

# FORT MYERS FLORIDA WEEKLY®

IN THE KNOW. IN THE NOW.

WEEK OF DECEMBER 30, 2020-JANUARY 5, 2021

www.FloridaWeekly.com

Vol. XIV, No. 38 • FREE

INSIDE



### Keeping your culture

Businesses can help their culture thrive outside the office during COVID. **A25** ▶



### Writing challenge

Florida Weekly's 10th annual winners announced. **B1** ▶



### House Hunting

Take a look at this gem at 4151 Park Shore Blvd. N., Naples. **A29** ▶



### Florida politics

Governor's response to COVID-19 dominates debate. **A8** ▶

Download our FREE App today



Available on the iTunes and Android App Store.

Good riddance, 2020.

# Hello, 2021!

**T**he year, like other years running out their course, launched only 12 months ago. But that was in a different era, a time we remained innocent of a disease that would soon blanket the globe, topping the significant tally of terrible events The Universe produced in a super-storm of biological, environmental and social disruption.

SEE 2021, A10 ▶

By Evan Williams • ewilliams@floridaweekly.com

PRSR STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
FORT MYERS, FL  
PERMIT NO. 715



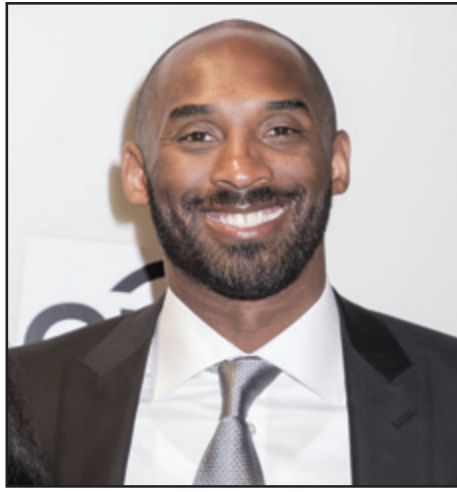
**FREE SHIPPING TO SOUTHWEST FLORIDA!**

**BROTHERS**

Lighting & Fan Gallery  
www.BrothersLighting.net  
239-277-0333



**Lighting & Fans!**



Pictured clockwise, Quentin Tarantino and the cast of "Once Upon a Time In Hollywood," the late basketball hero Kobe Bryant, Kansas City Chiefs fans and President Donald Trump found themselves amid the moods and moments of 2020.

SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

## 2021

From page 1

If 2020 was neck-and-neck with 2001 in a ranking for the most hated year of the new millennium, it also was the most thrilling and transformative, a salacious movie featuring an invisible serial killer stalking our movements while an existential chasm opened and nearly everyone, finally, got a look into The Abyss — which looked back, shrugging. Or at least that's how it might seem in the mind of a writer prone to dramatization.

This story is a diversion from many end-of-year summaries, somewhere between the personal and the public, empirical and imaginative; or as the French say, "Entre Chien Et Loup" ("Between Dog and Wolf") — in the fading twilight when, according to the Loft Artists Association (loftartists.org), "the light is such that it becomes difficult to distinguish between a dog and a wolf, between friend and foe, between known and unknown."

What a ride this year has been. Here's a look back at some of its defining ideas, moods and moments, followed by a brief glance at what might await us in the next 52-week adventure.

🐾 Basketball hero Kobe Bryant, his daughter, six friends and the pilot of their helicopter all died in a crash in January. The cover of the New York Post was chilling, its spare, hard headline filling half the page with just four words:

LOST IN THE FOG. For a while as the lockdowns began, before any vaccine was imminent, so were we all.

🐾 In the Indigo Room bathroom, in Fort Myers, I was confronted by a tombstone scrawled in black Sharpie over the green paint on the wall above the urinals. Its epitaph read, "R.I.P. Everyone." Funny and true enough at the time, in January, it's now the heavy-handed foreshadowing of a morbid clairvoyant.

🐾 Quentin Tarantino should have won the best director Oscar in February for "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood" and not Bong Joon Ho for "Parasite." But watching Joon Ho accept the award became one of the highlights of the year when he applauded fellow director Martin Scorsese, who also was up for the best director award ("The Irishman"). It was the old guard passing the torch to the new in so many ways. A magnanimous Scorsese smiled and nodded, though earlier had appeared to fall asleep during Eminem's musical performance. Joon Ho said that Scorsese wrote him a letter after the Oscar ceremony, telling him, "You've done well. Now rest. But don't rest too long."

🐾 The Kansas City Chiefs won the Super Bowl with a spectacular comeback victory over the San Francisco 49ers. Later, professional sports teams played to vast, empty stadiums.

🐾 It was a year with extremes and disparities. The lockdown situation might suit introverts; some people were thriving. For so many others, it could be a

nightmare if they lost a job or a loved one. Maybe they were stuck inside with abusive parents, or they were a single mom trying to figure out how to care for a disabled child who ordinarily would be in school. Each of Earth's 8 billion people experienced 2020 both together and in their own way.

🐾 The pandemic seemed to magnify even ordinary events, transforming the creation of a rock album or sometimes even a trip to the supermarket into what felt like a semi-heroic act.

🐾 The X album "Alphabetland" was my favorite new album of the pandemic. It was inspiring to see all the original members of this 1970s and '80s Los Angeles band in a photo in the L.A. Times, back after 27 years and still forces of energy and creativity.

🐾 From the endless stream of events, some minds culled the worst. You could conflate what you were actually going through with merely reported events into a powerfully attractive apocalyptic vision. It was easy to pile it on, zombified by the glow of a computer screen that kept asking you to see the worst — the dead bodies, the violence, and then one day after avoiding the store for months you could find yourself wiping with paper towels and then washcloths and finally just grabbing dirty clothes — even if mostly you were managing to navigate the changes fairly well, or even finding silver linings amid the gloom.

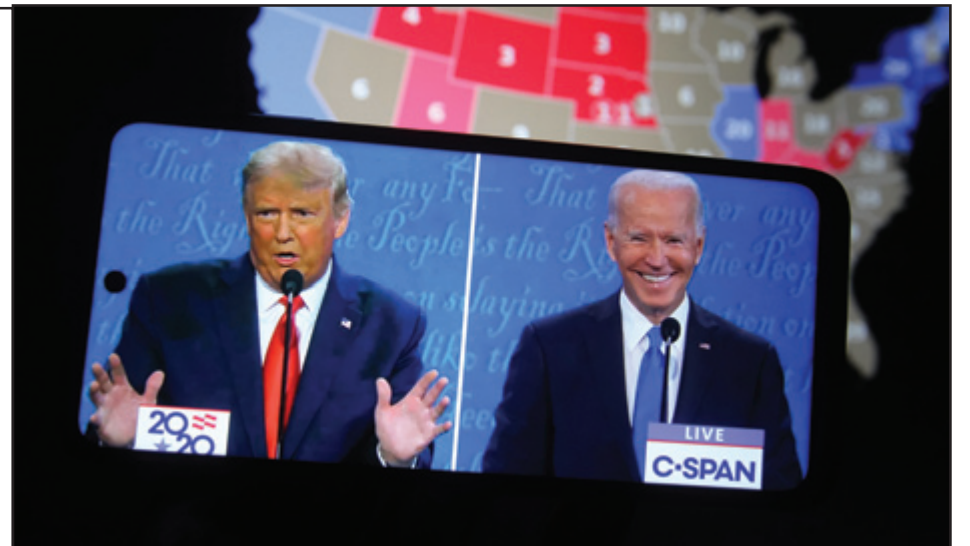
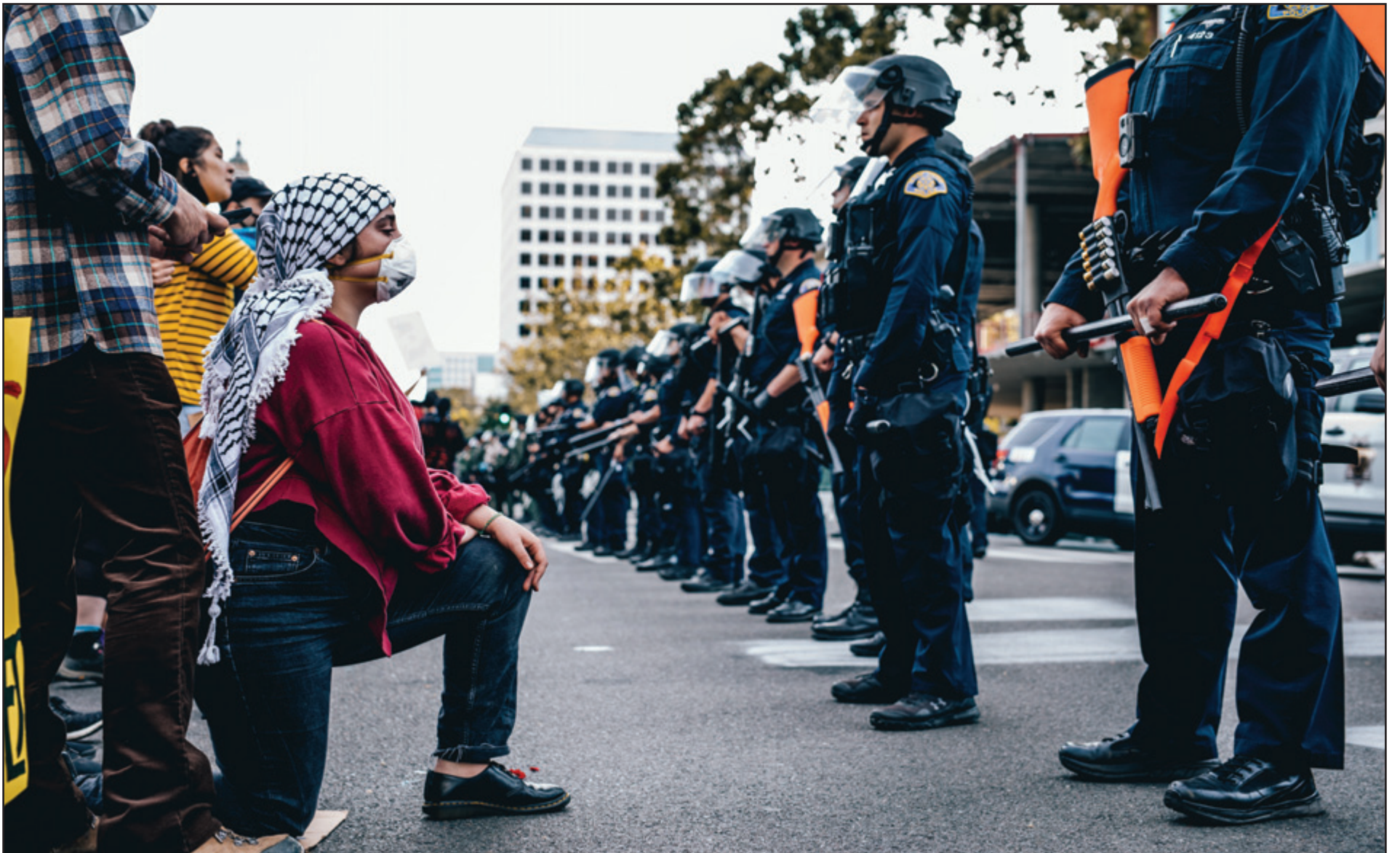
🐾 One of the interesting celebrities

I followed off and on in 2020 was Lena Dunham, the creator of HBO's "Girls," and a fearless, outspoken artist. Page Six would report things like "Lena Dunham emerges in an eccentric outfit," showing a paparazzi photograph of Dunham in a swirl of yellow and pink fabrics, a sort of hospital room chic. Anything associated with her was guaranteed to be smart and diverting or sharp or funny or even annoying — it was all part of a package that you bought or you didn't. And I did.

🐾 People took up peculiar pastimes. The horror novelist Stephen King tweeted in April that he was "studying the etymology of 'Great googly-moogly,' a phrase that's giving autocorrect spasms. Appears to have been first uttered by Willie Dixon in a blues song called 'Goin' Down Slow,' but I also found it in a Snickers commercial.

🐾 CNN blurred into a series of disconnected phrases: "specious contention," "a matter of accepted wisdom," "frivolous and dangerous," "interbranch conflict," "Thus, as professor Jonathan Turkey has persuasively explained," "It ain't nothin' until I call it," "indeed in response to demand," "litigated for months and in some cases, years."

🐾 Lockdowns began in March with the first huge downward hill of the roller-coaster, screaming with mass layoffs and imminent morbidity. It seemed we were headed for a level of suffering that most Americans, especially younger generations, had not witnessed in their lifetime. That may have turned out to be true for many. And then suddenly: into a dark tunnel.



Black Lives Matter protests, inappropriate Zoom behavior and absurd politics also helped define 2020.

SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

Wink News television reporters conducted a poll one afternoon in downtown Fort Myers, sometime in March. How concerned are you about the pandemic? Very, moderately, or not concerned. I checked “moderately.” The virus is even less deadly than the flu, I opined hopefully, in ignorance.

George Floyd’s death in May was like a public execution, the video circulating online for all to see. “I can’t breathe,” Floyd famously said as he died, a mantra echoed in protests across the country, at times violent but largely peaceful gatherings. In Fort Myers in Centennial Park, people took turns at a mic sharing emotional stories about racism. Later one night, the crowd marched to the Fort Myers police station, where a circle formed around dancers in the street. Protest art began to fill galleries across the state.

Donald Trump remained one of the most divisive and possibly misunderstood figures in American history, drawing fierce public hatred and love — along with nearly 24/7 news coverage — leaving little room for calmer, more nuanced

perspectives on who he is and what he stood for.

Wearing a mask took on political and personal double meanings, with Republican/Trump supporters tending to flaunt not wearing one as a provocative stance on personal freedom and Democratic/Biden supporters studiously following the advice of public health officials. The masks also became a symbol of the “masks” we wear every day at home or at work, and increasingly on Zoom video calls.

More and more people were “cancelled” for not being wide enough awake.

Bread became the unofficial food of the pandemic. People baked so much bread that some stores sold out of yeast.

Some called it The Pause or The Great Reset. After the first series of lockdowns began, the relentless social and commercial pressures that normally existed dissipated. An economic system forever vying for your attention and money were gone. There was no one to be offended if you missed a cocktail party

or a show. It was a rare chance to define what we really need to be happy compared to what we think we need. Even Amazon deliveries had slowed to a crawl. Los Angeles magazine ran a feature story about how the animals at the zoo were happier and thriving more than ever without the regular crowds of people to gawk at them. Polluted air around the world momentarily cleared. But soon the whole socio-economic structure, some of it migrated online, more or less resumed. And a toxic, heating atmosphere is cumulative over years.

School was put on hold, causing delight, hand wringing and trying recalibrations of effort for teachers and students suddenly thrust into digital-learning classrooms.

The media’s insatiable hunger for death culminated with The New York Times running a cover filled with the names and one line obituaries of the dead: the first 100,000 people in the U.S. to die of the virus. As of Sunday, the count of victims dying from COVID-related causes in the country was about 330,901, with 21,212 dead in Florida.

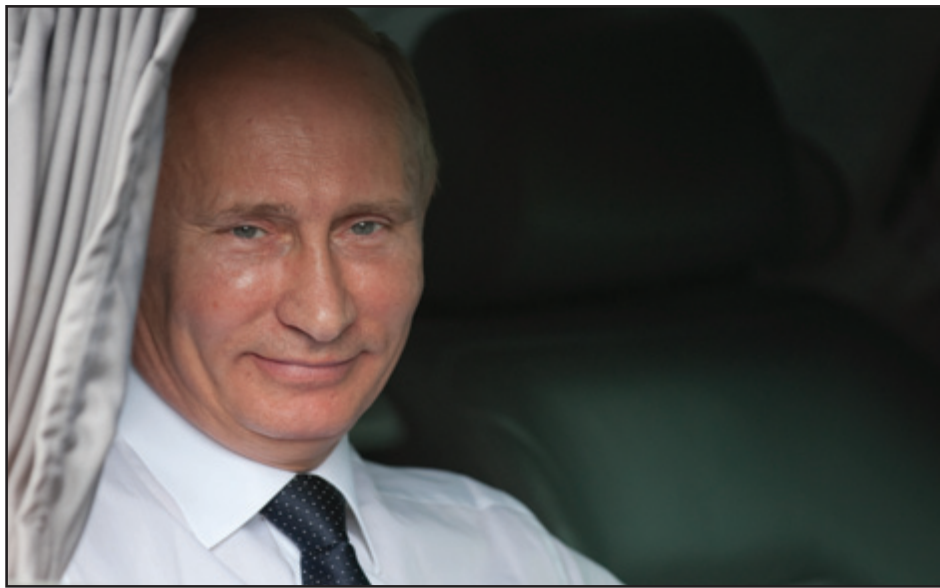
Even as the number of people tagged by the virus or dead from it rose day by day, the majority of us remained free from its worst symptoms. The country, let alone the world, is so massive it was easy to feel disconnected from the news of other peoples’ suffering.

“Cataclysmic events, whatever their outcome, are as rare and transporting as a great love. Bombings, revolutions, earthquakes, hurricanes — anyone who has passed through one and lived, if they are honest, will tell you that even in the depths of their fear there was an exhilaration such as had been missing from their lives until then,” says Ana Mendendez, quoted in an epigraph for “The Good Life,” by Jay McInerney. She forgot to mention pandemics.

An underlying thrum of dread suffused every-day acts of going out in public.

Zoom calls and online meetings prevailed, sometimes giving us a fascinating or even disturbing peek into people’s homes, and lives. New Yorker writer and

SEE 2021, A12 ►



SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

2021 likely will continue to see a crisis in commercial real estate in places like New York City, a rise in Putinians and an ambitious and determined Chinese.

# 2021

From page 11

CNN commentator Jeffrey Toobin was caught masturbating on a Zoom call and promptly disappeared. His mistake was somewhat shocking, but also funny and human. With an apparently stern Puritanical streak, The New Yorker fired him when it could have just laughed.

☛ For someone known to defy mortality by doing his own death-defying stunts, the movie star and producer Tom Cruise turned out to be a stickler for COVID-19 safety protocols. When he discovered cast or crewmembers on “Mission Impossible: 7” were failing to social distance after months of setbacks, he completely lost his shit, bellowing at about 50 of them in one of his most memorable performances.

“They’re back there in Hollywood making movies right now because of us!” he shouted. “Because they believe in us and what we’re doing! I’m on the phone with every f\*\*\*ing studio at night, insurance companies, producers, and they’re looking at us and using us to make their movies. We are creating thousands of jobs, you mother f\*\*\*ers! I don’t ever want to see it again, ever! And if you don’t do it, you’re fired. If I see you do it again you’re f\*\*\*ing gone!”

If only elected officials had taken COVID-19 so seriously.

☛ In 2021, maybe we can rise above

the past, love in the present and embrace the future.

## A glance forward

By Roger Williams • [rwilliams@floridaweekly.com](mailto:rwilliams@floridaweekly.com)

Since any future always springs from its antecedent past, nothing we say about the New Year can escape shades of the old. Fortunately, 2021 will begin equipped with one of the greatest accomplishments in the history of medicine, a seeming 2020 “miracle,” as it’s being hailed: two vaccines, each more than 90% effective against COVID-19, invented, produced and distributed to the first of what will be hundreds of millions if not billions of humans, in a mere 11 months.

That’s a world record. Previous vaccines took many years to bring to the stricken masses.

The first to reach the goal of distribution to people was created by a husband-wife team of physician-researchers, Drs. Ugur Sahim and Özlem Türeci, at the German-based company they founded, BioNTech. They’ve partnered with the American biopharmaceutical giant, Pfizer, making a vaccine different from any previous vaccine because it uses messenger RNA, or ribonucleic acid.

RNA combines with DNA, another nucleic acid, as one of the four essential macromolecules in all known life forms (the three others are lipids, proteins and

carbohydrates). The mRNA can move — from the cell nucleus to the solution that fills cells, known as cytoplasm. There, proteins are made. BioNTech’s vaccine, known as BNT162, deploys synthetic mRNA that reaches and uses the body’s proteins to make “fake” viruses resembling COVID-19. That kicks off a strong immune response and prevents the real virus from reproducing, in a person suddenly stricken with COVID-19.

Other vaccines used to slow or stop diseases such as smallpox, hepatitis, polio and current flu shots all depend on virus particles that are either partly alive or dead — attenuated, as they call it, but not synthetic. They take much longer to develop, they may be less safe, and they can’t be produced as rapidly.

The second vaccine coming roughly a week later and also approved for distribution in the U.S. has been made by a Cambridge, Mass.-based firm, Moderna, in collaboration with the federal government.

BioNTech, meanwhile, partnered not just with Pfizer, but with China’s Fosun Pharma, which means its market will be worldwide. Last month, the company value skyrocketed to \$21 billion. Its owners and founders — now in their mid-50s and among Germany’s 10 richest people — still live in a modest flat not far from their lab in Mainz, where they spent the last decade looking for cancer therapies. They don’t even own a car. Instead of driving, they pedal to work, apparently, on bicycles.

If you’re going to save humanity in 2021, might as well reduce your emissions to near zero while you’re doing it.

☛ And speaking of the Chinese, they’re ambitious and determined — determined to brand the 21st century as theirs, just as we branded the 20th, “The American Century.” In mid-December they executed a nearly flawless unmanned moon landing that collected almost 4.5 pounds of lunar surface material and returned to Earth, the first time they’ve effectively challenged the American precedent in space. You saw it here first: Before 2021 wraps up, President Joe Biden will announce an ambitious, multiyear plan to put a manned expedition on Mars, in a Kennedy-esque nod to once-upon-a-time American ingenuity, determination and wealth in a race to the moon.

☛ The Russians are coming — again. Or more precisely, the Putinians, who already came without our knowing.

This month we’ve learned that a Russian intelligence agency, the SVR, has hacked and for six to nine months had access to or even administrative control over hundreds of U.S. companies, along with federal agencies that include the Department of Homeland Security. Their espionage tradecraft has resulted in “among the greatest (American) intelligence failures of modern times.”

Thomas Bossert, President Trump’s former homeland security adviser, wrote in a New York Times editorial, “the magnitude of this ongoing attack is hard to overstate.”

So what should we expect in 2021? Some large and unexplained investments by American companies in vodka distilleries or caviar manufacturers or country



SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

The new year will usher in President Biden with a new administration. We are likely to see plenty of new Supreme Court decisions. And who knows what to expect next from Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan Markle?

homes for Mr. Putin and his pals?  
 No.  
 We can expect Mr. Biden to do what Mr. Bossert recommends, and hope the same for Mr. Trump.  
 "President Trump is on the verge of leaving behind a federal government, and perhaps a large number of major industries, compromised by the Russian government. He must use whatever leverage he can muster to protect the United States and severely punish the Russians."  
 That's in the first three weeks of the New Year. And Mr. Biden "must begin his planning to take charge of this crisis. He has to assume that communications about this matter are being read by Russia, and assume that any government data or email could be falsified."  
 Expect difficulty, confusion, embarrassment, courtesy of the Russians, along with a large tab to pay for the replacement of our networks. But don't expect us to emerge from the mire by the end of this year, or for a few more.  
 Associate Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died Sept. 18, 2020. On Sept. 29, President Trump appointed Amy Coney Barrett, the third

in a trio of conservative justices including Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh ushered by Mr. Trump to the front-row of the American experiment, and given a seat for life on the nine-member Supreme Court.  
 In 2021 and conceivably for the next couple of decades, at least, we can expect court decisions more likely to inhibit personal choice in the reproductive rights of women; to support less regulation of industry and in corporate life; to allow less constricting interpretations of the Second Amendment; and to retain the notion that corporations can be counted as individuals in our political rules of the road, hugely increasing the likelihood that elections can go to the richest man. Or woman.  
 There's a crisis in the commercial real estate industry in New York City — all those high-rise office buildings in midtown.  
 And New York's probably not the only place, as companies and their legions of workers abandon traditional notions of office careers for the zoom and homework opportunities revealed by pandemic lockdowns.  
 Should they be turned into apart-

ments? Yeah, sure. Why not?  
 But let's not complain when the recent-year rates of 900 or 1,000 new arrivals to Florida each day increases, because some of those folks figure they can work from Palm Beach or Port Charlotte just as easily as from West 34th Street in Manhattan.  
 This will be a real good year for Realtors, property owners and sellers in the Sunshine State.  
 It's going to be hot, maybe the hottest year on record. Why? In part because the factors that contribute to climate change are not only accumulative, they're accelerating. So, while the air cleared in some polluted places where people drove less during the pandemic, providing some degree of comfort and control for our children requires immediate action now, by the country and the state, at a minimum.  
 We'll be reshaping and rejoining The Paris Accord or something like it, this year.  
 Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, the duke and duchess of Sussex, announced their plan in January and then actually carried it out starting in March: They left their palaces, their traditions of privilege, their preordained

lives as members of British royalty. They left Harry's siblings, father and grandparents, and joined the peasants — that's us. The result, perhaps, was a year of profound gloom and despair at Buckingham Palace.  
 Will the New Year see the invention of a new vaccine that could be administered through the muscle tissue of their now peasant shoulders, to bring them back to their senses in 2021?  
 We hope not. We fought a revolution, after all, over the notion that First, God didn't stick anyone in a palace because they're better than anyone else, in God's eyes; and Second, even if He did, they don't get to tax us arbitrarily.  
 We hope Harry and Meg like peasant food, or as Monty Python put it in a description of the peasant menu: "... Egg and bacon; egg sausage and bacon; egg and spam; egg bacon and spam; egg bacon sausage and spam; spam bacon sausage and spam; spam egg spam spam bacon and spam; spam sausage spam spam bacon spam tomato and spam ... or Lobster Thermidor a Crevette with a mornay sauce served in a Provençal manner with shallots and aubergines garnished with truffle pate, brandy and with a fried egg on top — and spam." ■