



AP Photo/Evan Vucci

Ivanka Trump, right, looks on as her father, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, delivers a policy speech on child care Tuesday in Aston, Penn.

Hillary sharpens, Trump softens. But he's rising

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER
Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — If you are the status quo candidate in a change election in which the national mood is sour and two-thirds of the electorate think the country is on the wrong track, what do you do? Attack. Relentlessly. Paint your opponent as extremist, volatile, clueless, unfit, dangerous. Indeed, Hillary Clinton's latest national ad, featuring major Republican politicians echoing that indictment of Donald Trump, ends thus: "Unfit. Dangerous. Even for Republicans."

That was the theme of Clinton's famous "alt-right" speech and of much of her \$100 million worth of ads.

Problem is, it's not working.

Over the last month, Trump's new team, led by Kellyanne Conway, has worked single-mindedly to blunt that line of attack on the theory that if he can just cross the threshold of acceptability, he wins. In an act of brazen rebranding, they set out to endow him with stature and empathy.

Stature was acquired in Mexico, whose president inexplicably gave Trump the opportunity to stand on the world stage with a national leader and more than hold his own. It's the same stature booster U.S. Sen. Barack Obama pulled off when he stood with the French president at a news conference in Paris in 2008.

That was part one: Trump the statesman. Part two: the kinder gentler Trump.

Nervy. Can you really repackage the boasting, bullying, bombastic, insulting, insensitive Trump into a mellow and caring version? With two months to go? In a digital age in which every past outrage is preserved on imperishable video?

Turns out, yes. How? Deflect and deny — and pretend it never happened. Where are they now — the birtherism, the deportation force, the scorn for teleprompters, the mocking of candidates who take outside money? Down the memory hole.

Orwell was wrong. You don't need repression. You need only the sensory overload of an age of numbingly ephemeral social media. In this surreal election season, there is no past.

Clinton ads keep showing actual Trump sound bites meant to shock. Yet her numbers are dropping, his rising.

How? Trump never goes on the defensive. He merely creates new Trumps. Hence:

(1) The African-American blitz. It's a new pose and the novelty shows. Trump is not very familiar with the language. He occasionally slips, for example, into referring to "the blacks." And his argument that African-Americans

inhabit a living hell and therefore have nothing to lose by voting for him hovers somewhere between condescension and insult.

But, as every living commentator has noted, the foray into African-American precincts was not aimed at winning black votes but at countering Trump's general image as the bigoted candidate of white people.

Result? A curious dynamic in which Clinton keeps upping the accusatory ante just as Trump keeps softening his tone — until she finds herself way over the top, landing in a basket of deplorables, a phrase that will haunt her until Election Day. (Politics 101: Never attack the voter.)

(2) The immigration wobble. A week of nonstop

word salad about illegal immigration left everyone confused about what Trump really believes. Genius. The only message to emerge from the rhetorical fog is that he is done talking about deportation and/or legalization. The very discussion is off the table until years down the road.

Case closed. Toxic issue detoxified.

Again, that's not going to win him the Hispanic vote. But that wasn't the point. The point was to soften his image in the Philadelphia suburbs, pundit shorthand for white college-educated women that Republicans have to win (and where Trump trails Romney 2012 by 10 points). Which brings us to:

(3) The blockbuster childcare proposal. Unveiled Tuesday, it is liberalism at its best, Big Government at its biggest: tax deductions, tax rebates (i.e. cash), and a federal mandate of six weeks of paid maternity leave. The biggest entitlement since, well, Obamacare.

But wait. Didn't Trump's acolytes assure us that he spoke for those betrayed by the sold-out, elitist, GOP establishment that for years refused to stand up to Obama's overweening mandates, Big Government profligacy and budget-busting entitlements?

No matter. That was yesterday. There is no past. Nor a future — at least for Ivanka-care. It would never get through the GOP House.

Nor is it meant to. It is meant to signal what George H. W. Bush once memorably read off a cue card. "Message: I care."

And where do you think Trump gave this dish-the-Whigs cradle-to-college entitlement speech? Why, the Philadelphia suburbs!

Can't get more transparent than that. Or shameless. Or brilliant.

And it's working.

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Library questions

Describing a problem is the first step in solving it. So far, Astoria's city council has only offered a title: Library.

Oh — and three councilors did finally, after extended, ill-designed discussion, vote to try to scrape up a minimal sum for a renovation of current facilities, which prompted expert warnings of expensive errors. No wonder the five councilors who voted on an array of scenarios failed to satisfy a seeming majority of voters.

I, for one, appreciate the beautiful new libraries at Naselle, Washington, and Seaside as civic ornaments.

I'll offer some questions which should help achieve a useful description of the problem:

Is a significant dollar expenditure appropriate in order to achieve a major civic ornament? Can we quantify that value?

How many patrons use the public library today, compared with 10 (or 20) years ago?

How does circulation compare, over a similar time span?

How have online downloads to personal devices (tablets, iPods, Kindles, smartphones, etc.) affected circulation?

How does the Astoria Library compare with the libraries at Clatsop Community College and Astoria High School?

Choices made today will affect the library, which has belonged to all 10,000-plus Astorians for a century or more. The city council owes taxpayers deliberate, competent problem-solving. I'd like to see a ballot measure based upon such a study.

RALPH WIRFS
Astoria

Calling foul

This is in response to the editorial "Agricultural decisions should be based on facts" (*The Daily Astorian*, Aug. 30). The suggestion in this editorial that neonicotinoids' impact on bee populations is "folklore" and "posturing" is insulting. Of course that is the editor's stance. Most of the newspaper's parent company's revenue comes from agriculture. But please, don't play your readers for stupid.

Here is another qualified long term study suggesting there is, indeed, enough evidence to suggest a link: "Nearly two decades of data reinforce concerns that pesticides are really bad for bees," mentioned Aug. 16 in the *Washington Post*. I can produce more links to studies saying the same thing.

The editor's last sentence, though, was a real corker: "... we must bear in mind that terrestrial and aquatic farmers are the best stewards among us." Yep. Business can always be trusted to put people and the environment before profits. Right. Some farmers are, indeed, good stewards. But corporate farming, not so much. It's that profit thing.

Geneticists are increasingly finding convincing evidence that chemical exposure in humans (whether ingested, inhaled, or simply exposed to) can show up in the genes of subsequent generations. Agricultural fertilizer runoff is having impacts — sometimes devastating — on rivers, aquifers and even the oceans, so much so that experts say potable water will be a serious issue in the second half of this century.

There simply aren't enough long term studies to say with any certainty that the chemical manufacturers' claims of

"safety" are valid. With all the "cides," be them "insecta" or "pesti" or "herba" that we are applying to our crops and soil, we are playing Russian roulette with the environment and our genetics. In the game of Russian roulette, sooner or later the gun goes off.

BILL GRAFFIUS
Gearhart

What's a liberal?

If you think it's OK to unionize public employees who are over-protected, making it next to impossible to fire a worthless employee, you're probably a liberal.

If you have no problem with the unions taking dues from all employees, and supporting only the Democratic party with those dues, you're probably a liberal.

If you think it's OK for the unions, with the help of the Democratic party, to negotiate wages and benefits that far exceed those in the private sector, you're probably a liberal.

If it doesn't bother you that unions are one of the main reasons that our local and federal governments can't balance a budget, you're probably a liberal.

If you don't think we have enough labor laws to protect the working class, without the need of unions, you're probably a liberal.

With this kind of thinking, I'm guessing that you also have no problem with the illegal aliens' devastation to our country, either. Yes, you're a liberal.

With these being some of our most major problems, and the fact that they get big support from both Hillary Clinton and the liberals, our country is in real trouble. God, please help us.

JIM ELVIN
Salem

Keep benefits

I am a public school teacher serving Clatsop County. Every day I am on the front lines, and I am proud to keep my commitment to my community.

When firefighters, nurses, and teachers like me were hired, our employers offered salary and benefits packages that we agreed to accept. The work we do is difficult, and sometimes dangerous. Stable compensation packages ensure that state, county and city employers can recruit and retain a qualified workforce that doesn't turn over every year or so.

Even so, retirement benefits have already been reduced substantially for the public workforce. It is disheartening when powerful people call on our employers to change the rules and further reduce our retirement benefits, especially when those calls are based on false information.

Here is the reality: There have been two lengthy and expensive Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) lawsuits that brought bigger pension shortfalls, and the Oregon Supreme Court has made it clear that employers cannot reduce benefits further. There isn't a single proposal being put forth today that would withstand legal muster, or make a significant reduction in the state's pension bill without threatening our retirement.

Instead of entering another round of costly legal fights, it's time for the state to pay its debt through the normal budgeting process. Real leadership from Gov. Brown and state lawmakers will move the state forward and keep the promises made to workers like me.

CHUCK ALBRIGHT
Astoria

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WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE TWO HOMES?

HINT: IT HAS TO DO WITH SAVING ENERGY AND MONEY.

Though two homes may look alike, energy-efficiency upgrades can make a big difference in terms of maximizing comfort and reducing energy use and cost.

Energy Trust of Oregon can help you find a trade ally contractor and provide cash incentives that help offset the cost of qualifying energy improvements. With upgrades to your water heater, appliances and lighting, you could save up to 20 percent on your home energy costs while not having to scale back on comfort.

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Serving customers of Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural and Cascade Natural Gas.

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