

THE DISPATCH

Our Best Stuff From a Week Near the End of the Pandemic Tunnel

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Happy Saturday! In case anyone was still wondering whether masks work: I've been blissfully going without one except when necessary the last few weeks, and ... I have a cold. So there's that. If that's the price I have to pay for a return to normalcy, I'll take it.

And I have to say, normal feels pretty darn good. Last March, when everything shut down, I think most of us had the impression that the pandemic was going to be a blip. We'd have a couple months of lockdowns, and then we'd go back to normal. Someday we'd reminisce about "social distancing" and maybe even reflect on the shared sacrifices. Looking back, last summer wasn't terrible, at least here in Ohio. The initial lockdown measures—bans on in-person dining, total closures of non-essential businesses—ended in late May and early June. It was around that time I saw an ad for "sports masks," designed to be worn while working out, but they were on backorder until August. I remember telling a friend, "Gosh, I hope we aren't still wearing masks in two months." Ahem.

But then fall and winter hit, and the opposite feeling sank in. We weren't *ever* going to get out of this. We typically host Thanksgiving at our house, usually about 15-20 people counting kids. This year, we were in the middle of a kitchen remodel and mostly living in our basement at the time, and I'll never forget the lonely little dinner we made for the five of us. Christmas was a little better, but not the usual over-the-top spectacle I insist on making it. And then January hit, and the emails from the schools got a little crazy: 12 cases at the high school in one day, 18 a couple days later. Our district had worked so hard to open up in person and stay that way, but the whole high school shut down for about a week to get things under control. It was a long winter.

All of that makes me very grateful for what we have now. I'm not going to wax eloquent about the lessons we learned, for a few reasons. We're not entirely out of the woods, we're just now getting to the bottom of how this disease originated, and the stress and confinement exacerbated our already dangerous polarization. (Plus, David already wrote that column this week.) But I will enjoy the normalcy. And this weekend, that means a baseball tournament, a weekend long swim meet, and hopefully some plans with friends later. So I'm going to keep this short and let you get right to our best stuff. Enjoy your weekend!

[A Slow Kowtow to China](#)

Good news, everyone. Jonah has a fantastic idea for a screenplay: a little *Contagion*, a little *Chernobyl*, a little *Seven Days in May*. It would look into what happens when a Chinese research lab accidentally unleashes a virus that creates a global pandemic and kills millions. What could go wrong? Just ask ... John Cena. In an extra spicy **G-File**, Jonah inveighs against the woke corporations and celebrities that are only too happy to performatively boycott states like Georgia or North Carolina, but continue to do whatever it takes—groveling, prostration, etc.—to do business with and in a country that has actual concentration camps and 3 million slaves. It’s about money, sure. But it’s more than that. It’s about America, too. “We are addicted to a kind of rebelliousness that cannot rationally account for the fact that this is a good and decent country,” Jonah writes. “Where’s the courage in denouncing that? So we manufacture outrage and exaggerate existing foibles. We systemize anecdotes and reify literary and abstract indictments.”

The China Threat Meets the China Reality

There are lots of reasons to worry about China. (Did you read the **G-File** I just blurbed 🙌?) It has imprisoned 1 million Uighurs, cracked down on Hong Kong, threatens Taiwan on the regular, and spent plenty of time during the pandemic that started in its own country pursuing an aggressive foreign policy. But is it ready to overtake the U.S. as a global economic hegemon? Not so fast, says Scott Lincicome in **Capitolism**. He looks at China’s economic growth that started in the 1970s and its reliance on state capitalism today, which has numerous downsides: “China’s industrial policies have also been shown to indirectly foment numerous problems proven to hinder stable, long-term economic growth, including resource misallocation; corruption; investment bubbles; and overcapacity.”

Is the Right Going to Talk Itself Back into Political Violence?

If you watched the violence at the Capitol on January 6 and hoped it might serve as a warning about our overheated dialogue and bring people back to their senses, you have something in common with David French. And, as David notes in his midweek **French Press**, you’d have been wrong. He uses two recent examples to highlight the danger we still face from what he calls the “nationalization of outrage”: Michael Flynn’s suggestion that we could/should have a Myanmar-style coup to restore Donald Trump to the Oval Office and Tucker Carlson’s claim that workplace vaccination requirements are a “medical Jim Crow.” “What’s particularly alarming about this relentless alarmism is that the nationalization of everything means that there is constant fuel for the grievance fire,” David writes. “It’s a big country, and there’s always an outrage somewhere.”

How Moscow Is Threatening Radio Free Europe

When Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny voluntarily repatriated to Russia after recovering from being poisoned by henchmen of Vladimir Putin, his flight was diverted to a small airport, hoping to keep him away from supporters and news crews. It might have worked to some extent, but two journalists from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty had boarded Navalny’s flight in Germany and were able to document the whole thing. Charlotte uses that example to show why the U.S.-funded but editorially independent outlet is so vital, and why it has drawn Putin’s ire. The regime has designated RFE as a “foreign agent,” a move that requires it to apply lengthy disclosures on its content. “Russia’s heavy-handed enforcement effectively and

deliberately renders independent outlets unable to operate. According to RFE/RL head Jamie Fly, the disclaimers—if properly applied—take up almost the entirety of a social media post,” Charlotte writes. The measures also have chilling effects on freelance journalists.

And now for the best of the rest:

- Glenn Youngkin won the GOP’s Virginia gubernatorial nomination. Audrey checks in on how his messaging may have changed as he moves into a general election campaign.
- Please welcome Emma Rogers to *The Dispatch*. She’s one of four (or six, or eight, it’s hard to keep track) interns spending the summer with us. For her first assignment, she tackled what’s going on with Texas’ proposed election reform law.
- We’re pretty sure Tom Joscelyn is tired of reminding everyone that the Afghanistan peace “deal” was bad and that the Taliban and al-Qaeda are still closely intertwined. But when Joe Biden suggests that we can take out al-Qaeda “if they return to Afghanistan,” well, Tom has little choice in the matter.
- Speaking of bad deals ... As the Biden administration rushes headlong into a retooled Iran nuclear agreement, Danielle Pletka shares the juicy bits of a new book that details the full extent of the Islamic Republic’s nuclear aspirations.
- If you’ve paid attention to the vaccine-requirements debate, you may have seen people arguing online that businesses can’t ask you about your vaccination status or even enforce their own mask mandates because of a law called HIPAA. Walter Olson debunks those myths and reminds readers what the law mandates (lots of paperwork for nurses) and what it doesn’t.
- On the pods: Are you keeping up with **The Hangover**? After the initial burst of three episodes, a new one will roll out every Thursday. This week, Chris Stirewalt interviewed Matthew Continetti, founder of the *Washington Free Beacon*. On the **Dispatch Podcast**, Steve and Sarah talk to the *Washington Post*’s Josh Rogin, who first covered the lab-leak hypothesis of the origins of COVID in April 2020, about the politicization of the issue. Some of us of a certain age remember when a president questioned the definition of the word “is.” On Advisory Opinions this week, David and Sarah do a deep dive on the meaning of the word “so.” (It’s important!) And if you haven’t had enough of David and Jonah lately, check out their conversation on **The Remnant**.