

Congress could use some working folks

Like many modern Americans, I probably watch too much television, although I don't pay much for my programming. When son Willie bought a barn down the road from my place, I was pleasantly surprised to find a brand-new condition aluminum antenna in the loft. I promptly borrowed my friend's bucket-truck and bolted it to the old windmill tower in our backyard. We get somewhere in the range of two dozen channels. I might prefer to have 57 channels, but there would undoubtedly still be times when there was nothin' on (my apologies to the Boss).

Just like Woody Owl and anyone else who "gives a hoot," I try to stay informed about current events by watching the news, even though it frequently has an adverse effect on my blood-pressure. And despite the fact that my favorite shows tend to be re-runs of "M.A.S.H." or "Gunsmoke," I also watch a fair amount of programs with educational content, perhaps so that I can fool my wife into occasionally believing I might know something when we are watching "Jeopardy!"

The recent midterm elections offered an opportunity for the political pundits (and other "experts") to proffer opinions concerning the diversity of those elected to the House and Senate and whether or not the American population is being accurately and fairly represented. There are now more women and minorities in Congress than at any other time in our history — which, in theory, should demonstrate that we are in an era when true equality is the order of the day and we have, hopefully, largely moved past the divisive nature of our collective being that has historically been so disrupt-

tive to our society. However, in the humble and provincial opinion of this observer, the gridlock and vitriol persists. Why?

While watching a recent episode of "This Old House," a program of which I have been a fan for a long time, a "guest electrician" was interviewed on the jobsite. It turns out this fellow, Donald Norcross, is a member of the House of Representatives from New Jersey. Before becoming a "public servant" (I have occasionally taken umbrage to this term when applied to "public employees"; the volunteer work that neighbor Larry and I perform digging graves for the Helix Cemetery is, I believe, a purer form of "public service" because we are not on the payroll), Mr. Norcross was a journeyman electrician for 17 years. How many other electricians serve alongside him? None, although he stated there is one former carpenter and one former steelworker. Maybe the rub is not race or gender but work experience. I had an immediate epiphany on the matter, which warranted further research.

Not surprisingly, I found that about 2 out of 5 members of the House or Senate listed their previous occupation as public service/politics. About one-third listed "business" (with that percentage I would think the federal budget would be closer to balanced), another 40 percent were lawyers (out of

respect for my barrister friends, I won't even comment) and about 1 out of 5 were current or former educators. Other noteworthy occupations were 14 doctors, 4 dentists, 3 veterinarians and 2 nurses as well as 8 ordained ministers. Plenty of previous government leadership is ostensibly evident in the form of 43 former mayors and 12 former governors.

I thought about my circle of acquaintance, which is quite extensive for a self-proclaimed hillbilly, and thought maybe I could help fill in the gaps of the under-represented segments of our electorate. For example, I know at least 2 diesel mechanics who are proficient problem-solvers and would most certainly balance the budget and tackle controversial issues head-on. I have a farrier friend

whose view of the world is as clear as anyone I've ever encountered. I know several carpenters who are extremely intelligent and have an inherent ability to see, and more importantly understand, the big picture of how things should work to achieve a common goal. As a kid, I pitched melons, hoed weeds and built fence with folks who may have lacked formal education but possessed wisdom far beyond what I see from my view afar of the Legislative branch of our government. My wife is a secretary and has been for many years. I am also well-ac-

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MATT WOOD
FROM THE TRACTOR

quainted with a number of other secretaries and have learned that if you want something to be accomplished efficiently and correctly, no matter the business or institution, no matter whose name is on the door or sign out front, the secretary is the one who will make it happen.

I told son Willie of my theory regarding the need to elect more mechanics, tradesman, and administrative assistants. He agreed to a point, but told me those folks were "too busy working to get involved in that political crap."

Houston remembers the Bushes

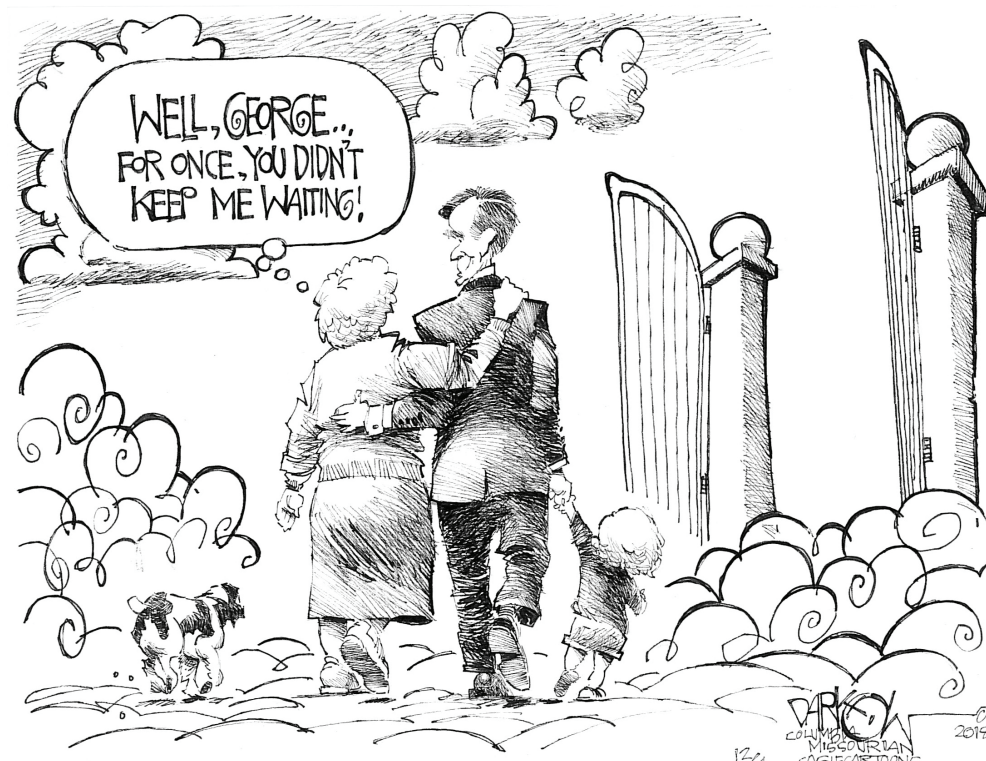
Houston Chronicle

In June 1948, after the College World Series and graduation day at Yale, young George H.W. Bush packed up his cranberry-red Studebaker (a graduation gift from his father) and headed the car's distinctive nose in a southwesterly direction. The little car got him to Odessa and to a shotgun duplex, where two prostitutes lived on the other side of the wall. "Kind of humble," Bush called it. While the young war hero from Connecticut scrambled to gain a foothold in the West Texas oil patch, the rented dwelling would be home for himself and his wife Barbara and their little boy George.

The young New England patricians had come to a strange new world. "First, it was flat, perfectly flat, like no land they had ever seen," Richard Ben Cramer wrote in his classic "What It Takes: The Way to the White House." "No brooks, streams, rivers. No native trees — no trees. It was bright, and hot like they'd never felt heat, and gritty everywhere with dust."

That little Studebaker — a restored version of the car is on permanent display at the Bush Library in College Station — was the Bushes' chariot to a new life. It carried them to an adventure, an opportunity to create lives for themselves far away from received wisdom, hoary tradition and family expectations.

Texas — first Odessa-Midland, and then Houston — offered a young family that



opportunity. It was in the tradition of an opportunity held out slightly more than a century earlier to Stephen F. Austin's Old Three Hundred and to newcomers eager to start afresh in a swampy, sultry settlement beside a mosquito-ridden bayou. It was the same sort of opportunity that lured to the Lone Star State countless young war veter-

ans eager, like the Bushes, to begin building homes, families and careers. The place was open, unformed and rich with promise.

"When I wanted to learn the ways of the world, I didn't go to the Kennedy School," Bush told delegates to the 1988 Texas state GOP convention. "I came to Texas, in 1948."

Flash forward nearly 45 years beyond the Bushes' West Texas adventure. "They won't come back to Houston," people were saying as George and Barbara Bush prepared to vacate the White House after years of living in Washington. "They'll go back East."

But they didn't go back East. Houston was home. They not only came home, but they made themselves an integral part of this community. They continued serving, as they had their whole lives. The Houston Literacy Foundation bears Barbara's name. George was an invaluable resource for a city expanding its economic horizon toward China. And they were always a common sight behind home plate at Astros games.

Now they are both gone, but as exemplars for their fellow Houstonians and their fellow Texans, George and Barbara Bush still serve.

The nation will discuss and debate the Bush presidency. Books will explore its achievements and its failures. That's not only right and proper, but useful in a nation that presumes to govern itself.

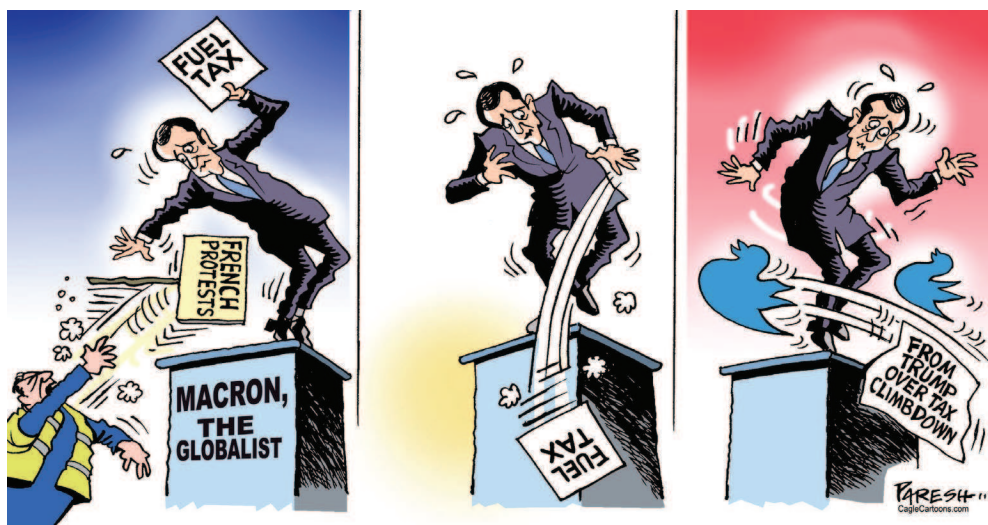
Just as useful are Bush memorials in our midst. A great international airport, a statue near the Arts District, a dynamic literacy program — perhaps a little red Studebaker, circa 1947 — are reminders that we too have opportunities to serve, wherever we happen to be, whatever our status in life. Our fellow Texan, the good and decent man we lost a few days ago, has shown us the way.

Some realism needed to face climate change

The Wall Street Journal

There is no Plan B because there is no Planet B," Emmanuel Macron lectured Donald Trump — in English — when the American President withdrew from the Paris climate agreement last year. Well, apparently there is a Plan B after all. Mr. Macron stopped his fuel-tax increase after concluding that marginal carbon reductions aren't worth kneecapping an economy and sacrificing his political career. Mr. Trump could have warned him.

The French President views stopping climate change as a grand legacy project, and he had hoped to use higher fuel taxes to discourage driving for the sake of slashing carbon emissions. It didn't matter to him that French emissions already are very low on a per capita basis and further cuts to transport emissions would be extremely difficult to achieve. But this matters a great



deal to lower-income rural voters whose use of cars for daily life and business was about to become much more expensive.

Those voters produced the yellow-vest

movement — named for the safety gear they wear — that in turn has created a political crisis for Mr. Macron. What began as a few hundred thousand protest-

ers scattered around the country became more than a million last weekend, including inexcusable rioting mobs in Paris.

Mr. Macron's tax backtrack, which his government says is only for six months, might induce the protesters to return home. But the movement grew so large and garnered so much public sympathy that his entire economic-reform agenda is now in jeopardy. The fuel tax was not part of his election campaign.

Mr. Trump tried to warn the French leader, albeit indirectly. "No responsible leader can put the workers — and the people — of their country at this debilitating and tremendous disadvantage," he said of the costs of the Paris climate deal when he announced America's withdrawal last year. The point is that the public seems to understand better than progressive elites that the consequences of climate change, whatever they turn out to be, will be easier to confront the more prosperous the world is.

Ranchers shouldn't bear cost of wolves

Capital Press

The U.S. House of Representatives has passed legislation that would remove the grey wolf from the federal Endangered Species list. The bill passed on a 196-180 vote.

The measure would strip wolves of federal protection in California, and the western two-thirds of Oregon and Washington. Wolves already have been de-listed in Idaho and the eastern one-third of Oregon and Washington.

Cattlemen are hailing the measure's passage. It now goes to the U.S. Senate where, because chamber rules require 60 votes to end debate, it faces extremely long odds.

We take exception to comments made by

Rep. Peter DeFazio, a Democrat who represents Oregon's 4th District, in defense of keeping federal protections on wolves. He called the bill "a talking point for a few idiots."

We recognize there are honest disagreements about wildlife policy, but insulting the intelligence of your opponents is hardly the stuff of thoughtful debate. The cattle and sheep producers of the West are not idiots and they deserve more respect from an elected representative.

We also think DeFazio should consider those who have to deal with the wolves first hand.

DeFazio told the House about Oregon's famous "wandering wolf," OR-7. OR-7 hailed from northeast Oregon. He wandered

to California, came back into the southern Cascades where he found a mate and has produced pups. He and his progeny, seven or eight wolves in total, comprise the Rogue pack — so named not for their behavior but after the river valley where they roam.

"Guess what? We are not having catastrophic predation on cattle in Southern Oregon," DeFazio said. "We could accommodate more wolves."

The Rogue pack has a taste for livestock. It was credited with five confirmed kills in a three-week period earlier this month. Producers say the toll is higher, but those kills have not been confirmed by state wildlife officials.

Are the losses to depredation in Western Oregon "catastrophic?" Certainly not, if you

aren't running cattle or sheep on public and private grazing allotments.

Maybe DeFazio would have a different opinion if his livelihood was being devoured on the hoof and there was little he could do about it because the federal government tied his hands.

The gentleman from Springfield need not fear. His district will get more wolves. But should ranchers be forced to continue to bear their losses?

We have always believed that wolves have a place in the wild. But we've never believed that cattlemen and sheep producers should be required to provide a free buffet.

It's time to end the protections for wolves as they continue to multiply and spread across the region without any help from