

THREE THINGS: FRAUD TRIAL BEGINS, NEWSOM'S PICK, CONTINGENT AID

[NB: check the byline, thanks. /~Rayne]

It's going to be a rather busy Monday. Grab your poison of choice – second LARGE cup of joe underway here – and let's get at it.

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It's rather sad this needed to be said yet again in reference to Donald Trump:

“No matter how much money you think you may have, no one is above the law,” James told reporters before entering the courtroom. “The law is both powerful and fragile. And today in court will prove our case.”

But the wretched former guy apparently needs it as the civil fraud trial opens today in New York.

The Trump campaign's post-debate stunt leaving a bird cage outside fellow GOP candidate Nikki Haley's hotel room likely encouraged the reminder, on top of Trump's other egregious behavior including insults about New York AG Letitia James.

The stunt, which followed Trump's insult on social media saying Haley had a bird brain, didn't go over well abroad. India's media took note of this trashy behavior unbecoming a former U.S. president and a current presidential candidate.

One can only wonder if Trump would be both stupid and arrogant enough to pull such a gag on AG James as a dig at the prosecutor.

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California's Gov. Gavin Newsom will appoint Laphonza Butler to fill the Senate seat in the wake of Dianne Feinstein's death.

Butler's appointment is a statement none of the other possible appointees could make. She's been president of political action committee EMILY's List since 2021; the organization's mission has been to get more women elected to office.

Butler has also been a superdelegate for California during the 2016 election when she supported Hillary Clinton. Originally from Mississippi, Butler has worked as a union organizer, last with SEIU where she worked toward raising the minimum wage and taxing the wealthiest Californians.

In 2018 Butler left the SEIU to join a Democratic communications firm, SCRB (now Bearstar Strategies) where she worked on Kamala Harris' campaign.

Butler is gay and married; she and her partner have a daughter.

So many boxes checked off by one appointment, so many marginalized and suppressed groups now represented. Worth reading Philip Bump's graphic-laden piece in WaPo to understand what this means.

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Americans know Congress passed a continuing resolution (CR) this weekend establishing a 45-day extension on the budget. Omitted from the extension was financial aid to Ukraine at a time when Ukraine is preparing ahead of winter warfare against aggressor Russia.

The failure to provide aid in spite of efforts by Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin is in part the result of ongoing influence operations by Russia targeting GOP members of Congress. Like Trump they have fallen prey to the idea that the US has no interest in Ukraine's democratic sovereignty and

that NATO and the EU likewise should play no role in rejecting Russia's attack on Ukraine.

But the reasons why financial aid to Ukraine may not have passed with the CR isn't solely due to hostile foreign influence. It's also linked to ongoing corruption in Ukraine undermining the nation's sovereignty while cannibalizing the resources needed to repel Russia and build back infrastructure destroyed by the last 19 months' war.

Ukraine took a large move toward addressing corruption with its arrest of oligarch Ihor Kolomoyskyi on September 2. Kolomoyskyi, appointed Governor of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in 2014 after the Euromaidan, had already been blacklisted and indicted by the U.S.

This arrest is only one step Ukraine must take. The Biden administration has continued to press the Zelenskyy administration for more measurable efforts on corruption. Without making more substantial headway, it would be difficult for Ukraine to join the EU let alone NATO. Ukraine can't become a means to drain EU and NATO resources in peacetime.

Zelenskyy will have to make considerable progress over the next 45 days – for this reason alone the near-shutdown and CR have a beneficial effect since both the Biden's State Department and Zelenskyy can point to a date toward which both will have to work on corruption together.

It's all the more important that the U.S. at state and federal level also address domestic corruption. The U.S. can't make a demand of other democracies to tackle corruption without setting an example.

All the more reason why we need to demonstrate and not merely say no person in this democracy is above the law.

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This is an open thread.