

FINAL WORD ➔ BY TIM ROWLAND

The Weirdness of Politics

Nothing would rattle an old politico friend of mine more than child tax credits. “If you have seven children, you should pay seven times the tax,” he’d growl, on the theory that parents should pay for their kids’ schools, clinics, daycare, and all the other childhood necessities that government seems to wind up financing.

He’s gone now, but I can only imagine his reaction to Republican vice-presidential nominee J.D. Vance’s idea of a (bigger) tax subsidy for the fertile, let alone his idea to weight the American electoral system toward the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe.

Last month, Democrats trotted out a new word to chastise this sort of policy flimflam: “Weird.” It fast became the rhetorical umbrella covering all sorts of Trumpian, well, weirdness, from soliloquies on Hannibal Lecter to awkward proclivities with women.

“Weird” is a great word. You might say I wrote the book on weirdness in politics, my 2019 *Politics Weird-o-Pedia: The Ultimate Book of Surprising, Strange, and Incredibly Bizarre Facts about Politics* (Racehorse Publishing, 2019).

Trump, for example, wasn’t the first president to engage in the weirdness he later called “locker room talk.” After hearing one too many stories of Jack Kennedy’s sexual exploits, Lyndon Johnson grouched that—well, this is a serious publication, but you can guess what the one-upper Johnson might say about Kennedy’s conquests.

Yet technology indicates things are getting weirder. Google trackers show that use of the word “weird” started to skyrocket in 2000 and has never looked

back. The word “normal,” by contrast, is on the downswing.

Among the things that have been called weird this year: kitchen gadgets, the pop singer Remi Wolf, headless Marie Antoinette dolls at the Paris Olympics, tornadoes, Taylor Swift, rumors about the upcoming iPhone, Florida (natch), Patrick Mahomes’ running style, flying, Xiaomi Moaan InkPalm 5 (I’ve no clue either), and the housing market.

Democrats are right: MAGA is weird, QAnon is weird, chanting “Let’s go Brandon!” to mean—well, again, serious publication—is weird. But they need to be careful because neither party has a monopoly on weirdness. The Dems, after all, have child tax credit ideas of their own. Extremely online progressives who get a case of the vapors with each new QAnon fantasy were among the first to speculate that Trump hadn’t really been shot in Butler, PA; it was all a big, uh, hoax. Oh dear. And remember when Dems vowed not to get the COVID jab because it was approved by the Trump FDA, but then rushed to get it when Joe Biden took

office? Or, despite endless tributes to the importance of education, kept public schools closed long after much of American life returned to normal?

There’s even been a weird pushback on this use of the word “weird.” *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman recently wrote, “I cannot think of a sillier, more playground, more foolish and more counterproductive political taunt for Democrats to seize on than calling Trump and his supporters ‘weird.’” None sillier, or more playground? Oh, please. The town of Dorset, MN, once chose a mayor by drawing the name of one resident from a hat; the winner, age 3, came up with the slogan “Be nice and no poop talk.” How refreshingly unweird.

On that note, Democrats who got so worked up over Biden’s age and health might have considered that at least three Americans have been elected to state or federal office *after they were dead*. Given that, confusing the presidents of Mexico and Spain doesn’t seem like that big a deal.

But it does seem weird when a Republican suggests a wealth transfer to parents because, ostensibly, only big families are invested in a bright and prosperous American tomorrow. As recently as Ronald Reagan, conservatives, as they were then understood, frowned on programs like food stamps that financially incentivize childbirth. If we’re to believe Vance, all those much-derided 1980s welfare queens were in fact patriots. Who knew?

And it is certainly weird that Vance has suggested conferring on parents extra votes based on the number of kids they’ve brought into the world. It’s unclear exactly how this would work, but under the right circumstances the next president could be chosen by the Kardashians.

As for those without kids? They supposedly are sour cat ladies intent on infecting others with their childless misery. Because nothing makes you miserable more than free time, a full night’s sleep, and disposable income, I guess.

Weird? It seems we might need a stronger word than that. R



TIM ROWLAND is the author of *Politics Weird-o-Pedia: The Ultimate Book of Surprising, Strange, and Incredibly Bizarre Facts about Politics* (Racehorse Publishing, 2019).