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OUR VIEW

Trump is a disaster — Clinton the only choice for president

Everything was lining up for a Republican to take the White House in 2016.

It's the natural course of things in this country — after eight years of Clinton, America wanted Bush. After eight years of Bush, America wanted Obama. After eight years of Obama, it was likely the country was leaning toward a change in tactics and vision.

But the GOP nominated Donald J. Trump, and the possibility that the party would take back the White House immediately went up in smoke.

Quite simply: Trump represents the worst of America, is an affront to the essential values of this country and has no business anywhere near the White House.

Here are a few nonpartisan reasons:

- He is trying to undermine the entire American democracy, claiming that the election will be rigged weeks before any voting even took place. Trump has not yet said he will accept the results of the election — thus putting at risk the country's long history of peaceful transfer of power. Being the sore loser and publicity hound that he is, one can imagine Trump undermining the legitimacy of the next president for as long as the cameras and crowds allow him.

- He oozes greed and narcissism. Throughout his life, he has done everything he can to cheat his way out of his obligations via bankruptcy and tax loopholes, and stifling the little guy whenever his clout and power allowed it.

- He is blatantly working in concert with one of America's enemies — in this case Russia — to undermine our democracy. That bears repeating: He is working with information supplied illegally by a foreign government and a foreign non-state actor to defeat his opposition.

- He is a xenophobe. He has inflamed white supremacists across the country, refusing to denounce them in every campaign stop and interview. He has done irreparable damage, especially to young minds, with his vicious verbal assaults against Mexicans, Muslims and African-Americans, just to name a few groups he has targeted.

- He treats women terribly. He has left one wife after another — cheating on each — and is a serial abuser of women. He admitted to that fact in the leaked 2005 video, and plenty of women have stood up to corroborate Trump's own words.

- He has undermined faith in the media. The media is not tasked with fair and equal handling of unequal candidates. Our job is to test and poke and prod each candidate fairly, and Trump failed those tests to a far greater degree than his competitor. We tried to find one newspaper that has endorsed Trump, and have been unable to do so. And that's the way it should be. Anyone of unbiased mind, with the facts in front of them, has to come to the conclusion that Trump is a far weaker choice. What he sees as conspiracy is simply consensus.

- He has inflicted terrible damage on the Republican Party. He is not a conservative and believes in none of the core beliefs of the GOP — small government, free trade, personal responsibility. He has laid waste to

the party in his self-absorbed sprint to November, and may have handed Congress to the Democrats and Hillary Clinton.

- He has committed crimes against common decency. His language, his casual support of violence, and his continuous, bilious insults of others will be what this campaign is remembered for. When we look back upon a man who said such awful, ignorant things in front of thousands of cheering fans, we are bound to be shocked and saddened, embarrassed by ourselves and the way we turned against our neighbors and our democratic institutions.

Yet despite all that, while it is clear that Trump is an odious person, that does not necessarily preclude him from being a good president.

But the plain and simple truth about why Donald Trump cannot do the job: He has no idea what he's talking about.

Literally, no idea. We doubt he could pass an eighth grade civics test. He has learned so little through the campaign process and refused to prepare substantively for any of the debates.

Trump's promise was that he was so brilliant and successful, that given a few weeks or months he could know more than the dumb generals and bring peace to the Middle East, know more than the dumb economists and boost American incomes, know more than the politicians and untangle all the intractable problems that America faces. Yet, when faced with the daunting task of forming and then defending his positions, he gave up with a whimper. Instead he sat in his hotel room, turned on CNN and Fox News, and tweeted about how nasty everyone who disagrees with him is.

And now a word about the next President of the United States: Hillary Clinton. She is a noticeably poor campaigner. She doesn't have the oratory skills of her husband or her predecessor in the White House. She doesn't have the natural instinct for politics and people that those men do, either.

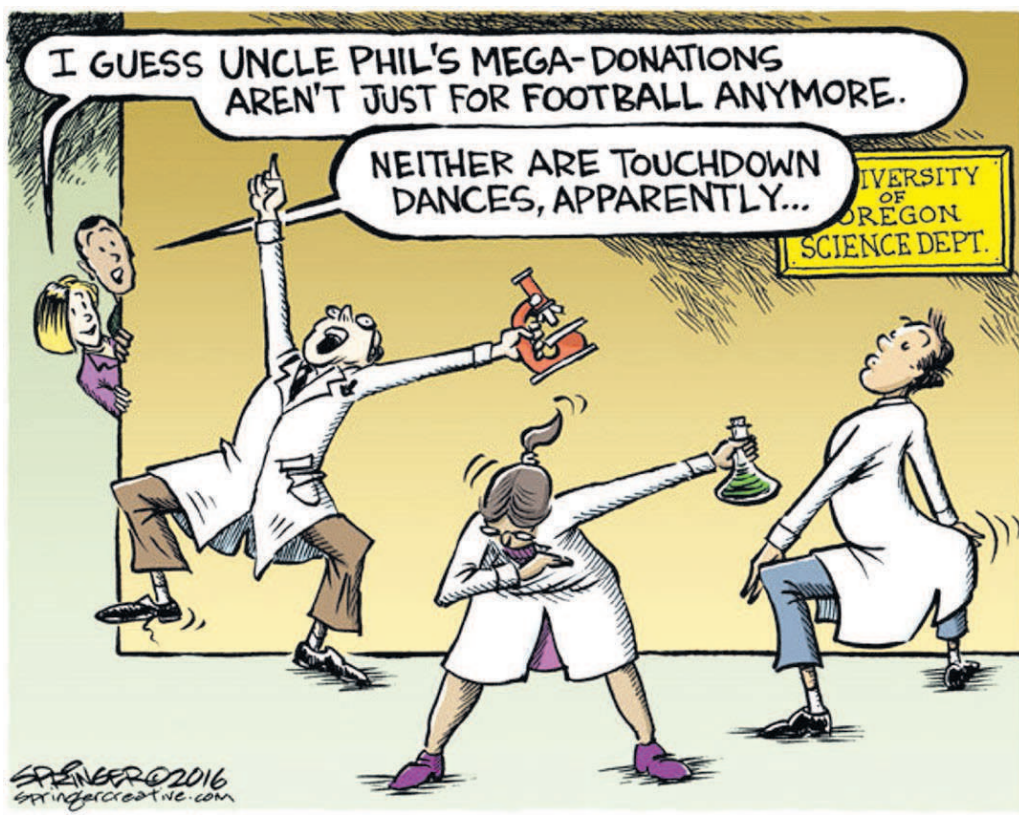
Obama and Bush are excellent speakers. Bush especially seemed to relish the competition of an election much more than the daily grind of governance.

Hillary is the opposite. She fails to whip crowds into a frenzy, fails to dazzle us in debates. And her constant shading of political positions and personal beliefs is maddening, her hawkish foreign policy a clear cause for concern.

But she is a dogged, determined policy guru. She will put her head down and work, looking for solutions to every possible problem this nation will face. She may even help rebuild the Republican Party just by being who she is — a straightforward foil that half the country reflexively opposes.

Clinton is worthy of the office. She has worked all her life to get there, and no one will work harder once she arrives.

Her opponent isn't worthy of anything except sitting in his chair in his lonely, gilded hotel room, flipping through cable news channels and complaining about them.



OTHER VIEWS

Repairing moral capital

Hillary Clinton, who has been in politics all her adult life, seems to have learned something from Michelle Obama, who has never run for public office. Clinton gave three masterful answers in the debate Wednesday night that were tonally different from her normal clichés.

They were about Donald Trump's alleged assaults on women, his refusal to respect the democratic process and the contrast between his years of "Celebrity Apprentice" experience and her own governing experience. Clinton's answers were given in a slow and understated manner, but they were marked by moral passion, clarity and quiet contempt.

They were not spoken from the point of view of a politician. They were spoken from the point of view of a parent, which is the point of view Michelle Obama frequently uses. The politician asks: What can I offer to win votes? The parent asks: What world are my children going out into when they leave the house?

The politician is focused on individual interest, but the parent is interested in the shared social, economic and moral environment.

That turns out to be a useful frame for this ugly year. It's becoming ever clearer that the nation's moral capital is being decimated, and the urgent challenge is to name that decimation and reverse it.

Moral capital is the set of shared habits, norms, institutions and values that make common life possible. Left to our own, we human beings have an impressive capacity for selfishness. Unadorned, the struggle for power has a tendency to become barbaric. So people in decent societies agree on a million informal restraints — codes of politeness, humility and mutual respect that girdle selfishness and steer us toward reconciliation.

This year Trump is dismantling those restraints one by one. By savagely attacking Carly Fiorina's looks and Ted Cruz's wife he dismantled the codes of etiquette that prevent politics from becoming an unmodulated screaming match. By lying more or less all the time, he dismantles the fealty to truth without which conversation is impossible. By refusing to automatically respect the election results he corrodes confidence in our common institutions and risks turning public life into a never-ending dogfight.

Clinton has contributed to the degradation too. As the James O'Keefe videos remind us, wherever Hillary Clinton has gone in her career, a cloud of unsavory people and unsavory behavior has traveled alongside. But she is right to emphasize that Trump is the greatest threat to moral capital in recent history and that the health of that capital is more fundamental than any particular policy position.



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

The sad fact is that in the realm of common life, gnats can undo the work of giants. "Moral communities are fragile things, hard to build and easy to destroy," Jonathan Haidt writes in his book "The Righteous Mind." "When we think about very large communities such as nations, the challenge is extraordinary and the threat of moral entropy is intense."

We are now in a country in which major presidential candidates can gibe about the menstrual cycles of their interviewers and the penis size of their opponents. We are now in a society in which the childish desires of a reality-TV narcissist can insult the inheritance that Washington and Hamilton risked their lives to bequeath. We are now in a society in which serial insults to basic decency aren't automatically disqualifying.

Clearly, we have a giant task of moral repair ahead of us.

Clearly, we have a giant task of moral repair ahead of us. That starts with a renunciation of the Trump style. One big lesson of 2016 is that that can only happen if people police members of their own party. If somebody is destroying the basic social and moral fabric through brutalistic rhetoric and vicious misogynistic behavior, it doesn't really matter that he agrees with you on taxes and the Supreme Court; he has to be renounced or else he will drag the whole society to a level of degradation that will make all decent politics impossible.

It also means addressing the substantive social chasms that fueled Trump's rise. We are clearly going to have a lot of angry populists around in the years ahead, of right and left. It should be possible to oppose them with a political movement that champions dynamism with cohesion, globalism with solidarity — a movement that supports free trade, open skilled immigration, ethnic diversity and a free American-led world order, but also local community building, state-fostered economic security, moral cohesion and patriotic purpose.

In other words, it should be possible to be conservative on macroeconomics, liberal on immigration policy, traditionalist on moral and civic matters, Swedish on welfare state policies, and Reaganesque on America's role in the world.

The election of 2016 has exposed the staleness of the Republican and Democratic ideologies. It has also established a nihilistic, reality TV standard of conduct that will pull down the country if it is allowed to survive. The one nice thing about Trump is that he has prompted so many people to find their voice, and to turn from their revulsion to a higher alternative.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003. He is also currently a commentator on PBS.



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