Holyoke Mayor Morse challenges Congressman Neal

HOLYOKE, Mass. (AP)—A mayor first elected at age 22 launched a Democratic primary challenge Monday to the longest-serving member of the Massachusetts congressional delegation, one of the most powerful members of the U.S. House.

Holyoke Mayor Alex Morse, who was first elected in 2011 and is now in his fourth term, touted his record in attracting investment to the city, reducing crime and boosting high school graduation rates in announcing his plan to challenge U.S. Rep. Richard Neal.

"There's an urgency to this moment in Massachusetts' First District and our country, and that urgency is not matched by our current representative in Congress," Morse, 30, said in a statement. "The fact is, the congressman has been largely silent on the issues that matter most. He's been absent, unaccountable, and unavailable."

The city's first openly gay mayor, Morse is a graduate of Brown University and the first college graduate in his family. His campaign announcement told the story of his family's rise out of poverty into the middle class.

Neal, 70, was first elected in 1988 and is chairman of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee.

Last year, Neal easily defeated challenger and Springfield attorney Tahira Amatul-Wadud with more than 70% of the vote.

A Neal spokesman welcomed Morse into the democratic process.

"Richie has been a champion for working families in western Massachusetts and has fought tirelessly to ensure that the people of our region are not forgotten and receive our fair share," said Neal spokesman Peter Panos in an emailed statement.

The state's 1st District, the largest geographically, covers much of western Massachusetts, including all of Berkshire County, as well as portions of Franklin, Hampden, Hampshire and Worcester counties. It covers the cities of Springfield, Pittsfield and Holyoke, as well as dozens of rural towns.

MTPC Welcomes New Executive Director Tre'Andre Valentine

Submitted by MTPC

The Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC) announced today that Tre'Andre Valentine will take the helm as its new Executive Director.

Tre'Andre, who uses he/his pronouns, brings nearly a decade of non-profit experience and grassroots organizing energy to MTPC. In their previous role at The Network La Red, Tre'Andre was responsible for managing community engagement, outreach programs, educational programming, as well as grassroots fundraising. Tre'Andre also served on MTPC's steering committee from 2006-2016. In addition to their extensive experience in the non-profit sector, they also bring their own lived experience as an indigenous transgender person of color.

"After an extensive, two month long search process, we are so thrilled to have De'Andre on board," said Michelle Tat, Co-chair of MTPC's Steering Committee. Co-chair Kaden Mohammed added, "In De'Andre we found a leader with drive, excitement, and passion whose values, skills, expertise, and lived experiences will guide MTPC into its future."

"I am humbled and honored to have the privilege of leading MTPC as we continue to forge forward," said Tre'Andre Valentine.

BOSTON (AP)—Supporters of transgender rights are staging a rally in downtown Boston to demand continued federal protections for transgender people who need health care.

Activists and advocates planned to gather at City Hall Plaza on Sunday afternoon to protest the Trump administration’s proposed rollback of the Affordable Care Act.

"We call on the Trump administration to reject this harmful proposal and instead protect the Affordable Care Act. It’s a proven program that ensures that transgender people can access the care they need, regardless of their gender identity or expression," said Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund Founder name.

The Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition says flouting the law "will deny transgender people access to live-saving care by falsely telling doctors, hospitals, and insurance companies that they can turn away transgender people."

"Faye Dunaway playing a legendary film star—what could go wrong?"

— Billy Masters on necn’s "The Take with Sue O’Connell" way back in April.

find Billy Masters on page 11!
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Pardon me, dear reader, but after thirty months of misrule by a cruel, reckless, morally treasonous sexual predator, I am sick of being told that it is Democrats who are extreme.

A colleague tells me that the top four democratic presidential candidates are a clown car, ignoring all the rest, despite the party conventions still being a year away. Excuse me, but I've been to the circus, and four people do not a clown car make. Four people are a carpool. Bad metaphors are devouring our brains. But I digress.

One alleged clown is Sen. Kamala Harris, whom I consider one of the most impressive people running—smart, tough, likable, quick on her feet—but she is dismissed as an unelectable extremist because my colleague says so, his preferences being father to his analysis. Who knows how Kamala will fare in the campaign? Plenty of smart people were wrong in 2016. A little intellectual humility, never abundant in political circles, can steer us around our blind spots.

What is the supposed extremism? Universal healthcare? Reproductive freedom? Compassion for migrant families who behave like many of our own ancestors? Trump treats four progressive congresswomen of color as if they were space aliens, like the moon rocks in Apollo 18 that turn out to be alive. I hate to mention it, but the moon rocks already run the government. What sense does it make to be so spooked by a few sketchy policy proposals that you're ready to run into the changing rooms at Bergdorf's with Donald Trump?

Unlike 1960, when Kennedy decired a fictional “missile gap” and Nixon waxed bellicose over obscure Chinese islands Quemoy and Matsu, Democrats in this election cycle are addressing real problems. No, I don't support taking away people's private health insurance. We're looking at the menu, not pushing candied cockroaches in your mouth.

Let’s discuss extreme policies. Why should the working class subsidize tax cuts for plutocrats? Why should we privatize corporate profits while socializing losses? How can any conservative or patriot admire a leader who coddles murderous dictators? Why is a white domestic terrorist treated to Burger King by police while a black motorist with a broken taillight is killed? Is “Turn off the camera” our new national motto?

As D.L. Hughley says, “Your nostalgia is our nightmare.” When we say, “America is better than this,” we ignore our history.

The professed Christians backing Trump have exchanged the Gospel for a primitive tribalism. Core teachings of Christ like the parable of the good Samaritan and the call to welcome strangers are cast aside. Their God is an agent of revenge—or scapegoating.

“What you're seeing and what you're reading is not what's happening,” 45 declares. He is not trying to persuade his critics or the press, but playing to supporters he successfully gaslighted. They are unlikely to be persuaded by anything Robert Mueller told Congress.

When Trump describes immigrants as animals, he echoes Hutus demonizing Tutsis in the run-up to the Rwandan genocide in 1994. When he triggers “Send her back!” chants, he incites violence. A local right-wing troll treats me like an imbecile online, then comes up and speaks pleasantly at a cafe. I consider this deranged, but also fascinating. Maybe I’ll draft better insults for him, as upperclassmen used to do at the political union in college. Recently I saw Tucker Carlson referred to as a latter-day William F. Buckley. The writer was aware of the absurdity; alas, much of what calls itself the conservative movement nowadays is not.

In this environment, restoring reality to public discourse is an uphill battle. At least we can keep learning from people of different backgrounds and perspectives, and not surrender to the mob or to lectures from those who do not share our concerns and will suffer the fewest adverse consequences of our losing.

Brit Hume says Trump’s “go back” comments were nativist, xenophobic, counterfactual and politically stupid, but not racist. What a comforting assurance for a woman of color to receive from someone who is not so targeted.

Do not succumb to panic. Make a daily vow to keep it as real as you can. You will have less to regret afterward.

Richard J. Rosendall is a writer and activist who can be reached at rrosendall@starpower.net.

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Watching these exhausting debates closely

by Rev. Irene Monroe
contributing writer

Did you watch Tuesday night’s Democratic debate? The race to the White House for Democrats is an exhausting one, and I’m simply watching the battle on television.

The topic of President Trump’s xenophobia and racism will dominate these debates. All of them gave excellent responses to these issues, with spiritual guru Marianne Williamson trending on social media for her. However, of the lineup, none of the candidates have a good relationship with people of color, even the candidates of color. The below-mentioned ones were the top three in Tuesday’s debate, and they are the ones black communities are eying closely.

ELIZABETH WARREN

Elizabeth Warren is the sharpest and most prepared candidate of the entire brood. And, Warren was stopped when she admonished her Democratic presidential hopefuls that they “should stop using Republican talk points in order to talk with each other about how to best provide that health care.” However, her mishandling claiming Native American ancestry is still a pox on her credibility. While most white Americans I’ve spoken to about this matter feel it will merely blow over, just the opposite response I receive from people of color. And, when it comes to African American women, since we’re a powerful voting bloc, Warren is no Hillary.

Warren is making the right inroads to the black community, like attending last month’s Essence Festival, an annual gathering of sisters in New Orleans. She impressed them with addressing issues impacting black communities. However, Warren cannot shake that she used her Native American ancestry to advance her career. According to the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) desk book, a directory of law professors, Warren listed herself as a minority for nearly a decade from 1986 through 1995 - the same year she left the Republic party to join the Democratic party, and also the same year she was hired at Harvard.

“I listed myself in the directory in the hopes that it might mean that I would be invited to a luncheon, a group something that might happen with people who are like I am. Nothing like that ever happened, that was clearly not the use for it, and so I stopped checking it off,” Warren told reporters in Braintree, Massachusetts in 2012.

For many African American women, Warren’s only wooing their votes.

BERNIE SANDERS

Bernie Sanders gets a nod from African Americans because - as he says, “I was actually at the March on Washington with Dr. King back in 1963.” When Sand-

er wants to boast about his consistent support of black causes and candidates, he’ll tell us about Jesse.

“As somebody who actively supported Jesse Jackson’s campaign — as one of the few white elected officials to do so in ’88 — I have dedicated my life to the fight against racism and sexism and discrimination of all forms.”

While we know Bernie comes from one of the whitest states with less than two percent African Americans, he still hasn’t quite grasped how his brilliant economic solutions to the country’sills don’t fully address income disparity, mass incarceration, police brutality, to name a few, when it comes to black people, Sanders proposes to restore voting rights to incarcerated people is powerful, since he was one of several elected officials to support Bill Clinton’s 1994 crime bill that encouraged states to adopt stricter sentencing laws in exchange for additional federal funding. This bill helped to create the industrial prison complex.

“I voted for that because for a couple of reasons,” Sanders told the “Breakfast Club” a black radio show. “One of the things, it’s a fair question, but as you know a lot of bills have a lot of stuff in it. And if I hadn’t voted for that, you’d be saying to me how come you voted against the Violence Against Women Act? How come you voted against the effort to deal with some gun safety legislation, which was included in that? That was a ban, I recall, on banning assault weapons, something that I believe in.”

PETE BUTTIGIEG

I like Mayor Pete, and I now can pronounce his sur-

name correctly most times. Like Warren, Buttigieg is one of the sharpest candidates. He’s refreshing. For me, But-
tigieg is the hope for a sincerely multicultural and par-
ticipatory government. However, some blunders a candi-
date can’t shake, especially when it comes to a cop killing another unarmed black man in these streets of America.

“My community is in anguish right now because of an officer-involved shooting — a black man, Eric Logan, killed by a white officer. I’m not allowed to take sides un-
til the investigation comes back. The officer said he was attacked with a knife, but he didn’t have his body camera on. It’s a mess, and we’re hurting,” Buttigieg stated in first Democratic debate.

Blacks are tagged as being the most homophobic. However, it wasn’t Pete’s sexual orientation that caused him to lose black support between two mayoral runs. Buttigieg struggles to win confidence with South Bend’s black community was not only about a police shooting. It was, too, about several failed initiatives, one of which was his abandoned and vacant house initiative that tar-
ged long standing black enclaves. Many felt his goal was gentrification to attract white college-educated pro-
fessionals.

Wednesday night I’ll be watching again. The lineup of interest will be Biden, Harris, and Booker. I’ll give my 411 on them next time. However, while some Americans think Harris isn’t black enough, Booker should come out, and Biden is too old, all I want is to wake up from this present nightmare.

BERLIN (AP)—Germany is condemning the killing of a political activist in Russia and urging authorities to find out whether the crime was related to her advocacy of LGBT rights.

Yelena Grigorieva’s body was found Saturday near her home with eight stab wounds and signs of strangling. Homosexuality is not criminalized in Russia, but ani-
mosity towards the LGBT community is commonplace.

German Foreign Ministry spokesman Christoph Burger said Wednesday that Berlin is “very concerned about the circumstances of her death,” in light of the fact that Grigorieva had faced threats.

He called for a transparent and impartial investigation:

“see WORLD, page 8

2 transgender women tortured, killed in Pakistan

MULTAN, Pakistan (AP)—Police in Pakistan say they have found the bodies of two transgender women who were tortured and beaten to death.

Senior officer Mohammad Ali Zia says the bodies were recovered late Saturday from a locked house in the Sahiwal district of the eastern Punjab province. He says it’s unclear what motivated the killings, which appear to have taken place three days ago.

Transgender people are often subjected to abuse in conservative, Muslim-majority Pakistan. They are also among the victims of so-called honor killings carried out by relatives to punish perceived sexual transgressions.

4 teens charged over attack on lesbians on London bus

LONDON (AP)—British police say four teenagers have been charged with assaulting two women who say they were punched on a London bus because they are lesbians.

London’s Metropolitan Police force said Thursday that four male suspects aged between 15 and 17 had been charged with an aggravated hate crime under the Public Order Act.

The suspects’ names were not released because of their age.

Melania Geymonat posted an image on her Facebook page showing her bloodied face and that of her girl-

friend after the May 30 attack. She said the couple were punched after being taunted and told to kiss.

The incident drew wide condemnation, with Prince William among those expressing shock at the attack.

Tens of thousands part in LGBT event in Berlin

BERLIN (AP)—Tens of thousands have been marching through Berlin in celebration of Christopher Street Day, one of Germany’s largest LGBT pride observances.

Revelers from across the country and abroad were parading through Berlin on Saturday from chichi Kur-
fuerstendamm street in the west to the city’s landmark Brandenburg Gate.

German news agency dpa reported that more than 150,000 people participated, but up to 600,000 were expected overall at the march and other LGBT celebrata-
tions over the weekend.

Despite recent successes for Germany’s LGBT community, like the legalization of gay marriage last year, harassment and discrimination still takes place. Berlin police registered 225 criminal acts in connection with sexual orientation in 2018.

Germany condemns killing of Russian LGBT activist

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He called for a transparent and impartial investigation:
Pushing for Inclusivity in Children’s Books
One Publisher Shows How

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

Orca Book Publishers of British Columbia, Canada, is an independent publisher with the goal of offering “reading material that represents the diversity of human experience to readers of all ages.”

Among other titles, they have produced two of my recent favorite LGBTQ-inclusive children’s books: Pride Colors, by Robin Stevenson, a bright board book for the youngest tots, and A Plan for Pops, by Heather Smith and Brooke Kerrigan, a poignant story about a two-grandfather couple and their gender-ambiguous grandchild.

Publisher and owner Andrew Wooldridge was kind enough to speak with me recently about the 35-year-old company and its commitment to diverse books.

Orca had started actively looking for more inclusive stories nearly two decades ago when they launched several series geared for struggling readers, Wooldridge said. Finding authors that create diverse content “happened pretty organically,” he explained, “which is, I think, why it’s been successful.”

As authors such as Stevenson and Carrie Mac (both queer parents) approached Orca, the company began “figuring out what was important” to these writers.

“Our focus has slowly become more and more about diversity and compassion and indigenous stories as well,” he said. Much of their success, he feels, comes from finding authors who can write from their own experiences. It’s really about helping them tell their stories,” he believes. When it comes to nonfiction, he feels, comes from finding authors who can write from their own experiences.

“It’s kind of a story, but I think it’s much more effective as an LGBTQ-inclusive story when it doesn’t have a big billboard on it. It just lets people read it and treat it as ‘This is who we are.’ We see the same thing with presenting stories with a multicultural cast of characters without making it about somebody’s race.”

In addition to their diverse fiction books, Orca this year launched Orca Issues, a series of critical-thinking nonfiction for teens, tackling sometimes contentious topics such as feminism, reproductive rights or feminism because as far as I’m concerned, the way we publish, there’s only one side to these things, really.”

This approach has occasionally given rise to backlash. Stevenson had a few events cancelled over her middle-grade nonfiction book Pride: Celebrating Diversity and Community. And after her Orca Issues book about abortion rights, My Body, My Choice, came out, Wooldridge said, “I’ve seen pushback from schools who’ve said, ‘We’ve bought every other book that you’ve published, but we never will again because of what you’ve done,’ which I think means that we must be doing our job right. But in some ways, that’s why we’re doing it, to get people to actually pay attention.”

“I welcome a little bit of controversy about what we’re doing,” he asserted. “There’s this saying in publishing: There’s nothing better than having somebody attempt to ban a book, because it just gets the book talked about.” He added, “We have the luxury in some ways in that we have a successful publishing program and can take chances on things if we’re not sure what the market looks like or what the reaction will be.”

He contrasts this with some educational publishers who “publish safely so that you don’t offend anybody.” The publishers making a difference, he asserts, “are those ones who are independent and able to take the risk.”

At times, he said, “You do see major publishers, some of the multinationals, taking chances on some of the things they publish, but they have to answer to somebody. I’m lucky that I don’t have

For their LGBTQ-inclusive books, Wooldridge explained, they sought to include characters who would be broadly appealing and tried to avoid “really basic” coming out stories. Another important factor, he said, was offering stories across the spectrum that present issues without banging people over the head with them.

With A Plan for Pops, for example, “We could easily have done that book about a heterosexual married couple and it would have been a similar kind of story, but I think it’s much more effective [as an LGBTQ-inclusive story] when it doesn’t have a big billboard on it. It just lets people read it and treat it as ‘This is who we are.’ We see the same thing with presenting stories with a multicultural cast of characters without making it about somebody’s race.”

A Plan for Pops, by Heather Smith and Brooke Kerrigan (Left) Andrew Wooldridge (Center) A Plan for Pops by Heather Smith and Brooke Kerrigan (Right) Pride Colors by Robin Stevenson

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Tre’Andre. “Massachusetts has a strong foundation for transgender rights thanks to the leadership of my predecessors Gunner Scott, Mason Dunn, as well as the steering committee and all of MTPC’s supporters and allies. “I look forward to being a part of the effort of making a difference in the daily lived experiences of transgender, non-binary, and genderqueer individuals of Massachusetts.”

MTPC is coming off its historic 2018 victory in the Yes on 3 Campaign, defending transgender rights at the ballot box in Massachusetts. “We now have the opportunity to help our state become a place not only with legal protections, but where trans and non-binary people experience lived equality in their daily lives,” said Tre’Andre. Founded in 2001, MTPC is a trans led and trans focused organization that has been working for almost two decades to improve the lives of Massachusetts transgender youths, adults, and their families. The Steering Committee and De’Andre are excited to step into this next phase of the organization’s work and to continue building and engaging community along the way.

The Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition is dedicated to ending oppression and discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression. Rooted in social justice, we educate the public, advocate with state, local and federal government, engage in activism and encourage empowerment of community members through collective action.
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Bulgaria court recognizes gay marriage in landmark case

SOFIA, Bulgaria (AP)—A court in Bulgaria has ruled in favor of a same-sex couple who married in France, in a case that recognized gay marriage for the first time in the conservative country.

Australian citizen Kristina Palma, who married Mariama Diallo of France in 2016, was initially permitted to live, work and travel in Bulgaria and the European Union on the grounds that she married an EU citizen. But Bulgaria later denied her those rights, arguing that same-sex marriage was not legal in the country.

The couple fought a two-year battle that concluded Wednesday, when the court affirmed Palma’s rights as the spouse of an EU citizen. Their lawyer Denitsa Lyubenova said the ruling could be an important first step toward legalizing same-sex marriage in the country.

France may extend fertilization rights to lesbians, singles

PARIS (AP)—Lesbians and single women in France may soon have access to medically assisted reproduction for the first time.

President Emmanuel Macron’s government presented a draft law Wednesday on bioethics that includes expanding treatments such as in vitro fertilization, or IVF. Currently the procedures are only available to heterosexual married couples, which LGBT rights groups and single women have long decried as unjust.

The government says the measure is a response to “unprecedented technological advances” and societal change.

The bill now goes to parliament, where Macron’s centrist party has the majority. But many conservative and far right activists oppose the measure, and are already planning a protest against it to challenge Macron’s leadership.

The bill also includes new rules on parental rights and genetic research. Surrogate pregnancies will remain illegal.

Right-wing Polish magazine slammed for anti-LGBT stickers

WARSAW, Poland (AP)—A right-wing, pro-government weekly magazine in Poland has drawn widespread criticism for distributing so-called “LGBT-free zone” stickers.

The outcry began last week when Gazeta Polska, which focuses on conservative values, said on Twitter it would be distributing the stickers, which feature a rainbow flag with two black bars across it, with its issue Wednesday.

Opposition politicians condemned the publication, and distribution points including Empik newsagent and BP Polska gas stations refused to accept Wednesday’s issue, arguing they were discriminatory.

Trade unions of the national airline LOT appealed for the magazine to be removed from its airplanes, and a rally in support of LGBT rights was held in the city of Gdansk.

U.S. Ambassador Georgette Mosbacher tweeted she was “disappointed and disturbed.” The European Trade Union Confederation said it was “appalled” at the stickers and said they were a “provocation and an insult to members of the LGBT community.”

The weekly said it was “defending freedom and true tolerance.”

A debate on LGBT rights is growing in predominantly Catholic Poland ahead of parliamentary elections in the fall, in which the ruling Law and Justice party is expected to emerge as the winner.

Conservative government members have spoken against same-sex marriage, but they also condemned violence by radical groups Saturday against the first LGBT rights march in the city of Bialystok.

Continued from page 4

“In particular, we expect it to be cleared up whether the killing of Ms. Grigorieva was linked to her commitment to LGBT rights.”

"The world still has its challenges but things are getting better. From the way we first met on line to marriage equality to our daughter’s upcoming Quinceañera our life together is more fulfilling every day. We keep up with events and entertainment on EDGE, because that’s where we see our future at its brightest.”

We are the future of the LGBT community.
to answer to anybody. So we can take a risk on some things, doing it just because we believe it’s a story that needs to be out there.”

That need remains strong, especially given the recent political climate in the U.S., where Orca sees most of its sales. Nor is Canada immune. “I see the same pressures here as well,” he asserted.

Wooldridge finds a silver lining, however. “I think one of the benefits of the current political situation in the U.S. is that it’s forcing change faster than it would have happened otherwise. We’re seeing it in the way we publish and the media we read,” he said. “Many more people are engaged now than they were four years ago and many more people are thinking about things that they never would have before.”

Wooldridge has also been motivated by his own experience helping his own three sons find diverse content and “realizing we need to be doing more of it for everybody,” he said. “The focus has really become on being as inclusive as possible, but also trying to push that as far as we can.”

For more on Orca and its upcoming titles, visit orcabook.com (Canada) or us.orcabook.com (U.S.)

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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If there’s one thing I enjoy more than starting a column, by saying I was right, it’s starting a column by sharing a Fayewatch item. Miss Dunaway will NOT be appearing as Katharine Hepburn on Broadway...or anywhere else, for that matter. While I predicted this outcome months ago, I wasn’t completely right. Sure, I knew she wouldn’t make it to Broadway, but I didn’t predict that Faye would be FIRED. And this makes me sad. Not because she was good in the role—it was an ill-advised pairing from the get-go. But from the stories that are now circulating from the limited run in Boston, the hijinks which have engulfed an actual Broadway production would have given me fodder for endless columns. At least we can now tell you about her unhinged behavior in Boston.

It seems things were never good on the "Tea at Five" set. At a photo session announcing the play, Dunaway reportedly threw her luncheon salad on the ground, proclaiming that since she was watching her weight, ‘the salad would be better on the floor than in her hand’. Sources confirm that she never learned her lines (as I reported, an earpiece had to be used on stage), she frequently cancelled or was late to rehearsals, and would not allow people—including the playwright and director—to look at her. When she did show up, she insisted that nobody around her wear white "because it detracts me." You know what might have helped with that? Learning the lines! And, while it seems implausible, sources claim that shortly before opening night, Faye had staffers get down on their hands and knees and scrub the floor of her dressing room. I’m sure the words, “Now clean up this mess!” were uttered. More believable, however, is that people working on the show would get "troubling, trembling, angry" voicemails in the middle of the night. Hmmm—this sounds familiar. And you can hear it on BillyMasters.com.

Of course, some entertainment ventures end by choice. It’s just been announced that the upcoming third season of the "Will & Grace" reboot will be its last. "We think of the 'Will & Grace' reboot episodes the way Karen Walker thinks of martinis—51 is not enough, 53 is too many. That is why, after consulting with the cast, we all have decided this will be the final season of 'Will & Grace,'" says the executive producers. But not so fast. My sources tell me that everyone involved in the production has left the door open for occasional future specials and seasons—much like British shows do. That’s how "Absolutely Fabulous" managed to crank out six seasons over 20 years!

After last week’s "The Men Tell All" episode of "The Bachelorette" (I know I wasn’t the only one watching), we saw previews for the upcoming "Bachelor in Paradise" series, which features a tumultuous queer romance. Needless to say, it is between two women—cause Bachelor Nation ain’t ready for two hot guys dry-humping. Be that as it may, this will be the first same-sex romance to air on a domestic installment of "The Bachelor" franchise.

When we last heard from George Michael’s ex, he had barricaded himself in the late pop singer’s house...despite the fact that he was completely left out of the will. A neighbor took some photos of the property revealing numerous smashed windows and water damage—which Fadi Fawaz claimed was part of his ‘home improvements’. The family tried to evict Fadi...I mean Fadi (although, from recent photos, it’s an honest mistake). Finally, the police arrested him on suspicion of aggravated criminal damage. While in custody, the family changed the locks and boarded up the broken windows. Since his release, neighbors say Fawaz has been seen sleeping on the balcony.

I kept hearing that a revival of "Little Shop of Horrors" was planned for off-Broadway this fall. Details were unknown...until now. Lending the cast will be Jonathan Groff as Seymour and Tammy Blanchard as Audrey. And taking on the role of the Orin the dentist will be Christian Borle. The show opens on October 17th at the Westside Theatre. This may be an off-Broadway production, but something tells me it could transfer to the Great White Way.

This Friday, embattled Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Roselló will be out of office—and some of the credit must go to Ricky Martin. It all started when close to 1,000 pages of text messages were released to the public in which Roselló used some colorful language—among other things, calling gay persons “cocksuckers”. When folks took to the streets of San Juan in protest on July 22nd (remember when things like that happened on the mainland?), one of those was Ricky Martin—waving a Pride flag! The image went viral, as did Ricky’s Tweets.

You all know how proud I am to be a Bostonian. After all, Beantown is the place where many great things have begun—like the fight for freedom, and gay marriage (no name but two). Alas, we were also going to be the first city to have a Straight Pride Parade. However, a similar event is under consideration in Modesto, California. If it happens, that will take place on August 24th—one week before the Boston parade. In this isolated instance, I am totally OK with Modesto taking bragging rights for being first.

It’s been a few weeks since a judge ordered that a special prosecutor be appointed to investigate the handling of the Jessie Smollett “incidents”. Recently, Jessie’s attorneys filed a motion to have that decision vacated and the appointment of a special prosecutor denied. But it was the next request which caught my eye. “In the event the Court is not inclined to grant the Motion, Mr. Smollett, by his attorneys, Geragos & Geragos, respectfully requests that the Court modify the June 21, 2019 Order to clarify that the special prosecutor may investigate and prosecute potential misconduct only, and may not further prosecute Mr. Smollett for the charges that were previously brought and dismissed against him.” Say what you will, he’s got big balls.

Shawn Mendes is getting some flack regarding a coming out story—no, not his own. At an Oakland, California meet and greet, a female fan asked Shawn to appear in a short video telling her parents that she’s gay. ‘I’m bisexual and I haven’t told anybody, but my parents are very strict and I don’t know how to tell them, so I was wondering if you could do a little video.” Shawn said, “This is what I want to tell you. Your parents are your parents. They’re going to love you no matter what you say, no matter how you say it, no matter how you look when you say it, at any time of the day. Nothing I say is going to mean anything that is even close to what you saying it means to them, OK?” He added, “Don’t ask me to do that. And I would if I thought that it was a better thing to do, but I know in my heart it’s not. I know your parents are going to just love you even more for being honest with them.” While I completely agree that it’s not Shawn’s place to get involved, I think he’s making a whole lot of assumptions about this girl’s parents. And, since I live to play devil’s advocate, do we know if a) this girl is really bisexual and b) the even has parents? I mean, those Shawn Mendes fans can be pretty sneaky.

Our "Ask Billy" question comes from Russ in San Francisco: "I just watched 'Russian Doll' and think Charlie Barnett is absolutely gorgeous. Do you know anything about him? Has he ever done nudity?"

I LOVED "Russian Doll" and have now watched it about five times, each time picking up something new. As for Charlie Barnett, he’s having quite a year. In addition to "Russian Doll", he’s also in the new "Tales of the City" on Netflix. He previously played gay on "Chicago Fire", which was not a stretch since he’s openly gay. Regarding nudity, parts of his anatomy seem to pop up in several productions, as you’ll see on BillyMasters.com.

When we’re delivering assets, it’s definitely time to end yet another column. As we go to press, Valerie Harper’s husband has revealed that she is near the end of her long journey with brain cancer. We send her all our love. I’m sending the rest of you to www.BillyMasters.com—the site that delivers love, plus a whole lot more. If you have a question, you can send it to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before Faye Dunaway endorses Hidden Valley salad dressing! Until next time, remember, one man’s fifth is another man’s bible.
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