

OPINION

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Two Years until 2020 Election – Time to Get to Work

As people of color, we are in a pitched battle

BY OSCAR H. BLAYTON

Most readers will be familiar with this scenario. A white politician that you have not heard from in two years starts to show up at black churches, glad-handing the pastors, reciting for the congregation his or her accomplishments that you've never heard of and reminding you to vote for him or her in the upcoming elections.

It's a scenario that is played out in most political districts where blacks make up a significant portion – but not the majority – of the electorate. We know very little about these absentee politicians except that they are “the lesser of two evils” – the choice offered to those black folk allowed to vote, since the end of the Reconstruction.

The question is: Why are we con-

sistently faced with only being able to choose between the lesser of two evils each election cycle? Or put another way: “Why can we not have more options when selecting who will represent us?”

The answer is that we do have more options.

We simply must constantly stay politically “woke” and not wait until the last minute to pay attention to who the potential candidates are. Politicians interested in running in 2020 already are lining up at the starting gate. People aspiring to become the next president of the United States already have advanced people in Iowa and other key states in preparation for the primary elections. Those eyeing congressional seats, state and local offices are organizing their political teams in order to hold on to those offices or to unseat an incumbent.

2016 has shown us that if we do not get engaged, we are in danger of being saddled with a lying racist, bent on erasing all of the gains people of color have made during the

last five decades.

2018 has shown us that when people organize, they can overcome many of the obstacles that are strewn in our paths to equal justice and the freedoms promised to us by the U. S. Constitution. 2018 also has shown us that there are those who would deny people of color justice and freedom by blocking us from our guaranteed right to vote.

The Georgia governor's race shone the light on how bigots and racists will go to any lengths to tilt the vote in their favor by removing voters from the rolls and by making it more difficult for voters to get to the polls to cast their ballots. Republican Brian Kemp ran for governor of that state while refusing to step down as its secretary of state, the office that oversees elections in Georgia. Over the years, Kemp systematically removed black voters from the rolls through various questionable means, giving himself a clear advantage by increasing the percentage of would-be voters who were white.

There are those who will try to cheat us out of our rights, including

our right to vote. There are those who will try to steal elections in the way that Trump did in 2016 with the help of Russian interference. These people can be stopped, however. They can be stopped by you and by me. They can be stopped by your parents and your voting-age children – and by your aunts and uncles and cousins and friends.

The way we stop them is by looking for people qualified to run for office in federal, state and local elections and helping them to win. These people can be found among your parents and your voting age children – and your aunts and uncles and cousins and friends. They must be identified and then encouraged to run for office. And when they run, we must support them. We must support them with our time, our labor and with our money. There may not be many of us that can give much of any of these things, but we can each give something.

If we make more of an effort, we can get more elected officials of the type we want and deserve. The proof is in the pudding. 2018 saw a record number of women of color

elected, and it is expected that these women will work to steer America back on the correct course to fulfilling the promises of our Constitution.

According to the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, women of color now will occupy 38 seats in Congress, 9 statewide elective offices, 456 state legislative seats and 10 mayors' offices in some of the nation's 100 largest cities.

We, as people of color, are in a pitched battle for our rightful place in this nation. And it is a battle that we will not win if we do not enlist as many people as possible in the fight. If we do not identify, enlist and support candidates who champion our best interests, then we deserve the callous and unjust treatment that we receive from elected officials who do not respect us.

The clock is running and so are the same tired old politicians. It is time we bring some serious champions into the fight.

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Preventing Nations from Muzzling the Media

The voices of its citizens are key

BY J. ALEX TARQUINIO

More than an ocean separates the United States from France. The contradictory world views of their leaders veered sharply into focus on the centennial of the first World War. Hours after making the now famous Armistice Day pronouncement beneath the Arc de Triomphe that “patriotism is the exact opposite of nationalism,” French President Emmanuel Macron introduced an event launching a global initiative for freedom of information and democracy.

Everyone living in a free and democratic society should be in agreement on the importance of this issue. The clear advantage of reliable public information, and of the liberty of speech and of the press, should be a non-partisan issue. Yet in the high-profile announcement, the heavy burden of partisanship, pitting globalists against

nationalists, signaled the challenges ahead.

Although none of the speakers mentioned the U.S. president by name, their *bête noire* was conspicuous by his absence. This highly-restricted event occurred within the Paris Peace Forum – a three-day tribute to multilateralism that President Donald J. Trump bowed out of – in a session hosted by Reporters Without Borders, a Paris-based global non-governmental organization also known by its French name, Reporters Sans Frontiers.

“It is a common good for humanity that there be honesty in information and liberty of the press and of opinion,” the French president told the select audience that included heads of state, diplomats and Nobel laureates. I was there representing the Society of Professional Journalists.

Macron cited philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt, a German Jew who fled Nazism and became famous for her writings condemning all forms of totalitarianism, quoting from her 1967 book *Truth and*

Politics in which she wrote, “Freedom of opinion is a farce unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts themselves are not in dispute.”

He went on to draw a comparison between trends today and more primitive forms of democracy last witnessed 50 to 100 years ago. His point was not lost on the audience, which included the heads of state of Canada, Costa Rica, Norway, Senegal and Tunisia, all of whom followed up with remarks about the imperative need to protect freedom of expression.

In the same vein, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau pointed to the anxiety stirred up by globalization as paving the way for politicians to scapegoat the press. “Attacks on the media are not just about getting your preferred political candidate elected,” he said, “they're about increasing the level of cynicism that citizens have towards all authorities, towards all of the institutions that are there to protect us.”

This was one of several veiled digs that Trudeau made at the expense of Trump, who has consistently pushed the envelope to test the limits of the

electorate's appetite for his media bashing. From the U.S. president's initial mocking of the press trailing his campaign, he progressed to the assertion that the media are the enemy of the American people. In July, the White House barred a CNN reporter from covering a Rose Garden event. In November, it pulled the credentials of Jim Acosta, the network's Chief White House Correspondent.

The event took place only four days after the revocation of Acosta's press pass. As one of relatively few Americans present, I was peppered with questions about what this meant. I explained that the U.S. has a solid legal framework, so the question would most likely be decided in the courts.

Fortunately, the White House has since backed down from what might have proved a protracted legal battle. Yet countries that lack strong democratic institutions are increasingly seeking political advantage by muzzling the media. Examples abound, from Myanmar's unjustified jailing of the Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, to the appalling murder of Saudi Arabian journalist Jamal

Khashoggi.

Unsurprisingly, the group of 25 prominent media and communication experts of 18 different nationalities that were assembled to study the problem came up with a global response. The Nov. 11 declaration by the commission, which was led by Secretary-General Christophe DeLoire and Nobel peace laureate Shirin Ebadi, proposed creating an international body of experts to continuously research global information issues and recommend the best practices and norms for public communication.

While we applaud the efforts of press freedom groups to expand free speech around the world, there is no effective substitute for political will. It is up to our citizens to express their outrage at the daily undermining of the credibility of responsible media outlets. When eroding the foundation of a free press is no longer a popular political tactic, we will be closer to realizing the ideal of a free and open information society.

J. Alex Tarquinio is president of the Society of Professional Journalists.

Letter to the Editor

‘Fail First’ Fails Seniors

In January, Medicare Advantage Plan Holders will no longer be protected from insurance company

implemented Step Therapy. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services recently announced the upcoming change which will force physicians to prescribe drugs chosen by the insurance company first, only allowing a patient to move on to potentially more effective drugs if the first fails, giving this program the nickname “fail first”.

The Sickle Cell Anemia Foundation of Oregon is a nonprofit dedicated to serving the needs of patients living with Sickle-Cell across the Pacific-Northwest. Our most pressing objective is to help identify those living with the disease, then to help with all of their healthcare needs, including facilitating regular access to appropriate

health care providers and services.

Navigating insurance when you require high-quality care is hard enough without them also having to fight for access to the best care. This change prevents doctors from choosing the best treatment and allows insurance companies to interfere with doctor-patient relationships.

Sickle Cell Anemia patients already face an uphill battle when it comes to treatment. They do not deserve to have to suffer through fail-first.

Taking away a patient's best option and interfering with the patient-doctor relationship are not acceptable.

Marcia L. Taylor, Sickle Cell Anemia Foundation of Oregon, Inc.