

May 15, 2018 – MORE SCHADENFREUDE

More on the collapse of the Hillary campaign as recounted by Amy Chozick in her new book **Chasing Hillary**. This time **Vanity Fair** has published a chapter from the book.

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## Vanity Fair

### "ORGANIZATION DON'T MEAN SHIT": INSIDE THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE CLINTON CAMPAIGN

*In an excerpt from her new book, **Chasing Hillary**, the author explains how a group of perspicacious—and pretty miserable—Clinton campaign reporters knew the candidate's electoral hopes were imperiled all the way back in Iowa, in early 2016.*

by Amy Chozick

"To our traveling press corps—Happy New Year!" the e-mail read. "For your safety and convenience we will be providing a bus that will begin in Davenport and transport press throughout the swing."

It was the beginning of 2016, and the traveling **Hillary Clinton** press corps had finally gotten our bus—a glorious maroon Signature premium people carrier with TVs over every third row and boxed lunches and bottled water piled up on the front couple of rows, and power outlets under all our seats. For many of us, the arrival of the bus—parked on the frozen Mississippi Valley Fairgrounds in Davenport, Iowa—signified more than an end to speeding tickets and Avis points. We'd finally moved into our very own communal home, like a loft apartment on MTV's *Real World* but with wheels. In the outside world, most of us wouldn't have chosen to spend our time together and certainly not *that* much time together. But in our shared caravan, we were the Travelers. The bus marked the beginning of us becoming a rowdy, high-strung family forever bound by our bizarre lifestyles, unhealthy diets, and constant search for a power outlet.

The nine or so of us on that first bus trip wanted to mark the moment. We stood on our seats and squatted in the aisle to fit into a group photo. "Say, 'I'm With Her!'" a young campaign staffer said. "Can you just take the picture?" one reporter replied.

Like all political reporters, I'd devoured **Timothy Crouse** and Hunter S. Thompson and Richard Ben Cramer and David Foster Wallace's *Up, Simba!* (plus glossary), romanticizing the campaign bus beyond all reason. I imagined Great Men, the "heavies" as Crouse called the top rung on the hierarchy of traveling press—Johnny Apple (*The New York Times*), David Broder (*The Washington Post*), and Bob Novak (the *Chicago Sun-Times*)—driving public opinion in between drinking sessions. Their prose had the power to sway primaries and convert other Great Men into presidents, or tear them down until they were also-rans confined to a historical footnote (see Muskie, Edmund). The job had a poetic, renegade feel. Men left their wives and families and

their comfortable homes in the suburbs to sleep in a different hotel every night. All in the service of democracy and dick swinging. Add to the political clout free-flowing booze and summer-camp camaraderie, and it was hard to believe that anyone got paid to have that much fun.

But by 2016, so much about the trail had changed. At least back then the "traveling press secretary" actually traveled *with* the press. This didn't seem like a radical concept until 2016, when on most days not a single person authorized to speak for the Clinton campaign ever traveled with us. Proximity was power in 2016. The Clinton team preferred instead to ride alongside Hillary in the motorcade or on her private chartered plane. When there was no room on the charter between Iowa City and Ottumwa, one aide sat on the plane's turned-down toilet seat for the half-hour flight rather than ride in our putrid press quarters. On a typical day, we'd spend 18 hours on the bus only to set eyes on Hillary from the back of a packed gymnasium or as a flash of blonde disappearing behind a van door held open by a bulky Secret Service agent.

I think it was **Cheryl Mills**, Hillary's longtime aide and adviser, who said that "by the time women and minorities reach the presidency, the role has been vastly diminished." Well, call it a slap from the patriarchy or a stroke of bad luck, but by the time women reporters dominated Hillary's press corps, Twitter and live-streaming and a (female) candidate who had zero interest in having a relationship with the press vastly diminished the campaign bus's place in the media ecosystem. My colleagues at *The New York Times*, and reporters at other organizations, could cover a speech or a press conference (on the rare occasion those happened) while watching the livestream from their newsroom desks, where they'd have Wi-Fi and power and wouldn't have to worry about waiting in line at a porta-potty on deadline or some fresh-faced campaign staffer yelling "loading!" right when you're crafting the perfect nut graph.

The traveling press had become the province of what one prickly print reporter called "the Human Tripods," the young network embeds who'd never covered a campaign before and who had to capture everything the candidate did on video. As long as the Tripods delivered a livestream, the print reporters could do our jobs and the ecosystem worked. The *Times* and the *Post* and the A.P. and Politico still broke news and provided TV talking heads with something to gab about. But in our little leper colony on wheels, at least in the media ecosystem of 2016, the masters of Snapchat and Vine and Twitter and Periscope had become the new "heavies."

Any haughtiness I had in working for the *Times* diminished during that first ride from Davenport, when, after about two hours and 35 minutes, I found myself somewhere on I-80 perched over the back of my seat pleading with the embeds to let me watch their video feed of Hillary's town hall. Because Hillary preferred to fly to her events, the bus-bound Travelers couldn't make it to the Cedar Rapids and Osage stops. Our only option was to live-stream Hillary's Iowa events from the press bus in Iowa. Then, through a muffled intercom, the bus driver apologized. All I heard was, "So sorry, folks . . . gotta . . . generator . . . break . . ." The power and the Wi-Fi went out. We could live without Krispy Kreme donut holes and Chips Ahoy! snack packs. We could even hold our noses over the toilet that had long ago run out of anti-bacterial hand foam. But the prospect of losing Wi-Fi as Hillary carried on without us in Cedar Rapids pushed us over the edge. How would we explain to our editors that we'd allowed ourselves to be sequestered hundreds of miles from the candidate we were supposed to be obsessively covering? I imagined something terrible happening—a terrorist attack or an assassination attempt. My editors would pull me off the trail forever. I could hear the scorn: "You had *one fucking job!*"

That's when the world's most influential print publications—the *Times*, the *Post*, the *Journal*, Politico, the A.P., Bloomberg, and Reuters—banded together and did the one thing we still felt empowered to do. We whined . . .

"She could've been shot!"

"Yeah, or dropped dead of a heart attack."

"Seriously, guys, what if something happened to her and we weren't there?"

"The bus fucking sucks." "I hate the bus . . ."

"How much longer?"

On the bus, my whole body and my journalism atrophied. On most days, I'd make at least a dozen calls to sources, but on the bus I hardly made any phone calls or talked to anyone outside my fellow Travelers. I no longer had the energy to yell at my editors in New York when other colleagues got to write the daily A1 stories. I lost my will to protest when editors only wanted me to send color and quotes that would be melded (or not) into a roundup Frankenstory, or what we called the editor-assembled daily news stories with multiple bylines and several contributor lines at the bottom. I didn't even complain when the Travelers had to convene in the lobby of the Marriott at seven A.M. only to drive to the Jewish Federation of Greater Des Moines and sit on our bus outside as Hillary answered questions about Israel. The campaign said the space was too tight to accommodate her traveling press corps. During the event, Hillary had a mild coughing attack, or at least it looked as though she'd had a mild coughing attack from the live feed that I watched on my phone while standing in the parking lot puffing on an e-cigarette. I hadn't smoked since high school, but at 37, traveling on a bus in frigid weather in the middle of Iowa, it seemed like as good a time as any to develop a nicotine addiction.

Amid the traveling, we reverted to becoming tweens. The bus almost abandoned us in Vinton (pop. 5,257) after we couldn't pull ourselves away from the *Fast and the Furious* arcade game at the roller-skating rink where Hillary spoke. She declared, "The entire country, indeed the entire world, is watching to see what happens right here in Benton County . . ." The entire world except the members of her traveling press, who were in the adjacent room locked in a heated game of *Ms. Pac-Man*. We established cliques, banishing newcomers to the Landfill, what we called the last row of seats between the bathroom and the trash. We started our periods at the same time and sang **Justin Bieber's** "Love Yourself" on a loop.

While our counterparts on the Bernie Bus exuded the unexpected cockiness of covering a budding insurgency, the Hillary press mimicked the morose march of our assigned campaign. As early as that January, we knew something was amiss with the Clinton campaign. Bernie packed an auditorium in Decorah, Iowa, telling the 2,300 people, "Today, the inevitable candidate doesn't look quite so inevitable." Hillary, meanwhile, spoke to 450 in the city's Hotel Winneshiek ballroom, where the mostly over-65 set wore red T-shirts with the fighting words, *Does Your Candidate Have a Plan for Social Security?* In Sioux City, Bernie filled the Orpheum Theatre. Days earlier, when Hillary, paranoid about comparisons to Bernie's crowd sizes, went to Sioux City, she held a "Fighting for Us" town hall at the Orpheum Theatre. Not in the theater auditorium itself, but in its ornate foyer. Supporters squeezed onto the stairs and hung over gold-leafed balconies festooned with American flags. Afterward, campaign aides bragged that a crowd stretched around the block ("at least a couple hundred people") who wanted to see Hillary but couldn't fit inside. "Shit," I thought. "If only there'd been a larger venue, like a theater, nearby . . ."

Hillary's town halls became so frequent and intimate that they started to take on the familiar, if laborious, feel of catching up with an old girlfriend who cites G.D.P. statistics over brunch. On a Saturday afternoon, in Clinton, Iowa (motto: "So many things to do—with a river view!"), Hillary

cracked herself up when she told the small crowd at Eagle Heights Elementary, "You didn't have to name it [Clinton]. I would've come anyway!" Her brow grew deliberate. "I got to tell you, I did a little research and Clinton County is named for DeWitt Clinton, the sixth governor of New York, and what is so interesting, because I admire DeWitt Clinton, he was the person who said, 'We're going to build a canal from the Hudson River to Lake Erie, all the way across New York to open up the West to commerce . . .'"

It didn't matter to Hillary that by this point the crowd had started to fidget and look down at their phones. Or that most of the press, sensing a prolonged history lesson, had stood up from our row of seats at the back of the auditorium and moved to a nearby room set up with bottled water and bags of chips. "He started when he was mayor of New York City just pushing, pushing, pushing, as hard as he could, and finally on the Fourth of July 1817 they broke ground. It took eight years. He was elected governor. He worked really hard, then he ran into some political headwinds. I know a little about that. [Some laughs.] He was voted out and then he came back. I know a little about that, too. [Some more laughs.] And then in 1825, after those eight years, the Erie Canal was opened up . . ."

Yes, Hillary *was* DeWitt Clinton. She had the perseverance and the political headwinds and the \$275 billion infrastructure plan. What did Bernie have? She had so much fun telling this story that I figured we'd driven the three hours from Des Moines to Clinton that morning only so she could riff on DeWitt ("no relation"). "I think it's pretty interesting that the folks who settled here named this part of Iowa for DeWitt Clinton," she said, in conclusion. "They understood that he was a leader who set big goals and then he worked. He did the politics." I wasn't entirely sure how DeWitt's big goals squared with Hillary's *other* campaign promise at the time. "I would rather underpromise and overdeliver," she told 460 people at the Five Flags Center in Dubuque.

The "underpromise" line made Clinton campaign headquarters, in Brooklyn, cringe. It didn't take a room full of pollsters to know that American voters preferred to elect charismatic men who wildly overpromised. But Hillary didn't want to be like them. She was a realist, or as I called it, a radical incrementalist. She'd tried to tell voters in '08 that Obama couldn't deliver on the "hope" and "change" he was selling. "Now, I could stand up here and say, 'Let's just get everybody together, let's get unified, the sky will open up, the light will come down, celestial choirs will be singing, and everyone will know we should do the right thing and the world will be perfect,'" she'd told a crowd in Providence, Rhode Island, during her 2008 primary fight against Obama. Eight years later, Hillary privately blamed the country's anger in no small part on what she thought was Obama's inability to deliver. So for a while, before her aides pried the underpromise line off her lips, Hillary would tell Iowans, "I don't want to overpromise. We don't need any more of that."

You had to give it to Hillary for being back in Iowa at all. It had to be agonizing to get up every day and try to win over the voters who had handed her a mortifying third-place finish in 2008. For years pollsters warned her, "They just don't like you in Iowa." But if she had skipped the caucuses, we all would've written stories calling her entitled—an imperial candidate, running scared from the liberal base. She wasn't going to let that happen. Instead, Hillary tried out comedic shticks and did impersonations that I almost never saw her do outside Iowa. She'd get to the part of her stump speech about how she planned to improve the Affordable Care Act, including how she'd lower the cost of prescription drugs, a winning issue with her base of aging baby boomers. Part of her plan, she explained, would stop pharmaceutical companies from receiving tax credits for advertising on TV.

At this point Hillary would swirl her arms and segue into reciting, in florid detail, what sounded like a Cialis ad. "You know the ads, they have people walking through fields of wildflowers, walking on beaches, they have the name of the drug, which you know is unpronounceable, and then in a low voice . . ."—and Hillary would soften her voice, pull the microphone close to her lips, and say in a deep, guttural pitch that always made the press corps look up from our laptops and chuckle—"If you take this drug, your nose will fall off . . ."

On the rope line, when a French journalist shouted over **Katy Perry's** "Roar" and thrust his camera Hillary's way, knocking me in the head a couple of times, "Madam Secretary, for French TV, for French TV . . ." Hillary waved and put on a faux French accent. "Itzzz zoo good to zeeeeee you. Bonjour. Bonjour. French TV, bonjour."

After these town halls, Hillary stuck around to shake hands and dole out compliments. "I love that outfit!" she said, tugging at a woman's knitted scarf. "This is pretty. Is that attached? It's really pretty." She made small talk. Asked what kind of music she liked, Hillary swayed a little and shouted over a **Kelly Clarkson** song, "You know what, I'm kind of a 60s person to be honest. Old school, yeah, old school that brings back a lot of good memories."

Shouts of "Madam President" always made Hillary beam. "Doesn't that sound good?" she'd say. "Let's make it happen!" Hillary practically dove at a man in a gray leisure suit who carried a copy of *Hard Choices*, her memoir focusing on her time as secretary of state, under his arm. She signed, "Best wishes, Hillary," and as she handed it back with a come-hither wink, said, "It's a complicated world, isn't it?"

After speaking at a bowling alley in Adel, Hillary was so swarmed with a group of teachers ("I hope you get an excused absence today!") that she grabbed my phone right out of my hand to pose for a selfie. **Huma Abedin** whispered in Hillary's ear, "That's Amy's," and Hillary handed it back so fast it looked as if she'd suffered electric shock. "Is that yours?! Oh no!" she said.

She would dispense policy prescriptions, pausing amid the crush of selfies to ask Iowans about their "COLA" (cost of living adjustments on social security) and whether they'd signed up for an "income-contingent repayment plan." I once saw Hillary criticize Bernie's college plan ("I'm not going to take care of rich people") to a 13-year-old whom she then referred to [hillaryclinton.com](http://hillaryclinton.com) to read the details of her "New College Compact." "That's what it's called, O.K.?" Hillary said, crouching down to eye level with the teen. He stared blankly. "Want a selfie?!" she asked.

During long drives on the press bus, our conversations started to revolve entirely around Hillary's Iowa idiosyncrasies. In '08, Hillary talked about "the nurse from Waterloo" so regularly that the traveling press had lengthy hypothetical conversations about this romanticized nurse in Waterloo, always stretching out the *loo* for several syllables the way Hillary did. In 2016, an enormous 3-D printer had become the new nurse from Waterlooooooo. Hillary discovered the printer ("the largest in North America") by accident while touring Cedar Valley TechWorks in Waterloo. She watched entranced as the contraption spit out a two-foot-tall, sand-and-resin, three-dimensional version of her "H" campaign logo made entirely of discarded corncobs. "Oh, come on! Come on!"

The printer might as well have produced a handful of fully formed Hillary super-delegates. The 3-D printer was made in Germany, but it quickly became Hillary's favorite symbol of American exceptionalism. It was "3-D printer this" and "3-D printer that" five or six times a day, usually followed by her lengthy proposal to create advanced manufacturing jobs in the Midwest. "When

I went to Cedar Valley TechWorks, I saw the biggest 3-D-printing machine in all of North America," she told a crowd in Waterloo. "It's amazing."

In Dubuque, Hillary called the 3-D printer "a job magnet for the Midwest." In Urbandale, she called the \$1.5 million gadget "thrilling," "a big job multiplier," and "a business growth strategy." Hillary vowed to be the president who helps Iowa "make this kind of machinery, 3-D printers in America," and, in keeping with her promise to only make modest promises, she even vowed to cut the ribbon on the first 3-D printer production plant.

After the first couple of days, Hillary had relayed the story so many times that she started to mix up the details. "I was at the Black Hawk community college. They bought the biggest 3-D printer in North America because they're thinking about the future," she said in Des Moines, Dubuque, and half a dozen other cities. Black Hawk College was in Moline, Illinois, and Hillary had never visited. But even (or especially?) with the muddled details, the giant 3-D printer became emblematic of Hillary's campaign style: she could be so pedantic in expressing her sincere optimism for the American worker that she either bored audiences or went over their heads entirely.

On the bus, meanwhile, we were simultaneously tired of hearing about the 3-D printer and at a complete loss for anything better to talk about . . .

*"Hillary won't stop talking about that fucking 3-D printer."*

*"It'd be funny if she started placing it in whatever state she's campaigning in at the moment."*

*"I was just at Henderson County Community College where they had the world's largest 3-D printer."*

*"That would redeem this whole humiliating ordeal of a campaign."*

When Clinton confronted an unexpected and profoundly narrow win in the Iowa caucuses, her campaign was thrust into strategic upheaval, which raised questions about whether her candidacy—her radical incrementalism, her sincere yet pedantic optimism, her underpromise-but-overdeliver stoicism—could address an angry and restless electorate.

As the caucus results trickled in that night, I sat before my computer typing and deleting, typing and deleting, typing and deleting. My print deadlines came and went. In five hours, I'd maybe written 50 words of usable "B matter," or background information beyond the real news itself. It was almost midnight on the East Coast when an editor broke the news that my story would be banished to the two words a *Times* reporter never wanted to hear: Web-only. Despite all our talk about the Web and being "digital-first," the six most beautiful words in the English language remained, "They want it for the front."

I should've pre-written a Hillary-says-she-won-but-basically-tied-and-we're-still-not-sure-but-let's-just-get-New Hampshire-over-with-and-move-on-to-the-primary-states-with-more-than-just-white-people version, but my sources had been so certain that she would win. The polling data put her outside the margin of error. The campaign had even less of an idea about what to say. Hillary arrived at her victory rally at Drake University a couple of hours late wearing red. I stood on a folding chair in the back of the room and marveled at how good the entire Clinton family had become at smothering any honest emotional reaction. With **Bill** and **Chelsea Clinton** standing onstage behind her, Hillary drew into some deep reserve of fakery and willed herself into looking happy, as if trying hard enough would make it so. I remembered the advice Huma

had given to a sobbing **Anthony Weiner** staffer after the Carlos Danger sexting scandal enveloped her husband's mayoral bid, as famously captured in the documentary *Weiner*. "I assume the photographers are still outside, so you will look happy?" Huma said, rhetorically.

With a plastered-on grin, Hillary pointed at the crowd, equal parts Iowans, Washington insiders, and New York donors, and a pile of baby boomers who came up in caravans from Arkansas. I saw Hillary smooth her suit jacket. She ran her palms down the sides of her thighs, the kind of fidgety gesture she hardly ever made onstage. "I love it! Wow, what a night, an unbelievable night," she said, letting the word "unbelievable" hang there. *You will look happy.* "I stand here tonight breathing a big sigh of relief. Thank you, Iowa!"

**Rachel Platten's** "Fight Song" came on, ending Hillary's six-minute-and-45-second speech. Meanwhile, a rosy-cheeked campaign staffer yelled "loading!" over the campaign's newest girl-power pop anthem, and we prepared to head back to the bus. As we rolled up our power cords and trudged through the parking lot to the bus with our open laptops cradled in our arms, the traveling press corps looked aghast.

*"Um, what just happened?"*

*"That didn't feel like a victory rally."*

*"No, no it did not," I said.*

We were sitting on the bus in the parking lot when my phone exploded with texts and e-mails. Democrats saw the virtual tie as an omen and wanted campaign manager **Robby Mook** "layered." Nobody said he should've been fired; that would've led to too many negative headlines. Nothing drove news traffic like Clinton infighting.

Two years earlier, I'd written a story for *The New York Times Magazine* suggesting that Clinton's biggest obstacle in her pursuit of the White House, on some level, was navigating the innumerable advisers she and Bill had collected over their decades in public life, while somehow side-stepping the inevitable conflicts, weeding out the signal from the noise. At the time, it seemed as though Clinton's very capable younger aides were going to have difficulty cracking into her inner circle, which had ossified so many elections earlier. And right after the Iowa results came in, the old-school Clinton Democrats who'd come up during the McGovern campaign, in particular, worried the then 36-year-old campaign manager's approach—all math and no poetry—needed to be replaced by some old-fashioned fire. (The younger operatives would point out that Nixon defeated McGovern in a landslide.) People proposed **Maggie Williams**, who had been Hillary's chief of staff in the White House and was one of the only people who could tell Hillary no. Maggie had been dragged into easing Clinton melodrama for years, including reluctantly taking over in 2008 from then campaign manager **Patti Solis Doyle**, who was fired after Iowa. To avoid negative headlines, Robby could even keep his title and his corner office and his standing desk and his "mafia" of obedient bros who'd followed him from **Terry McAuliffe's** Virginia governor's race. But Maggie had been there, done that. She was content to offer outside counsel from her perch at Harvard.

During the campaign, I turned again and again to the most overused words of the Democratic primary: *organization* and *enthusiasm*. I asked Bernie and Hillary people which one was more important. They all said, "You need both." But like a bratty teenager playing a drinking game, I demanded an answer: "You must choose," I told them. Most people settled (not for attribution) on enthusiasm. "Organization don't mean shit if people aren't excited about the candidate," a veteran Texas Democrat said. Robby was an organization man; Bill Clinton, the ultimate



enthusiasm guy. By Iowa, a rift between Bill and Robby's competing ideologies was widening. "What's the data and organization for if voters don't like Hillary?" Bill would say to anyone who would listen. "They need to see the person I know."

About a week before the caucuses, at the end of an epically newsless bus swing, **Demi Lovato** performed "Confident" on campus at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, the epicenter of the "Feel the Bern" movement. She introduced Hillary, saying there wasn't "a woman more confident than Hillary Clinton." (Telling the crowd the truth—that one of Hillary's more endearing qualities is that, despite her successes, she is a heaping pile of insecurities—wouldn't have played well.) Hillary came onstage to a sea of Snapchatting coeds. She thanked Demi and spent a total of 3.5 minutes reminding the couple thousand students in the audience to caucus.

I waded into the crowd afterward. I didn't meet a single student who said they were supporting Hillary. "I'm just here for Demi," a rail-thin sophomore named **Tyler** told me. So why was he wearing an "H" sticker? He looked down at his plaid flannel shirt as if it surprised him to see it stuck there against his almost inverted chest. "I don't know. They gave it to me. But Demi's cool, she's got my vote." We heard the same responses at Katy Perry concerts and **Lena Dunham** house parties. "I'm here for Lena," said **Heather**, a 33-year-old from Cedar Rapids. "I don't want to vote for someone for president of the United States because I love Lena Dunham."

**Pete D'Alessandro**, Bernie's top man in Iowa, could hardly drum up an endorsement from anyone other than **Susan Sarandon** and **Mark Ruffalo**. But when I asked him about enthusiasm vs. organization, he compared these star-studded Hillary events to a story from the 1968 campaign. Pete had slithery hair and a goatee and none of the polish of the political class who worked for Hillary, but he spoke about the race with a Zen certitude that I never heard from the Clinton camp, a Jedi Master in Dickies and a shabby black fleece. In '68, Eugene McCarthy's campaign held a barbecue that attracted hundreds of voters lined up with "McCarthy for President" signs as far as the eye could see. The scene led Bobby Kennedy's campaign to think McCarthy had a lock on the primary. Kennedy ended up defeating him badly.

"Turned out," Pete said, "they just came for the ribs."

*This article has been adapted from the book CHASING HILLARY: Ten Years, Two Presidential Campaigns, and One Intact Glass Ceiling by Amy Chozick. Copyright 2018 by Amy Chozick. Reprinted by permission of Harper, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.*

Stew  
McGee  
BND AMS

The president  
is vulgar.



WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS' ASSOCIATION  
*Our Washington betters look forward to their favorite after dinner treat*

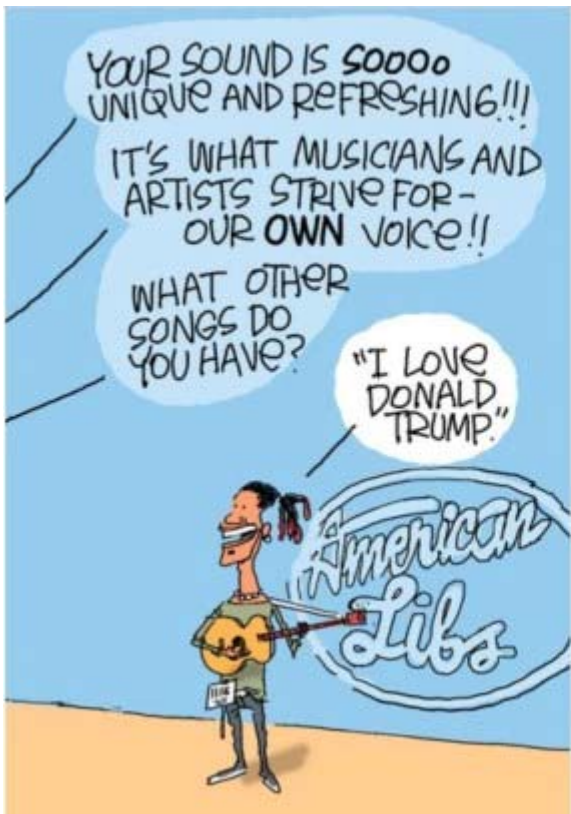


SUMMERS 2018  
TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY

# ENTRANCE

THE LEFT

THE RIGHT



**Trump works out a Trade Deal with Kim Jong-Un**

