LGBTQ Politics

By Lisa Keen
Keen News Service

One might argue that 2019 was a pretty good year for LGBT people. An openly gay man rose to the top tier of a large field of Democratic presidential candidates. A second openly LGBT person was sworn into the U.S. Senate. And Republican President Donald Trump issued a statement to "celebrate LGBT Pride Month."

Others might argue that 2019 was a year of looming and unresolved battles over the heart and soul of American democracy and the harbinger of uncertainty about the future for the political and legal movements for LGBT equality. However, one assesses the year in LGBT news, here are some of the year's most headline-grabbing news stories to consider:

**BUTTIGIEG SURGES TO THE TOP:** Pete Buttigieg’s success with his long shot bid to win the Democratic nomination for president could probably take up all 10 slots of any “LGBT Top Stories” list for 2019. He became not only the first openly gay person to seek the Democratic presidential nomination, he raised enough support to participate in the first official Democratic debate, quickly surged to a top five slot in a field of more than 20 viable candidates, and held onto that position while candidates who were much better known fell away.

His success continued throughout the year, helped by an early staking out of a moderate position just as progressive candidates were taking heat for appealing for dramatic changes, such as Medicare for All. Buttigieg pitched “Medicare for All Who Want It,” spoke openly about how his religious faith informs his views, and proved to be a respectful but formidable contender in debate. By December, he held first place in Iowa polling, second place in New Hampshire polling, and fourth place in national polling. But with success in any presidential bid comes additional scrutiny and challenge. In May, two Republican operatives tried to promote a false accusation that Buttigieg had sexually assaulted two men.

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**Our country must live in us**

Rebuilding together against lies and madness

by Richard J. Rosendall | rrosendall@starpower.net

contributing writer

I know it’s time for holiday cheer when my building’s lobby is festooned with fake Christmas presents. Fortunately, nearby collection bins for coats and non-perishable food show the real spirit of giving.

We are beset, however, by counterfeits. A Russian asset poses as an American patriot. Republicans vilify Stanford law professor Pamela Karlan for a punning reference to Barron Trump as if she had roasted and eaten him like the witch in a folktale, despite their own history of gleeful attacks on teens from Chelsea Clinton to Greta Thunberg. Former Speaker Newt Gingrich laments, “On the eve of Christmas it is really sad to see the dishonesty and the partisanship,” referring to Democrats, amazingly enough, considering that he himself impeached Bill Clinton six days before Christmas.

Think of Donald Trump as a meaner, dilater, and less competent version of Eddie Murphy’s Billy Ray Valentine in the 1983 film Trading Places, who is caught up in a wager between plutocrats over what will happen if they replace the managing director of their brokerage firm with a street hustler. In our case, the wagerer is Vladimir Putin, who helped dupe American voters.

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**LGBTQ Parenting Year in Review**

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com

contributing writer

This past year saw many challenges to LGBTQ equality—but there was still some progress. Let’s review the parenting-specific news of the year.

Some Setbacks

The Trump administration’s Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) was perhaps the biggest antagonist of the year. HHS began in January by granting South Carolina a waiver so that federally funded adoption and foster care agencies in the state may discriminate based on a person’s religion, LGBTQ identity, or other factors that do not fit with the religious or moral beliefs that the agency espouses.

HHS proposed another rule in April that would abandon the collection of data related to the sexual orientation of youth, parents, and guardians connected to the foster care system, except when a case worker knows that it is related to the reason a child was removed from their home. LGBTQ and child welfare organizations say the fuller data would have helped to serve LGBTQ youth more effectively.

In May, HHS finalized a rule that allows any health care workers—from doctors to clerical staff—to deny medical treatment, information, and services to patients because of the worker's personal religious or moral beliefs, even if their institution takes federal funds like Medicare or Medicaid. The rule focuses mainly on abortion, sterilization, and assisted suicide, which is bad enough, but it could also lead to health care workers refusing to serve...
but both of those men denied the claims. In October, he was criticized for being too straight-looking and delined as "Mary Pete." And at year's end, Buttigieg was still struggling to prove he could win support from African American voters and fending off suggestions that his post-graduate work for a conservative management consulting firm, McKinsey, included work that led to the loss of jobs for many. So far, he has astutely navigated a daunting landscape and blown through a wall that most LGBT people expected would block a path to the White House for any gay person in their lifetimes. Win or lose, he could well become 2020's top story; too.

SUPREME COURT TACKLES TITLE VII: The U.S. Supreme Court in October heard oral arguments about whether existing federal law --Title VII of the Civil Rights Act—already prohibits discrimination in employment based on two things: sexual orientation and gender identity. The court's eventual ruling on each issue, expected by next June, will have profound consequences for LGBT people everywhere in the U.S. And it could be a mixed outcome: The court could rule one way for sexual orientation and a different way for transgender status. Conservative Justice Neil Gorsuch articulated that he was "really close" to seeing how the law specifies how to interpret the concept of gender identity in employment. And Stanford law professor Pam Karlan was a key witness before one committee, serving as an expert on constitutional law regarding impeachment. At deadline, the full House was expected to approve both articles of impeachment by Christmas, sending the charges to the Senate for trial. That Republican-dominated body is expected to address the issue in January for President Donald Trump, who said he would not accept a trial if he is re-elected. That much is known and essentially predictable. What remains to be seen is how the U.S. voters will respond in next November's presidential election.

HHS SEeks to Deny Health Care: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced in May that it would "substantively revise" language in the Affordable Care Act to eliminate protections against discrimination based on gender identity in health care. The announcement came just three days after HHS published a final rule that enabled health care providers to refuse to provide certain services by claiming they had religious or moral beliefs that compelled them to refuse. Such "Denial of Care" rules have been primarily aimed against women who seek an abortion or emergency contraception, terminally ill patients wanting to accelerate a painful dying process, and LGBT people generally. But by year's end, three different federal district judges ruled that the final regulations were unconstitutional.

RELIGIOUS STORM CLOUDS GATHER: The long-standing battle continues to escalate. Laws which prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation are being continuously challenged by churches and business owners who claim the First Amendment to the constitution gives them a religious liberty to violate those non-discrimination laws. The U.S. Supreme Court dispensed with two such cases in 2019 (refusing to hear Aloha v. Cervelli and sending back Klein v. Oregon), but more have arrived. The latest is Fulton v. Philadelphia, which asks the high court to overturn a Third Circuit opinion that a local government can refuse funding to a Catholic run foster care agency because the agency refuses to abide by a city ordinance that prohibits sexual orientation discrimination.

HATE CRIME NUMBERS HAUNT: At least 22 transgender people of color were murdered in 2019, a statistic that has haunted the LGBT community and drawn the notice of many Democratic presidential candidates. It's not that the number itself was so different than in previous years (which averaged 22 per year), noted the Human Rights Campaign in its now annual report on violence against transgender people. It's that they are now seen to reflect "intersections of racism, sexism and transphobia" in the United States that is "sometimes ruthlessly endorsed and enforced by those at the highest level of our government," said Alphonso David, HRC's next president. The Hate Crimes Statistics report filed annually by the Federal Bureau of Investigation showed a 34 percent increase in the number of victims of anti-transgender crime in 2018, compared to 2017. During that same time period, there was a nine percent increase in crimes against gay, lesbian, and bisexual victims, but a decrease in hate crimes overall. The significance of these numbers is dependant in part on how well law enforcement agencies identify and report specific hate crimes. But there's no denying that, if there is any inaccuracy in the reporting, the true incidence of hate crimes against LGBT people is likely higher and increasing every year.

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As we come to the end of another year in the midst of the Trump-era, I find too much of my mental and emotional energy is taken up by the daily drama in Washington. And unlike during the Watergate investigation, when some Republicans were willing to put country over party, I have little confidence that the good guys will win in the end. The GOP-controlled Senate will never vote to impeach their small-fingered dictator.

I think back 10 years ago, which feels simultaneously like last month—since the years go faster as I age—and last century. In January 2009, I was one of the lucky 2+ million who saw Barack Obama sworn in as President as I stood shivering with the masses on the Mall, my eyes glued to the giant screens that brought the tiny specs in the distance into sharp focus. Despite the bitter cold and a stomach bug, I was determined to see history in the making, and felt certain that I was living in a new age, a new Camelot for the 21st Century.

Now, a decade later, I’m living in a dystopian world I couldn’t have imagined back then. Every month, week, every day, a new outrage from Trump-world: Children in cages, mercury and sewage in our streams, and graft on a scale befitting a banana republic or Russia under Vladimir Putin, who seems to be Trump’s BFF.

Meanwhile, I watched the Democratic scrum in the last few debates and the desperate struggle to provide an alternative to the Orange Menace, and I’m filled with more foreboding than hope; I’m not confident any of the current cast of candidates, from Deval Patrick to Bernie to Elizabeth to Joe B, will beat Trump. Part of the problem is that for many Democrats, as the saying goes, “the perfect is the enemy of the good.”

Today I see the internal warfare that reminds me of 2016, the battle between the “Bernie Bros” and Hillary supporters. I wasn’t on either team back then but knew I would be voting for the Democratic nominee, since the alternative was unthinkable. But many Millennials and others who decided their votes didn’t really matter, Clinton and Trump were both crooked, and/or Hillary was going to win anyway, and we ended up with our current state of affairs, an ongoing nightmare coming to an end in January 2021—maybe.

I scroll through my Facebook feed and there are posts from friends and acquaintances, ranging from left to moderate, (there are few if any Trump supporters in my little bubble). While it makes sense to examine each of the Democratic
**Mombian**

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LGBTQ people or their children, to deny them fertility treatments, treatment or preventative care for AIDS or HIV, or care related to gender transitions.

In November, however, just a couple of weeks before the rule was set to go into effect, three federal district courts, in California, New York, and Washington, said the rule was unconstitutional and completely vacated it. It remains in effect in other districts, however; and the decisions could be appealed by HHS.

On November 1, however, HHS also issued a new rule that similarly would allow discrimination against LGBTQ people and others by all recipients of HHS grants, including foster care and adoption agencies as well as programs dedicated to youth homelessness, HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and substance abuse prevention, among others. While ten states (Alabama, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, and Virginia) already allow child service agencies to similarly discriminate in foster care and adoption, the new HHS rule would enshrine such discrimination at the federal level and extend it to the full range of HHS services.

The State Department also showed its anti-LGBTQ side. Two married, two-dad couples sued the department for refusing to recognize the U.S. citizenship of their children, born via surrogacy abroad, even though the parents are all citizens. These families join two other same-sex couples, each of which has at least one U.S. citizen parent, who have been fighting the department over their children’s citizenship for several years.

On the state level, both New York and Rhode Island Island saw the failure of bills that would have more effectively protected families formed through assisted reproduction by offering cheaper and easier ways to ensure firm legal recognition of nonbiological parents. The New York bill would also have legalized gestational surrogacy (where the surrogate does not contribute the egg).

In Michigan, two same-sex couples filed a lawsuit against the state after they were rejected by two Christian adoption agencies with state contracts. In a March injunction, allowing it to maintain its contract while refusing to work with same-sex couples and unmarried people while the case is fully litigated.

In a separate case in April, however, a Catholic child service agency in Philadelphia was denied a similar injunction by a federal appeals court. That’s good—though the case could now be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court (and the Michigan case could ultimately find its way there as well).

**Signs of Progress**

The Equality Act, a comprehensive, federal LGBTQ civil rights bill, passed the U.S. House in May. It offers protections against discrimination in foster care and adoption as well as in employment, housing, public accommodations, public education, and other areas.

More focused on children and family, the Every Child Deserves a Family Act was introduced in both houses for the sixth Congress in a row. It prohibits discrimination in foster care and adoption on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and marital status, as with past versions, but also bans it on the basis of religion; bans conversion therapy; directs HHS to assist states, tribes, and agencies in improving services to LGBTQ and two-spirit foster youth; and requires HHS to collect data on the sexual orientation and gender identity of children and parents connected to the foster care system. The bill would count more of HHS’ moves this year, but looks unlikely to pass the Republican-controlled Senate.

The American Bar Association, the “national representative of the legal profession,” in January adopted a resolution that “Opposes laws, regulations, and rules or practices that discriminate against LGBT individu- als in the exercise of the fundamental right to parent.” While that clearly didn’t stop HHS, it’s good to know that many of the nation’s lawyers view HHS’ moves as discriminatory.

On the state level, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Oregon each enacted laws that extend paid family leave with broad definitions of who’s in a family.

The Oklahoma Supreme Court not only ruled in fa- vor of a nonbiological mother in a child custody case in June, but established guidelines for future cases, writ- ing conclusively that “A non-biological same-sex parent stands in parity with a biological parent.”

Arizona in April repealed an anti-LGBTQ law that had banned instruction in public school health curricula that “Promotes a homosexual life-style” or suggests there are “safe methods of homosexual sex.”

More than three dozen queer parents elected in 2018 took office in January 2019 at all levels of government. Additionally, in April, two lesbian moms were elected mayors: Lori Lightfoot in Chicago and Jane Castor in Tampa, Florida.

Financial giants J. P. Morgan and MassMutual each announced expanded fertility benefits to help LGBTQ employees start or grow their families. Among other features, these benefits are offered without requiring a medical diagnosis of infertility—useful for simple people and couples who simply don’t have both egg and sperm.

In a major reversal of policy, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) in April said that children of LGBTQ parents may now be blessed and baptized in the faith, and that same-sex couples in the LDS Church will no longer be considered “apostates,” although marrying a person of the same sex is still “a serious transgression.”

There was also another banner year for LGBTQ-in- clusive children’s books in quality and quantity—too many to list here, but I’ve rounded up some of the best at mombian.com.

A Sharon Mattes, known as Sharon Bottoms when she fought to overcome anti-LGBTQ bias in a legal battle for custody of her son in the 1990s—a headline case for queer parents—died in February at age 48.

Looking Ahead

While it’s easy to get disillusioned over the significant political setbacks, I hope we can take heart at the progres- s that has been made, even if it is less than we would like. Next year may be similar—but it is also an election year. We may never have a perfect candidate, but we can still vote for the one most likely to make a positive differ- ence for ourselves and our families.

Wishing you joy and love this holiday season, and a more equitable new year for us all.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory for LGBTQ parents.

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**Rosendall**

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into replacing a thoughtful and decent president with a mobbed-up developer to see if he could turn a republic into a third-rate crime syndicate.

So far, Trump’s biggest hustle has been remarkably successful: he vandals our country by exploiting race-

less.

The devil himself could not be more heart- less.

While Democratic candidates argue over healthcare

services, these benefits are offered without requiring a

employees start or grow their families. Among other

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By Jules Becker

At a time when anti-Semitism and other forms of prejudice are spiking, Americans of all creeds and colors need to know about Leo Frank. Scapegoated in 1913 for the murder of Mariette, Georgia factory worker Mary Phagan, the Jewish National Pencil Company factory superintendent was convicted on the basis of trumped up circumstantial evidence and eventually lynched by an angry mob. “Parade,” a 1999 Drama Desk best musical and both score and book Tony Award winner, richly captures the musical’s timely warning about the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism in particular and in general.

In the Jason Robert Brown (score)-Alfred Uhry (book) collaboration, that pervasiveness finds an anti-Semitic red hills of Georgia Confederates like religious extremist Tom Watson and Governor Slatyon and dark suits for Leo and African-Americans who find themselves being manipulated by Dorsay. Lindsay Genevieve Fuori’s expressive choreography. Even Chelsea Kerl’s clever costumes serve as a kind of color code—various shades of red for ‘red hills of Georgia’ Confederates like religious extremist Tom Watson and Governor Slatyon.

The prevalence of anti-Semitism in particular and in general. Furthermore, the pervasive nature of anti-Semitism is particularly chilling in the case of Leo Frank, who is portrayed as a wooden, almost lifeless character by Bisantz. However, in the hands of the talented cast led by Brittany Craig, the character comes to life with a soulful performance that reveals the depth of his humanity and his struggle against the injustices he faced. Bisantz’s portrayal is particularly powerful as she brings to life the character of Leo Frank, a man who was wrongfully convicted and eventually lynched.

One of the most healing and bumble exchanges between two people is an apology. Saying, “I’m sorry!” can restore feelings of safety, dignity, and respect. The words can even repair relationships when based on the concept of restorative justice. However, not all apologies are the same or have any meaning behind them.

Their emotional duet “All the Wasted Time” is stunningly poignant. Taylor delivers the seminal prayer “Sh’Ma” (traditionally uttered by someone facing imminent death) with great feeling.

Look for that feeling from the actors portraying villains and conflicted characters as well. Jerry Bisantz captures Dorsey’s scheming especially as he pressures a parade of witnesses. Dan Prior proves equally convincing as jaded journalist Britt Craig and overly charming Governor Slatyon. His “Big News” is front page fun. Aaron Patterson has scene-stealing vocal force as complicated witness Jim Conley. Other standouts in a stellar cast include Gabe Kinsman as Frankie Epps, Elbert Joseph as Newt Lee, Todd Yard as Watson and big-voiced Yowande Odetoyinbo as Frank housekeeper Minnie McNight.

Last season Moonbox Productions brought chilling impact to “Cabaret.” Without exaggeration, its “Parade” is as good as the original at Lincoln Center and easily the best midsize production of the year.

When an apology doesn’t create restorative justice

by Rev. Irene Monroe

One of the most healing and bumble exchanges between two people is an apology. Saying, “I’m sorry!” can restore feelings of safety, dignity, and respect. The words can even repair relationships when based on the concept of restorative justice. However, not all apologies are the same or have any meaning behind them.

For example, Hollywood film mogul, Harvey Weinstein, is allegedly accused of sexually harassing, assaulting, and raping dozens of women. Weinstein’s public and scripted mea culpa stated: “I so respect all women and regret any meaning behind them. However, not all apologies are the same or have any meaning behind them. For example, Hollywood film mogul, Harvey Weinstein, is allegedly accused of sexually harassing, assaulting, and raping dozens of women. Weinstein’s public and scripted mea culpa stated: "I so respect all women and regret any meaning behind them.

However, ineffective apologies make restorative justice impossible because they intentionally change the topic, minimize the blame, and most egregiously wait too long to be sincere or sufficient. We all have experienced these types of ineffective apologies when someone does the following: apologize to be polite; apologize to appease; apologize on demand; apologize from guilt, and apologize without apologizing. These apologies fail to recognize an offense, aggrieved parties, and to lay a foundation toward reconciliation.

On December 13, a letter was sent to Dexter by district educators requesting her resignation. “Regardless of your intent, we must all acknowledge that your use of the N-word, compounded by your boisterous apology to our students, has caused harm that cannot begin to be repaired while you remain in office.” Dexter will not be returning for her third term. Perhaps now healing can begin. This matter shouldn’t have escalated to a fever pitch. It’s now district educators’ turn to apologize to our students.
Hallmark's flip-flop on same-sex ads backfires

By MAE ANDERSON
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP)—The Hallmark Channel’s decision to pull, then reinstate a commercial that featured a same-sex couple kissing shows how controversy can generate more publicity than simply ignoring it.

The company also didn’t help matters by reversing its decision following the backlash.

“It’s hard to keep everyone happy, but flip-flopping doesn’t help,” said Allen Adamson, co-founder of the marketing consultancy Metaforce. “These are difficult issues to navigate but when you’re going to make a call one way or another, make sure you understand the ramifications. You only want to pull the Band-Aid off once.”

The debacle ultimately made a winner out of Zola, the wedding-planning website whose ads a conservative advocacy group didn’t want shown on Hallmark.

“For Zola, this is Christmas times 100,” said Laura Ries, president of marketing firm Ries and Ries. “Nobody ever heard of Zola, and now everybody knows it and loves it.”

Paul Argenti, Dartmouth College professor of corporate communication, added that the debacle “shows you if you know who you are, what you’re doing and stand by your beliefs, you’ll be better off in the end.”

The Hallmark Channel, owned by Hallmark Cards Inc., is Crown Media Family Networks’ flagship cable channel. It is known for family-friendly programming, particularly made-for-TV Christmas-themed movies.

That reputation prompted Hallmark to pull four Zola ads with same-sex couples after getting a complaint from a conservative group with a stated mission to “fight against indecency.” Hallmark allowed two ads with opposite-sex couples from Zola, though Zola pulled those after the same-sex ads were nixed.

In one of the pulled ads, two brides stand at the altar and wonder aloud whether their wedding would be going more smoothly if they had used a wedding-planning site like Zola. The lighthearted ad ends with the two brides sharing a quick kiss on the altar.

In an interview over the weekend, Hallmark spokeswoman Molly Biwer said the company felt "it was in the best interest of the brand to pull them and not continue to generate controversy."

Instead, Hallmark faced criticism on Twitter from celebrities, including Ellen DeGeneres and William Shatner. "Isn’t it almost 2020? What are you thinking?" DeGeneres tweeted.

Hallmark was also mocked on “Saturday Night Live.” Netflix tweeted stills from a TV show and movie that it labeled “Titles Featuring Lesbians Joyfully Existing And Also It’s Christmas Can We Just Let People Love Who They Love.”

By Sunday, Hallmark had reversed its decision.

In a statement, Hallmark Cards CEO Mike Perry said Crown Media was “agonizing” over the decision. “Said simply, they believe this was the wrong decision,” he said.

That, in turn, prompted calls for a boycott of the Hallmark Channel by the group that made the original complaint, One Million Moms. It accused Hallmark of caving to the LGBTQ community and portrayed the reversal as a betrayal to conservatives.

Hallmark Cards, the Kansas City, Missouri, enterprise started in 1910, has moved quickly before to respond to any flare-ups, such as when it removed a gift wrap from circulation after one person complained of seeing a swastika in its pattern. In March, it cut ties with actress Lori Loughlin, one of the so-called “Christmas Queens” who star in its holiday movies, after her arrest in a college admissions scam put the family-friendly network and extended Hallmark brand in uncomfortable proximity to a national scandal.

The group behind the latest complaint, One Million Moms, is an offshoot of the conservative American Family Association. It has tried to implement many boycotts, including one in 2008 targeting Hallmark Cards when it started selling same-sex wedding cards. It has also tried to start boycotts against Target, “Toy Story 4” and other entities it deems to be LGBTQ friendly.

Adamson said Hallmark’s backlash was different from what exercise bike maker Peloton recently faced over its tone-deaf ad. That ad, widely mocked on social media, showed a man giving a reluctant wife a Peloton bike for Christmas. Ryan Reynolds’ Aviation Gin quickly capitalized on the debacle, showing the same actress out with friends trying to get over a split.

“The Peloton was painful for the company, but not a reflection of management values,” Adamson said.

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Merriam-Webster declares 'they' its 2019 word of the year

By LEANNE ITALIE
AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP)—A common but increasingly mighty and very busy little word, "they," has an accolade all its own. The language mavens at Merriam-Webster have declared the personal pronoun their word of the year based on a 313% increase in look-ups on the company’s search site, Merriam-Webster.com, this year when compared with 2018.

"I have to say it’s surprising to me," said Peter Sokolowski, a lexicographer and Merriam-Webster’s editor at large, ahead of Tuesday’s announcement. "It’s a word we all know and love. So many people were talking about this word."

Sokolowski and his team monitor spikes in searches and "they" got an early start last January with the rise of model Oslo Grace on top fashion runways. The Northern Californian identifies as non-binary and uses the plural pronoun. Sokolowski said the increase is no shock.

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Hallmark
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son said. "In Hallmark’s case, this decision was initially and now a reflection of what they stand for. You really want to not change that story. If you believe and stand for something, that should be your North Star.”

Bill Pearce, assistant dean at the University of California, Berkeley’s business school, said Hallmark was ahead of the same-sex wedding issue when it introduced same-sex greeting cards in 2008, before gay marriage was legalized.

“Any goodwill engendered from the LGBTQ community is squandered and I don’t think they made any friends on the other side of the issue either,” Pearce said. “It’s a classic blunder by in-decision.”
Motorist to pay medical bills of gay pride parade organizer

DOVER, Del. (AP)—Prosecutors in Delaware have dropped charges against a former city councilman who was accused of refusing to detour around a gay pride parade and striking a parade organizer with his truck.

Television station WBOC reported that prosecutors signed an agreement Tuesday dropping the charges against 90-year-old Reuben Salters.

Salters was charged earlier this year with third-degree vehicular assault and failure to obey a traffic control device.

Salters stepped down from Dover City Council in 2011 after 22 years on the council.

They

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transgender nonbinary, walking in both men’s and women’s shows around the world.

Another look-up spike occurred in April, when U.S. Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Washington, got emotional while talking of her gender-nonconforming child during a House committee hearing as she advocated for LGBTQ rights legislation.

Merriam-Webster recently added a new definition to its online dictionary to reflect use of “they” as relating to a person whose gender identity is nonbinary. In October, the American Psychological Association endorsed “they” as a singular third-person pronoun in its latest style guide for scholarly writing.

“We believe writers should try to use a person’s self-identified pronoun whenever feasible,” said Jasper Simons, chief publishing officer for the APA. “The singular ‘they’ is a way for writers to avoid making assumptions about gender when it is not known.”

The American Dialect Society, which is dedicated to the study of the English language in North America, named “they” its word of the year for 2015, in recognition of its emergence among people who reject “he” and “she.”

In September, Merriam-Webster experienced another big increase in look-ups for “they” when pop star Sam Smith wrote on social media that their preferred pronouns were “they and ‘them.” Smith said the decision came after a “lifetime of being at war with my gender.”

Sokolowski told The Associated Press that “they,” one of a handful of nonbinary pronouns to emerge in recent years, is “here to stay.” Nick Adams, director of transgender representation for the LGBTQ advocacy group GLAAD, said Merriam-Webster’s choice is a positive step in acknowledging nonbinary people.

“There is a long road ahead before language, policy and culture are completely affirming and inclusive,” Adams said.

The AP Stylebook allows the use of “they” as a singular or gender-neutral pronoun in some cases. And the Merriam-Webster runners-up to word of the year?

They include “quid pro quo,” “impeach” and “crawdad,” the latter a word in the title of Delia Evans best-selling novel, “Where the Crawdads Sing.” The Top 10 also included “egregious,” “clemency” and “the,” a shocker of a look-up spike when Ohio State University attempted to patent the word to protect its turf. It failed.

Also in the mix: “snitty,” which emerged on the lips of Attorney General William Barr in reference to a letter by Robert Mueller about a summary Barr wrote of the Mueller report.

We have Washington Post columnist George Will to thank for “tergiversation.” The word, meaning an evasion or a desertion, was Merriam-Webster’s top look-up on Jan. 24 after Will used it in a column in reference to Lindsey Graham.

The words “camp” and “exculcate” rounded out the Top 10 list.
Judah

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candidates, and to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, the run up to 2020 is reminding me of the infighting of four years earlier. The field is too male, too white, too moneyed. (I don’t disagree). From the leftist perspective, Biden is out of touch, possibly senile, misogynistic. Mayor Pete is a closet racist, a tool of corporate donors, a lightweight with no real management experience. From the center, Bernie and Warren are seen as socialists, their “Medicare for All” and tax on the wealthy too extreme to win a national election. I watch the vitriol, the venom tossed one way and the other, and wonder how we will not poison ourselves, losing focus on what really matters: getting rid of the Human Stain, helping the Democrats gain control of Congress and limiting Mitch McConnell’s power to turn back the clock and make us a society of straight white Christians, with little room for anyone else.

There’s a difference between healthy debate and nasty character assassination; at our present rate, we may not come together around a single Democratic nominee. Trump, and the white men who have bought and paid for him will not go down without a fight. In 2020, I hope we—LGBT folks, and anyone else who cares about our democracy—can come together and give it to them.

Judah Leblang is a Boston-based writer, teacher and storyteller. His new memoir, Echoes of Jerry, is at Porter Square Books, Wellesley Books, and at judahleblang.com

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When John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John announced they were reuniting for three "Grease" sing-a-long events in Florida, the events sold out immediately. It didn’t hurt that the duo was joined by three of their co-stars—Barry Pearl, Kelly Ward, and Michael Tiucci—collectively known as the T-Birds (Didi Conn’s invitation must have gotten lost in the mail). Travolta thought it would be fun if his fellow T-Birds dyed their hair. “This made me wonder, what would Travolta do?” I am delighted to report that he donned one of the best wigs of his life. Actually, it was on the minimalist side, so perhaps it was a wiglet. He and Livvy turned up in their end-of-film attire for the Q&A, and even sang some of the songs. You can see photos and even videos at BillyMasters.com.

Two former "One Direction" members were recently accused of queer-baiting. First was Liam Payne, who people say is “fetishizing bisexuality” in one of his songs. A day later, headlines around the world read "Harry Styles eats sperm." And so he did. Filling in for James Corden on "The Late Late Show," Styles invited ex-girlfriend Kendall Jenner to play a game of "Spill Your Guts or Fill Your Guts." When asked which tracks on his latest CD were written about Kendall, he opted to down some tasty cod sperm. Tasty!

St. Paul’s Church in Malmö, Sweden commissioned a new piece of art entitled “Paradise.” Artist Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin did a work 20 years ago inspired by the Last Supper, with Jesus surrounded by the 12 apostles—in drag. For "Paradise," she had the Garden of Eden populated with straight couples, gay couples, and even a transgender person in a tree holding the snake! You’d think "all-inclusive," right? Apparently it was too inclusive. The Swedish Church felt since that the snake represents sin and temptation in religious settings, having the transgender holding it could be interpreted as trans-phobic. Ohlson says she’s making a new image for the church—"without a snake." So now it’s snake-phobic.

Social media had a problem with the snake. Jason Derulo had in his tight black boxer briefs. Derulo explained, “I was not aroused. I was literally, like, getting out of the water. I don’t want to say I was swirled up, I definitely didn’t have the cold shiver." For those of you interested in what it looks like dry, Jason added, “It leans more to the front. If it’s on the side, and it’s just chilling on the side, it’s a semi.” This led to Derulo receiving an offer to do porn—"cause, you know, fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly, anacondas gotta breathe. CamSoda offered Derulo $500K to sit around in his boxer briefs and fondle the ferocious fella. So, basically, the anaconda didn’t even have to come out of hibernation! Jason turned down the offer, saying “I’mma need a wayyy bigger bag than that.”

Maybe Derulo has so much money he doesn’t need to fondle his undies for half a million bucks. We do know that Lil Nas X is doing just fine. According to Forbes', he’s the first gay man to appear on the list of highest-paid country acts. Of course, you can see his anaconda on BillyMasters.com. And, trust me, we didn’t pay him a cent! But when asked about featuring LGBTQ+ content, Hallmark Channel CEO Bill Abbott said, "We’re open to really any type of movie of any type of relationship in any space. We are always encouraging people to bring us stories across the board. It’s certainly something that we do discuss consistently with our teams and with our talent and with the agencies.” Of course, this makes sense for a network that continuously runs episodes of “The Golden Girls”. However, the statement outraged conservative fans of programs starring the pious Candace Cameron Bure and the soon-to-be incarcerated Lori Loughlin. Then came a proposed boycott from "One Million Moms", a grassroots organization that presumably has one million-plus moms (I don’t have my abacus handy, but if they say 1 in 10 people are gay, then there’s a pretty good chance I slept with a baker’s dozen of those one million moms’ sons). The moms were vehemently opposed to commercials with lesbian couples promoting Zola, a wedding planning website. The network killed the commercials, saying they don’t accept ads that "are deemed controversial." A spokesperson went so far as to say that two brides kissing violated the channel’s policy against “public displays of affection”—ironic coming from a network where virtually every movie is about a girl sleeping with both her capitalist big-city boyfriend and her hometown childhood sweetheart who is trying to save a Christmas tree farm.

And yet on the same day, Olivia Newton-John was joined by her son, 24-year-old Estanislao. Not only does Estanislao have an alter ego in a popular drag queen named Dhhyry, he also wore a rainbow pocket square to the event. I suppose one could say he was rainbow high (yes, I’ve been dying to say that, too). The president previously described his son as “one of the most creative persons.” When asked about Estanislao by the press, the president said, “My son is a rights activist in that community. I would worry if he was a criminal, but he is a great man. In that world, which I don’t know much about, he seems to be very respected and recognized. I have pride in my son. How could I not be proud?” Perhaps it’s just an Argentine tradition, but I enjoyed seeing El Presidente being worn in while carrying a scepter and wearing a sash—kinda like Miss Universe!

What a perfect segue to this week’s “Billy’s Holiday Gift Giving Suggestions”. I am surprised at how little most of us know about our LGBTQ+ history. If you want to fill that gap with some fascinating knowledge that’s also fun and colorful, pick up Frank DeCaro’s book “Drag: Combining Through the Big Wigs of Show Business”. Sure, you’ll learn a lot about the impact drag queens have made throughout the history of...well, everything. But it’s also a gorgeous coffee table book which would be a great gift for anyone on your list (coffee table not included).

While you’re buying books, it bears repeating that Frank’s husband, Jim Colucci, wrote an exhaustive volume called “Golden Girls Forever: An Unauthorized Look Behind the Lanai”. I gave that book to lots of people this time last year, and it was a big hit. I recently heard of a new book—“The Golden Girls: Twas the Night Before Christmas”. It appears to be an animated holiday story. Nobody has sent it to me, so buy at your own risk.

If you have a “Golden Girls” devotee on your list, why not buy them a “Golden Girls” Chia Pet. Oh, yes, if you have a green thumb (really any green extremity will do), you too could cultivate some sort of uncanny herb sprouting out of a clay head kinda shaped like Bea Arthur, Rue McClanahan, Betty White, or Estelle Getty (I think the Sophia one looks the best). You can find these anywhere cheap gifts are sold.

While the original “Dynasty” was a guilty pleasure, the current incarnation is more guilty than pleasurable. I know you’re not watching, but it is fun—even if the cast is constantly changing. In three seasons, we’re on our third Crystal and our second Alexis—well, third if you count the episodes Fallon played herself and her mother.

Which leads to our “Ask Billy” question. Henry in Maine says, “The guy who plays Liam on Dynasty is really hot. He gives off a gay vibe—or is it me?”

If you’re reading this column, it’s you giving off the gay vibe. Let’s move on to Adam Huber, who plays Liam. He may be somewhat light in the acting department, but he’s got great hair—which makes him a perfect addition to the cast. That head of hair made me think that perhaps he’s modeled. A bit of sleuthing uncovered his modeling past—where he showed off his impressive physique. And, wait—is that a brief foray into nude modeling? As with all good stocking stuffers, you can see all on BillyMasters.com.

When I’m beginning and ending critiquing people’s hair, it’s time to end yet another column. You know what a perfect gift is? A membership to www.BillyMasters.com, the site where we never censor a big snake. If you wanna dare me with a question, send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before I cry for Argentina. Until next time, remember, one man’s filth is another man’s bible.
Bravery reflected.

On X1, it’s Pride all year, only with Xfinity. For some, showing the world who they truly are is a courageous act. That’s why Xfinity created the largest first-of-its-kind community endorsed LGBTQ Film & TV Collection. Enjoy thousands of TV shows and movies at home and on-the-go with Xfinity On Demand. Just say, “LGBTQ” into the X1 Voice Remote to discover brave and powerful stories that reflect your life. Simple, easy, awesome.

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