

## OPINION

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## MR. PRUITT DEPARTS. COUNT THE SILVER.

Scott Pruitt, the anti-environmental grifter who has led the Environmental Protection Agency, finally leaves the administration.

Just when America had all but given up hope, Scott Pruitt's appalling reign as Environmental Protection Agency administrator is finally over. Thursday afternoon, Mr. Pruitt delivered President Trump his resignation letter, replete with references to "God's providence" and how "blessed" he was to have had the opportunity to serve not the nation, but this president. He sadly noted that "the unrelenting attacks on me personally, my family, are unprecedented and have taken a sizable toll on all of us." And so Mr. Pruitt heads for the door, leaving behind a dark, oily stain on the office that he has spent the past year and a half vigorously defiling.

Mr. Pruitt's departure did not come as a total shock. Word around Washington in recent weeks was that the stench of corruption wafting from E.P.A. headquarters was getting to be too much even for Mr. Trump. Someone in the White House no doubt noticed that, with the midterms approaching, Mr. Pruitt was not playing well with any voter who retains some common sense. In an administration characterized by extreme swampiness and ethical flexibility, the E.P.A. chief had nonetheless distinguished himself with pathological grifting to the point that even some Republican lawmakers and reliably conservative commentators had begun publicly slapping him.

Still, for months, Mr. Pruitt held on to his job as the embarrassing revelations piled up like so many used mattresses: his profligate spending on posh travel, over-the-top security, and ridiculous, self-aggrandizing office supplies; his directing agency staffers to run his personal errands, including finding him a place to live in Washington and combing hotels for his favorite skin cream; his attempts to score his wife a high-paying job, possibly involving chicken nuggets and waffle fries. Every week seemed to bring fresh examples of Mr. Pruitt's shameless and yet surprisingly petty misuse of his office.

Mr. Trump's willingness to tolerate Mr. Pruitt's chicanery was not surprising. The two men share an environmental philosophy that may be roughly summarized as "industry over science," and, for all his flaws, Mr. Pruitt was tireless in the crusade to dismantle environmental protections. His greatest hits include playing a key role in getting Mr. Trump to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate agreement; pushing the repeal of numerous Obama-era regulations, including those to cut greenhouse gas emissions from power plants and automobiles; and instituting a policy that barred scientists who receive federal grants from serving on the E.P.A.'s advisory committees, while simultaneously welcoming corporate representatives onto these panels. Just last month, The Times reported that the E.P.A. had decided for the most part not to consider exposure to chemicals through the air, water or ground when it is evaluating whether they should be regulated or banned under a bipartisan law passed in 2016.

Impressively, Mr. Pruitt was both a sneak and a thug. Self-aware enough to realize that some of what he was up to — especially his snuggling up to certain industry interests — might be viewed negatively by some, he took pains to keep his activities under wraps. Aides have accused him of keeping secret schedules and calendars, employing multiple email accounts and conducting important agency business on phones other than his own to ensure that the calls wouldn't show up on official logs.

At the same time, staff members who tried to curtail some of Mr. Pruitt's more egregious behavior were demoted, reassigned or fired.

Upon accepting Mr. Pruitt's resignation, Mr. Trump moved to tweet supportively: "Within the Agency Scott has done an outstanding job, and I will always be thankful to him for this." Speaking to reporters on Air Force One, Mr. Trump said Mr. Pruitt was a "terrific guy." The president said the decision to leave was Mr. Pruitt's, but then noted, "We've been talking about it for a little while."

The daily drumbeat of toxic publicity finally turned the president against his E.P.A. chief. "It's one thing after another with this guy," Mr. Trump told a friend recently.

Not that Mr. Trump is likely to lose much sleep over Mr. Pruitt's departure. Mr. Pruitt's successor, Andrew Wheeler, is expected to stay the anti-regulatory course, albeit presumably without drawing as many headlines, by avoiding his predecessor's penchant for scandal. Mr. Wheeler is a former coal industry lobbyist and a former aide to Senator James Inhofe, the Oklahoma Republican who has denied the existence of climate change and has long opposed legislation to address that global problem.

One task facing Mr. Wheeler — who publicly opposed Mr. Trump during the Republican presidential primaries — is to rebuild morale at the E.P.A. Much of the agency's career staff has felt under siege, not just because of Mr. Pruitt's policies and bullying behavior, but also because of his contempt for science and professional expertise. When President Trump's tweet appeared announcing the Pruitt resignation, there were reports of cheering in the hallways.

In the end, Mr. Pruitt was driven from office for having abused his position so outrageously. But if Mr. Trump continues down the same policy paths, as seems likely, Mr. Pruitt's more lasting legacy, along with the president's, will be an overheated planet and shortened life spans.

## A lesson in demonizing refugees

David T. Smith

The Trump administration retreated last month when faced with outrage over its separation of refugee and migrant families at the Mexican border. President Trump said he hated taking children away from their parents, and soon abandoned his claim that only Congress could stop it.

Such a reversal is hard to imagine here in Australia, where the ruthless deterrence of asylum seekers has provided a template for other countries in an era of hardened attitudes. Australia does not separate the children of "unauthorized arrivals" from their parents, but it does detain entire families in horrible conditions, sometimes for years.

Because these families are held in prisonlike centers on islands hundreds of miles away, Australians rarely get to see the kinds of images that provoked widespread anger in America. But even if we did, it is unlikely that public opinion or government policy would change. We Australians understand, and many of us accept, that discouraging migrants from landing on our shores means cruelty.

Deterrence is a seductive policy. It promises a sense of security and sovereignty in return for atrocious costs on a relatively small number of people, people often stigmatized as lawbreakers who need to be stopped for their own safety. The only way to deter people desperate enough to risk death on their journey to a new country is to threaten them with conditions worse than the ones they fled. The United States has so far been unwilling to do this explicitly, and Americans seem unprepared to face the human consequences of such an approach.

But if political leaders in the United States keep talking about a humanitarian crisis as nothing more than a violation of America's laws, Americans could become inured to the suffering of migrants and more receptive to brutality. Mr. Trump's preoccupation with foreigners "taking advantage" of Americans could still usher in an Australian-style future.

Australia has imposed mandatory detention on immigrants without valid visas since 1992. The government of Prime Minister John Howard toughened this policy in 2001 with the "Pacific Solution." Under this system, asylum seekers arriving by boat cannot

apply for protection visas in Australia. Instead they are taken to detention centers in the island country of Nauru or, until recently, on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea while their claims are examined. Since 2013, it has been government policy that they cannot be resettled in Australia.

And while they wait to be processed, they languish in conditions that are often horrifying. A United Nations report from 2017 cites isolation, overcrowding and limited access to basic services on Manus and Nauru, along with "allegations of sexual abuse by the service providers" and continuing reports of self-harm and suicide.

This year, the Department of Home Affairs contested a federal court order that a 10-year-old who repeatedly attempted suicide on Nauru must be brought to Australia for treatment. In 2015, the United Nations special rapporteur on torture found that Austral-

ia's processing centers violated the rights of asylum seekers to be free from torture. The prime minister at the time, Tony Abbott, responded that Australians were "sick of being lectured to by the United Nations."

About 80 percent of the asylum seekers detained on Nauru and Manus are ultimately found to be refugees. But with no prospect of ever being allowed into Australia, hundreds decide to return to their countries of origin. Australia has sought other locations for resettlement, including Cambodia and the United States. Canberra has so far refused offers by New Zealand to resettle refugees, arguing that this option would be too appealing to asylum seekers.

Almost no boats have arrived in Australia since 2014, though the Australian government has turned back an unknown number at sea. There are still some 225 people in detention on Nauru, and an estimated 515 in "transition centers" on Manus Island.

Some of Australia's politicians openly defend the brutality of deterrence policies. For many years, they have preferred to talk about "people smugglers" rather than asylum seekers themselves. Forever banishing boatborne asylum seekers from Australia, they say, destroys the business of those who carry refugees on dilapidated vessels for profit. The politicians warn that people smugglers are watching and waiting for a moment of weakness by Australia to resume operations. Last month, Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton warned that "the hard-won success of the last few years could be undone overnight by a single act of compassion."

Many people's attitudes about asylum seekers changed in 2008. That year, the Labor Party government of Kevin Rudd closed the Pacific detention centers and began processing asylum

seekers in Australia. This coincided with deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, and there was a surge in boat arrivals, resulting in many deaths at sea. Some progressives were finally convinced of the moral need for harsh policies.

A former Labor immigration minister, Tony Burke, describes how he kept the name of a 10-week-old boy who died at sea on his desk as a reminder of why he came to support policies to discourage people from getting on boats. Labor reinstated offshore processing in 2012, but lost an election the following year to the Liberals and Mr. Abbott, who pledged to "stop the boats." The Australian Greens, a smaller progressive party, is the only one in Parliament that consistently opposes offshore processing.

The severe stances of the major parties are popular. A recent study found that about two-thirds of Australians support offshore processing, and growing numbers support measures to turn back intercepted boats at sea. While a quarter of the population says policies are too tough, higher numbers usually say policies are too soft. Some Australians see refugees from predominantly Muslim war-torn countries as national security threats, and believe they must be dealt with as harshly as possible. Many others resent those who arrive by boat as "queue-jumpers" who have unfairly circumvented Australia's laws, unlike the "legitimate" refugees who wait for years in United Nations refugee camps.

Government statements and public opinion reinforce each other. Politicians justify draconian measures with appeals to Australians' sense of fairness and safety, and in turn they face an electorate that they fear would punish them if they did otherwise.

If American public opinion turns toward accepting cruel deterrent measures, it will be political rhetoric that leads the way. Warnings by the Trump administration that criminals use children to exploit legal loopholes would sound familiar to Australians, whose government once claimed that asylum seekers threw children into the sea to force the navy to take them to Australia.

While some Americans compared Mr. Trump's separation policy to Margaret Atwood's Gilead in "The Handmaid's Tale," when Australians seek fictional dystopias to account for our asylum policies we often reach for Ursula Le Guin. Her short story "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" describes a peaceful and idyllic city-state whose happiness depends on the cruel imprisonment of a child in a basement. Everyone knows the child is there.

The citizens of Omelas may be disturbed by the predicament of the child, but they are convinced of its necessity. In the words of the journalist Jeff Sparrow: "Le Guin intended her story as a cautionary tale. How did we end up with two political parties using it as an instruction manual?"

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A display at a vigil in Melbourne, Australia, for refugees who died at the Manus Island detention center.

## Catholic evolution on L.G.B.T. rights

John Gehring

A growing number of Americans now broadly support equal rights for gay, lesbian and transgender people. It's tempting to view this as inevitable, but less than a decade ago many Democrats, including Barack Obama, didn't even publicly support same-sex marriage. The speed at which L.G.B.T. rights became a mainstream issue, including for many religious denominations, represents nothing less than a dizzying cultural transformation.

What does this revolution mean for the Catholic Church, an ancient institution that thinks in centuries, and holds a view of human sexuality at odds with the shifting cultural winds? Well, last month, the Vatican used "L.G.B.T." for what is believed to be the first time ever in a document prepared for a major gathering of bishops and young people in October. "Some L.G.B.T. youth," it reads, want to "benefit from greater closeness and experience greater care from the church." The document also acknowledges that many young Catholics disagree with the church's teaching on same-sex marriage.

Not exactly breaking news, you might argue. But adopting "L.G.B.T." is emblematic of an emerging shift in the church's posture toward gay, lesbian and transgender people. Catholic teaching documents have typically used "homosexual" or referred to those with "homosexual tendencies," which reduce a person's multidimensional humanity to the mechanics of sex. Using the L.G.B.T. descriptor, often preferred by many gay, lesbian and transgender people, is a sign of respect.

Pope Francis has opened space for a deeper, more authentic conversation

about how the church can keep one foot planted in Catholic tradition without being afraid to step into the lived experiences of others. When Pope Francis gave the most famous papal sound bite in history five years ago — "Who am I to judge?" — even his colloquial use of the word "gay" caused a stir in traditional Catholic circles. While the pope has strongly defended church teaching on marriage as exclusively between a man and a woman, he prioritizes listening and personal encounter over finger-wagging denunciations. He's met with transgender people, and when he spoke privately last month with a Chilean clergy sexual abuse survivor, the pope told him that God made him gay and loved him.

There are other signs of progress. The prominent Jesuit priest and author Rev. James Martin, who has been banned from speaking at some Catholic institutions in the United States simply for encouraging the church to build bridges with L.G.B.T. people, was recently invited to give a keynote address at the Vatican-sponsored World Meeting of Families in Dublin later this summer. At the last gathering in Philadelphia three years ago, the only discussion about L.G.B.T. issues came from celibate gay Catholics who spoke about chastity.

The pope's emphasis on encounter and engagement is trickling down to influence other church leaders. Cardinal Joe Tobin of Newark welcomed a pilgrimage of L.G.B.T. Catholics to the city's cathedral last spring. In this month's issue of U.S. Catholic magazine, a deacon in the diocese of St. Petersburg, Fla., wrote movingly about his transgender daughter, and challenged the church's notion of "gender ideology," a term that has been used to discredit the push for transgender rights.

Despite this progress, the Catholic Church must do far more not only to

acknowledge the humanity of L.G.B.T. people, but also to recognize most want the same committed, loving relationships as straight couples. After the Supreme Court's 2015 decision legalizing same-sex marriage, Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago called for "real, not rhetorical" respect for gays and lesbians. The court decision, which he opposed, still offered an opportunity for "mature and serene reflections," the cardinal wrote.

Catholic leaders in the United States should consider studying a proposal made by Bishop Franz-Josef Bode, the vice president of the German bishops' conference, who has encouraged a thoughtful discussion on whether Catholic clergymen might offer a type of blessing for Catholics in same-sex relationships. "Although 'marriage for all' differs clearly from the church's concept of marriage, it's now political reality," the bishop said. "We have to ask ourselves how we're encountering those who form such relationships, and are also involved in the church, how we're accompanying them pastorally and liturgically."

The church's own language toward L.G.B.T. people is a stumbling block to its professed commitment to human dignity. While the Catholic catechism, which details church teaching, forbids any violence or "unjust discrimination" toward people who are gay or lesbian, it also describes sexual intimacy between them as "intrinsically disordered." Before he became pope, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote in 1986 that homo-

sexuality represents a "strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil."

Many L.G.B.T. Catholics are also forced to live in what the Rev. Bryan Massingale, a Fordham University theologian, calls "the open closet." This is particularly true at Catholic schools, where in recent years more than 70 L.G.B.T. church employees and Catholic schoolteachers have been fired or lost their jobs in employment disputes. L.G.B.T. Catholic employees have their lives subjected to moral scrutiny in ways heterosexual Catholics never do. Straight Catholics are not fired for using contraception, for example, or having sex before marriage.

Five years into the Francis papacy, a pope who emphasizes mercy and strikes a more welcoming tone toward L.G.B.T. people is helping to rescue the church from a culture-war Christianity that drives people away. But until the Catholic hierarchy can find more tangible ways to institutionalize a commitment to the rights of gay, lesbian and transgender people, the exodus of Catholics will continue. Surveys show most Catholics support same-sex marriage, and the church's opposition to L.G.B.T. rights drives young people away.

If the first step toward change is listening, Bishop John Stowe of Lexington, Ky., had it right when he addressed a national gathering of L.G.B.T. Catholics last year. "In a church that has not always valued or welcomed your presence, we need to hear your voices and take seriously your experiences," he said. It's time to make sure that is more than just an applause line.

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