



The Bunkhouse Chronicle

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Columnist

Famous mayoral meltdowns

The video that surfaced this week on BookFace of Sisters Mayor Chuck Ryan in a rant directed at one of his neighbors was certainly evidence of bad behavior — most likely personally embarrassing, and definitely intriguing, but hardly worthy of a 60 Minutes segment.

If you haven't seen it, I strongly encourage you not to bother. The background story, as I've learned it, is fairly mundane, and open to all kinds of interpretation. It's barely even a story, really, except that Mr. Ryan is the mayor of Sisters, and therefore ranting at a neighbor from his porch becomes, at least briefly, flashy news.

Whatever the origins of this bubbling neighbor vs. neighbor pot that sadly boiled over, the mayor's behavior in the video — since taken down — is clearly not his best foot forward.

And also, we can probably just mute the apologists, who in these pages frequently offer the notion that volunteering for political office somehow excuses bad, or at least ridiculous, behavior.

It doesn't.

Reserve Police Officers don't get paid either, and offer themselves up for community service in frequently far more demanding and truly dangerous circumstances. But when they step in it, they are subject to all of the same rules as the deputy who collects a check.

The real lesson from this sort of interpersonal micro-drama is that whatever good work we do — and one thinks our mayor probably does a lot of good and wholly unacknowledged work — it can easily be overshadowed by even the briefest regrettable video posted to Al Gore's Internet.

One suspects that is the case in this event. And one hopes the fallout from it is as brief as the video, with lessons learned on all sides.

For perspective, there have been far greater, and far more consequential Mayoral Meltdowns. Mayor Rob Ford of Toronto, may he rest in peace, is probably my personal favorite in the modern era. Ford loved gang members and crackheads, and refused to enter rehab even after video of him hitting the pipe like a deranged Chris Farley in the Viper Room consumed large chunks of

Internet bandwidth.

Mayor Bill de Blasio, of New York, is another uber-modern example of mayoral lapses in judgment. Last week, for instance, he winged over to Germany to hob-nob with the assembled Molotov cocktail-throwing nihilists and black bloc anarchists at the G-20 meetings — the day after the killing of Miosotis Familia, a veteran New York policewoman and mother of three who was assassinated in the mayor's own city.

Seattle Mayor Ed Murray, who is a study in political hubris, continues to defy calls to resign, even after apparently substantiated sexual abuse claims from a number of victims.

And who can forget the delightful former mayor of Washington D.C., with the suspiciously Russian middle name of Shepilov — Marion Berry (yes, that's Marion Shepilov Berry) who was polite enough to smoke his crack, and take his bribes, in hotel rooms with hookers, rather than befoul his own Georgetown manse with questionable dalliances and the particularly rancid odor of rock cocaine.

In the film "Red Dawn," Mayor Bates of Calumet, Colorado, was a real cautionary tale. A spineless collaborator with Russian paratroopers (oh good God, the Russians again!) who talked his son into swallowing a tracking device — an act of astonishing betrayal

that saw most of our partisan Wolverines killed by Spetsnaz commandos.

Anthony Weiner, who preferred the moniker "Carlos Danger" when texting underage girls, ran for mayor of New York, which qualifies as a scandal on an unprecedented number of levels, even though he wasn't elected.

The list of mayoral indiscretions is as endless as the post itself.

But there is, at least in literature, an alternative narrative. Mayor Orden, for instance, hero of Steinbeck's "The Moon is Down," for which the author received one of Norway's highest honors, the Freedom Cross, comes to mind. A quiet, well-considered model-train enthusiast, the mayor resisted the Nazi invaders to the bitter end, reminding the groupthink jackboots that "to break man's spirit permanently" is impossible. Orden encouraged his fellow citizens to resist — even while under arrest and threat of imminent execution — and all in the Socratic spirit.

Our local guy, in the video at least, was none of those very serious criminal or anti-heroic characters. He was, it appears, having an un-extraordinary bad day, and most of us do that from

time to time.

If anything, and if only for liability's sake, he should probably be counseled, by someone, that invective offered in falsetto is never quite convincing as a truly menacing affront. Especially out here, in Sisters, home of the Outlaws, after all, with our Wild-West storefronts and Quilt Show blowouts.

And maybe the neighbor who filmed the freakish episode and posted it on social media should figure that out, too.

But still, things being equal, it didn't look too good. Any town's mayor will always be held to a higher standard than his neighbor — it just comes with the billet, and is better accepted and embraced as the price of public service, voluntary or otherwise.

Probably, and I'm just guessing here — the winds of Sisters being what they are — a public acknowledgment that the Mayor's recorded behavior was, ahem, not exactly mayoral material, would calm the aggrieved.

And then perhaps we can all collect ourselves, and begin the real work of sandbagging our bunkers, and storing fuel, water, and food, for next month's Eclipsalypse.

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