

Putting 'care' back in health care

The recent marked shift in our local weather pattern has coincided with an unfortunate turn of events in the health of several people with whom I am closely associated. A couple of those affected are my actual family members while others, due to their long and valued friendship, may as well be. All of the aforementioned folks are (or soon will be) faced with mobility issues.

Aside from a broken arm 30-some years ago, there has not been a time in my memory when I was not able to climb a ladder or drive a stick shift (well, OK, since I was 12 or 13 years of age, at least). I have been lucky and feel truly blessed. Now, some of the people I know who have not only been able to negotiate a ladder or a clutch pedal, but, in one instance, even fly a U.S. Navy airplane, require assistance with such seemingly mundane tasks as getting dressed or eating a meal. A few days ago, son Willie and I ventured out to the grocery store via an unplowed country road full of wind-blown snow and, not surprisingly, quickly found ourselves stuck in a snowdrift. Within 15 or so minutes, we had shoveled our way out, chained up the rear wheels and were once again on our way. Odd as it may sound, I was happy to run a "poor man's backhoe" for awhile and felt

immediately guilty that I have taken for granted that I can.

In the past week or so, I have spent more time in hospitals or rehabilitation/care facilities than I had for many years. One immediate observation is the double meaning that can be found in the term health "care" providers. The professionals I have observed of late are not only trained experts in their field, be it administering lifesaving treatment in the ER, operating a CT scan or other high-tech equipment or persevering through hours, days, and months or years of physical therapy with a patient; they also genuinely "care" about the people they are treating and frequently exhibit a level of combined personal and professional concern (not to mention compassion and patience) that is eminently laudable.

I consider myself to be sufficiently qualified to roof a barn, set the point gap on an antique tractor, or fill a barn loft full of hay bales. Perhaps with an alternate path of matriculation, I could have learned to operate a CT scan. However, I will readily admit that I likely do not possess the capacity nor ability to help someone regain the ability to walk again after a stroke has left them partially paralyzed. That, my friends, calls for an individual who

is not only uniquely qualified, but truly exceptional.

As is the case so frequently in our time spent on this third planet from the Sun, for every action or event or crisis there is likely a reaction or a counterbalance. For our household, this meant a visit from an uncle I had not seen in 20-odd years and my kids had not met. We made arrangements to pick him up at the airport and hastily set up humble (to say the least) sleeping accommodations in our basement.

During the course of his several days here, we made numerous trips to visit our temporarily (presumably) infirmed kin and eagerly tracked his progress and discussed his upcoming challenges. On a happier note, we attended daughter Annie's final high school basketball game (an exciting one), shared several lunches out and generally got caught up with family news of the past two decades. We also discovered that aside from being a heckuva nice guy, he is also a decent antique farm equipment mechanic who possesses encyclopedic knowledge of movies, music and baseball.

We dropped him off at the airport with a souvenir 1957 Milwaukee Braves schedule (his favorite team as a kid) and promised not to wait another 20 years to see each other.



MATT WOOD
FROM THE TRACTOR

Military action in Venezuela a step too far

While facing sharp criticism nationwide, including lawsuits from 16 states, for declaring a national emergency over money to build a border wall, President Trump, of course, spent Presidents Day in friendly territory:

He came to Miami-Dade and a packed Florida International University arena to show support for Venezuelans, but also Cubans and Nicaraguans who support his administration's efforts to apply more political pressure to end the illegitimate regime of Nicolás Maduro and throw support to Juan Guaidó as the South American country's interim leader.

Trump found a warm reception in the city of refugees from dictatorships and political unrest — and rightly so. Trump deserves credit for being the only president since Ronald Reagan to take a hard stand against dictators in Latin America, a region often forgotten by administrations.

But more important, Trump may have given the thousands gathered a preview of his 2020 re-election campaign battle cry. Going after undocumented immigrants, as he touted as a 2016 campaign promise, is a perennial rant for the president. So he's now targeting old-school socialism and communism.

"America will never be a socialist country," Trump preached to the choir highlighting the troubles that have plagued Venezuela since it went down that road under late leader Hugo Chávez.

Such statements hark back to America's past glories, much like Trump's State of the Union address where he made numerous mentions of World War II. But Monday, in the context of Venezuela, Trump spoke directly to Maduro and his military.

The Trump administration is hoping to step up international pressure on the dic-

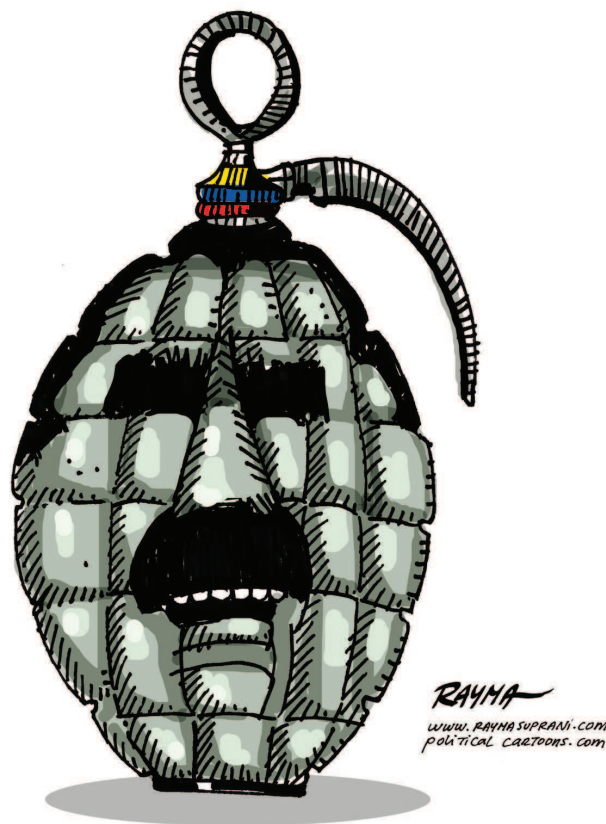
tator, who's blocking at the Colombia border millions of dollars in humanitarian aid from entering his country. Sen Marco Rubio, who has taken a leadership role in the Venezuelan effort, and U.S. Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart flew to the Colombia-Venezuela border over the weekend to attract international attention to the blockaded food and medicine. Maduro is being given until Saturday to allow the goods in. The unspoken plan is that if the aid gets in, the Venezuelan people, who are experiencing tremendous shortages, may welcome it enough to turn on Maduro.

The Venezuelan military must now turn its back on Maduro and allow aid to enter Venezuela, the president, senator and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis all said.

"You must not block this humanitarian aid," Trump said. "We seek a peaceful transition of power. But all options are open. If you choose this path, you will find no safe harbor, no easy exit and no way out. You'll lose everything."

Such talk attracted opposing demonstrators to FIU who demanded that the United States keep out of Venezuela and opposed any U.S. military action there.

U.S. military action is just the wrong, and deadly, action to take when Venezuelans themselves already are taking matters into their own hands — Guaidó's takeover being the biggest first step. The U.S.' unending thirst for oil must not supersede Venezuelans' desire to do for themselves. Trump, so far, has deftly navigated our involvement in Venezuela. He can continue to do so without the threat, or folly, of military intrusion.



Rapists presented by their church as men of God

When a journalist for the Illinois Baptist newspaper reported in 2002 on a Baptist pastor who had sexually assaulted two teenage girls in his church, one apparently just 13 years old, he received a furious reprimand.

Glenn L. Akins, then running the Illinois Baptist State Association, offered a bizarre objection: that writing about one pastor who committed sex crimes was unfair because that "ignores many others who have done the same thing." Akins cited "several other prominent churches

where the same sort of sexual misconduct has occurred recently in our state."

In the end, the Baptists ousted the journalist, Michael W. Leathers, while the pastor who had committed the crimes, Leslie Mason, received a seven-year prison sentence and then, as a registered sex offender, returned to the pulpit at a series of Baptist churches nearby. So Leathers is no longer a journalist, and Mason remained a pastor.

That saga was cited in a searing investigation by the *Houston Chronicle* and the *San Antonio Express-News* that found that the Southern Baptist Convention repeatedly tolerated sexual assaults by clergymen and church volunteers. The *Chronicle* found 380 credible cases of church leaders and volunteers engaging in sexual misconduct, with the victims sometimes shunned by churches, urged to forgive abusers or

advised to get abortions.

"Some victims as young as 3 were molested or raped inside pastors' studies and Sunday school classrooms," the *Chronicle* reported.

Leathers told me he is glad he wrote the 2002 article, even if it cost him his career. He expressed frustration at Southern Baptist priorities: The church leadership would expel a church that appointed a woman as senior pastor, even as it accepted sexual predators.

The indifference to criminal behavior is an echo of what has been unearthed in the Roman Catholic Church over the decades. The latest sickening revelations are of priests getting away with raping nuns and with assaulting deaf students.

These new scandals provoke fresh nausea at the hypocrisy of religious blowhards like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson who hounded at the immorality of gay people even as their own Southern Baptist network tolerated child rape.

I suspect it's no accident that these crimes emerged in denominations that do not ordain women and that relegate them to second-class status.

"If God is male," Mary Daly, the feminist theologian, wrote, "then the male is God."

The result may be threefold: an entitled male clergy, women and girls taught to be submissive in church, and a lack of accountability and oversight. It's compli-

cated, of course, for many of the Catholic victims were boys, but there does seem to have been an element of elevating male clergy members on a pedestal in a way that made them omnipotent and unaccountable.

"Underneath it all is this patriarchy that goes back millennia," Serene Jones, the president of Union Theological Seminary, told me, noting the commonality of the Catholic and Southern Baptist churches: "They both have very masculine understandings of God and have a structure where men are considered the closest representatives of God."

The paradox is that Jesus and the early Christian church seem to have been very open

to women. The only person in the New Testament who wins an argument with Jesus is an unnamed woman who begs him to heal her daughter (Mark 7:24-30 and Matthew 15:21-28).

The Gospel of Mary, a Gnostic text from the early second century, suggests that Jesus entrusted Mary Magdalene to provide religious instruction to his disciples.

But then conventional hierarchies asserted themselves, and women were mostly barred from religious leadership.

After the *Chronicle's* investigation, the Southern Baptists have promised greater training and more background checks, but what's needed above all is accountability and equality.

**"IF GOD IS MALE, THEN
THE MALE IS GOD."**

— Mary Daly

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