

I recently saw an article pointing out that even Academy Award gift bags create tax consequences. It was reported “the Academy decided to end its practice of handing out gift bags, citing the upfront tax burden they placed on stars.” Well, if gift bags for stars create tax consequences, so must big gifts to Justices. And if Hollywood stars are expected to understand that, well so should Supreme Court Justices.

If Justices didn’t make the required tax filings, they broke the law. And if they did make the required tax filings but still not the required judicial disclosure filings, that signals potential willfulness. It is the Attorney General’s job to determine, but if it is determined that the misfiling was willful, that brings its own penalties and consequences.

A large body of law about false statements also applies here, based on criminal laws, like 18 United States Code section 1001, a felony offense. Who knows, proper investigation may show that even fraud and bribery statutes apply, at least with respect to the billionaires who so generously lavish these Justices who keep handing them favorable decisions.

Remember, for instance, the \$25,000 payment via the Court-fixer Leonard Leo to Thomas’s spouse, Ginni Thomas, specifying “no mention of Ginni, of course.”

This is serious. By shrouding in clubby secrecy judicial colleagues’ violation of judicial disclosure laws, judges may also be covering up crimes—a problem reaching well beyond internal business of the judiciary. Plus, covering up crimes is just a bad look for judges.

So to the straight stick, let’s look at how other recipients of unreported gifts in other government offices have been treated when the unreported gifts come to light. If it is the judiciary’s position that Justices are subject to a lower standard of accountability than ordinary executive and legislative branch officials, well, I would like to hear them say that outright. But if the standard for Justices is not lower, then these cases are very relevant comparisons.

To keep it simple, today, let’s just compare cases involving nondisclosure of free gifts of vacations, event tickets, lodging and travel, like those gifts which Thomas and/or Alito received from wealthy donors.

In 2016, the government accepted a guilty plea from the Resident Agent in Charge of a Mexico DEA field office. The DEA agent had failed to disclose gifts of private air travel provided to him between his duty station in Mexico and his home in Texas—trips which he claimed were “for personal” purposes. He didn’t pay fair market value for the flights; although, he did occasionally pay fuel costs.

For his failure to disclose these gifts, the DEA agent pleaded guilty to a section 1001 false statements criminal violation, a felony, and was sentenced to 2

years of probation and 100 hours of community service.

That same year, the government accepted a guilty plea from the director of a Veterans Affairs hospital for her failure to disclose gifts she received totaling a bit more than \$21,000, including domestic and international airline tickets, concert tickets worth \$730, a check for \$5,000, resort spa services, a gift card, and the registration fee for a marathon. She, too, pleaded guilty to a section 1001 false statement violation, a felony, and was sentenced to 2 years of probation.

The government prosecuted an official at the Department of Housing and Urban Development for failing to disclose gifts he received from the president of a company representing clients trying to secure HUD contracts. The gifts included luxury box tickets to a Washington Redskins football game. That official pleaded guilty to a section 1018 false statements by a public official violation and was sentenced to 12 months of probation, 60 hours of community service, and a \$500 fine.

The Jack Abramoff scandal produced a plea agreement with former Congressman Robert Ney for failing to properly disclose gifts he received from Abramoff and others. The gifts involved a trip to Scotland, worth more than \$160,000, including all-expense-paid and reduced-price commercial and private jet travel; luxury accommodations in Scotland and London; and free golf, meals, drinks, and transportation. His other undisclosed or underreported gifts included an all-expense-paid 3-night trip to New Orleans to gamble and vacation worth about \$7,200; and a 2-night vacation at a resort in Lake George, NY, with lodging, boat rental, a chartered car, meals, drinks, and golf worth more than \$3,500.

Ney admitted to taking official actions to benefit Abramoff and others in connection with these gifts. He pleaded guilty to a section 1001 false statement violation and to conspiracy to commit honest services fraud, make false statements, and violate a lobbying ban. Ney was sentenced to 30 months in prison, 2 years of supervised release, a \$6,000 fine, and 1,200 hours of community service.

In the Abramoff scandal, the government also prosecuted the chief of staff for the Department of Labor’s Employment Standards Administration for failing to disclose gifts he received from Abramoff and others representing a client with business before the Labor Department.

The unreported gifts included luxury box tickets to a Georgetown University basketball game, luxury suite tickets to a Harlem Globetrotters basketball game, tickets to a Baltimore Orioles baseball game, and tickets to a Washington Capitals hockey game.

The official pleaded guilty to a section 1018 false statements by a public official violation and was sentenced to 36 months of probation and a \$500 fine.

The government also prosecuted a Department of the Interior employee

who had failed to disclose gifts from Abramoff. The gifts included tickets to a Washington Redskins game and to a Simon and Garfunkel concert.

According to a summary of the case by the Office of Government Affairs, the employee and Abramoff had developed a personal friendship. When Abramoff began giving this employee and his family sporting and concert tickets, the employee sometimes offered to pay for the items, but Abramoff said the tickets were for unused seats and that he wanted to give them to his friend—precisely like Alito’s claims of empty private jet seats and personal friendship.

The Department of the Interior employee pleaded guilty to a section 1018 false statements by a public official violation and was sentenced to 2 years of probation and a \$1,000 fine.

So what conclusion can you draw from those cases? The conclusion you draw from those cases is that over and over, in the real world of proper government disclosure and accountability, government officials are prosecuted for failing to disclose gifts far lower in value than what Supreme Court Justices have received. In that real world, they plead guilty to felony criminal charges, and they receive criminal sentences. As felons, they lose various legal privilege. And this is just for failing to disclose. These cases did not involve tax crimes.

The cases against these ordinary government officials, even a Member of Congress, provide a comparable—a comparable—against which undisclosed gifts to Justices of the Supreme Court should be measured. What we see shows that equivalent acts in the other branches are prosecuted as crimes, but at the Supreme Court, they are covered up behind a wall of judicial omerta.

We can’t even get the basic facts. That is no way to run a judicial branch. The judicial branch should be the straightest of sticks.

To be continued.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

---

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION

---

### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

---

### 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF WYMAN’S

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, 150 years ago, in 1874, one of Maine’s most iconic businesses launched its first venture. Although it began as a small sardine cannery operation in the corner of northeast Maine, Wyman’s has thrived through 150 years of business and is

now Maine's preeminent purveyor of wild blueberries, as well as the top selling brand of frozen fruit in the United States.

Each year, Wyman's harvests and freezes tens of millions of pounds of Maine blueberries. In addition to owning over 30,000 acres of land in Maine, Wyman's partners with hundreds of Maine blueberry farms to process their products and export them around the country and around the globe. Four generations later, Wyman's continues to be a leader in cultivating the wild blueberry for which Maine is famous, providing economic vitality for the Downeast region and high-quality jobs across the State.

Wyman's is also at the cutting edge of agricultural research. Recently, the business has partnered with the University of Maine to study how harsh weather patterns such as early frosts and droughts impact growth, gaining valuable insights into what can be done to boost productivity for all in the industry.

While Wyman's is certainly a generational affair for the Wyman family, it is wonderful to see how the business has also become generational for so many within the community. More than a third of Wyman's employees have tenures lasting over a decade, and many families continue to return to work at the blueberry harvest over several generations. Wyman's deep roots and work in the field of agricultural sustainability show that the company continues to live up to its values of enhancing health. I am very proud to join them in celebrating their 150 years of operation.

#### 2024 ECLIPSE

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, the eclipse was a momentous occasion for Vermont, bringing more than 160,000 people to our State. I am especially thankful to our emergency personnel, law enforcement, and small business owners who handled the busy weekend with grace. Everyone viewing "totality" in the Green Mountain State, whether they were locals or visiting for the first time, experienced something that was pretty special: the beauty of our State.

Steven Pappas, publisher and executive editor of the Times Argus and Rutland Herald, summarized the celestial spectacle in his editorial titled "Overshadowed" and published April 9. I ask unanimous consent that it be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Times Argus/Rutland Herald]

OVERSHADOWED

(By Steven Pappas)

It lived up to the hype.

While there are those individuals who went out of their way to voice certain disappointment, the vast majority of Vermonters and humanity who witnessed Monday's total solar eclipse seem to agree the rare astronomical union was worth waiting for.

It took patience for it to arrive, but the few minutes of the totality in Vermont drew gasps and cheers heard in crowds. There were many hugs, and more than a few tears of joy. It had a profound effect.

On Tuesday, eyewitnesses were overjoyed to share their photos and stories about the eclipse. And while we all—more or less, thanks to a clear, sunny day in the Green Mountain State—saw the same thing, we each brought a piece of ourselves to the moment.

Save a few naysayers, the eclipse united us briefly. The day had the feel of a holiday, with picnics and barbecues; laughter and anticipation. Folks were going out of their way to share the moment with others who might not be in the path of totality.

It has also been impressive, in hearing the various debriefings and anecdotes, just how much one thought overshadowed all others: We needed that common space.

Whether you were standing alone, gazing skyward; or you were crammed together on the State House steps or along the Burlington waterfront, the unity above transcended all else.

The moment reminded us of a series of editorials we wrote back in 2020, at a time when we all came together under less joyous circumstances: the COVID-19 pandemic.

At that time, we wrote about how fear and tragedy were uniting us because the coronavirus did not distinguish between us. In those early days, if you will recall, it felt as though if you "got COVID" it was akin to a potential death sentence. Over time, and vaccines, those fears abated somewhat, but we still followed the numbers and our concern over public health was kept going for months—and in certain circumstances—years.

Monday's eclipse, which had been calculated down to the minute (and those mathematical predictions were absolutely spot on), provided the expected darkness (in dramatic effect) but it continued out of totality, and the light returned. As we felt the warm sun on our faces once again, there was hope and jubilation. We knew it was coming, but it was still a bit unexpected.

Individuals with hours of waiting in vehicles ahead of them were—for a brief period of time—giddy over the show in the sky. They did not care much about the traffic jam awaiting. It stripped us of worry.

Other parts of the country had cloud cover. Across Vermont, though, we got (at least according to most scientific experts) the best of the show. It was unobstructed, and it shone brightly into our hearts.

The moon's shadow fell across all stripes of people. Your station in life did not matter; nor did your political leanings; nor did your place along the gender spectrum; nor was your race a factor in what happened in the sky. We were all citizens of the universe; and we were became witnesses of history, plain and simple.

So, yeah, we needed that.

Because as soon as the eclipse headed northeast to northern New Hampshire, Maine and the Canadian Maritimes, and then off the North American continent, the news cycle returned with its four horsemen. The bickering and sniping was right there waiting. The hardships and anxiety crept back onto the scene. Hate had just been hiding in the shadow.

The moment passed.

What our editorial board is hoping for now is that the enthusiasm, and the moment we felt as that rare sight united us, does not lose all of its momentum. We hope that as most of us look fondly back on eclipse day, the emotion of being awestruck alongside family, friends, neighbors and strangers proves to have a lasting place in our laugh-

ter, on how we carry ourselves, and well beyond (and through) the rigors of life that are already hard enough.

In describing their eclipse day on Tuesday, it was striking how many individuals described themselves as feeling "overwhelmed" by this smallest change—light and darkness well out of place in a normal day. Others suggested that they had been at a loss for words as the world around them fell into a shadow, as if a hush were carried with it. They struggle, as we do, for the best descriptor of the oddity.

But when those dark glasses could come off, and we all took in the same world we had always known, just bathed in the brightest, natural darkness we could probably ever know, we felt it—we did not just see it. It affected us at a cellular level, a spiritual level, and it inspired awe.

We all shared one line of thinking: "Can you imagine if you didn't know what this was? Can you imagine what those people seeing it must have thought? Can you imagine their fear?"

In mere moments, the sun returned to shining brightly, resuming its place in our predictable lives, and we started to forget that shared concern for the legion of witnesses long dead.

It should not always take a pandemic nor an eclipse to allow us an opportunity to measure the magnitude of our humanity. Simply, it should take the sun coming up every morning to inspire us to create our own awe, and inspire ourselves and the others around us to share kindness and commonality.

Apparently, as we witnessed, it happens naturally.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### TRIBUTE TO BEAU McCASTLAIN

● Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to Beau McCastlain, the 2024 Arkansas Teacher of the Year.

As a television production teacher at De Queen High School for the past 3 years, Beau has become known for his innovative and engaging teaching practices. He puts students above all else, encourages outside-the-box thinking, and prepares them for future careers through connections with real world opportunities in and around their community.

Beau's love for education is evident in his involvement. He has gone the extra mile by establishing partnerships with a local radio station and the Arkansas Broadcasters Association to give students hands-on work that introduces them to the field and different possibilities it offers. This has led many of his students to paid internships, freelance opportunities, and State and national recognition for their work.

His contributions extend beyond the classroom. Beau has also served as a head baseball coach, assistant football coach, and photojournalist at television stations around the State. He also is certified to teach social studies for grades 7 through 12 and holds a technical permit for television broadcasting.

In addition to receiving a bachelor's degree in communications from the