

DAILY NEWS EDITORIAL

Poisonous priorities

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, in league with President Trump, stands on the barricades and refuses to authorize a dollar in aid to states and localities forced to furlough and lay off teachers, police officers and firefighters because of the COVID-induced recession.

They refuse to toss a token to America's public transit systems that, having lost ridership and tax revenue, ready debilitating service cuts.

They refuse to assist school districts to help them reopen for in-person learning, even as Trump continues to pressure them to do so.

They refuse to send any more help to millions of families about to exhaust all their unemployment aid, including countless New Yorkers in hospitality and the arts whose livelihoods have ground to a halt.

McConnell and Trump had no time for and spent no political capital on these priorities.

But after the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg 46 days before the election, they did clear the

deck to rush through a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court, Judge Amy Coney Barrett, who, barring a strike of lightning, will be confirmed in a party-line vote on the Senate floor today.

McConnell and his crew of opportunists do this despite having practically carved a rule in the Capitol's marble four years ago, after the death of Justice Antonin Scalia 269 days before the 2016 election: No election-year confirmations, they said, and said again, and again, insisting Americans hold them to the new precedent they were setting.

May they reap the electoral whirlwind for shredding any semblance of principle.

While we disagree with her judicial philosophy, while we revile the judicial assault on the Affordable Care Act to which she will almost certainly assent, under normal circumstances we would endorse Barrett's confirmation. She is qualified; this Senate and this president are once and for all disqualified from purporting to honorably lead America.

Doing right by the heroes

For years the federal bureaucracy wrongly ensnared millions of dollars meant for the FDNY's health clinics monitoring and treating more than 17,000 retired and active firefighters and EMTs who heroically risked all responding to the World Trade Center rescue and recovery and were sickened by the toxic stew.

The problem was the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, a branch of the Department of Health and Human Services, had an unpaid debt due from New York City on something completely unrelated. Thus the Treasury Department automatically withheld payment to satisfy the uncollected debt, shortchanging the FDNY by \$3.3 million.

The Daily News exposed the mess as Vice President Mike Pence was heading to Ground Zero for last month's 9/11 ceremony. The Veep's aides promised Rep. Pete King to fix it, but Treasury only sent mixed messages, claiming City Hall was at fault. Finally, to the rescue came the federal World

Trade Center Health Program, whose head, Dr. John Howard, has been championing the victims and heroes of 9/11 since 2006.

The immediate parent agency of the WTC Health Program within HHS is the CDC. And on Friday the CDC, yes, the same CDC which tries to protect Americans from coronavirus against an uncaring chief executive, requested Treasury exempt the FDNY money from withholding and Treasury immediately agreed. CDC also asked its sister CMS to refund \$3.3 million, which should happen quickly.

FDNY top doc, Dr. David Prezant, credits the Daily News: "Without your help and your constant publicity on this issue, none of this would have happened because we'd been trying for over a year on our own to make this happen. And it wasn't moving forward at all. You're amazing. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."

We thank the heroes who served and suffered at the WTC.

Childhoods stolen

America already had one haunting image in its mind, courtesy of Donald Trump's purposely cruel immigration policies: More than 5,000 children, some as young as four months old, torn from their parents at the border.

Now the nation must make room for another: Five hundred and forty-five children who, three years after our government's heartless experiment with human lives, have yet to be reunited with their mothers and fathers.

The revelation comes via a new filing in a court fight between the American Civil Liberties Union and Trump administration, and provides a fresh reason Trump must be ousted on Nov. 3.

In June 2018, federal Judge Dana Sabraw — a George W. Bush-nominated judge, for those who play Trump's silly game — ordered the families that had been torn asunder put back together. The Trump administration failed to initially disclose the existence of these 545 children, in some cases

because they were part of an earlier pilot policy. That greatly complicated the reunification efforts, as many of their parents had long since been deported, in most cases to Central America.

The Department of Homeland Security claims it has "taken every step to facilitate the reunification of these families here the parents wanted such reunification to occur," suggesting many parents prefer to let their children stay in the U.S., typically with sponsors or extended family, rather than rejoining them in places that are often dangerous and devoid of economic opportunity.

If that is the case, who can blame them? But all can blame an administration that forced parents to accept a Hobson's choice between keeping their sons and daughters and seeking a better, safer life, all to send a message that America has no tolerance for illegal immigration.

If that's the price of sending a message, it's one no moral American should be willing to pay.



If Bea Lumpkin can vote, so can you

BE OUR GUEST

BY JENNIFER J. RAAB

A few days ago, a retired Chicago schoolteacher named Bea Lumpkin dressed herself in multiple layers of protective gear — including medical-grade gloves for her hands and beekeeper-style headgear so enveloping that only her eyes showed behind her face shield — and then made her way outdoors to drop her 2020 election ballot into a street-corner mailbox.

Lumpkin's effort was captured for the cameras, and went viral, for good reason: She is 102 years old and, having voted in every presidential contest since Franklin Roosevelt beat Wendell Willkie in 1940, she was determined to keep her streak alive — even in the wake of a pandemic that imperils super-seniors like herself. As CNN later reported, Bea spent the next few days relentlessly tracking the progress of her ballot online, staying connected until she received confirmation that it had been received and counted. Now she proudly wears an "I Voted" sticker.

The story comes as no surprise to those who know about her early life and career in New York City, for Bea Shapiro — as she was known then — graduated from Hunter College with a bachelor's degree in history back in 1939. Then she proceeded, as did many of her classmates, to pursue a life of social activism, embracing the Hunter motto: *mihī cura future* — "the care of the future is mine."

Bea, born in the Bronx to two struggling immigrant garment workers, came by her passion for justice naturally. Her mother labored at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in Greenwich Village but was pregnant, and fortunately at home, when the notorious fire there cost the lives of 146 laborers, mostly women and girls. Bea went on to work at a Brooklyn laundry, where she quickly organized its workers into a union. During World War II, serving as an electronics technician in Buffalo, she became a labor and tenants' rights activist. Her own eviction was upheld by a local judge when her one-time affiliation with the Communist Party was read into the record.

Later, alongside her African-American husband, steelworker Frank Lumpkin, Bea fought Jim Crow laws, launched a new career as a schoolteacher and eventually became a tenured professor at Malcolm X College in Chicago. She wrote a 1999 book about her husband's struggle to recover 3,000 lost pensions from a bankrupt Wisconsin Steel plant. And in 2013, she produced an unapologetic autobiography chronicling her proud life as a radical activist: "Joy in the Struggle: My Life and Love."

Not an unimpressive legacy for a poor, first-generation American. But no real surprise. As our unofficial college slogan goes: "You can always tell a Hunter girl. But you can't tell her much."

Now, contrast Lumpkin's 80-year-long fight for civil and voter rights with the message on a recently unearthed, similarly viral video, in which the 20-something activist Charlie Kirk, founder of Turning Point U.S.A., all but advocated for voter suppression: The COVID-19 pandemic had forced the shutdown of so many college campuses that some 500,000 likely progressive students registered to vote near their schools might well be disenfranchised this year.

"So, please keep the campuses closed," Kirk urged. "Like, it's a great thing."

Bea Shapiro Lumpkin would disagree. And her story animates Hunter College's ongoing work to make sure that today's students — even those studying remotely while our own campus remains largely closed — stay engaged on the issues and fully prepared to exercise the franchise.

Hunter's student government, for example, used Instagram to conduct a virtual voter registration drive, and is now engaged in a vigorous get-out-the-vote campaign. Students who worked through the summer on completing the census are now being successfully recruited to serve as poll workers. Two of our alumni are even running for office this cycle.

The pandemic has not curtailed outreach. A recent Hunter online discussion of Gen Z activism brought organizers and undergraduates together to stress the urgent need to participate, especially in an age plagued by anxiety and disparity.

In New York City, commuter students like CUNY's must be sure to vote in their home districts — or secure their absentee ballots ASAP from the Board of Elections website. Local students enrolled (and registered to vote) at out-of-town campuses that may be closed: secure mail-in-ballots from the state where you study, and cast ballots as soon as you can.

As Lumpkin put it to CNN: "The most important reason to vote in this election is that there's so much at stake, more than any other vote I've cast, because of the great challenge to the survival of democracy."

Whatever side of the political spectrum you identify with, this much should be true: If this woman can risk her very life to vote at age 102, every student can vote as if their own lives depended on it.

Raab is the president of Hunter College.