EDITORIALS

The 13,099 countdown

No, not bottles of beer on the wall

Polonius: What do you read, my lord?

Hamlet: Words, words, words.

The other day, in passing, CNN leaked into our ears. (There are televisions *everywhere*, including in newsrooms.) We stopped for a sec to catch one shout-show, which seemed to have a producer raised on ESPN morning programs. Because the invited guest wanted a fight, and seemed determined to get it, baiting the anchor about some bit of data that he had—and he kept chewing on that bit like it was bad deer jerky.

He wanted the pointy-headed, liberal, weak-kneed, biased, Blue State, softish TV anchor to admit that the government—this government! Biden's government! Harris' government!—had recently released a statement saying the feds had let 13,099 murderers into the United States.



Boy howdy, Mr. Guest wouldn't let it go. Even when the anchor tried to ask other questions.

Hey, TV guy, how come this government has let in so many murderers, huh, huh? The feds have let in four murderers for every county in the United States! Whaddarwe gonna do about all that?

That caught. In our throat. We know people in Nevada County, Ark. Four murderers running around Prescott would be bad news.

We had to look it up. Thankfully, there's Google at the fingertips.

There are not 13,099 illegal immigrant murderers running free in the United States. Our friends in Prescott can rest easy.

But explaining the data takes more time than television sometimes gives its guests. Unfortunately circa 2024, bumper-sticker shouting on TV often leads to bumper-sticker thought.

We get our information from the trusted (by us) Cato Institute in general and writer Alex Nowrasteh in particular. (NB: The Cato Institute is a libertarian outfit more inclined toward the P.J. O'Rourke wing of conservatism, bless its heart.)

You see, what-had-happened-was the Immigration and Customs Enforcement types put out a study that mentioned the infamous 13,099 number. And certain U.S. representatives and presidential candidates ran with that number without giving it much time or thought.

You'd be forgiven for thinking that the Biden administration had admitted to releasing 13,099 murderers onto the streets of America if you watched cable TV shout-shows. But one reason that number stuck in our throats—see above—is because there are "only" about 21,000 to 22,000 murders in the whole country every year. So 13,000-plus would be 62 percent. And we're Ivory-Soap certain that if 62 percent of all murders in the United States were committed by illegal immigrants, there would be more fuss about it.

According to Cato, the first mistake is thinking that when ICE says a body is "non-detained" in its data, that means the person is not detained. When it only means that ICE isn't the one doing the detaining. When an illegal immigrant is in county jail or state prison, that's ICE's definition of a person being non-detained. Somebody tell us this isn't a government operation.

For instance, a migrant who killed an American in 1990, but is serving a sentence in Angola, La., would be among the 13,099 that ICE calls non-detained. Trust us on this one, Angola is one of the most detained places in America.

Once an illegal immigrant completes a sentence for murder, or any other crime, he is given back to ICE, which puts him on the docket for removal from these shores. Back to his homeland he goes.

That's if—this is another problem—the migrant can go home. The U.S. doesn't have agreements for repatriation for several countries it considers bad actors. Think Vietnam, Cuba, Iran, etc.

Cato says the number of felons who served their sentences but can't be sent home is small.

Also, you get the sense from our betters in politics and TV that these murders were 1. committed recently and 2. committed in the United States. Neither are generally true. Some of these crimes go back four decades or more. And many of these murderers committed their crimes overseas and were caught here.

They should be sent home, sure. If they can be. If not, they certainly don't need to be running around in Prescott. If ICE doesn't have a plan, and a place, for these people—no matter how few—the office should get new management.

So how many illegal immigrants, who have committed murder, recently, and in the United States, are running around on our streets? Hard to tell when a government agency says people in prison are non-detained. But the bet here is that 13,099 is way off.

Not that that will keep it out of the mouths of those trying to stir those bumper-sticker thoughts.

Words are important. Paul Greenberg, our longtime boss, once said language is the Little Round Top of debate. The person who holds it holds the high ground. And the advantage.

He also wrote this once upon a better time: "The temptation to abuse language for our own self-interested purposes can prove irresistible. Especially to the kind of person convinced of the rightness of his cause, and the wrongness of the other fellow's."

A body can't expect politicians and those who are chosen to appear on 24/7 cable news channels to devote themselves to precision and fairness. Scrupulousness doesn't necessarily win elections or get TV invites.

But the rest of us can deliberate, well, deliberately. And can be more thoughtful with our debates. And honest with our numbers.

OTHERS SAY

Too late to play tough

THE BOSTON HERALD

Vice President Kamala Harris ticked off her presidential campaign checklist with a visit to the southern border recently. She talked with members of the Border Patrol and made boilerplate promises of getting tough on immigration.

Sorry, Kamala, you don't get points for promising to close the barn door after the horses have escaped.

Harris, as a presidential candidate at a 2019 primary debate, raised her hand when asked if she supported "decriminalizing" border crossings to make unlawful crossings only a civil offense. She no longer supports that view, she told CNN.

Now, however, "I was attorney general of a border state for two terms. I saw the violence and chaos that transnational criminal organizations cause and the heartbreak and loss from the spread of their illicit drugs," Harris said, adding that going after such gangs would be a priority if she is elected president.

Why isn't going after these gangs a priority of the Biden administration now?

Harris doesn't have to harken back to her time as California AG for examples of criminal illegal immigrants and their effect on communities. She just needs to expand her campaign stops from rallies and auditoriums to some of the communities damaged by the lax immigration policies of the Biden administration, of which she is part.

Harris was a fan of "sanctuary" laws, at least back in the day. In 2015, as AG, she sent a letter to U.S. senators opposing the Stop Sanctuary Policies and Protect Americans Act.

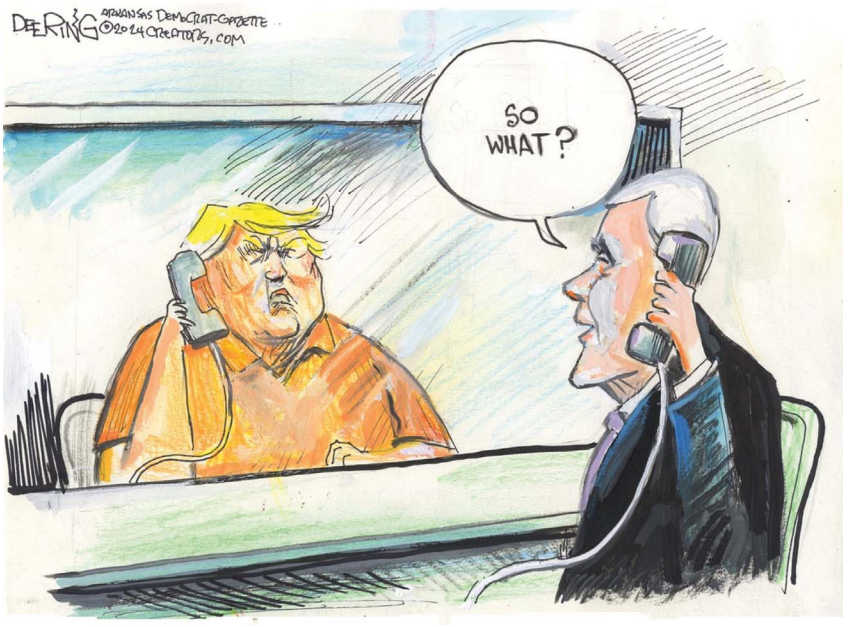
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COLUMNISTS

Moving to Arkansas

OPINION



Rex Nelson

It's an oversimplification, but I separate the explosive growth of northwest Arkansas over the past four decades into three phases.

The first phase was the steady expansion of Walmart, Tyson Foods, J.B. Hunt and the University of Arkansas through the years. That included completion of what's now Interstate 49 and Northwest Arkansas National Airport, which opened the region to the rest of the nation.

The second phase occurred when Walmart officials said, in essence, to vendors around the world: "We're tired of just being Vendorville, a place you fly into, do your business and then fly back out. We would like you to have a full-time presence here. We want you to be able to be at our home office within 30 minutes should we need to meet with you."

That edict led to hundreds of new offices, dozens of new office buildings and thousands of new residents. Many of those residents stayed in Arkansas and opened their own businesses. Their presence gave the region a more cosmopolitan flair and took the economy to a higher level.

The third phase began Nov. 11, 2011, when Alice Walton's Crystal Bridges of Museum of American Art opened in Bentonville. Only a person with the resources of a Walton could create one of the world's great art museums from scratch. That, in turn, led to wealthy visitors descending on the region, better restaurants and nicer hotels. The arts and food scenes exploded. This was no longer Vendorville. It was among the nation's hippest places to visit.



I sense a fourth phase is beginning. This is due to decisions by Tyson and Walmart to move many of the white-collar employees scattered across the country to Arkansas. We've become so accustomed to good economic news coming from northwest Arkansas that these decisions were underplayed by the media. Based on the number of jobs involved, both decisions were the equivalent of a major corporation moving its headquarters to Arkansas from outside the state.

Tyson was first. In October 2022, the company announced that it would relocate about 1,000 employees to Arkansas from offices in Chicago; Downers Grove, Ill.; and Dakota Dunes, S.D. Employees were offered relocation assistance.

"Bringing our talented corporate team members and businesses together under one roof unlocks greater opportunities to share perspectives and ideas, while also enabling us to act quickly to solve problems and provide the innovative products solutions our customers deserve," Tyson CEO Donnie King said at the time.

Tyson had operated its beef business out of Dakota Dunes since the purchase of IBP in 2001. The Illinois offices had housed the prepared foods segment since the purchase of Hillshire Brands in 2014.

By December 2022, The Wall Street Journal was reporting that more than three-quarters of the almost 500 employees in the South Dakota office had informed the company they wouldn't relocate to Arkansas and that more than 90 percent of the staff in Illinois also refused to move.

As far as the northwest Arkansas economy was concerned, it didn't matter. Many of the jobs would still be filled, and those jobs would be filled in Arkansas.

"I'm confident the plan we have in place ensures business continuity and positions us for long-term success," King said in response to the Journal story. "We knew there would be a variety of responses when we announced the consolidation."

Tyson's corporate headquarters in Springdale already housed 1,700 workers before the move.

In July 2023, Dakota Dunes employees left the office originally built for IBP in 1997. The Tyson offices in downtown Chicago and suburban Downers Grove, which also had almost 500 employees, closed the same month.

Next up was Walmart. In May of this year, Walmart human relations head Donna Morris sent a memo to employees that said "some parts of our business have made changes." She said Walmart asked most of those who had been working remotely across the country—along with employees of offices in Dallas, Atlanta and Toronto—to move to Bentonville.

Morris said the decision was made "with the goal of bringing more of us together more often."

Serenah McKay wrote in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette: "Walmart follows several other large companies in asking white-collar workers to relocate as part of a push for more in-person work. The move comes amid a national stalemate over the return to offices. The effort to get workers back together in person has been ongoing since 2021, and scores of knowledge workers have long since made the transition. Yet office occupancy has hovered stubbornly around 50 percent of pre-pandemic levels across the country's top metro areas since early 2023."

Walmart is spending more than $1 billion on its new corporate campus in Bentonville. And it's not spending that kind of money for buildings to sit empty. I expect more consolidation to the home office in the months and years to come, and that's positive news for Arkansas.

By August, Bloomberg News had released a story about Walmart workers who were complaining about the move.

"Thousands of employees from smaller offices and remote workers around the United States have been ordered to the retailer's corporate hubs, a move by the company to draw more people back to offices," Jaewon Kang wrote for Bloomberg. "While some employees are happy to comply, others shared worries ranging from partners' jobs to childcare options. Some who have been working remotely said they want to maintain that flexibility.

"There are also concerns about increased workloads as colleagues leave rather than relocate. Walmart is not the first big employer to ask workers to relocate. Unlike the office migrations of years past, such as Boeing's 2001 move to Chicago from Seattle, recent shifts have come amid the pandemic-era adoption of remote white-collar work."

Walmart's Morris said in response to the story: "We know many associates are in the process of moving and are already enjoying the benefits of being together with their teams in offices on a more regular basis."

Walmart gave employees until July 1 to let the company know if they planned to relocate. They have until Oct. 31 to make the move. "Walmart is making the case that the sacrifice is worth it. Morris said that being together improves the company and strengthens its culture while helping to collaborate and innovate. The majority of employees being asked to relocate are doing so, she said, with most going to Bentonville. A smaller number are headed to Walmart hubs in Hoboken, N.J., and California's bay area."

The 350-acre Walmart corporate campus in Bentonville will have 12 office buildings, 10 miles of walking and biking trails, an AC Hotel by Marriott, restaurants and bars, and a massive health and fitness center that already has opened.

"Some Walmart employees are embracing the change, such as Jeff Bartlett, a senior product manager who recently moved to Bentonville from Dallas," Kang wrote. "Bartlett said he and his wife, who are both from Texas, decided to make the jump after a visit to the city and a desire to be closer to nature. He said Bentonville's housing costs were still lower than those in Dallas.

"Leaving their extended families was hard, but he had already been mulling a change for career reasons, and Arkansas 'feels like the right place to be.'"

Bliss Deylami, a senior director for global talent and learning, told Kang that she has been able to work more effectively with her staff since moving to Bentonville with her husband and two children after working remotely for more than a decade. She said her team was collaborating more.

"People didn't even realize how isolated they were," Deylami said.

As was the case with the vendors all those years ago, many Tyson and Walmart employees will fall in love with Arkansas, stick around after leaving their current jobs and start businesses. They bring needed intellectual capital and new ways of thinking to our state.

Rex Nelson is a senior editor at the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.