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Boston lawyer's Herald columns compiled into new book

Boston lawyer's Herald columns compiled into new book

Kris Olson (https://masslawyersweekly.com/author/kris-olson/) **4 Minute Read**
Massachusetts Herald columns compiled into new book
body=Boston attorney Jeffrey S. Robbins has long been glad that the city continues to enjoy the benefits of having two newspapers compete for scoops and offer their readers a variety of perspectives on the matters of the day.
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Boston attorney Jeffrey S. Robbins has long been glad that the city continues to enjoy the benefits of having two newspapers compete for scoops and offer their readers a variety of perspectives on the matters of the day.

But the Saul Ewing partner recently got an additional reason to be grateful for the Boston Herald's existence: It opened the door to a book deal.

For the past decade, Robbins has written a pro bono weekly column for the Herald, which became "modestly syndicated" about four years ago, appearing weekly in some two dozen publications. Thanks to the publishing company Creators, he has an unlikely fan base in Ponca City, Oklahoma, Robbins notes with a chuckle.

Two months ago, out of the blue, Creators emailed Robbins to ask if he had "any objection" to the publishing house turning a collection of his columns into a book, which would hit shelves — virtual and otherwise — around Memorial Day.

Robbins certainly had no such objections, and now "Notes from the Brink: A Collection of Columns About Policy at Home and Abroad" has become a reality.

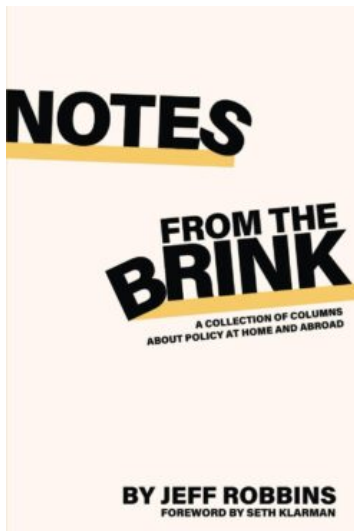
Not coincidentally, given one of Robbins' frequent column topics, the book bears blurbs from former Massachusetts governors from opposing political parties, Democrat Deval L. Patrick and Republican William F. Weld.

The book jacket also offers words of praise from Abraham Foxman, the former national director of the Anti-Defamation League, and David Harris, the former CEO of the American Jewish

Committee

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The book's forward was written by Seth Klarman, the founder of Boston's largest hedge fund and a major philanthropist in the city and beyond. Klarman calls Robbins "a consistent voice of reason in an often-unreasonable world."



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While the two are friends, there was no guarantee that Klarman would agree to put some thoughts on paper, Robbins says.

"He rarely writes, and he rarely speaks," Robbins says of Klarman. "When he writes or speaks, it tends to get noticed — a lot."

Robbins presumes that the rush to publish the column compilation has something to do with the fact that he has brought his "consistent voice of reason" to bear on several major issues that continue to roil the nation and the world.

Robbins says the columns in the book touch generally on topics like "the severe, lethal threat to democracy we now face"; "the threat of authoritarianism, not just in America but abroad"; and "the death of the 'center' in politics."

In his daily life and in his columns, Robbins has also been grappling with the meaning of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on Israel on Oct. 7 and what he calls an "explosion and normalization of antisemitism."

"I'm completely gob smacked that you have to beg people to fully condemn what happened on Oct. 7 and that it's somehow regarded as progressive to embrace or to whitewash or contextualize the massacre of 1,000 people," he says.

Robbins says he completely understands those who are horrified by the deaths in Gaza.

"What I don't get is people who hold themselves out as humane find themselves on the side of a genocidal group," he says.

Robbins is also a visiting assistant professor of political science at Brown University and says he is "amazed at what smart young people don't know."

Of the country's polarization, Robbins says he is particularly troubled by the seeming rising intolerance for departures from the orthodoxy of one's political team, both on the left and the right.

"There's a political gospel that's strictly enforced. You either take the side of the gospel, or your career is in jeopardy," he says, citing as one example the suspension and eventual resignation of NPR senior editor Uri Berliner, who had written a [column about how NPR had "lost America's trust" for The Free Press](https://www.thefp.com/p/npr-editor-how-npr-lost-americas-trust) (<https://www.thefp.com/p/npr-editor-how-npr-lost-americas-trust>), the media company founded by former New York Times editor and writer Bari Weiss.

On that subject, Robbins says his thoughts align with those expressed by Weiss' spouse, former New York Times reporter Nellie Bowles, in her new book, "Morning After the Revolution."

Before the Herald became home to Robbins' writing, it had been a client. Robbins represented the tabloid after it was sued for defamation by Tom Scholz, a founding member of the band Boston. The case [culminated with a victory for the newspaper before the Supreme Judicial Court](https://masslawyersweekly.com/2015/11/25/scholz-loses-defamation-appeal/) (<https://masslawyersweekly.com/2015/11/25/scholz-loses-defamation-appeal/>).

Robbins says that when he first pitched a monthly column to longtime Herald editorial page editor Rachelle G. Cohen, she warned him — presciently, as it turned out — that writing once a month would not be frequent enough for him. Sure enough, when editor-in-chief Joe Sciacca asked if he would like to make the column weekly, Robbins said yes "without thinking about it," he says.

As time consuming as it can be to conceive and execute the columns, Robbins says, "it's a privilege, to be quite blunt, to have that space."

Robbins considers himself "left of center" on the political spectrum.

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But for some Herald readers, even that moderate perspective can be “not welcome,” which they have not been shy to tell him. Robbins credits the Herald with sticking by his columns despite the periodic negative feedback.

But the Herald’s value goes beyond merely providing a forum for him personally, Robbins says.

“The importance of this being a two-newspaper town rather than a one-newspaper town cannot be overstated,” he says. “A corollary of ‘absolute power corrupts absolutely’ is, if you’re just representing one team or seem to be expressing the view of one team, it’s not to the benefit of the community at large.”

Robbins says he admires the “ethos” of the Herald and the ferocity of its journalism.

“People hacking away at and peeling back the accepted consensus is a good thing,” he says.

As for his hopes for the book, Robbins says he harbors no illusions about it curing all the world’s ills.

“I do hope that people read the columns and think that some of what we are fed is more fashion than anything else,” he says. “I do hope there are people who read it who are angry at what they perceive as the elitism of the left, with good reason — they’ve got a right to be offended by elitism,” he says. “But we can’t torch the democracy.”

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