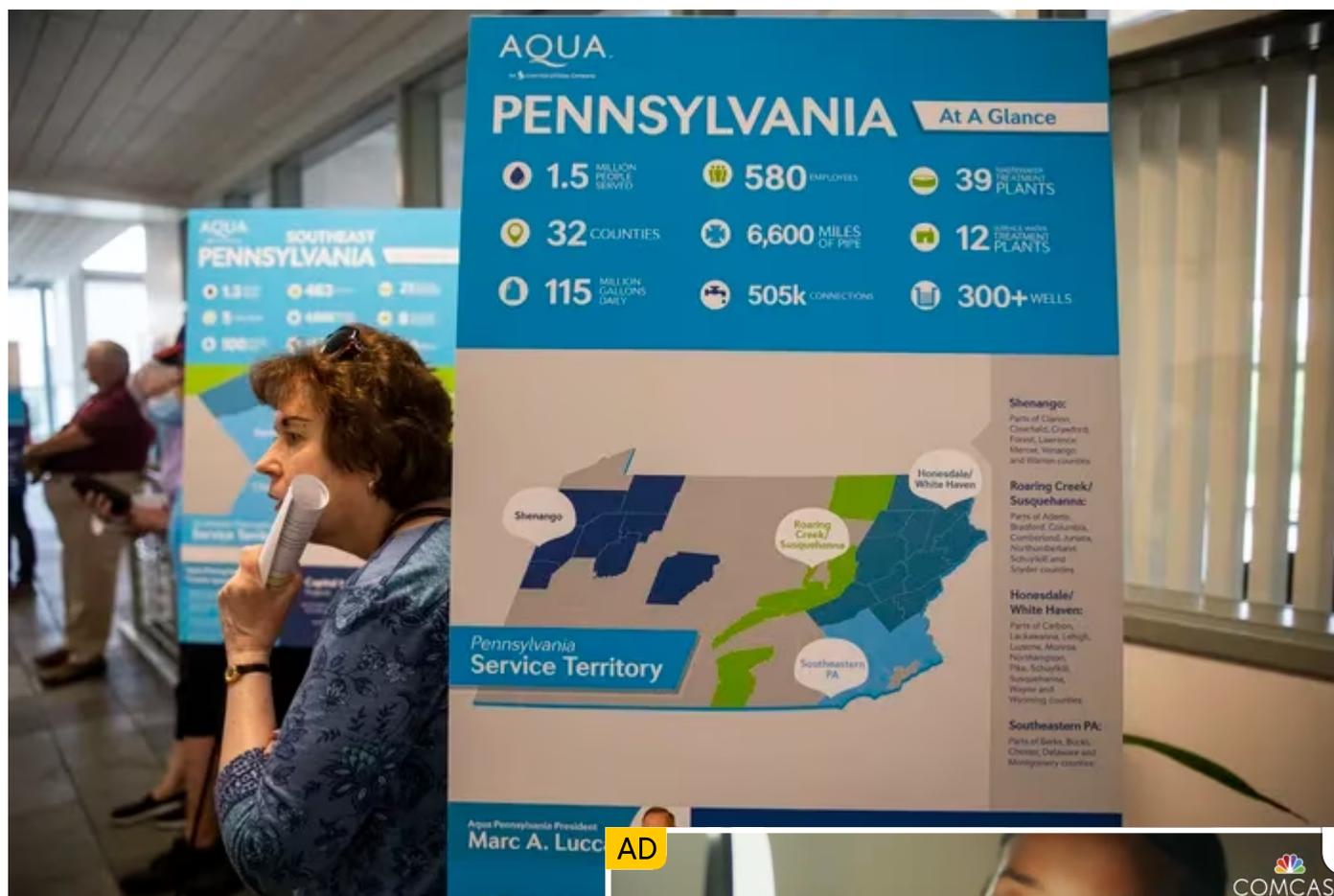


OPINION > EDITORIALS



Court's reversal of East Whiteland sewer sale is a win for consumers | Editorial

A three-judge panel did what the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission has repeatedly failed to do when it comes to reviewing the sale of utilities to for-profit companies.



The Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court smartly ruled to reverse the sale of public water and sewer services to Aqua Pennsylvania. Selling off public water and sewer services to for-profit companies is a bad idea. **TYGER WILLIAMS / Staff Photographer**

by The Editorial Board
Updated on Aug 17, 2023, 5:02 a.m. ET

Finally, someone in Pennsylvania put a stop to the irresponsible sell-off of water and sewer utilities to for-profit companies that are leaving customers across the state stuck with exorbitant hikes in their monthly bills.

This month, the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court smartly halted the sale of the East Whiteland Township sewer system to Aqua Pennsylvania. In doing so, the three-judge panel did what the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) has repeatedly failed to do when it comes to reviewing the sale of the utilities.

In writing the court decision, President Judge Renée Cohn Jubelirer found that the PUC “erred and/or abused its discretion” in approving the sale to Aqua because any public benefit did not outweigh the harm of the transaction. The court’s decision effectively blocked the \$54.9 million deal for the township’s sewer system for now.

» **READ MORE: [As Pa. municipalities sell water systems to for-profit companies, consumers are left paying the price | Editorial](#)**

ADVERTISEMENT

AD

Kudos to the court for recognizing the negative consequences that have occurred in other towns that sold off their water and sewer.

Once the sale is complete, residents have seen their bills skyrocket.

Look at what happened in New Garden Township in Chester County. After the township sold its wastewater system to Aqua in 2020, residents there saw their [bills increase](#) by roughly 90%.

Bill Ferguson, a New Garden resident, struggled to understand what he received in return: “Does the toilet flush any better? No. Nothing has changed other than who’s collecting the bill and how much it is,” he [told WHY](#). Ferguson, who cofounded a residents’ group called Keep Water Affordable, cheered the court ruling but wished it could be retroactive for other towns.

ADVERTISEMENT

AD

The Bucks County Commissioners saved themselves from that mistake after they **called off** a proposed \$1.1 billion sale of its sewer system to Aqua after a public backlash to the deal. Other towns have not been so lucky. After Aqua took over, prices went up 98% in Limerick Township, 73% in East Norriton, and 69% in Cheltenham.



The Philadelphia Inquirer

SIGN IN / SIGN UP

Ginny Marcille-Kerslake, Eastern Pennsylvania organizer with Food and Water Watch, and David McMahon, Neighbors Opposing Privatization Effort (NOPE), during a rally opposing the privatization of the ... [Read more](#)
ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ / Staff Photographer

Of course, this entire problem was created by lawmakers in Harrisburg — with help from Big Water lobbyists who (AD
General Assembly passed a measure that allowed private profit companies to charge customers more for the acquired system rather than the low

That opened the floodgates for these bucks to town leaders to sell off a p

For the most part, two companies have been gobbling up the water and sewer utilities here: Aqua and Pennsylvania American Water. The argument for the sale is that the towns get the utility — and its employees — off their books in return for a one-time windfall.

The for-profit water companies, in turn, argue that by cobbling together smaller utilities, they can reduce costs by scaling up and operating more efficiently.

Left unsaid is that these companies have shareholders who want to see a quick return on their investment, unlike a public utility that can take a long view and reinvest any proceeds into the operation. So far, any cost savings have not found their way to customers.

» **READ MORE: [Our water is becoming privatized. That's a good thing.](#)** | **Opinion**

AD

Residents in East Whiteland were surprised when the township's water and sewer utility was sold to Aqua and Pennsylvania American Water. Patrick Cicero, who successfully argued against the acquisition, says the sale would provide any public utility with the costs for the township's 3,900 residents.

But the fight is not over. The East Whiteland supervisors, Aqua, and the PUC are seeking to have a [rehearing](#) on the sale. The court decision should be upheld, and East Whiteland residents should let their township supervisors know this is a bad deal.

Rather than allow small towns to continue to fall prey to Big Water, the General Assembly should repeal the statute that opened the door for utility customers to get gouged.

Published Aug. 17, 2023



The Inquirer Editorial Board 

This opinion was written by a group of journalists who work separately from the newsroom to debate matters of public interest.

TRENDING IN PHILLY

This rural Pennsylvania utopia is like a spa for the mind

Taylor Swift seen, and swarmed, on Long Beach Island for producer Jack Antonoff's wedding

Philadelphia Orchestra musicians have authorized a strike if negotiations don't progress soon

There's no Jan. 6 justice while Roger Stone, Michael Flynn and Steve Bannon walk free

AD

Bobby Eli, guitarist, songwriter
Philadelphia, has died

MUSIC



Stranded at Citizens Bank Park, diehard Bruce fans are ‘devastated’ and ‘worried’

Just hours ahead of Springsteen’s first of two performances in South Philly, the news rippled through the roll call line: his Philly shows were postponed. The Boss is sick.

Mike Newall and Emily Bloch Aug 17, 2023

OPINION

AD

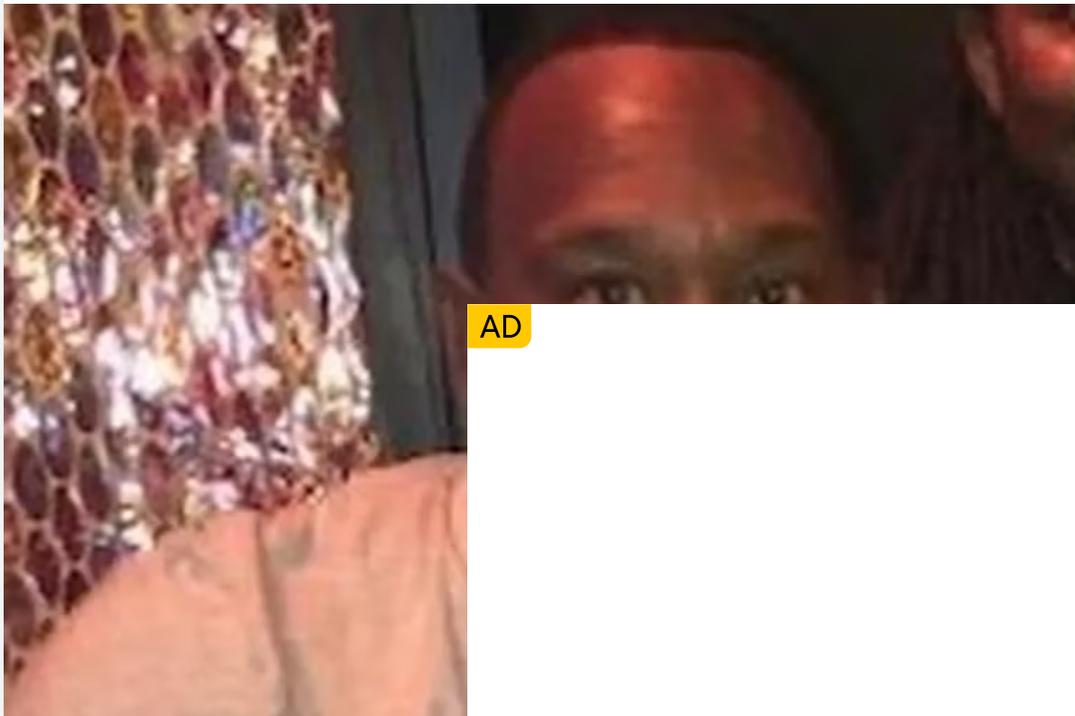


The problem with 'Rich Men North of Richmond' | Will Bunch Newsletter

Plus, Lionel Messi is coming to Chester and I am freaking out!

Will Bunch | Columnist Aug 15, 2023

BUSINESS



Real-estate influencer Greg Parker faces scam claims: 5 things to know from our investigation

Greg Parker Jr., known online as Big Bizzneesss, and his wife Danielle "Nikki" Morris Parker are online wealth influencers who got their start in Philly.

Samantha Melamed Aug 17, 2023

OPINION



From a Kansas newsroom to a soccer pitch, why the right hates America and democracy AD

The right's hatred of young, m
U.S. soccer women — is drivin

Will Bunch | Columnist Aug 13

OPINION



The young Honduran drowned in Greg Abbott's Texas had a name: Norlan Bayardo Herrera

We need to name the refugees needlessly killed by Texas' cruel border demagoguery.

Will Bunch | Columnist Aug 17, 2023

NEW JERSEY NEWS

AD



Did Shore house owners push their luck with high rents? Prices are dropping and weeks are open.

Vacant weeks are causing some Shore owners to offer deals and drop prices. It's a "return to normal," after three summers of pandemic-bloated demand. Did Shore owners finally push their luck?

Amy S. Rosenberg Aug 10, 2023

OPINION

AD



There's no Jan. 6 justice while Roger Stone, Michael Flynn and Steve Bannon walk free

Evidence linking Roger Stone, Michael Flynn and Steve Bannon has been out there since Jan. 6, 2021. Why no criminal charges?

Will Bunch | Columnist 3 hours ago

OPINION

AD



Letters to the Editor | Aug. 14, 2023

Inquirer readers on another bad policy from the Central Bucks school board, learning about Black history, and replacing the city's streetlights.

Letters to the Editor, For The Inquirer Aug 14, 2023

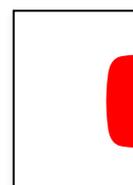
INQUIRER LIVE



Gameday Central: Eagles vs. Browns



AD



OPINION



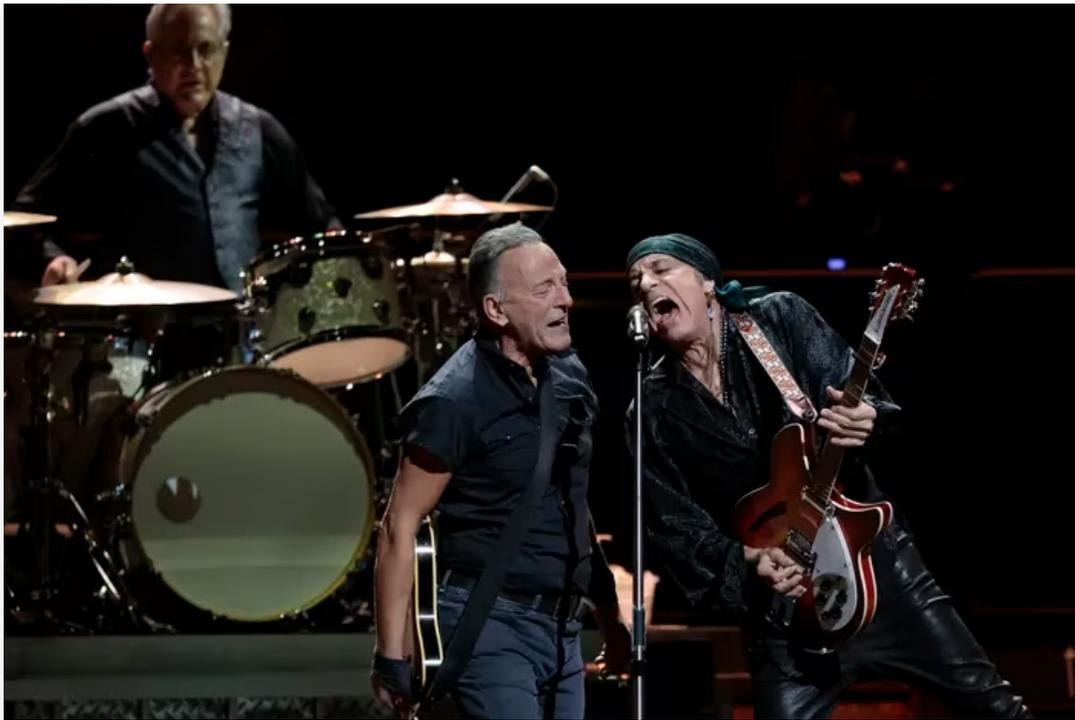
How Mayor Kenney can leave a lasting imprint on the city — and perhaps democracy itself | Editorial

Far from playing out his final months in office in obscurity, the city's outgoing chief executive could effectively rally Philadelphia voters ahead of the 2024 presidential race.

The Editorial Board Aug 12, 2023

OPINION

AD

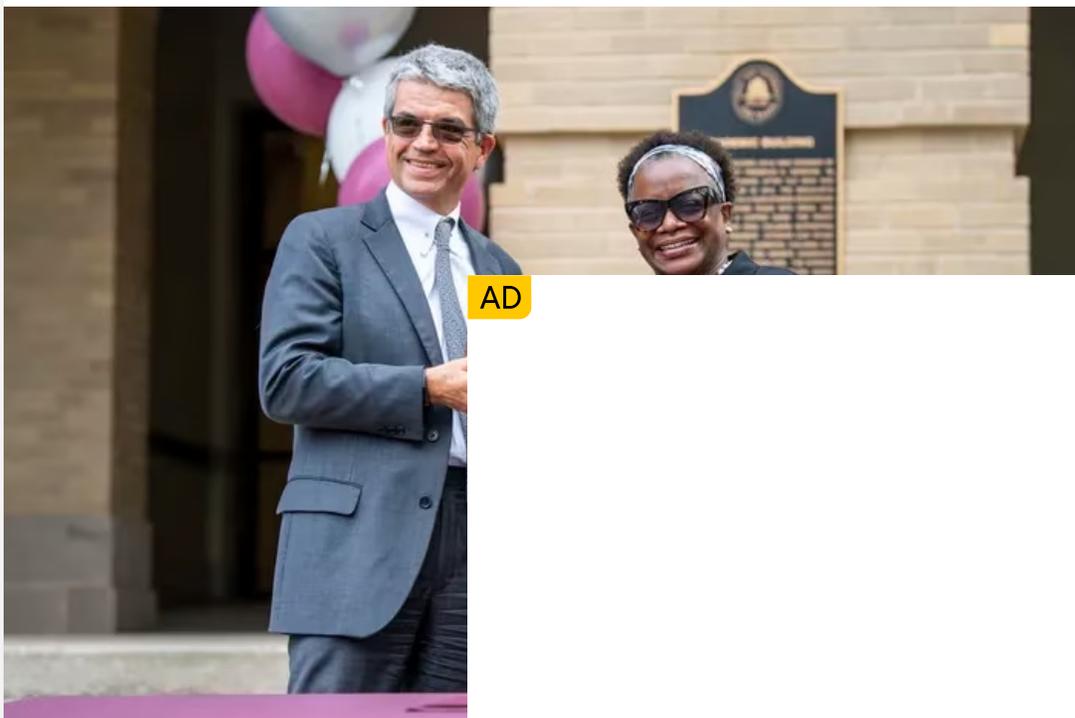


Why I'm saying goodbye to Bruce Springsteen

For 50 years, the House of E Street has been my church, and now I'm leaving.

Jeff Gammage Aug 9, 2023

OPINION



Threat to campus speech isn't coming from the left | Will Bunch Newsletter

Plus, a new book puts America's 1980s/'90s 'crack epidemic' in its place.

Will Bunch | Columnist Aug 8, 2023

OPINION

Funeral procession in Ukraine

Vasyl Pushkar, 42, died from wounds sustained in a mine explosion on the war's front lines. He was buried July 31, 2023 in the village of Torkiv.

Handout Aug 3, 2023

AD

OPINION



It's justice that Trump, who wanted to toss Black votes, gets charged under a KKK Act

Donald Trump's rise and his Jan. 6 insurrection are deeply rooted in racism. How fitting he's charged under a law to stop the KKK.

Will Bunch | Columnist Aug 3, 2023

OPINION

AD

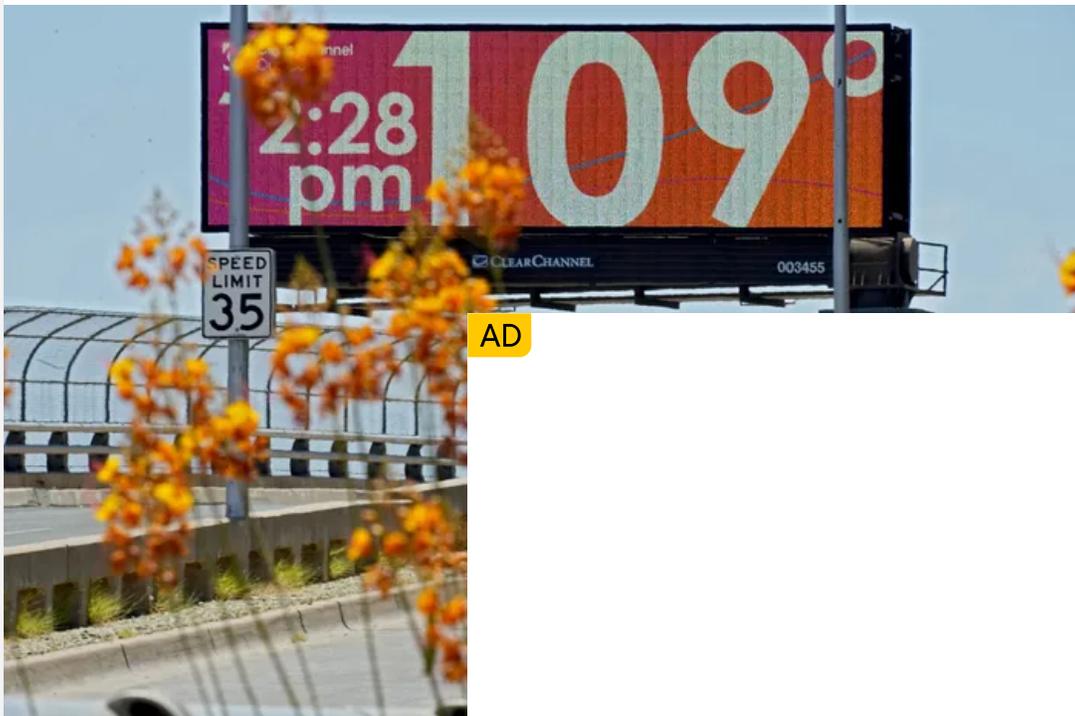


Alito, Alabama, and the Supreme Court's fall | Will Bunch Newsletter

Plus, my book "After the Ivory Tower Falls" is finally out in paperback.

Will Bunch | Columnist Aug 1, 2023

OPINION

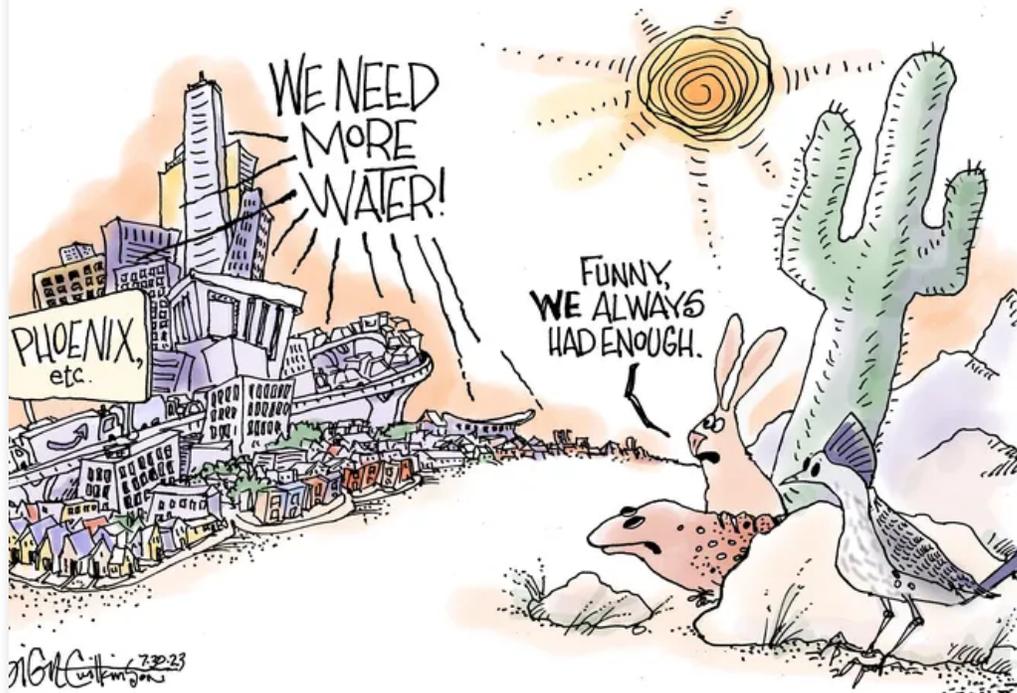


Project 2025 is GOPers' blueprint for destroying the planet. It must be stopped.

It sounds insane: In a summer of 110-degree heat waves and killer floods, GOPers draft a 2025 scheme to end all action on climate change.

Will Bunch | Columnist Jul 30, 2023

OPINION



Not a drop to drink | Editorial Cartoon

Signe Wilkinson on the water crisis plaguing Phoenix and the Southwest.

Signe Wilkinson, For The Inquirer **AD**

OPINION

2024 will be America's Election, and the 1

Half the electorate lives in a world where Fauci is a war criminal, top Dems eat babies, and the answer is autocracy. How did things go so wrong?

Will Bunch | Columnist Jul 27, 2023

OPINION



How the Jan 6. committee saved America | Will Bunch Newsletter

Plus, why is Gov. Josh Shapiro so afraid to mention climate change?

Will Bunch | Columnist Jul 25, 2023

OPINION

AD

To improve teens' address child sex

This problem is endemic in ou policymakers must make fund abuse a priority.

Benita Williams and Teresa Huizar, For ... Jul 25, 2023

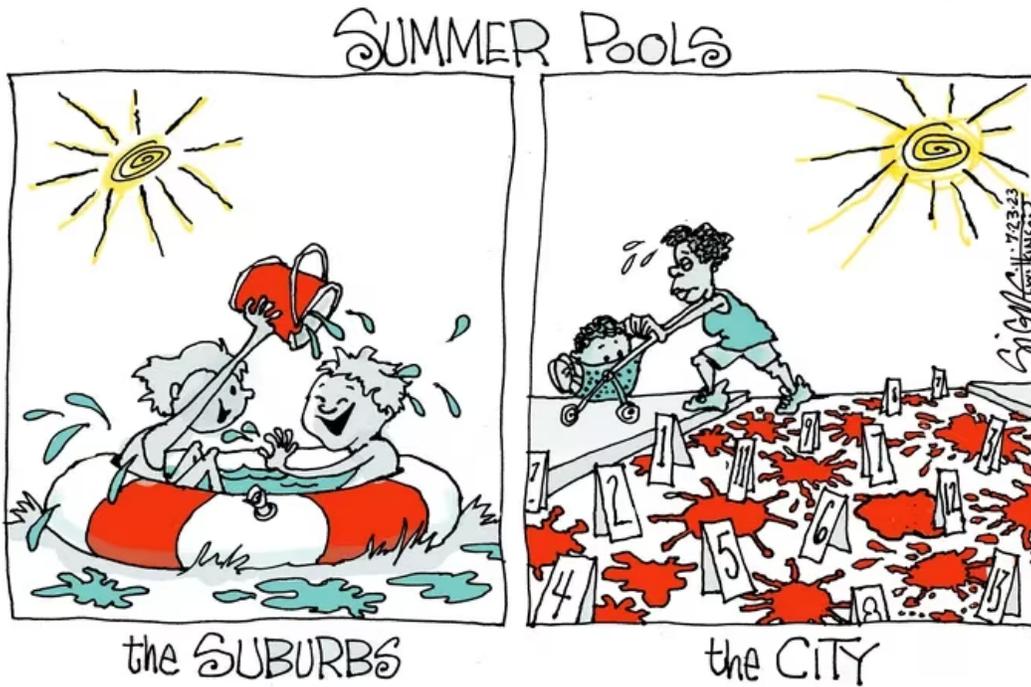
OPINION

Why are Texas and Florida building their own large, sadistic armies?

State troops under Texas Gov. Greg Abbott commit brutal war crimes against migrants at the Rio Grande. Why are red states forming armies?

Will Bunch | Columnist Jul 23, 2023

OPINION



Summer pools | Ec AD

Signe Wilkinson on how the lo Philadelphia and its suburbs.

Signe Wilkinson, For The Inq

OPINION



Home-court advantage | Editorial Cartoon

John Cole on the Sixers paying to play.

John Cole, For The Inquirer Jul 21, 2023

OPINION



Political refugees: Why a family fleeing Ron DeSantis' Florida chose Swarthmore

Why two top Fla. Dems fled for a Philly suburb, joining an exodus of political refugees from Gov. Ron DeSantis' increasingly authoritarian state.

Will Bunch | Columnist Jul 20, 2023

OPINION



As a white high school student, I am grateful to learn Black history

The United States was built on slavery. Yet, in many U.S. history courses, slavery is barely discussed. **AD**

Sadie Batchis, For The Inquirer

OPINION



ABOUT US

- [About The Inquirer](#)
- [Diversity & Inclusion](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Licensing & Permissions](#)
- [Photo Reprints](#)
- [Newspapers in Education](#)
- [Jobs & Internships](#)
- [Inquirer Events](#)
- [Acel Moore Workshops](#)
- [Newsroom Staff](#)

AD

NEWS & INFO

- [News](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Sports Betting](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Food](#)
- [Life](#)

MARKETPLACE

- [Subscribe](#)
- [Inquirer Store](#)

[Job Listings](#)

[All Classifieds](#)

[Death Notices](#)

[Legal Notices](#)

[Gift Subscriptions](#)

MOBILE APPS

[Apple iOS](#)

[Google Android](#)



© 2023 The Philadelphia Inquirer, LLC

[Terms of Use](#) / [Privacy Policy](#) / [Cancellation Policy](#) / [California Notice](#)

[California residents do not sell my data request](#)

AD