

Author's Note

The 28th Amendment is a story about an actor who portrays a fictional US President on television, does his job a little too well, and gets drawn into real-world politics. In my book the TV show is called *The Oval Office*, but anyone who watched the now-retired NBC series *The West Wing* will quickly see the similarity. Think *Martin Sheen (Almost) Goes to Washington*.

Even those who are not familiar with *The West Wing* will recognize the very real potential for conflict between entertainment and politics in our media-defined age. My book explores the logical extremes of this conflict, even as-real life examples abound: Fred Thompson made it into the 2008 Republican Presidential primary not because he was an unremarkable former Senator from Tennessee, but because he gained national recognition as an avuncular district attorney on the television series *Law & Order*.

My story includes numerous references to the card game bridge. You certainly don't have to know how to play bridge to enjoy this book, but you may enjoy it more if you know how bridge is played. I have therefore also added an Appendix that provides a basic outline of the game for the non-player.

If you've gotten this far, there is a statistically high probability that you'll turn to the next page, so now would be the right time to advise you that this is a work of fiction: any similarity to real people or events is unintended and purely *coincidental*. All of the *coincidences* described in the book, however, are based on real events that I have personally experienced.

Neal Rechtman
Ossining, NY
July 2008

In the few minutes that had passed since his lawyer called, Victor Glade managed to work himself into a state of high anxiety. He knew that Jeremy Lerner, his long-time friend and for the past three years his Executive Producer and General Counsel, wouldn't be stopping by just to *schmooze*. Jeremy was ruthlessly efficient with his own time, and equally protective of Victor's, *ergo* any in-person meeting on short notice like this could only mean trouble.

Glade was half-seated on a stool in the middle of his dressing room after a morning of retakes that pretty much concluded *The Oval Office's* production for the week. A makeup assistant whose name he could never remember wrestled his tie off and unfastened the top four buttons of his starched, white dress shirt. She then disappeared behind him, threw a wide vinyl cape over his shoulders, and began her cotton swabbing of his cheeks and eyebrows and ears. *What had Jeremy been working on that might blow up? The distribution deal with Paramount?* A red-vested wardrobe assistant, also nameless, knelt beside him and began removing his presidential cufflinks. *They're already making out like bandits, what more could they possibly want?*

Three front-to-back strokes of a comb took the spray starch out of his masterfully dyed hair, a mottled charcoal black with silver highlights, and then off came the cape. Now Glade stood up, and in one seamless motion pulled his undershirt and long-sleeve shirt over his head and handed them to Robin red-vest, who in return was holding out for him the navy blue golf shirt that he had worn to work that morning. When he retrieved it, remaining in her outstretched hand, like magic, was a deodorant stick, which he frowned at and then grabbed. *It could also be just another lawsuit, but it would have to be a pretty big one to bring it to me in the middle of the day like this.*

He stretched the shirt over his head, popped his arms through, and nipped it down over his belt. Then two steps sideways and a squint into the illuminated mirror ten feet away: *well there's nothing I can do about it, is there?* The "it" being his age, which was sixty-five; his hair, which was far thinner in person than it appeared on the pate of President Alvin Bosco, his *Oval Office* alter ego; and his physique, which used to be athletic and was now as boxy as his Brooks Brothers shirts. He sighed, ran his hand once through his hair--*at least there was still something there*--and then darted out of the dressing room. His bodyguard, a ruddy, six-foot Scotsman and former Royal Navy Seal named Grainger Wells, was waiting for him in the hallway and accompanied him in the elevator up to his eleventh floor office.

During the ten seconds of vertical silence Victor's synapses suddenly fired out the answer: Jeremy's unscheduled visit must be about Bill Clinton's call. The ex-President had telephoned earlier that morning, but Victor had been in a final rehearsal of a scene involving five other actors, was completely in character, and had the call forwarded to Jeremy. He hadn't thought about it again until just now.

Grainger left him off at his corner office, where his private secretary, Caroline, a posture-perfect, bespectacled ex-librarian of forty-nine, was waiting for him at the door with her steno pad tucked officially under one arm. (A native of Gibraltar, she had at some point served in the British army and acquired various military habits.) She followed him to his desk, a rectangular slab of glass mounted on two sawed-off olive tree trunks that appeared to grow naturally out of the polished hardwood floor. Behind the desk, a curtain-wall window framed a panoramic view of the UCLA campus.

He plopped down in his leather swivel chair, immediately untied his Oxfords and chucked them off. "Wardrobe's going to come for these," he said, bending down to massage his feet through thin-ribbed socks. "When they do, tell them I need to be refit or something--these are killing me." He looked up at Caroline, who stood alongside the desk nodding with her usual good cheer.

"Good morning again, sir," she said. "I understand Jeremy is on his way over. He should be here any moment. The call from Clinton, perhaps."

"That's what I figure." He finished his foot massage and sat up.

Caroline glanced at her watch. "Well, if you can keep it under fifteen minutes, the rest of your day will stay on track. It's almost 11:15 now; at 11:30 you're due to meet with Evelyn Vaughn, from the 28th Amendment. That includes lunch and however long you want to spend with her afterwards. Then you're signing correspondence and making some decisions about your calendar, and then ... *then* you are free to go!" It was Thanksgiving Day eve, and everything was winding down early. "'The world is your oyster,' if that's an appropriate use of your American aphorism."

There was a knock on the doorpost and Jeremy stuck his head in. "Anyone home?"

"Greetings, greetings, come in please." Victor stood up and waved Jeremy in, and then nodded a silent thanks to Caroline. She dispensed a low-handed wave to Jeremy as they crossed paths, and exited into her adjoining office.

As always, even on the day before Thanksgiving, even in LA in seventy-five-degree weather, Jeremy was wearing a suit and tie. He was divorced; he didn't know how to match sport clothes, so he stuck with what he knew. At sixty-six he was a year older than Victor, and his hair even thinner, but it drove Victor crazy that Jeremy kept his thirty-two-inch waist and his tapered shirts without limiting his food intake or exercising at all. Jeremy attributed it all to his fast metabolism, which Victor agreed must be true. He walked rapidly, talked rapidly, and was constantly on the alert, always observing, evaluating, processing. When he was really busy even his body language seemed spring-loaded.

Now Victor was sure Jeremy's grin was a little too contrived to be genuinely celebratory. He was masking something. A shoe was about to drop, but it wouldn't be anything *really* terrible, otherwise there would be no grin at all. "Should I be seated for any reason?" Victor asked, standing beside his desk, still in his socks. "Are you the bearer of any dramatic news?"

Jeremy immediately saw his friend's distress. "Sit, stand, levitate, do as you please. Nothing I have to say is going to make you faint." He came over and extended his fist to Victor across the desk for their traditional bump-grind.

Victor shot him a disbelieving stare and Jeremy laughed. "What do you want me to say? Actually, the reason I've come by is because of something that's going on with *me* that I think you should know about. It's not all about *you*, you know."

This was said in good humor, and Victor took it that way, but it had its zing. "Got it. By all means, lay it on me. Are you okay? Your kids are okay?"

"Everyone was intact and thriving the last I checked." Jeremy pulled from the breast pocket of his suit jacket a stapled packet of sheets that he unfolded and passed across the glass tabletop.

"These are your hourlies from when, this morning?" Victor tried focusing on the small print, and began to paw at the papers scattered on his desk to find his reading glasses.

"Indeed they are. You don't need to read them now--I'll explain everything. I brought them because they outline a sequence of events."

"I see here the call from Clinton. I'll certainly want to hear about that."

"All will be revealed, but in proper order, please."

"Okay, I'm all yours."

"So, you know about my coincidence condition, right? My attraction to extremely unlikely coincidences?"

"Of course, no need to explain." Beginning in his early adult years, Jeremy came to recognize that he encountered astonishing, often outrageously implausible coincidences far more frequently than most people, and everyone who knew him knew it was true. As a hobby he documented these "coincidence events," as he called them, in a private blog that he shared with his close friends and family.

"Well, this entire morning has been one continuous coincidence. This will definitely end up as an entry in my blog. I could actually just paste in a copy of my hourlies."

“How so? What happened?”

“Starting with the 8:30am Security Memo”-- Jeremy gestured to the papers Victor was scanning--“everything that I touched for the rest of the morning, every phone call, every e-mail, everything I have handled today up until this very minute has all been about you running for President.”

Victor kept an impassive expression. If this was what it was all about, he could relax. “I thought you said this was something about you, that it wasn’t all about me.”

"This *is* about me. It's about my morning. I didn't engineer these calls and e-mails; they all came to me from different, independent sources, in the space of a few hours. There could not possibly have been any collusion or coordination. I know you don't want to run for President, and I didn't come here to change your mind. But when I encounter a coincidence like this I sit up and take notice. And, to get to the heart of the matter, at least one of the calls I took has public repercussions that you'll need to address."

“Uh-oh, here it comes! I knew I was in trouble! *Now* you’ve got my attention.” Victor finally found his reading glasses and slipped them on. He focused on the first page. “Okay, I see the security review here. What does this have to do with me running for President?”

“Nothing, on the face of it, but it starts the whole ball rolling. Stay with me here. This was a technical report I ordered to re-evaluate the Threat Index we have assigned to our friend Morley James in the *real* White House,” Jeremy said, referring to President Burton Grove’s theocratic Chief of Staff. “As you know, we’ve identified him as someone who might try to sabotage or close down *The Oval Office*. The hypothesis being evaluated was that James’s motivation to act against us might be increased because of recent events in the Middle East.”

Victor understood this issue right away. In the past few months, the Grove Administration had suffered numerous major setbacks in the Middle East, the most visible being the assassination of Saudi Arabia's Prime Minister. This was the third PM in a row to be killed; he had only been in the position for five months, and before he took the job it had been vacant for over a year. And in Egypt, the elections so ardently encouraged and supported by the Administration ended

up giving fundamentalist clerics outright control of Parliament, and the stage was now set for a showdown with the military, *a là* Algeria.

During this same period, *The Oval Office* had been reeling out a subplot about a Middle East peace initiative that President Alvin Bosco (portrayed by Victor) hatches one evening over dinner with a brainy, Democratic ex-President named Wendell Chapman--to any sentient observer a Bill Clinton stand-in.

After plying him with wine, President Bosco recruits Chapman to serve as America's *ex-officio* emissary to the Islamic clerical world. Chapman agrees to the assignment, but insists that nothing be announced until he's had an opportunity to prepare for it. He then begins intensive training in Arabic language, and devotes most of his other waking hours to studying Islamic history and culture. Various highlights of his education, conveniently dispensed by State Department experts acting as private tutors, are scripted into numerous episodes of *The Oval Office* over several weeks, in effect delivering a survey course on Islam to their viewers. Finally, after weeks of preparation, Chapman begins making private overtures to Islamic leaders of all sects, flying off to dozens of countries to meet with them in person--and ultimately persuades most to attend an Islamic Unity Conference where terrorism and suicide bombing are to be publicly renounced. In the same week that the Unity Conference was portrayed on *The Oval Office*, the marked Saudi Prime Minister was incinerated by a spectacularly powerful roadside bomb that killed twenty-three other people.

Because of the timing, it was inevitable that the PC crowd--pundits and columnists, in Jeremy's lingo--would end up comparing *The Oval Office's* fictional happy ending to the somewhat grim reality faced by the Grove Administration. When comment was solicited from *The Oval Office*, reporters were referred to their stock legal disclaimer, which was included as both static text and simultaneous voice-over, at the beginning of every episode: "The characters and events portrayed in *The Oval Office* are the exclusive product of our writers' imaginations. Any resemblance to real people or actual events is unintended and coincidental." When Deputy Press Secretary Gale Rose was asked if the White House had any comment, she replied with a

statement that had obviously been prepared in advance: "We believe *The Oval Office* is blurring the lines between entertainment and the serious business of diplomacy and national security."

Jeremy--who, before coming to work for Victor in 2016, had been Chief Counsel to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for twenty-five years--had highly refined senses when it came to interpreting official statements of this type. To him, it was a bludgeoning, an alarming escalation not only of rhetoric but of actual threat--hence his request for the security review.

"It's irrelevant," Jeremy said to Victor, "what the conclusion of the report was. They did end up increasing the Threat Index, but it doesn't matter. The point I want to get to is that after reading the report, I sat back and remarked to myself how absurd this whole situation is. Here you are, a fictional President with real leadership ability and practical policies, and we're stuck with a *real* President whose world view is a fiction and whose policies are a disaster. So this starts me thinking about you running for President."

"Jeremy, I'm not going to run for President. We've been through this. Why are we even talking about this?"

"No, no, no! That's not it. Stick with this. All I'm saying is that after I read the report, I was *thinking* about you running for President, but at that point I had no intention of visiting you this morning. I was just filing it away, planning to lay it on you at some carefully selected moment."

"So what happened?"

"So now, look back at the hourlies. I was on the report until 8:48am, when the call from Bill Clinton comes in, a call for you that you sent to me."

"I get it," Victor said, nodding, "he was calling to talk to me about running."

"*Voila!* He was in finest form, I might add, positively oozing charm and persuasion. He insisted that I arrange a meeting with you. By the end of the call, he had framed that as my assignment; it was my job to get you to lunch or dinner with him sometime soon, within the next week, and the fate of all of humanity rested on it."

"Let me guess again: he suggests that I have a moral obligation to run for President."

“We didn’t get that far, but you're going to find there are a lot people--me included--who feel that way.”

“Oh spare me.”

“I will spare you. For now. I’m here to tell you about my morning, right? Just be here for me, okay?”

“I’m here for you, Jeremy.” Victor could not suppress his grin.

“So, next on the list”--Jeremy pointed toward the paper in Victor’s hand--“is an e-mail from Gordon Kramer,” who was *The Oval Office’s* private pollster and a closely guarded secret. “The e-mail has a link to the still-unreleased results of a McKesson poll he got hold of. I didn’t ask him for this poll; he never mentioned it to me before. He just sent it to me with a note that he thought I might find it of interest. The poll showed you at the top of a list of six potential candidates for next year.”

"Who were the other... actually, you know what? Skip that, don't answer that. I don't want to know about polls. Who's next on your list?"

“Hold it, I’m not finished yet with Kramer. At this point I started to suspect that one of my coincidence events might be starting up, so I called Kramer to find out why it was that he sent me this e-mail, and in any event I wanted to make sure there was no perception, anywhere, that we were commissioning this kind of poll. He assured me that we were not, but pointed out that virtually everyone else was. The e-mail, he claims, was completely his idea--an FYI thing. He thought I might like to know about it, especially since he knows we don’t do this poll. At the end, he asked me if it was possible that you might run, and wanted me to tell you that according to him, you could win. I of course quickly denied that you had any interest."

“Got it. Okay, who’s next . . . Walter Trask called? The software guy who bought Gulf Pemblico? Why does *he* want me to run for President?”

“Based on my one conversation with him, I can’t say I know *why* he wants you to run, but he wants you to run badly enough to launch a Draft Glade campaign, and to drop a pretty piece of change into it for starters."

"You're not serious."

Jeremy raised an eyebrow, but said nothing.

"How did you handle it? You of course told him I was not a candidate and would not be a candidate."

"His call was not to consult with you. It was, as he said, a courtesy to let you know what he is doing. He is announcing it for tomorrow's papers--a brilliant stroke, actually. Thanksgiving is the perfect day to pull a stunt like this. There's no other news, it'll be all over the headlines, and everybody's gathered together at big family events where this kind of news travels fast."

Victor leaned back in his chair, expressing no outward sign of respiration, much less any verbal reaction. Jeremy made no effort to fill the silence.

"Is there anyone else involved with it?" Victor asked. "This guy by himself is a lightweight."

"I'm not aware of him being connected to anything or anyone bigger, but it doesn't matter. He's putting in twenty million dollars to start it up, which . . . "

"Jesus, twenty million dollars?" Victor's voice diminished to a croak.

" . . . which would suggest he plans to buy some heavyweight talent, and *a lot* of media. You underestimate your draw as a candidate, or as a non-candidate, I should say."

"I don't underestimate or overestimate, because I'm *not* a candidate, and I'm *not going to be* a candidate." Victor paused, and Jeremy again let it ride.

"Why do I have to do anything about it?" Victor pleaded. "I could ignore it completely. My schedule is packed--I don't have time for anything else."

"Victor, Victor! *Vey iz mir!*" Jeremy moaned, rocking his head between his hands. "Leave aside for now the fact that *the press is gonna fuckin' lay siege to this place*. Don't you see, the bigger danger is the Administration? This Trask thing is just going to fuel their paranoia about you as a political opponent. Talk about Threat Reviews!"

Victor sat back in his chair, perfectly aghast.

"Also," Jeremy continued, "you should consider the possibility that *really* doing nothing--not responding *at all*--may have the opposite of your intended effect. The silence might be construed as vacillation by you."

"Okay, I got it, I got it," Victor snapped. "Jesus, *son-of-a-bitch*." Pause. "Who's next on your list? This is about *you*, remember?"

"Absolutely. Look at the log, you'll see. The next call I took was from Carla Sanders."

"Of the DNC."

"The same."

"Well you know what I think of her. If I *were* running, I wouldn't *want* her endorsement."

"Notice she didn't even try to reach you--she called me directly."

"She's known you for two decades!"

"We're both native Alabamans; it's a bond. Anyhow, her take on it is slightly different. She wants you to run, but recognizes that you really don't want to. If you don't, she believes you must be persuaded--pressured is the word she used--to endorse someone else. A Democrat of course."

"Okay, okay, who's next? How many people called you this morning about me running for President?"

"Including the e-mails, a total of eight so far." Jeremy looked at his watch. "By now there could be more. I left my office about fifteen minutes ago."

"Okay, just tell me who the eight are. I get the picture." Victor scanned the hourlies, trying to pick out the names.

"Well, there's me first, with my security report. Then, coming in order after that are: Bill Clinton, Gordon Kramer, Walter Trask, Carla Sanders, Admiral Corbett, and then Tom Friedman, who got advance notice from Trask and was calling to offer his support and to invite you to appear on his Sunday morning program. And then about fifteen minutes ago, Irving Liman."

Liman was the ninety-one-year-old *majordomo* of Democratic campaign consultants, whose sage advice Jeremy and Victor had relied on for years.

Victor raised his eyebrows for Liman, but didn't take the bait. "So tell me," he said, "what these coincidences mean when you encounter them. Are they an omen of anything? Is there a superstition or something I should know about?"

"No, nothing like that. This kind of stuff just happens to me all the time. It's the most bizarre thing."

"No kidding." Victor cast him a sincere look, and paused, thinking. Jeremy kept his eyes on Victor, but said nothing.

"So." Victor's tone changed the subject. "What you said earlier about public repercussions--you're referring to the Trask thing, this draft effort."

Jeremy nodded.

"What are your thoughts about this, and about this guy?"

"My personal thoughts are that I want to send him a donation and a letter of encouragement. Wearing my *Oval Office* hat, my thoughts are the following. A, you're not going to be able to stop him. He's going to go forward regardless of your reaction. B, if he's going to be out there doing his thing, we need to figure out what your most effective response would be. We will bring in the finest spinners to do our work for us. I know some great people for situations like this."

"I appreciate your sacrifice of personal feelings on my behalf. But I'm not running for President, so with that in mind, how do you think I should respond?"

"Your objective is . . . ?"

"To spend as little time on it as possible."

"Then let's just issue a stock denial through the press office. It needn't take a minute of your time."

"Jeremy, don't be coy. I'm serious about this; now will you advise me or not?"

“Of course, of course. Okay.” Jeremy paused and put on his most appreciative smile, masking an internal conflict that was, he knew, inevitable.

“I’ve only had a little while to consider this, but here’s where I’m at. As I said, I think the worst consequence of this is that, regardless of your statements, Trask's effort will raise your profile as a potential presidential candidate. That in turn will make the Administration see you and *The Oval Office* as even more of a threat. *Ergo*, my sense is that we should respond to Trask, immediately and publicly, with the strongest possible message that you are not a candidate and that they are wasting their time and money. If we emphasize the wasted money part, and we keep that up as the theme of our response, that might curtail their donations and maybe cause them to re-evaluate their position.”

“We also could run ads,” posited Victor, “cautioning people not to throw their money away.”

“You’re not serious!” This was a twist Jeremy had not foreseen.

“Why not? I would think that would be very effective.”

“You would actually spend money on advertising to stay *out* of political office?”

“Sort of gives ‘negative campaigning’ a whole new meaning, doesn’t it?” Victor was very pleased with himself.

Jeremy’s heart sank. He didn’t want to do anything that might preclude a last-minute run, and negative ads like this would do just that. “I don’t know that we’ll need to go that far, and we certainly don’t have to do that now. Right now we just need to be as outspoken as possible about your position. Are we in agreement on this?”

“Absolutely.” Victor loved having Jeremy in charge--he knew how to get things done. He was so *efficient*. “What do you recommend?”

Jeremy now came to the actual, ultimate, final moment of truth. He knew what outcome he wanted, he just wasn’t sure what to say in order to get it. He could only go with his gut.

“You are looking to spend as little time on this as possible, right? My recommendation is that I man the front lines. I’ll do the interview with Friedman on Sunday, and maybe take another as

well, just to cover more territory. I'm familiar with the format, I know a lot of the people, it will be fun for me. What *you* should do, behind the scenes, is call Trask and speak to him yourself, but not in a threatening or negative way. Maybe loosen him up a little. Do your charm thing, throw in a little humor, and then gently lay it on the line. You've convinced me that you're never going to run, and I desperately don't want to believe you. Maybe you can convince him too."

"That's all?"

"What do you mean?"

"That's all we're going to do? Two interviews and a phone call? I get the feeling there's a lot at stake here."

"There is, but that's all we *can* do for the next four days."

Victor plucked a bag of M&M's from a box on his desk, tore it open, dispensed several of the colored candies onto a note pad on his desk, and began tinkering with them. After some inscrutable twirling and rearranging, he shifted his gaze to Jeremy, who again made no effort to disrupt the quiet.

"How effective will you be denying my candidacy if you really want to see me running?"

Victor suddenly asked.

"If your question is 'can you trust me?' the answer is an unequivocal yes. If your question is 'am I the best person for the job,' the answer is an equivocal no. You would probably do it better, but I'm certainly the second-best person for the job. I think you'll be very satisfied with the result."

Victor resumed his rearrangement of the M&M's. Through the silence Jeremy noticed the chime of the elevator and, he thought, the subsequent faint hiss of the elevator doors opening and closing. How was that possible? He constructed a mental plan of the 9th Floor: the elevator had to be at least eighty feet away, and the sound would have to travel through three closed rooms--at least a half-dozen walls. The chime sound he could see getting through, but maybe the hissing was a phantom sound, something he heard because it was expected? Like the famous phantom limb syndrome? Subconsciously he filed the question for future research.

Victor interrupted his acoustic ruminations. “What do you think of *me* doing the interviews?”

Jeremy remained outwardly calm, but his adrenalin kicked in. This would be the best possible outcome! If Victor did the interviews himself, it wouldn't matter what he said about running. It would establish a public perception of Victor Glade as himself, the real Victor Glade, as opposed to President Alvin Bosco, his *Oval Office* persona. Jeremy saw this as an absolute prerequisite to any scenario of late entry into the race. He had not recommended it directly to Victor because he was sure Victor would have resisted; it was something that could only work if he came to it himself.

“On any issue that is important to you,” Jeremy replied carefully, “you will always be your own best advocate. I didn't recommend it because you said you wanted to spend as little time on this as possible, and I would certainly do an adequate job of it.”

Victor's reaction was a further relapse into silence, his thinking now fueled by the serial consumption of M&M's in some indiscernible color-coded sequence. He then said, suddenly, “Let's do it this way.” His voice took on a decisive timbre that Jeremy well recognized. “I'll take the interview with Friedman. I'm going to be in Philadelphia anyway for the Thanksgiving holiday--it's easy enough to stop in DC on my way back, do the deed in person. Much more effective, I find, than those remote links--whatever they call them.”

Jeremy veered into a mental jig, but caught himself and recaptured his focus. Now was not the time to blow it. “It's up to you,” he said. “If you want to put in the time, you'll at least be left with the feeling that you did all that you could do at a crucial moment.”

“I'm taking time now because I can see that if this gets out of hand it could take a lot more time later. However,” Victor continued, “since you obviously are willing, I would ask that you also do an interview. Call your friend Fred Sherman at CNN and see if he can get you on one of their shows—*Dateline*, or whatever it is.”

“I think it's likely, after Trask's announcement hits the Web, we'll have a number of invitations to choose from.”

"One more thing," Victor added. I'd also like us to come up with a formal statement, press-release style, not more than a page, that declares my position and makes it official. I want you to do a first draft because I want it to have a legalistic sound and I want to leave absolutely no room for interpretation. We also need it to make sure that you and I are saying exactly the same thing."

Jeremy nodded. "I'll get a draft to you first thing Friday morning, which is the next day I'm picking things up. Speaking of press releases, you'll see in my hourlies, towards the end, a link to the press release that Trask has prepared. It hasn't been made public yet, but it will be by tomorrow. You should read it so you at least know how they're making their case."

"Great, I can't wait." Victor rolled his eyes.

"Is there anything else?" Jeremy asked, getting up out of his chair and stretching himself in a backwards arch. Victor also pushed his chair back and stood up.

"Actually there is. Remember I'm meeting with Evelyn Vaughn today? The woman who runs the 28th Amendment organization?"

Jeremy nodded. "You're going to talk about writing the 28th Amendment into the show, if I understand correctly?"

"Well, we only want to do it if it's going to help her cause, which is why your take on things might be valuable for both of us, I think. Can I get you to join us for a little while?"

"Absolutely, it will be an honor to meet her." Jeremy looked at his watch. "I have a conference call with Paramount in a few minutes, and I need to be in my office for that. As far as I know it should be quick. My next thing I can push back. But I absolutely need to be out by 12:15 for a luncheon outside. Why don't you . . . if you don't mind, the way to maximize my time with you would be to bring her to my office."

"Excellent plan. I see its inherent *efficiency*." He extended his fist over his desk and Jeremy tapped it with his own.

After Jeremy left, Victor dropped down into his chair again, picked up the hourlies, remounted his reading glasses, and found the Web link to Trask's press release. He tapped the URL into the open tablet on his desk and it came up instantly:

For Release 11/20/2019 at 20:00 hours.

COMMITTEE FORMED TO DRAFT VICTOR GLADE FOR 2020 PRESIDENTIAL RACE

Technology entrepreneur Walter Trask and other interested parties have announced the formation of a Political Action Committee (PAC) called "2020 Vision." The Committee is dedicated to bringing the writer/actor Victor Glade into the 2020 Presidential Race as a Draft Candidate, and is soliciting funds from the general public in furtherance of this effort.

Simultaneous to its formation, Trask has made an initial \$20 million contribution to 2020 Vision.

"I have taken this step," Trask says, "because I am convinced that Victor Glade is the only widely recognized public figure who has the ability and credibility to lead this country back to greatness, as a role model and guiding light for other nations."

"The first objective of this Committee is to learn how broad and deep the public's support for a Glade candidacy is, Trask stated. If we can demonstrate overwhelming support, we hope that will inspire him to seriously consider running."

"Glade's experience makes him by far the most qualified candidate," says Trask. He cites Glade's two terms in Congress, in 1986 and 1988, representing the 1st District of Massachusetts, as proof of his political savvy and electability. "It is important to remember," says Trask, "that Victor Glade is not just an actor, he is central to every episode of The Oval Office. He's the lead writer and approves every script that is produced. All you need to do to see his vision of a better America is to watch the show. I think it's perfectly natural that Americans would want their government to function the way Glade portrays it, and I anticipate an overwhelming response to our draft effort."

Further information can be found, and donations can be made, at <http://www.2020Vision.com>