

Opinion

The days of the season

By LYNDON ZAITZ

There are now less than two weeks until Christmas day. It is crunch time for those who are whittling down their shopping lists or finalizing holiday decorations at their homes.

Regardless of one's level of involvement with the holiday it can be a stressful time if only because we are all jostling for prime parking spaces, driving spaces and opting for the check-out counter we think will be quickest. We willingly make ourselves crazy this time of year.

It is like driving in ice and snow: we're sure of our abilities but are dubious of other people. It is the attitude of others in a store, in a parking lot or driving of which we must be mindful. There is a way to be less stressed during the frantic days of the season: think of others, plain and simple. That means becoming tolerant of others, putting yourself in oth-

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er's shoes. Exhibit patience each day.

Sages and religious figures through the centuries have expressed the view that giving is better than receiving—it's good for the soul. Giving is not limited to tangible things, it can also include giving of one's self—a smile, time well-spent with someone. Giving of one's self can also mean sharing one's gifts: if one is a musician, compose an original song or piece of music. The joy of creating is a gift we give to ourselves, our creation is the gift we give away. If one is a writer perhaps writing a poem or short story specifically for one person. That would be a one-of-a-kind gift that could never be found in a store or bought online.

Picture yourself in your comfortable chair creating a gift instead of fighting crowds. There is still time to create something personal and special as a gift for some of those on your list.

(Lyndon Zaitz is publisher of the *Keizertimes*.)

Who will speak for Trump?

By DEBRA J. SAUNDERS

Who will speak for President Donald Trump at his state funeral, far in the future though it should be? That must be what the 45th president was thinking as he sat in the front pew at the funeral for former President George H.W. Bush last week.

Bush was eulogized by a man of words, a foreign world leader, a onetime ally in Congress and his eldest son—Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and Bush biographer Jon Meacham, former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, former Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo., and son and former president George W. Bush.

Is there a scribe who will praise Trump for his leadership and his rhetoric?

Here's a hint. In January, Tony Schwartz, who co-wrote, "Trump: The Art of the Deal," wrote in *The Guardian* that the 45th president is "significantly angrier today: more reactive, deceitful, distracted, vindictive, impulsive and, above all, self-absorbed" than when Schwartz worked on the 1987 book.

A world leader? Well, Trump has developed warm relations with tyrants like Russian President Vladimir Putin, North Korean chairman Kim Jong Un and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, so there are some strongmen who might want to speak for Trump. But after Trump's taunts to NATO, it is hard to imagine the leader of a long-term ally who will look back fondly on Trump's tenure.

Is there a political colleague who would say, as Simpson said of Bush, that the late president was a true friend, who stood by him in tough times, and whom "you would've wanted on your side"?

Consider the fate of former Attorney General Jeff Sessions, whom Trump fired after the midterm elections. Trump never forgave Sessions, the first senator to endorse Trump in the 2016 primary, for recusing himself from the Russian probe. Sessions learned the hard way that loyalty is a one-way street in Trump world.

So scratch public figures with solid reputations. At best, Trump probably could rely on praise mainly from

political hit men, who hitched a ride with the only Republican who would let them near 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

At least Trump can count on one of his sons to speak highly of him.

Donald Jr. and Eric clearly are attached to their father. Ditto daughters Ivanka and Tiffany. (We'll leave Barron out of this discussion, as he is a minor.) But it is hard to imagine any of Trump's children extolling his kindnesses to strangers, even political foes.

The Bush family showed kindness toward Trump who had ridiculed "low energy" Jeb Bush during the 2016 GOP primary, trashed Dubya for the Iraq war and even mocked Bush 41's signature "thousand points of light," telling a rally this summer that he prefers "Make America Great Again."

This kindness was much more powerful than the snub of Trump and pointed barbs directed at him at the memorial service for Sen. John McCain in September. The McCain clan let it be known Trump was not welcome at the National Cathedral service. McCain's eulogizers used the occasion to disparage Trump—without naming him—as a small soul dwarfed by the legendary Vietnam POW. When it was over, both sides were further entrenched in their contempt for the other, and no one looked the better for it.

The National Cathedral send-off for the elder Bush showed Trump what can be—as the Bushes offered Trump a place in the community of presidents.

Bill and Hillary Clinton might greet him with cold stares, but like the Bushes, Barack and Michelle Obama understand the value of civility.

Bush 41 famously befriended Bill Clinton, the Democrat who defeated him in 1992. In the traditional letter to his successor, the vanquished Bush told Clinton, "Your success is now our country's success. I am rooting hard for you. Good luck." Bush put the country before his ego.

Yes. I know, the hard-core Trump base loves the fact that Trump is a fighter, not a gracious loser. But there are plenty of Republicans who miss the days when something as human as a funeral was above politics. (Creators Syndicate)



Is democracy being abandoned?

By E.J. DIONNE JR.

Especially after last week's court filings in the ongoing investigations of President Trump, his critics have good reason to focus on the threats he poses to democracy and the rule of law. But the president is not alone in his party.

In case after case, Republicans have demonstrated an eagerness to undercut democracy and tilt the rules of the game if doing so serves their ideological interests. The quiet coup by the GOP-controlled Legislature in Wisconsin is designed to defy the voters' wishes. It reflects an abandonment of the disciplines self-government requires.

In November, Wisconsin's electorate ended eight years of Republican dominance in state government by choosing Democrats Tony Evers as governor and Josh Kaul as attorney general. Democrats also won races for secretary of state and state treasurer.

There was nothing unnatural about this. Voters often tire of one party and decide to try the other side. It's the beautiful thing about constitutional democracies: There are no final victories, so there are no final defeats. We all agree to rules that apply uniformly whether those we favor win or lose because this protects our right to fight another day and perhaps prevail the next time.

Not so the Republicans in Wisconsin. Having lost the governorship, they're using a lame-duck session of the legislature to strip Evers of many powers they were perfectly content to see Republican Gov. Scott Walker exercise. Why are they doing this now? Because Walker, who was defeated by Evers, is still in office to sign their bills.

Among other things, the legislation would stop Evers from taking

control of a state economic development agency that the Democrat has pledged to abolish, and it would make it harder for him to overturn restrictions Walker imposed on social benefits. It would also limit early voting (which helped the Democrats win by expanding turnout). For good measure, the legislature wants to prevent Kaul from withdrawing the state from a lawsuit against the Affordable Care Act—even though that's exactly what Kaul told voters he would do.

It won't surprise you to learn that Republicans are shifting power to the state legislature because radically gerrymandered district boundaries helped the GOP maintain their majorities in the state Senate and Assembly despite the Democrats' performance at the top of the ticket.

In rationalizing their move, Rob-in Vos, the Republican speaker of the Wisconsin State Assembly, and Scott Fitzgerald, the Senate majority leader, had the nerve to issue a statement declaring: "The legislature is the most representative branch in government."

Well, no. The Democrats won the popular vote in State Assembly contests by a 54 percent to 46 percent margin, but emerged with only 36 seats to the GOP's 63.

Evers, denouncing the "hot mess" the legislature had created, said Sunday on NBC's *Meet the Press* that he had urged Walker to veto the bills and might go to court to block them.

Republican indifference to democratic norms is not confined to Wisconsin. Republicans in Michigan (which also replaced a Republican governor with a Democrat this year) are working on a similar effort.

One Michigan GOP target: incoming Democratic secretary of state Jocelyn Benson, who, like other Democratic secretaries of state this year,

was elected on an ambitious reform agenda. This includes greater transparency when it comes to political money. Republicans don't like this. So they introduced a bill to restrict her oversight of campaign finance issues.

Both states are borrowing from a playbook by North Carolina Republicans who moved to hamper Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper soon after he was elected in 2016. And as Michael Hobbes reported in *The Huffington Post*, GOP legislators are also trying to dilute progressive referendum victories in states such as Florida and Utah.

And, no, this is not about "polarization" in general. When Republicans won governorships in Massachusetts and Maryland in 2014 and Vermont in 2016, Democratic legislatures made no power-grabs like those Republicans are undertaking. Democrats chose to battle them in traditional ways—and to work with them, too.

The GOP's anti-democratic impulse has far more in common with the old segregationist Democrats of the South than with the best Republican traditions that led to the rights-conferring 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. The party's efforts to lock in power regardless of election outcomes also eerily echo some of the behaviors of anti-democratic politicians abroad.

At least a few anti-Trump Republicans are facing up to how extensively their party is undermining democracy's golden rules. "I'm old enough to remember when it wasn't a key part of Republican strategy to try, in effect, to nullify election results," *Weekly Standard* editor Bill Kristol tweeted last week.

But most in the party are either complicit or silent. Is it any wonder, then, that most Republicans are also willing to go right along with Trump? (Washington Post Writers Group)

other
voices

Border wall would join history's walls

President Trump demands, "The Wall absolutely must be built!" To him, apparently, it matters not that America's bridges, roads and infrastructure throughout the land have reached conditions of dangerous deterioration. Transportation improvements, No! Just fund that keep-'em-out Wall!

Our trains wobble in their tracks, about-to-fall on their backs, now providing threat of injury and death to more of us every day. Yet, so many American people want a 30-foot-high wall bordering Mexico. And one with Canada, too, we guess. For them, they don't see a secure, safe American future with "enemy" citizens having free access to America on north and south borders (only the Russians are okay).

What the White House wants will cost at least \$5 billion. However, to those who trust no elected government save the one headed by Trump, we'd just "blow" that amount on infrastructure repairs and functioning highways by making all travel and transportation throughout the U.S. a safe and sane experience. Instead, they want more white-knuckle, nerve-racking, uncertain-we'll-ever-get-there-alive for the U.S. traveler.

Last week the U.S. Congress approved a two-year stopgap spending bill to avert a government shutdown, setting a potential showdown later this month, over Trump's proposed border wall. Meanwhile, many in Congress argue that such a wall would be in-

effective at keeping out illegal immigrants and illicit drugs. They want to continue a defense against the unapproved by improving less-costly fencing and use of high-tech instruments that detect illegal border crossings and thereby seek to include in the federal budget \$1.6 billion for additional border security in their funding bill compromise.

Walls from human history's past are well known, including the Great Wall of China built before Christ while a century plus into Anno Domini the Romans established the Antonine and Hadrian's walls in what became Great Britain. The most notorious wall in

the modern age was the Berlin Wall (1961-1992).

Trump's wall, if built, will be a noxious negative barrier as most walls have been, representing denial and loss of opportunity. It will predictably be remembered as anti-humanistic, politically-inspired and mean-intended not unlike The Donald himself. Nevertheless, all foreboding aside, it confounds he who views the subject that virtually every living American today owes his freedoms and rights here to those original-founders not writing walls into the U.S. Constitution: Walls that would have prevented most of our family predecessors from gaining entry to the United States of America. (Gene H. McIntyre shares his opinion frequently in the *Keizertimes*.)

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