

## Sole Survivors: Inside the Cult of Trump's Florsheim Faithful

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The Reform Agenda

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It takes a special kind of devotion to wear the same shoes as your boss.

In Trump's inner circle, that devotion has transcended psychology and evolved into liturgy. Every male aide now shuffles around in identical pairs of Florsheim wingtips, personally selected and ceremonially bestowed by Trump himself. "Real man's shoes," he reportedly declared, thumping the leather the way a farmer sizes up a weary mule. He seemed convinced that greatness seeps upward through quality soles, political osmosis for the terminally sycophantic.

Cabinet secretaries, former CEOs, and at least one visibly trembling congressman now sweat through those suffocating wingtips, their toes quietly expiring beneath the sacred dress code of obedience. Marco Rubio's pair is the saddest of all, clearly a size and a half too large. They flap behind him like a trailing conscience, making a squeak so mournful it could double as a confession booth soundtrack. He insists they fit perfectly, smiling with the dead-eyed bravery of a man who knows that acknowledging pain is a firing offense.

Meanwhile, Trump's approval rating has collapsed to a sullen 33 percent, the political equivalent

of a Yelp score for a restaurant that gave everyone salmonella. Any other leader might interpret that as a warning sign. In Trump's orbit, it's treated like a clerical error. His remaining disciples respond by praising harder, louder, as if denial itself were the only available form of cardio.

The fall in support has enough causes to fill a true-crime podcast. Immigration raids so bungled that ICE recently detained a Canadian ambassador and three golden retrievers. Military "boat operations" that even the Pentagon can't describe without a flowchart. Airstrikes justified only by "gut instinct," the presidential synonym for "couldn't sleep." Gas prices sprinting uphill like they're training for the Olympics. A Medicare reform so efficient it managed to disenroll entire zip codes overnight. Tax cuts for the rich so lavish they should have arrived wrapped in Tiffany ribbon and handwritten thank-you cards from hedge funds.

And, for reasons still under investigation by both the EPA and basic decency, the gold-leaf ballroom where the east wing used to reside, being built for galas that will never happen, echoing through the night like a mausoleum for humility.

Yet, within the hermetic world of Trumpism, these calamities are regarded not as blunders but as evidence of misunderstood genius. Staffers praise his vision, his energy, his "unmatched instinct for greatness." One senator even compared him to an "American Churchill," skillfully overlooking the part where Churchill's voters

eventually told him to clear out his desk.

This pageant of devotion reached operatic heights with the birth of the America First Award, a prize conjured specifically for him by a committee consisting entirely of people who owe him either money or silence. The statuette portrays Trump shaking his own hand, an elegant solution to that age-old problem of finding anyone else worthy of contact. The inscription reads, "For unmatched service to the glory of Donald J. Trump." At the ceremony, he announced, "Many people are saying I deserve two of these," and the audience clapped with the frightened enthusiasm of captives hoping dessert might be next.

It now rests on a shelf beside the notorious FIFA Peace Award, that relic of diplomatic cosplay from his pre-imperialism years. Accepting that one, he congratulated himself for "making soccer great again" and suggested the ball "should probably be rounder." The officials applauded on reflex, unsure if it was satire or prophecy.

Inside the Trump ecosystem, loyalty has replaced oxygen. Every interaction functions as an audition for Best Supporting Worshipper. Advisers rehearse compliments like actors learning their lines, aware that forgetting a cue could mean banishment from paradise. They call him brilliant when he's belligerent, youthful when he's pickled, decisive when he's guessing. Outside, two-thirds of the country has tuned out. Inside, the remaining one-third throws parades for a man whose empire is built on grievance, flattery, and

Florsheims. Floodlights cut through the fog of applause, revealing rows of smiling faces that never quite reach the eyes. The faithful stand shoulder to shoulder, each one gripping a pamphlet thicker than a conscience and thinner than the truth. Cameras sweep across them, capturing the choreography of devotion, the synchronized nods, the reverent gasps, the laughter that always arrives half a second too late.

Outside, the historians of tomorrow take notes in silence. They cannot yet study this moment, not while the performance still sells tickets. But one day they will sift through the wreckage of these televised parades and marvel at how dignity became currency. They will trace how intelligence learned to fold itself neatly into the leader's suit pocket, beside the breath mints and emergency slogans.

Inside the hall, the leader grins with the calm assurance of a man who has never lost his reflection. Behind him, aides smile with the radiant stillness of hostages rehearsing joy. Each trophy gleams under the cold light, tokens of loyalty forged from burnt ambition and polished denial. The crowd responds exactly as scripted, their adoration booming like a hymn played on a broken organ.

When it is over, they file into the shining night, leather shoes whispering in rhythm. The sound is small and eerie, somewhere between a squeak and a sob. From far enough away, it almost sounds like laughter trying very hard not to remember what it once found funny.

**LETTERS**

### Vote Kirkman

I recently attended a meeting of the Burlington School Board. A public hearing was held regarding a proposed tax levy.

Community residents expressed concerns about a tax increase of 22 cents per \$1000 of property value. Citizen's concerns are understandable. Costs of everything have increased, including gas, groceries and healthcare. Expenses of the school district have also increased, including salaries, insurance and gas for buses. At this same time the school budget has decreased. This year Iowa provided State Supplemental Aid of \$8,100 per student, an increase of \$160. This is a 2% increase. The inflation rate is 2.75%. Iowa school districts have been underfunded in this way for 11 years.

In addition to receiving limited state funding, school districts have suffered from the Education Savings Account, which is the school voucher program. Funds previously allocated to public schools have been redirected to pay private school tuition. This cost taxpayers \$128 million the first year, and is expected to cost up to \$300 million yearly.

Community residents are struggling to keep up with inflation and are resistant to a tax increase. Complaints should be directed to Iowa Republican legislators. We need to vote them out.

Jennifer Kirkman is running for representative in House District 99. She's campaigning strongly to restore Iowa's schools to the top ranking they once maintained, and remove school vouchers. Vote for Jennifer Kirkman for common sense tax policy.

Deb Walz  
Burlington

**TODAY IN HISTORY**

Today is Friday, April 3, the 93rd day of 2026. There are 272 days left in the year.

On April 3, 1996, Theodore Kaczynski, the Harvard-educated mathematician known as the Unabomber, was arrested at a remote Montana cabin by FBI agents. From his off-the-grid location, Kaczynski waged a 17-year bombing campaign that killed three people and injured 23 others, permanently maiming several of his victims.

In 1860, the first Pony Express mail delivery rides began, one heading west from St. Joseph, Missouri, and one heading east from Sacramento, California.

In 1882, outlaw Jesse James was shot and killed in St. Joseph, Missouri, by Robert Ford, a member of James' gang.

In 1936, Bruno Richard Hauptmann was electrocuted in Trenton, New Jersey, for the 1932 kidnap-murder of 20-month-old Charles Lindbergh Jr.

In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court, in Smith v. Allwright, struck down a Democratic Party of Texas rule that allowed only white voters to participate in Democratic primaries.

### Children should not have access to porn at library

The issue is straightforward. Children should not have access to pornographic material in taxpayer-funded public libraries. Unfortunately, Burlington's library director, Brittany Jacobs, disagrees—and so strongly that she has publicly threatened to shut down the library for everyone under 18 if the legislature passes a law restricting minors' access to such materials, pending a full review of all books in the collection. According to her, that process would take ten years—a full decade.

What does the proposed law, HF 2622, actually require? In addition to other provisions, it mandates that libraries receiving taxpayer funding must "enforce age-appropriate policies that prohibit minors from accessing materials deemed inappropriate for minors and allow parents to monitor their child's borrowing activity." The law further clarifies that "age-appropriate" does not include any material with descriptions or visual depictions of a sex act as

defined in section 702.17 or section 728.1 of the Iowa Code." A simple review of those statutes makes clear what the legislature intends to restrict.

Jacob's hang-up isn't with parental access, which she says already exists. So what's her objection? It must be with the legislature's definition of "age appropriate," which would indicate that she does not like the idea of overseeing a library where kids can't access porn.

Is this really an issue at Burlington's Public Library? The answer is yes. For example, Flamer, The Perks of Being a Wallflower, The Bluest Eye, Looking for Alaska, Me and Earl and the Dying Girl, All Boys Aren't Blue, and Gender Queer contain graphic descriptions or visual depictions of sexual acts—and they are readily accessible to minors in the Burlington Public Library.

What about the claim that reviewing these materials would take ten years? That argument doesn't hold up. Many concerns are already well documented, and identifying

the most problematic materials can be done quickly. Public school libraries were required to comply with a similar standard in 2023, meaning lists of materials already identified under that framework likely exist. From there, a systematic review of the remaining materials is entirely manageable using modern tools, AI, and a focused process. The idea that this would take a decade—and require closing the library to minors in the meantime—is simply not credible.

In the end, this comes down to common sense. Public libraries exist to serve and protect the well-being of the entire community—especially its children. Allowing minors access to pornographic material runs contrary to that mission. Law or no law, Burlington deserves a library director who is willing to draw that line clearly and act accordingly. If she cannot do it, then we need to find new leadership.

Brad Cranston  
Burlington

### Hopping mad about gas prices...

