn pews, and happy children. Some of the modern pictures may make you wonder why they're included, but they set a tone and tell a tale.

This is the kind of book you'll take off the shelf, and notice something different every time you do. "Affrilachia" doesn't contain a lot of words, but it's a good choice when it's time to branch out in your reading.

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First Black woman-owned firearms manufacturer introduces line designed for women of color

(Black PR Wire) AnaLise “Bean” Matheson is changing the landscape of the firearms industry as the first Black woman to launch a firearms manufacturing company in the United States. Based in Utah and officially launched on Black Friday, the company is altering the conventional landscape of the firearms industry by creating made-to-order firearms for women of color (and the men in their lives), built by another woman of color.

While the company proudly serves all customers, it has a special focus

on empowering women of color, the fastest-growing demographic of firearm owners in the country. Each firearm is crafted with care, prioritizing safety, precision, and personalization. “This is about more than firearms—it’s about creating a firearm for women of color to feel empowered and represented in an industry that has previously not had a specific space for us,” says Matheson.

The company is proudly based in Utah and operates nationwide, as permitted by state laws. All firearms are built in Utah, using locally

sourced materials and parts whenever possible. By prioritizing collaboration with local suppliers and community members, the business reflects its commitment to fostering economic growth and opportunities within underserved communities.

“Our mission is to create high-quality, reliable firearms that are also reflective of each woman’s personality,” explains Bean. “Whenever possible, we work with other local and then U.S.-based businesses, resources within our Community. This isn’t just about a product—it’s about creating opportu-

nities for others as well.”

Bougie Builds by The Bean is committed to promoting responsible firearm ownership. By creating a tailored experience, the company aims to help all customers—especially women of color—feel confident, educated, and secure in their choices. With an emphasis on safety and accountability, the company seeks to equip the largest growing sector of firearm owners with the tools and knowledge they need.

“We want to make sure

that every woman who purchases from us feels empowered, educated, and responsible,” says Matheson. “Our goal is to make responsible firearm ownership an accessible and personalized experience for everyone, while focusing on serving women of color in a way that no one else has before.”

As the first Black woman to establish a firearms manufacturing company in the United States, Matheson is breaking barriers in an industry that has historically lacked diversity. Through

this venture, she is creating not only exceptional firearms but also a legacy of empowerment and representation for women of color.

“We are going back to our roots, as a community. Since the early 1900s we have bought for quality, by brand, and with the expectation that what we spend on will last so we could use it and share it with our families. That is what Bougie Builds are all about. Bringing us back together in every way.” says Matheson

PLAYOFFS, from Page 8

around the corner, many are ready to hop on the Polar Express, but it is also time to hop on the Pony Express—the Mustangs are back.

Texas and SMU have le-

gitimate paths to be two of the final four teams standing in the College Football Playoff. Arizona State awaits Texas for a potential matchup in the Peach Bowl while SMU will potentially

face Boise State in the Fiesta Bowl. First order of business for both teams will be taking care of business Dec. 21. The state of Texas prides itself on football—plenty of homegrown talent will be on display for both teams on the biggest stage.

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CHALLENGES, from Page 7

capacity.

Some tools that the incoming administration could use is expedited removal, a tool created in 1996 that allows the government to quickly and summarily deport people arriving without ever presenting their case to an immigration judge. Yet, as Gillard points out, it is difficult to know exactly how that could be carried out and the exact legal ramifications of this action.

Under the first Trump Administration, we saw an increase in bans on certain categories of immigrants, which under the Immigration Nationality Act, enabled the president to suspend entry for categories he defines under his discretion as potential threats. This could cover a wide range of rhetorical messages he's already been using, such as targeting immigrants as criminals and terrorists. These tactics would likely be challenged in the courts, added Robbins, though the Supreme Court will likely offer sufficient latitude to support Trump's efforts.

The staffing requirements for a mass deportation effort present additional challenges, added Chen. Just the required time just to hire needed immigration enforcement officers will be challenging, while finding enough border patrol officers and agents who

are sufficiently qualified has already been an issue. This is why discussions are pointing to state, local and National Guard resources. Private contractors, like Geo Corporation or Congressional Corporation of America may also be considered, Chen added.

According to Gillard, most deportations tend to happen to people who have previous involvement with local law enforcement, after committing a major crime or being caught driving without a license in a state where licenses aren't available to them. In such cases, the policies that local jurisdictions have about cooperating with ICE become very important from a legal standpoint in such a comprehensive operation.

Adding Chen, the new administration will need to respect our federal laws and civil rights as they attempt mass deportation. Yet, early discussions among the newly developing administration include mobilizing an untrained National Guard, who are unfamiliar with immigration laws, which could very well result in violations.

As pointed out by Elizabeth Taufa, senior policy attorney and strategist for the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, the emotional and psychological impacts of the intimidation campaigns and threats is also some-

thing that should be carefully considered, Taufa painting a dark picture at the community level.

"It looks like kids that aren't going to school because their parents are afraid of being deported. It looks like shortages of health care workers because people either move to states that are a little bit safer, or they are removed from the country. And it looks like fewer teachers. It's the unraveling of the threads of our American communities," she said.

And it will hit rural communities a lot harder than urban ones, the economic consequences to be severe. Taufa expects various sectors to fold without immigrant labor.

Chen added, "I was just down on the southern border in Arizona. In the southwest corner of Yuma County, [where] they are incredibly dependent on migrant labor for agriculture. The businesses there are very concerned about making sure that labor needs are able to be met."

The administration is counting on instilling fear in these communities. Even those with legal status are already expressing fears of being profiled and rounded up, concerns that are legitimate, he added.

With about 5% of our workforce currently unauthorized, Gillard said the impacts will be focused more in some industries

more than others. Yet, Chen projects devastation of businesses and industries in just about every economic sector. And considering the economy was the top issue for voters, Chen suggests the move may not be wise politically.

By conservative estimates, deporting 13 million people who are over 4% of the workforce in critical industries would have between 4.2 and 6.8% negative impact on gross domestic product--in line with the Great Recession, noted Robbins.

Conversely, the last big bill on immigration reform, which in 2013 added pathways to legal status, had a positive impact of \$900 billion over a 20-year period, bringing in more taxpayers, more consumers, and growing our economy, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office found.

If deportations are to be scaled up to Trump Administration desires, it will need both the House and Senate on its side. As

Robbins explained, to fund most government efforts, 60 votes are required in the Senate, with the exception of the reconciliation process, which can occur only once a year.

Currently working on the fiscal budget, monies will likely be locked up at current levels until next September, meaning the biggest opportunity to fund the effort would be through reconciliation, which requires only 50 votes. The one other way is to repurpose money from elsewhere, such as the military budget, which is being discussed, said Robbins. Yet, there will be many other priorities to consider, and it is unclear whether the incoming President's goals will be achieved.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) law enforcement budget already exceeds every other federal law enforcement agency's budget combined, so multiplying that several times over to get the required funding will be

challenging, added Chen.

Under the current policy, Gillard said, when people arrive at official crossing points, they can make an appointment, and while they may wait several months to be processed into the United States, they are often awarded temporary status, or humanitarian parole while they wait. However, many have a difficult time qualifying unless they meet certain exceptions, said Gillard.

Under the Trump Administration, we can expect these exceptions to be removed, and CBP1 ports of entry to be ended, she added, making it very difficult to access asylum proceedings.

So whereas many people have been presenting themselves to border authorities and asking for protection, we will likely see many paying smugglers to cross the border in the future, though such attempts may be fewer surrounding the rhetoric of a new Trump presidency, Gillard said.

CEO, from Page 4

longed or complex surgeries.

Medical professionals said anesthesia care should be tailored to the specific needs of each patient. "The length of surgery is a func-

tion of the surgeon, not the anesthesiologist," explained Dr. Dhivya Srivivasa, founder of the Institute for Advanced Breast Reconstruction. "The anesthesiologist is at the mercy

of the surgeon for however long they need to take to do the surgery well."

(Editor's Note: This story was filed prior to the arrest of a suspect in this case. A related final section was removed as there is no longer a manhunt in progress.)

NDG is looking for a Journalism Intern for a 6 month assignment to cover community events on site in the Irving area.

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Global Black Women's Chamber of Commerce State of Black Women Summit

(Black PR Wire) On Thursday, Dec. 5, in the nation's capital for the 4th annual (and 1st in-person) State of Black Women Summit 2024, hosted by The Global Black Women's Chamber of Commerce (GBWCC) and Visionary & CEO, Ambassador (Suzan) Suzan Johnson Cook.

GBWCC is the only Chamber that focuses solely on Black women owned businesses globally. GBWCC aims to empower & engage through conversations, collaborations & connections with leading intergenerational, intercon-



tinental, impactful Black women leaders in several industries who are world class winners. This dy-

namic event takes place on Thursday, December 5th from 12 - 3 p.m. at the National Press Club, located at

529 14th Street Northwest in Washington, DC 20045.

The Global Black Women's Chamber of Commerce was founded in 2020 with the goal of promoting and advancing the success of Black women leaders, entrepreneurs, and professionals on a global scale.

What to expect?

Vibrant conversational style discussions on: Business & the Economy, The Business of Cyber Security & Diplomacy, The Business of Sports, The Business of Media, The Business of Politics & Civic Engagement & Policy,

The Business of the Black Church & Health, and Hear from D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser's Office on Women in Business, The Business of Acquisitions & Partner-

ships, as well as The Business of Making Global Connections!

For details and registration info, visit <https://globalblackwomen.org>.

WOMEN, from Page 1

senior leadership positions, emphasizing their growing influence on state-level governance.

Officials said the victories reflect the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee's (DLCC) commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion within state governments. The DLCC said it repeatedly has underscored the importance of electing women to counter the incoming administration's policies, which critics warn

could jeopardize economic opportunities, reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ protections, education, and climate progress under Project 2025.

"Electing a record number of women to state legislatures couldn't come at a more impactful time," said DLCC Interim Communications Director Sam Paisley. "Project 2025 and the incoming Trump administration dangerously target women and minorities, and states will represent the

most powerful counterbalance to stop the MAGA hate from becoming the law of the land. Women deserve a seat at the table at all levels of government, and their growing numbers in state legislatures will impact policy today while building a strong pipeline of future leaders."

With Democratic women now leading in eight state

Houses and holding pivotal roles in nearly 100 legislative leadership positions, the DLCC said it plans to leverage their presence as a critical firewall against what it describes as threats posed by a federal GOP-dominated government.

"The work we've done ensures a powerful and diverse firewall is present in the states," Paisley added.



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Another Jingle Bell on the Tree

By Dr. James L. Snyder

Working in my office the other morning, I heard some rattling noises on the other side of the house. Being as busy as I was, I didn't take the time to find out what that noise was all about. When I'm working on a project, I like to stay on the project.

It was around lunchtime, and I was still hearing that noise. I decided to go into the kitchen and see what we were having for lunch, and as I did so, I noticed The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage was in the living room setting up our Christmas tree.

She does this every year and is very good at it. Each year, she gets a new Jingle Bell and puts it near the top of the tree.

If Santa Claus was real (and I do not believe what my parents said about him), he would immediately recruit her to organize his Christmas. She could make his job so much easier.

I'm sure Santa Claus would be very grateful for all the work she could

do for him. Of course, he would have to listen to her and do exactly what she says, or we would probably never see Santa Claus again.

I think he is so old that he would listen to her and do exactly what she says because he has done this work so long that he's just about worn out.

Sometimes, I think it would be really nice if there was a Santa Claus. Every year my parents would take me downtown where Santa Claus was, and I would sit on Santa's lap and tell him what I wanted for Christmas. I assured him I was a very good boy during the year.

The older I got the more suspicious I got of this man called Santa Claus. If he was real, he sure wasn't real to me.

Every year, as far as I can remember, I sat on his lap and told him that I wanted a pony for Christmas and nothing more. He always went through his "ho ho ho" act and I believed he was going to do it for me.

I remember getting up on

Christmas day and running into the living room, where my parents had their Christmas tree surrounded by all the Christmas gifts. I looked around the tree then I got up and went to the back porch, looked out, and shouted to my parents, "Where is he? I can't see him."

Of course, my parents would say, "What you're talking about," and I always responded by saying, "Santa Claus promised me that he was going to bring me a pony. Now, where is that pony?"

The older I got, the more sophisticated my parents' response to that question was. Usually, it was something like, "Santa might have run out of ponies this year, so you'll have to wait until next year, and I'm sure he'll bring one next year."

Christmas went by, and another Christmas went by, and another Christmas went by, and there was no sign of any pony with my name on it.

My parents were rather disappointed when I discovered that they had been lying to me all these years

Elphaba as she transcends from shy and apologetic to empowered. It's an elation that fills the theater. Quite a feat. Also, in this adaptation, the shunned green woman is of African heritage. So, the you're-not-like-us degradation Elphaba weathers has an extra sting and Erivo wears that hurt and anger well.

Hard to think of many screen-adapted Broadway musicals that were this magical. Wickedly magical.

Visit Film Critic Dwight Brown at DwightBrownInk.com.

and there was no such thing as a Santa Claus. Santa Claus was just a character somebody made up.

I remember the last time I sat on Santa Claus's lap, I was 12 years old. By the time the next Christmas came around, I had turned 13, and I was now a teenager. As a teenager, I knew everything, and nobody could talk to me about anything.

I remember the conversation I had with my parents. I explained to them that there is no such thing as a Santa Claus, and then I asked them why they had lied to me all those years.

"I'm sorry, son," my mother said. "Everyone was saying that, so we joined the crowd. We just wanted you to have a wonderful Christmas."

So Santa Claus is not a real person. If he were, why

do I have to spend so much money on Christmas presents?

I was thinking about this as I was eating lunch. There, the Christmas tree was in the process of being put together for Christmas. One of the routines at Christmas time was to buy a brand-new jingle Bell, usually at her favorite thrift store. As I was looking at the Christmas tree, I noticed there was a space near the top of the tree, but no jingle bell.

I looked at my wife and said, "My Dear, where is the new jingle Bell and why is there a big space on top of the Christmas tree?"

"I guess you never pay attention to what's going on around here, do you?" Then she laughed a good, merry laugh. "I cannot put the new jingle Bell on until

the night before Christmas. That has been our tradition for many years, in case you haven't noticed. That space near the top of the tree is where the new jingle Bell goes this year."

I sure do love it when a plan comes together, even if it's not my plan.

A verse of scripture came to mind, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle."

Traditions are important, especially those grounded on the Word of God.

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FILM, from Page 9

The most dramatic sub-narrative involves the persecution of animals. They're demeaned, rounded up and imprisoned. Their leader, a profit-like goat professor named Dr. Dillamond (Peter Dinklage, Game of Thrones), becomes their saintly leader. Any devices in this narrative that evoke the evils of fascism, Nazi Germany and current times are intended.

Marissa Bode as Elphaba's favored sister and Bowen Yang (Saturday Night Live) as Glinda's sy-

cophant shine. Yeoh plays Morrible, a mentor with her own agenda, with a devilish grandeur. Goldblum as the Wizard is completely duplicitous. Grande couldn't be sillier. Nice comic chops. When she uses her head tone, she coos like Christine Chenoweth, who played Glinda on Broadway.

Tony, Grammy and Emmy-winner Erivo stakes her claim as one of today's most talented performing artists. Her nuanced acting and strong singing propel

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The Power of Prayer



Sister Tarpley
NDG
Religion
Editor



We are in a crisis in our world, our Federal Government, our states, cities, communities; and the stressful lives of people, especially around this time of the year.

Prayer is the only thing that will help us with these problems. Prayer can change, not only conditions around us, but change us as well.

Prayer is a way to talk to GOD about things that no one can help us with.

Remember, GOD sits on the throne; and the devil is a liar.

Perhaps you are going through a tough time right now, but now is the time to

think positively.

I believe that God gives four answers to prayer: "Yes!" "No." "Not yet." Or "I have something better in mind."

I am told of the "Five Finger Prayer" it is beautiful! It is also worth

making it a part of our lives.

Your thumb is nearest you. Begin your prayers by praying for those closest to you. It has been said, "To pray for our loved ones is a sweet duty."

The next finger is the pointing finger. Pray for those who teach, instruct and heal.

The next finger is the tallest finger. It reminds us of our leaders. Pray for all elected officials.

Pray for leaders in the business world and in industry; and don't forget administrators.

These people shape our nation and guide public opinion. They need GOD'S divine guidance.

The fourth finger is our

ring finger. What is surprising to many is that this is our weakest finger, as any piano teacher will testify.

It should remind us to pray for those who are weak, in trouble or in pain. They need our prayers day and night.

And, last is our little finger (the pinkie) it is the smallest finger of all, which is where we should place ourselves in relation to GOD and others.

The Bible says, "The least shall be the greatest among you." Your pinkie should remind you to pray for yourself.

By the time you have prayed for the other groups, your own needs will be put into proper perspective and you will be able to pray for

yourself more effectively.

A prayer is one of the best gifts we receive. There is no cost but a lot of rewards. Continue to pray for one another. Anonymous

Things to Ponder: GOD is also willing to forgive; HIS love is there for those who pray to HIM; HE can be trusted.

GOD Loves US. HIS

love is faithful; HIS decisions are always fair. They are firm like mountains, deep like the sea.

HIS love is a treasure; we can find shelter in the shadow of HIS Wings. Psalm 36:5-10.

GOD Protects US. HE is our protector; HE doesn't sleep or let us stumble.

Thanks Be To GOD!

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Thursday, Nov 21 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.	Thursday, Dec 12 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.

For more information or to register for this event, please visit dallascasa.org

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