Janet Wu Looks Back on her Award-Winning Career as a Television Political News Reporter

By Christopher John Stephens

The landscape of Asian representation on Boston local television news was certainly different in the 1970s and 80s. Stalwarts like Chet Curtis, Jack Williams, John Henning, and Tom Ellis were the faces that brought viewers news of snowstorms, bus-ing and City Hall shenanigans in their stentorian tones and square-shouldered masculinity. Janet Wu’s appearance on the Boston media scene, first as a GBH State House reporter from 1978-1983 and then at WCVB from 1983 until her retirement in December 2022, was trailblazing for several reasons. She was the first woman on the job and the first Asian American. Her thirty-nine years as a fixture at WCVB and co-host of On The Record, demonstrated remarkable resiliency in a field where many on-camera reporters are shuffled around like a pack of playing cards.

Sampan recently had the opportunity to speak with Wu about her life and times on the job here in Boston. Wu is a 1972 graduate of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. She was a 1989 and 1998 recipient of the Edward R. Murrow award, and in 2001 and 2005 she was part of a team that won the Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in Television Political Journalism. In 2010, she was inducted into the Massachusetts Broadcasters Hall of Fame, and in 2011 received an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Emerson College.

SAMPAN: What was the spark that lit the journalist’s fire in you as a young woman?

Janet Wu: I was born in Shanghai and came to the U.S. as a child. In 1972, I graduated from the University of Michigan. I started my career in journalism in the mid-1970s. But I grew up in a family of journalists. My father was a journalist, and my mother was an author. I think I was exposed to journalism at an early age.

SAMPAN: In 1989, you were part of a team that won the Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in Television Political Journalism. What was it like to win such a prestigious award?

Janet Wu: It was a great honor. The award is given to the top journalists in the United States for their excellence in political reporting. To be recognized in such a way is a testament to the hard work and dedication that goes into journalism.

SAMPAN: You have been a trailblazer in the field of political journalism for several reasons. What do you think are some of the challenges that women of color face in this industry?

Janet Wu: Women of color face many challenges in this industry, including discrimination, lack of opportunity, and a lack of diversity in leadership positions. It's important to continue to push for diversity and inclusion in all aspects of media.

The Slowdown of Our Global Population: Social, Political, and Economic Anxieties

By Jeff Millman

In November of 2022 the world hit a plateau of 8 billion people. It only took about 12 years for the population to grow from 7 to 8 billion, matching the rapid growth of the past 50 years, but this may be the last time it grows so quickly. Global population growth is slowing; and the UN estimates it will take 15 years for another billion humans to be born, then 18 years for the next billion, then a slow 32 years for the next. Whatever the projections, the changing population drives reactions both of fear and hope.

In this new year, the United States marks a population of over 334 million, an increase of around 1.5 million since the beginning of 2022. According to the US Census Bureau, the combination of births, deaths, and net international migration to the US increases our population "by 1 person every 27 seconds."

Net international migration is particularly important for the population increase of the US: the Brookings Institution notes that immigration is essential for counteracting slow growth. They write that the US "is in the midst of unprecedented demographic stagnation," and that increased immigration would help to secure the growth of the young population.

The US Census Bureau predicts that beginning in 2030, because of population aging, immigration will overtake natural increase (the excess of births over deaths) as the primary driver of population growth for the country. The non-Hispanic White population is projected to shrink over coming decades as well, and the population of people who are "Two or More Races" is projected to be the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group, followed by Asians and Hispanics. The United States – a nation of immigrants in the first place – will be even more pluralistic than it is today.

The demographic turning points the US will face in the next few decades are, like other world population milestones, met with mixed reactions.
The pandemic has impacted many aspects of the US economy. We are struggling with some huge labor shortages. Studies have clearly identified the lack of immigrant workers as a major drain on the labor force. Immigrants have been contributing significantly to the US long before and since Covid in every field, but they are projected to be even more valuable as U.S. born workers move into retirement ages in the next few years and as other US born workers continue to show low labor participation levels. In 2022 alone, foreign-born workers have not only grown in larger numbers in the workforce, but some employers are desperately seeking them out to fill their labor shortages.

The labor shortage, especially after the pandemic, has changed production cost. It has “disrupted supply chains and other geopolitical events have limited the ability of suppliers to meet consumers’ demand,” the American Immigration Council reports. The United States labor shortage is making this imbalance worse, further increasing the price of goods and services to levels not seen in decades.

The meat and dairy industry has been seeking more immigrants on work visas and even requesting those visas to be extended. Immigrant workers have been central in America’s food supply conversation. The AIC explains, “As many workers — both U.S. and foreign-born — reach retirement age and leave the workforce, the meat and dairy industries will be increasingly hard-pressed to find enough workers. While meat and dairy employers are relying on the H-2A and H-2B visa programs to fill jobs with temporary foreign workers, these visa programs are seasonal and do not meet the needs of what are non-seasonal industries.” Lack of immigrant workers has forced higher labor costs causing some farmers and meatpacking plants to close, decreasing supply of meat and dairy products and leading to yet higher prices due to increased demand. Industry closures also threaten to financially harm many rural communities that rely on agricultural production for economic growth. As such, many meat and dairy owners are particularly interested in the movement to change seasonal visas for immigrant workers to year-round ones.

AIC reports 20% of the livestock production workforce are immigrants. The meatpacking industry sees 45.4% of their workers being foreign born, and in transportation, 26% are immigrants. The dairy sector has reported an even higher rate of immigrant workers, around 51%. Most foreign-born workers are young and thus help sustain the workforce by not reaching retirement age.

As the world moves faster into the technological age, the need for STEM workers to support the growth has increased in the US. Those in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields typically have the educational requirements for those jobs but the AIC found that immigrants exceed their American born counterparts in the STEM workforce in their preparation. ”Even among STEM workers, who are among the most highly educated workers in the United States, foreign-born workers stand out.” In 2018, while 67.3 percent of U.S.-born STEM workers held at least a bachelor’s degree, 86.5 percent of immigrant STEM workers held a bachelor’s or higher. Almost half, or 49.3 percent, of immigrant STEM workers held an advanced degree in 2019, compared to only 21.8 percent of U.S.-born STEM workers. With higher qualifications, it makes sense that the rate of immigrants in STEM is high. While women, both U.S. born and immigrants still see a lower percentage of involvement in STEM, the overall immigrant workforce in computer, math, and engineering has increased from 17.7% in 2000 to 26.1% in 2019. Overall STEM immigrant workers have increased by 44.5% between 2000 and 2019. With specific numbers by country, the AIC has detailed that “Immigrants from India formed the largest country of birth group among immigrant STEM workers, at 28.9 percent of all foreign-born STEM workers in 2019. There were also significant numbers of STEM workers who were born in China (273,000), Mexico (119,000), and Vietnam (100,000).”

With high percentages of immigrants with advanced degrees available to meet the US labor needs in STEM, hiring immigrants seems sensible. However, lack of temporary visas is hindering the process. “Any annual cap on the number of available green cards, H-1B visas, and other skilled talent visas hinders efforts to hire immigrant STEM professionals when no American workers are available.”

In the Boston Globe, Chair Jerome Powell explained the urgency, “The combination of a plunge in net immigration and a surge in deaths during the pandemic probably accounts for about [1.5 million] missing workers,” he said. He expanded on this point by noting that total immigration has slowed substantially since the start of the pandemic, lowering the labor force by about 1 million people relative to pre-pandemic trends.”

With immigrant contribution to the workforce increasing over the past 20 years but with current difficulty in passing bi-partisan immigration policies while dealing with this labor shortage, the future remains uncertain for the U.S. workforce and for immigrants, but more employers are recognizing the need and see how much immigrants do contribute. With an understanding of how the U.S. economy and workforce is supported by immigrants, employers and officials can understand not only the need for immigrants, but also for providing them pathways to citizenship.

When immigrant workers join the US labor force, they can further add to this country’s strength in innovation, resilience, and competence on the world stage. In 2021, 44 percent of Fortune 500 companies in the US were founded by an immigrant or the child of an immigrant.
I'm Living Through Zero-Covid in Shanghai. Here's the Good, the Bad and the Ugly

By Jing Zhao

long before China did. People in China rushed to hospitals and pharmacies for medications. Almost overnight, no cold medications were available in the market, and hospitals only prescribed a ration of cold medications (sometimes only a few pills a person). Some city dwellers went to the other way, ordering online purchases in pharmacies located in rural areas where the medication panic has yet to arrive. Accusations against such behavior followed. My family is lucky enough to have access to medications, but even that, one person’s social security card only gets one/two prescriptions. With family members, one after another, falling ill, my father’s cellphone has become a free family clinic landline. Some are asking for help as they are out of medications. Some are worried about their high fevers. Some simply need to talk to someone about their symptoms. It’s been over 2 weeks since all restrictions were erased. People who got ill have got well over a week or so. The symptoms did catch people off guard but most of them did get well.

What happened is inevitable and cause of this new strong wave of infections? I only saw a few cases of deaths, because they suffer from complications due to high fever. The number of death cases is suppressed, but I do doubt the horrendous dying scene as indicated in Western media. It is true that hospitals are packed with Covid patients. Cities are empty as people are either ill or too afraid to get infected.

There is a public concern that those who are in a most delicate state may die either of Covid complications or not being able to be treated in a timely manner due to the stress the health system is going through right now. Western media are blaming the Chinese government of going from one extreme to another without a solid plan like procuring and dispensing medications, using stronger vaccinations, or strengthening health system. All on points. However, the way the West is portraying it does cause some aversion, especially among those trusted Western media outlets on their reports regarding Zero-Covid policies. No country has prepared enough before the loosening the Covid restrictions. Wherever Chinese government moves toward, right or left, west media always finds it at fault. Western media can be such a hypocrite (I’m not saying ours isn’t). It’s a bit exhausting to read Western media after all of these. No country is straight A student in terms of its job. Moreover, maybe the government should work with those multinational and domestic pharmaceutical companies to make sure that all of the citizens receive timely and effective medications. There are many things the government needs to think about and work on. There is also a lingering question ---

What does the Chinese government do from now on? The healthcare resource is squeezed to its limit. How do they make up for the preparation they failed to do before loosening the policy? There has been a public voice about approving foreign vaccines since the experience has told everyone that the inactivated Sinovac doesn’t seem to do its job. Moreover, maybe the government should work with those multinational and domestic pharmaceutical companies to make sure that all of the citizens receive timely and effective medications. There are many things the government needs to think about and work on. There is also a lingering question ---
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The Slowdown of Our Global Population: Social, Political, and Economic Anxieties

Continued from Page 1

Though immigration can support the workforce and increase the number of young people—a cause for hope—we will still be an aging nation, and our senior citizens will eventually outnumber our youth. This is naturally concerning, and the US is not the only country to face such a problem. Dr. Elin Charles-Edwards from the University of Queensland says, "We're going to have more and more countries where there are more older people than young children...This is going to really shape the way we make decisions about how we govern, how we spend our money. It's a massive cultural change."

Of course, not everyone can agree on population projections. While the UN predicts the world will continue over 10 billion people by the end of the century, researchers from the University of Washington argue the population will shrink instead, and that by 2100 it may go down to 6 billion. Scientific journal The Lancet, meanwhile, projects a peak world population of 9 billion a little after midcentury. Any of the outcomes will bring with it large economic, social, and cultural change, and in each scenario immigration will be a critical factor in the changes within countries themselves.

It was a rebound in immigration to the US post-COVID, after all, that contributed most to the US population increase from 2022 to 2023. For those legitimately concerned about American population stagnation, immigration reform is therefore a priority. Making it easier and more desirable to move to the United States will counteract the endogenous population issues we've noted. But simply knowing what we may face in the future is important for developing a variety of policies. How can we strengthen the economy and improve social services for an aging population? What incentives can we offer to new families? And most importantly: what role can individuals play in our new world? An appropriate reflection for the dawn of a new year, a time of resolutions.

Janet Wu Looks Back on her Award-Winning Career as a Television Political News Reporter

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young woman from Bridgewater, NJ?

JANET WU: I grew up in a house-
hold with parents who both immigrated to the USA because of political, social and economic turmoil in China. Poli-
tics and government were always the top subject of discussion at dinner ev-
ery night. My father commuted from New York City and brought home 5 daily newspapers every night: The Herald Tribune, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, New York Daily News and the New York Post. We watched the nightly news during dinner. When I was a sophomore at the University of Michigan, I had to declare a major. I hadn’t realized until then that my in-
terests were politics and the news. So I double majored in political science and journalism.

SAMPAN: You have many com-
pelling stories for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is being a woman in a typically all-boys club as well as an Asian American in what was at the time a predominantly white profes-
sion. In a November 4, 2022 interview with The Boston Globe, you noted that things were tough with few female State House reporters on the beat. You added, "I say I was not welcomed initially would be an understatement." Was this resistance to your arrival gen-
der-based, racial, or a mixture of both?

JANET WU: I think it was both, equ-
ally. In 1975, all Statehouse report-
ers were white and primarily male. Only two other women were in the press corp. Most of the politicians were white males and apprehensive about stopping and chatting with me in the Statehouse hallways. While the male reporters could casually drop by the "Golden Dome (the bar that is now the "21 Club"") at 1 A.M., they didn’t have the permission or time to do so. They were afraid to be caught with me at the Statehouse when I tried to ask them questions about a conflict of interest issue. With a camera in tow videotaping the incident, I asked him if he wanted me to put the video of him running from me on the news that night. He finally stopped and answered my questions, reluctantly. Bullies often can’t take what they so easily dish out.

SAMPAN: What’s next for Janet Wu? You’ll be traveling and enjoying your grandchildren, but can we expect another act from this veteran Boston TV fixture?

JANET WU: I am 72 years old and unlike many others, I am not afraid to retire. I may work on a few projects if they come my way, but only if the issue and the people I’d be working with are folks and issues I respect. But I’d like to enjoy my family fully and cross off many things still on my bucket list. I am grateful for the career and oppor-
tunities I’ve enjoyed. Time to focus on important matters of the soul! Thank you for your interest and time.
Opinion: New Rowhouse Protection Areas Can Help Stabilize Chinatown

By the Chinatown Stabilization Committee

Over the last 60 years, the buildings in Chinatown and the people who live and work there, have undergone massive changes. The Boston Planning and Development Authority (BPDA) relaunched its lapsed PLAN: Downtown in November with an added focus on post-pandemic revitalization and stands to bring yet another wave of changes. The plan will culminate in new zoning guidelines governing land use, allowable heights, and density, and will encourage mixed use development and a more predictable system of trading larger scale development for community benefits.

Chinatown Protection Areas Should Have Smaller Scale Zoning

PLAN: Downtown includes Chinatown, but community participants have argued that Chinatown needs a different set of guidelines designed to preserve its historic and cultural character. Not only do historic buildings like the Mary Knoll Sisters Center or the 19th century brick row houses deserve additional protections, but smaller scale zoning in a few targeted protection areas can curb the level of speculation that has made it so difficult for a family to buy a home today.

The super-hot market is driven by outside investors for whom real estate speculation has become the new stock market. This July, the old garage and associated storefronts at 40 Beach Street sold for $32 million to a limited liability corporation (LLC) from Delaware and New York City! Row houses that less than ten years ago sold for $800,000 now list for twice that amount. Zoning laws, and Boston’s historic lack of enforcement, are key to driving up these land and property values.

A History of Displacement

It seems hard to believe now, but Chinatown was once known more for affordable living rather than desirable real estate. In the 1800s, the area was home to many working-class immigrants and their families. Rowhouses — three- to four-story brick buildings connected by their outer walls — provided shelter for new arrivals, including Irish tailors and laborers as well as Jewish and German immigrants. Starting in the late 19th century, the same rowhouses were home to families from what is now Syria and Lebanon, followed by multiple waves of Chinese laundrymen, garment workers, and restauranteurs.

However, as told in Forever Struggle: Activism, Identity, and Survival in Boston's Chinatown, 1880–2018, the neighborhood’s identity started changing after Boston’s government implemented “urban renewal” plans in the 1960s. Many rowhouses — longtime homes and spaces for small businesses run by Chinese immigrants — were replaced with highways and taller buildings. Tufts-New England Medical Center, now known as the Tufts Medical Center, also expanded significantly between 1972 and 2014, taking over some blocks where rowhouses were formerly located.

During these waves of development, thousands of residents were pushed out of Chinatown to other neighborhoods and suburbs like Malden and Quincy. Since then new mixed income developments like the Metropolitan and One Greenway have added affordable housing to the area, but haven’t been able to reverse the trend of rising housing prices.

Today, as Lydia Lowe of Chinatown Community Land Trust (CCLT) argues, it’s much harder for working-class immigrants and families to stay in the neighborhood, let alone move here. CCLT has worked to prevent some of these homes from being converted into luxury units by buying them outright, but current real estate prices make this difficult.

A Row House Protection Area and Implementation of the Chinatown Master Plan. Because the City of Boston has routinely allowed developers to work around zoning limits, builders have felt free to propose high-rise buildings in the neighborhood. Sung Ming Chan, for example, has proposed a 25-story luxury development where the See Sun Market and single room occupancy housing once operated. Another investor will pay $32 million for an old parking garage that will be torn down for new development.

Chinatown residents are not opposing taller buildings in a knee-jerk reaction. But unlimited real estate speculation is driving families out of the neighborhood’s smaller properties. Chinatown zoning laws should allow for height when development projects address community priorities and protect smaller scale streets from unwanted demolition or expansion.

Our volunteer group, Chinatown Stabilization Committee, is committed to using zoning in just this way. Together with CCLT and other community organizations, we’re advocating for a new Row House Protection Area to limit height and density on a few intract row house blocks, and proposing that the community’s own development vision, expressed in Chinatown Master Plan 2020, become the foundation for development decision making in the neighborhood. With amended language to enforce zoning protection areas, we aim to achieve the following broad goals:

1. Preserve the small-scale, family-oriented community that’s existed for decades
2. Prevent powerful developers from disregarding Chinatown’s history and displacing local businesses and workers
3. Add more opportunities for community input into the development process

We’re asking Boston’s development authorities to change zoning laws in order to stabilize Chinatown’s future and preserve an important piece of Chinatown’s history. If you’re interested in learning more about the proposal or supporting us, please get in touch through this Google form.

Chinatown Stabilization Committee is a volunteer-led group that supports organizing efforts for workers, tenant power, and language justice. They work in conjunction with the Chinese Progressive Association, Chinatown Community Land Trust, and other Boston grassroots progressive organizations.
Events Calendar

Please email ads@sampan.org to add events to the calendar

Chinatown’s Annual Lion Dance Parade
Sunday, Jan 29, 10 am - 3 pm; Phillips Square, Chinatown (near the intersection of Harrison Ave and Beach St)
Boston's huge Chinese New Year Parade in Chinatown! Chinese New Year has enjoyed a history of over 3,000 years and is one of the most important holidays in Chinese culture.

Lunar New Year Celebration Events:

• New Art Center
Sunday, January 22, 2023; 12 - 4 pm; Community Cultural Days, Events, Free Events, 61 Washington Park, Newton, MA 02460
https://newartcenter.org/class/lunar-new-year-cw23801/
Join the New Art Center and our friends from the Korean Cultural Society of Boston for a special Lunar New Year Celebration! This Cultural Community Day celebrates the Asian Lunar New Year with art, decorations, and performances. Bring the whole family for a day of fun.

• Lunar New Year Cultural Village
Sunday, Jan 29, 2023, 11:00 am - 3:00 pm; China Trade Center, 2 Boylston St, Boston, MA 02116, USA
Celebrate Lunar New Year with Chinatown Main Street! Gather with friends and family to open a Prosperous Year! A plethora of activities for kids, including calligraphy, origami, lantern crafting, and more! Special lion dance performance to open the New Year!

• Peabody Essex Museum
Saturday, January 28, 2023 from 10 am-4 pm; Peabody Essex Museum, 161 Essex St. Salem, MA 01970
Join us for performances, storytelling and art making as we celebrate Lunar New Year: Year of the Rabbit! Take a tour through Yin Yu Tang, PEM’s 200-year old Chinese home, and check out programs with our featured collaborators Gund Kwok and Limin Mo.

• Pao Arts Center
Sunday January 29, 2023; 11-3pm; Pao Arts Center, 99 Albany Street Boston, MA 02111
https://www.paoartscenter.org/events/2023/lunarnewyear
Experience interactive cultural activities for all ages, including: Chinese red envelope folding, Korean calligraphy, Korean dasik cookie stamping on clay, and rabbit-related crafts. Register and reserve your spot in our popular Lion Dance workshops for children, ages 5-12 (limit 10 children, siblings and parents welcome to watch), or drop in and learn more about how we celebrate Lunar New Year across Asian cultures!

• North Quincy High School
Sunday, February 5, 11AM - 4PM; North Quincy High School, 3160 Hancock Street, Quincy. Opening ceremony begins at 12PM
https://www.gqartsa.org/lunar-new-year-festival
During the momentous holiday, friends and family members gather and wish one another prosperity, good health and longevity in the new year. 2023 brings the Year of the Rabbit, symbolizing hope, prosperity, longevity, and peace.

Celebrate! With Bankadi Drum and Dance
Monday, January 16, 2023, 10:30 -11:30 AM, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum
Columbia Point, Boston, MA 02125.
https://www.bostonnausa.com/event/celebrate/-with-bankadi-drum-and-dance/75914/
With vivid costumes and uplifting energy, the multicultural Benkadi Drum and Dance group performs traditional West African rhythm and movements to celebrate the spirit of coming together in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Join us for singing, dancing, and drumming. Watch as a folk tale comes to life before your very eyes!

Arts Wayland Presents: The January Small Works Exhibit
Till Saturday, January 28, 2023, 9:00 am - 9:00 pm; 5 Concord Rd, Wayland, MA, 01778
https://www.bostoncentral.com/events/artsculture/p71732.php
We have a fabulous collection of small works to dazzle you with at our in-person exhibit at the Raytheon Room in the Wayland Public Library.

Reindeer Quest at Powisset Farm
Till January 31, 2023; Powisset Farm, 37 Powisset Street, Dover, MA 02030
https://www.bostoncentral.com/events/saturnalfun/p71312.php
Grab your snow boots and get everyone outside to discover our elusive herd of nine wooden reindeer, found throughout the farm trails!

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We can accommodate Buddhist and Christian services. We work with various local Asian temples and churches in the community to provide religious services at the funeral.

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- REFERRAL COORDINATOR (FT) – BOSTON/ QUINCY
- LAB ASSISTANT (FT) – BOSTON/ QUINCY
- LABOR COACH (FT) – BOSTON
- LICSW/ LMHC (FT) – BOSTON/ QUINCY
- MEMBER SERVICE (FT) - BOSTON/ MALDEN
- ACCOUNT RECEIVABLE REPRESENTATIVE (FT) – BOSTON

For more information on job postings, please visit: [www.scchc.org/career-opportunities/](http://www.scchc.org)
Or contact our HR Department: Billy Lee: 617-521-6709; blee@scchc.org
Le Jiang: 617-521-6701; le.jiang@scchc.org

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<td>Boston</td>
<td>Washington St. Clinic</td>
<td>Adult Medicine, Pediatrics, Podiatry, and Social Services</td>
<td>MON-FRI: 8:30AM - 5:00PM SAT: 8:30AM - 1:00PM (Adult Med. AND Pediatrics ONLY)</td>
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**January 6, 2023**

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Expanding the Right to Vote to 16-17 year olds in Boston: A Hot Button Topic for Young and Old

By Sasha Lianski

From the beginning of America, voting has been a fundamental right which many Americans have fought for and some have died for. It’s what established America as a “true” democratic country. Our right to vote is given to us by the 26th amendment of the constitution. However, in the past, there have been many discussions about whether constitutional amendments could be changed, and if cities and states had the power to bring these changes. The answers to these questions keep shifting over the years, and we can specifically see it with a recent event in Boston.

On December 21, 2022, the Boston City council decided to support the proposal of allowing 16-17-year-olds to vote in the city’s elections (with a vote of nine to four). To finalize this decision, the bill was forwarded to the state legislature if she agrees with it. If the decision is approved, 16-year-olds will be able to vote by filling out a separate form. For context, a 16-year-old in Massachusetts can drive a car, have a job, file taxes, and overall provide for their family like an adult.

And apparently, 16 year olds themselves are ready for this change. When asked if she agrees with the city council’s decision, Carlotta, a high schooler in Boston, said “I think a lot of the policies that cities (like Boston) enact, affect a lot of schools and students. This should give them a say in what kinds of policies are being enacted, and who is getting elected”. Another student, who chose to be kept anonymous, said that “16-17-year-olds are more educated than before and should have more say in our communities.” Jumping off of that, they noted that this decision could help raise more “devoted and invested city members.”

Rodney, a seventeen year old senior at Madison Park Technical Vocational High School, had a different perspective regarding what on its surface seems to be a progressive vote by the Boston City Council:

“I’m not that impressed or energized,” he said. “Yes, a lot of my friends are politically involved. We’re informed and we want to participate in the process of determining who will govern our city and which laws will be passed. I just have a feeling this is more than a little patronizing. Is it acknowledging that there are informed 16 and 17 year olds who deserve to have their votes recognized, or is it a scrap of bread they’re feeding us when we really deserve a full meal and a guaranteed seat at the table? I’m happy for my friends who may get the chance to vote, but I don’t have blind faith in their ability or willingness to make the best long-term decisions.”

Councilor Julia Mejia, one of the City Council members who voted in the affirmative, spoke with Sampan about her decision:

SAMPAN: What were the motivating factors that led to your voting to approve this amendment?

MEJIA: We sponsored this Home Rule Petition because we were inspired by the youth that worked in collaboration with our office. We realized how in many spaces, they are already doing the political work without representation, so we saw this as an opportunity to engage them further. It takes six years to turn a non-voter into a super voter. Giving youth the opportunity to vote at an earlier age is going to inspire them to become lifelong voters, which, we believe, is the pathway to real democracy.

SAMPAN: If this amendment is passed by state legislators Boston will be one of the largest cities in the country to make such a move. Do you foresee this having a ripple effect nationally?

MEJIA: Absolutely. Boston is a leader in politics nationwide, and lowering the voting age can be another way of modeling what is politically possible for the rest of the country. My hope is that youth across the United States will become more politically engaged and demand the right to vote. I also hope that other cities and states will recognize the value of giving young people the right to vote.

SAMPAN: Beyond allowing for a greater number of Boston’s constituents to have a voice in how the city functions, what will legislative passage of this amendment afford the 16 and 17 year old constituency in Boston?

MEJIA: Voting is a fundamental act of civic participation through which people can contribute to our democratic process. Expanding youth voting is one way we can strengthen our democracy, and it can serve as an entry point to other forms of political participation.

SAMPAN: How would you respond to critics who might say that 16 and 17-year-olds don’t have the proper emotional maturity and mindset to make clear decisions as voters in local elections?

MEJIA: Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds, just like anyone else, are affected by local political issues. They also work and pay taxes on their income, many drive, and in some cases, they can be tried as an adult in court. Lowering the voting age would force local politicians to listen to and address the concerns of their sixteen- and seventeen-year-old constituents.

The main opposition to this expansion comes from people who feel that 16-year-olds are generally not mature enough to vote independently. Erin Murphy, a mother of 3 teenagers and former teacher, was one of the 4 councilors who voted against this decision. She told The Boston Globe in November 2022: “they’re (teenagers) full of wisdom and have ideas and thoughts, but I also think that they’re very impressionable”. Alongside this, she worries that teenagers would be pressured and forced into voting for specific side by their parents. When the students were told about the opinions of the opposition, Carlotta said “I get this type of view, however, this argument would work best if connected between a teenager (16) and a fully developed adult (25), not between 2 people with a 2-year gap difference (16 and 18)”. Other students agreed with this statement, adding that in this day and age, teenagers educate their parents and guardians about progressive ideas and social norms.

However, student opinions differed when asked about hypothetically expanding the right to vote of 16-year-olds nationwide. One side stands on the idea that “16-year-olds could really shift elections toward the improvement of the country, with a student stating that “Now more than ever should teenagers have an effect on the country, due to being closest to progressive ideas.” On the other hand, students like Carlotta feel like the 26th amendment shouldn’t be changed: “16-year-olds who want to vote could mess up the election because of things like the internet and memes. For example, Kanye West ran for president, and if 16-year-olds had a chance to vote, there would have been a lot more votes for him, even though he wasn’t a serious candidate”.

While there is a disagreement about any nationwide lowering of the voting age, most Boston teenagers agree with the city council’s decision. To put it into context, Boston isn’t the first city to proceed with this lowering. A few towns in Maryland, like Greenbelt, have already moved their voting age down to 16, and if the state legislature approves 16 years old to vote, Boston will be added to the list.

Whether or not this decision is going to pass, it is exciting to see the trend of inclusion of the younger of our society into the political landscape, allowing them to have their say and contribute into the future of our town and our country.
What Everyone Should Know About Vaccines

By Jeff Millman

The lessons learned in Stockholm were soon forgotten. History abounds with examples of similar movements influencing anti-vaccination behaviors, only to result in outbreaks of preventable diseases. In the late 1990s, measles vaccination rates in the UK and Ireland dropped after controversial campaigns linking vaccines to autism. As students of the history of medicine could have predicted, Ireland then suffered an outbreak of measles from 1999 to 2000. More recently, the introduction of vaccines for COVID-19 was marked by vocal opponents and anti-vaccination claims spread rapidly online and on social media platforms. These claims had real effects, and a 2021 study in the journal Nature Human Behavior found "..." exposure to online misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines declined vaccination intent significantly in both the U.S. and U.K."

What are some of these claims? What is their origin, and do they have any merit? As we will see, there is overwhelming evidence that vaccines, including the most recent COVID-19 vaccines, are safe and effective. Vaccination against COVID will continue to be a primary public health priority as the pandemic enters its fourth year, and working against misinformation will also be critically important. In this spirit, below are four questions or claims about vaccines, followed by the scientific consensus on the issue.

ONE: Is there a link between vaccines and autism?

No, there is no link, causal or otherwise, between vaccines and autism. Vaccine ingredients do not cause autism, and vaccinating children will not cause them to develop autism. Scientists and vaccinologists have extensively investigated claims about there being a causal relationship between vaccines and autism and have found zero evidence to support the idea, which only emerged in 1998 after Andrew Wakefield, a doctor in the UK, published a now-discredited fraudulent study claiming a link. Wakefield was struck off after the fraud was uncovered.

TWO: Were COVID-19 vaccines even tested before they were released?

Yes, they were. The vaccine developers didn't skip any testing steps, but for the sake of time, they did conduct some of the steps on an overlapping schedule to gather data more quickly. The same process of phase one, phase two, and phase three clinical trials that are seen with other vaccines was used for the development of the COVID-19 vaccines, but given their time-sensitive nature they were performed more rapidly than usual.

THREE: Do vaccines have dangerous side-effects?

No, for the vast majority of people vaccines in use today have only mild side-effects, such as soreness at the site of injection or mild fever (signs the vaccine is working to stimulate the immune system). Vaccines (such as the COVID-19 vaccine) undergo clinical trials to ensure safety, and the number of individuals reporting serious side-effects is extremely low (less than a percent).

FOUR: Are vaccines supposedly to prevent infection completely? Why are people still getting COVID or the flu even if they are vaccinated against these viruses?

Vaccines are not perfect. They are meant to protect against serious illness and death, but nothing works 100%. Nonetheless, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are both close to 95% effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19 in people, and highly effective at reducing hospitalization and death if a person is infected.

Vaccine hesitancy and anti-vaccination beliefs are difficult problems to address and solve, but vaccines are too important a tool to ignore the problem and hope it goes away. As misinformation spreads uncontrollably on social media, we must keep in mind that false claims have real impacts on people's lives and can even be dangerous or deadly. The trend lines on graphs of polio and measles cases could easily trend back up if we are not careful.
For many of us, it seems like only yesterday that we faced the fears of a Y2K society. What would happen if all the ones and zeros of our devices flipped over into a new century? Would our worst fears be realized? Would we find ourselves catapaulted into a world where computers crashed and all data that comprised our lives vanished forever?

Nothing so drastic happened, but those of us who came of age without the current ease of on-demand entertainment and medical/financial record keeping felt left behind, with only our common sense and pre-internet survival instincts to bridge the increasingly widening gap between managing in a digital world and being managed by it. In 2014, the overall Internet adoption rate in the United States was 87%, while the adoption rate for people over 65 years old was only 57% (Pew Research Center, 2014). Early discussions on the digital divide focused on whether individuals had access to computers and the Internet. Overcoming this barrier, sometimes known as the first-level digital divide, that of having technology available to all sections of society, has been a long-standing concern (Chinn & Fairlie, 2006; Hisch, Rai, & Keil, 2000; Van Dijk & Hacker, 2003).

On May 17, 2022, Boston’s Mayor Michelle Wu and the Age Strong Commission announced the recipients of its Creating Community and Reducing Social Isolation grant, a new City program designed to provide funding to nonprofit community organizations to create new or expand current programs inviting older adults to engage more for better physical and mental health. The city awarded $360,000 to 16 non-profit community organizations. “Connecting our older residents with more opportunities to build community is crucial to our City’s recovery,” Mayor Wu noted. “It’s clear that the ongoing pandemic has only exacerbated the challenges that our older adults face as they try to stay engaged and connected. These investments will help build community for older adults and support our local organizations as they work to expand and build opportunities for our older adults to engage.”

Comcast announced an investment of more than $500,000 in grants to 17 organizations to support digital access and adoption for residents across the Greater Boston region. Among the local recipients selected were Tech Goes Home, Central Boston Elder Services, and One Bead. Funds were also allocated to create digital navigators, individuals affiliated with trusted community organizations who are trained to help people access the Internet, use devices and acquire digital skills. Once their training is complete, these digital navigators will educate community members in a wide range of digital awareness and literacy skills. Additionally, they would help residents learn about the federal government’s Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which provides eligible low-income households with a credit of up to $30 per month toward their Internet and/or mobile service.

Emily K. Shea, Commissioner of Boston’s Age Strong Commission, City of Boston, spoke with Sampan about connecting the elderly with digital technology.

SAMPAN: What are the most common obstacles you’re seeing when it comes to helping the people you serve transcend the digital divide?

SHEA: The most common obstacles that we see are access issues. In order for someone to have full access and be able to successfully bridge the digital divide, you need access to devices, internet and training.

SAMPAN: There was a push from the major Internet Service Providers as the COVID-19 lockdown started to make connection more accessible in areas of Boston that have not been well served. Has there been a comparable push to helping elderly consumers more clearly and efficiently acquire the skills needed to be active participants in our national and international digital correspondence with each other?

SHEA: Yes, there are a number of different stakeholders working to help older adults gain better access to technology, but more work is always needed. During the pandemic, the City of Boston distributed tablets with internet access to partner organizations working with older adults. We also gave out over $300,000 in digital equity grants in 2021 to organizations serving older adults who were helping with digital access (providing devices, internet access or training). In addition we were able to use some of our Older American Act funding (both our regular funding and one time ARPA funding) to support digital access for older adults and caregivers. Both the Age Strong Commission and its partners are helping older adults apply for the new federal Affordable Connectivity Program to get help paying for digital access. And finally, the City has used ARPA funds for digital equity and access by supporting partners like Tech Goes Home.

SAMPAN: Most medical practices, such as Mass General Brigham, communicate primarily through portals called Patient Gateways. They require usernames and passwords, a case sensitive series of letters and numbers that seem to require changing each time a patient logs in. This can be even more frustrating for an elderly patient trying to relay something only to face yet another digital barrier. Are you finding resistance from the medical community when it comes to making this efficient approach even more user friendly for the elderly?

SHEA: It is important for all hospitals to provide support, training, and guidance with medical communication to their patients if they use something like a Patient Gateway. And we would also recommend having easily accessible alternatives for patients who do not have the ability to access technology (due to knowledge, funding, training, etc).

SAMPAN: Are you finding comparable obstacles with financial institutions or even something as simple as the barcodes at the supermarket? And we would also recommend having easily accessible alternatives for people who cannot access technology.

SHEA: The same applies for financial institutions - there needs to be assistance available and an easily accessible alternative for people who cannot access technology.

SAMPAN: Are there any corporate or geographic cultures that could serve as role models for us when it comes to helping the elderly transcend the obstacles and prosper with digital technology?

SHEA: I'm not sure that I can comment on this. But there are a number of organizations helping to lead the way for support for older adults around technology. Here in Boston we have Tech Goes Home and Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly who do ongoing classes. Other partners like Boston Senior Home Care and Greater Boston Chinese Golden Age Center also have helped caregivers and older adults access technology. On a National level, AARP and OATS through Senior Planet are promoting older adult technology access.

Ruth Moy, Executive Director of The Greater Boston Chinese Golden Age Center, reflected on the disconnect of technology towards technology. “Technology can be very difficult for elderly because they have never used it before, some of them don’t even try, and there are some people who are good with it. Most of them can’t teach me how to use a computer, I understand some people talk to each other using WeChat… We have some grant money...to teach elderly how to use technology, but it is only a small number of people...there are other services as well. When we provide services, we make sure they are safe and well at home. Even though we don’t see them all the time, we still stay in contact.”

SAMPAN: “How can the community help the elderly to engage more?”

MOY: “There are many elderly and they are all different. Some are educated, some of them using the technology right along. Some elderly would like to learn more, use their computer more, but they can’t unless they are surrounded by people at the office or live with someone who can help. It's very frustrating if there is no one to ask... I think the elderly might learn a lot from TV, but some of them don’t want to get involved with new technology. The elderly can sign up for services at our center.

Is Boston doing enough for seniors who have no one to help them learn how to turn on their cellphones or order food from the supermarket when it comes to technology? Sam Lee, 80 yrs. old and living alone in Roslindale. She spoke to me with pride of her two sons, both successful lawyers. Then, she quickly got teary-eyed admitting that she did not know how to use her phone, I understand some people talk to each other using WeChat... We have some grant money...to teach elderly how to use technology, but it is only a small number of people...there are other services as well. When we provide services, we make sure they are safe and well at home. Even though we don’t see them all the time, we still stay in contact.”