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CHRISTOPHER RUSHKATHRYN B. BROWNANDREW CUTLERWYATT HAUPT JR.JADE McDOWELL

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OUR VIEW

Courtesy is a big deal in a democracy

Filling the role of a local politician isn't easy.

Let's face it, the people we elect to city council positions or mayoral slots are not doing it for the money. They don't go home from city council or county commission meetings with the promise of a sack full of cash waiting.

No, the work of local elected leaders can be thankless, but we need area residents who care about their communities to step up and get involved.

On the other side of the coin, though, those same local politicians have an obligation to listen to concerns from all voters. Even if that input appears to be, at first glance, distasteful or the elected leader disagrees with the sentiments of a voter.

Democracy is a two-way street. While admittedly it can be messy, its proper function depends upon a civil discourse between those who are elected and those who voted. Area politicians owe taxpayers — voters and constituents — the freedom to speak freely. That doesn't mean voters have a blank check to use profan-



Former Lexington Mayor Marcia Kemp speaks to a crowd of residents in July at city hall, explaining what steps she took after the city council failed to pass a budget before the start of the fiscal year.

ity or scream and yell at a local politician or make unfounded accusations. What it does mean is voters should be able to feel comfortable to address their elected leaders on mundane subjects or controversial issues.

Whether it is Pendleton or Lexington, anyone who steps forward with a public comment needs to be heard. Public officials already have the luxury of multiple platforms to get their message out. Voters do not.

Politicians are quoted in news stories on radio and websites, across social media and in public forums. In a sense, on this issue at least, the playing field is slightly tilted in their favor.

Voters, though, typically get two opportunities to voice their concerns — during an election or at a public meeting during public comment periods.

We applaud local towns that hold public meetings or public comment periods. Realistically, they don't have to do that. But when area politicians take the time to listen to their constituents, it shows not only concern but a genuine interest in the body politic.

Ridiculing a voter — no matter who he or she is or what they do — is a wrong answer for a locally elected leader.

When such incidents occur, it quickly illustrates a broken link between voters and those elected to represent them.

Courtesy really is a big deal in a democracy and it is sadly missing in a lot of places across our great nation.

OTHER VIEWS

Democrats see trouble at the top of their ticket

A president teetering on the brink of impeachment ... whose public approval is as much as 15 points underwater ... who trails the leading opposition candidates ... who may cost his party its majority in the Senate ... who burns through top level staff at an unprecedented rate ... who publicly belittles members of his cabinet.

Given the totality of these circumstances, the Republican Party should be desperately scouring the countryside for an alternative.

But, wait. It is democratic opposition leaders who are frantically searching for an individual they can persuade to enter the contest, pledging money, organization, unity and an unobstructed path to the party nomination. They worry and fret that none of the current field of 16 — including a former vice president and five sitting senators — is capable of recapturing the White House.

Instructed by history, the accepted judgment declares that a president weighted down with such personal and political baggage cannot possibly survive. It declares further that victory over a president laboring for re-election under such deadweight is a virtual certainty.

Why then has panic crept into the psyche of the democratic establishment, convincing some that it is in their best interest to seek an outsider?

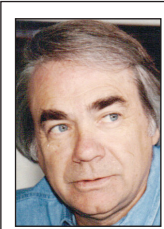
For them, the embarrassment of canceling hotel ballroom reservations for the Hillary Clinton victory celebration and trashing inaugural ceremony invitations is horrifyingly fresh.

Fear that the leading candidates — former Vice President Joe Biden and Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Bernie Sanders of Vermont — will wither under the anticipated brutal assault and record-shattering spending from the Trump campaign is sufficiently genuine that the names of others have entered the public dialogue.

Speculation has fallen on former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and former Secretary of State and 2004 nominee John Kerry as potential candidates who could ignite the party, rise above the ceaseless petty squabbling among the current field, and provide the jolt of energy to halt Trump. Disney chief executive Robert Iger

drew some attention before he disclaimed any presidential ambitions, and former Starbucks chief Howard Schultz flirted with an independent run before declining.

And, of course, there's Hillary, who's dropped hints about her availability and eagerness to gain redemption through a rematch with Trump. But the prospect of another Clinton campaign produced so much agita among democratic leaders they publicly suggested (in the nicest possible way) it was time to move on.



CARL GOLDEN
COMMENT

It appears as this point any effort to convince Bloomberg, Kerry or someone else to come to the rescue has fallen short. It is admittedly a hard sell and time is not on their side, what with fewer than 100 days until the Iowa caucuses.

It's fitting that Donald Trump, the most unorthodox president in American history, be the one to upend conventional wisdom, to rewrite decades of sagacity and insight and shatter deeply embedded preconceived notions about the psyche of American voters and their willingness to follow a well-worn political path.

Will the wisdom that his re-election is doomed be validated? Have the American people had their fill of the "strum and drang" that has surrounded his administration from the moment he uttered "I do" on the Capitol steps on Jan. 20, 2017?

Whether he can overcome what most candidates would consider insurmountable obstacles remains to be seen. Even suffering impeachment by the House and acquittal by the Senate doesn't seem to be an issue for him. His governing and campaign style will not change a whit.

It will fall to the Democratic Party to convince the American people that Biden is still mentally razor sharp, that neither Warren nor Sanders is part of the left's lunatic fringe, or that Peter Buttigieg's experience as mayor of a city of just over 100,000 qualifies him to lead a nation of 330 million.

If "electability" is the goal, can any of these four achieve it?

Like Diogenes, party leaders should stow the lantern and place their faith in conventional wisdom.

Carl Golden is a nationally syndicated columnist.

Veteran stories are a crucial part of our nation's history

I love to study our nation's history through the lens of our military veterans.

Who could fail to be inspired by the brash courage of the United States Marines during the Battle of Belleau Wood in World War I? Or by the words of Marine Captain Lloyd W. Williams, who, after being repeatedly urged to turn back by retreating French forces, famously said, "Retreat? Hell, we just got here."

Legend has it that it was at this battle that Marines earned the German nickname "Teufelshunde": "Devil Dogs."

What about the story of Pfc. Dirk J. Vlug, serving in the Philippines during World War II, who refused to back down despite being outnumbered 5-to-1. No, it wasn't one against five enemy soldiers. It was one soldier against five, heavily armed Japanese tanks.

Reacting on instinct, Pfc. Vlug grabbed a bazooka and six rounds of ammunition, and managed to destroy all five tanks singlehandedly.

I still get goosebumps when I read the words of Lt. Gen. Lewis "Chesty" Puller, the most decorated Marine in American history, when he and his men were surrounded by enemy forces at the Battle of Chosin Reservoir: "They're on our left, they're on our right, they're in front of us, they're behind us ... we got them right where we want them. They can't get away this time."

Or the story of Master Sgt. Roy Benavidez, who jumped from a helicopter armed only with a knife, determined to help a Special Forces patrol trapped in North Vietnam. Over the course of a six-hour ordeal, Benavidez was wounded by bullets, bayonets and shrapnel a total of 37 times.

When he was awarded the Medal of Honor, President Reagan said that if his story were a movie script, audiences wouldn't believe it. His heroic actions saved the lives of eight men.

In Iraq, Sgt. Leigh Ann Hester became the first woman awarded the Silver Star since World War II. A retail store manager from Kentucky, Hester led the counter-assault against 50 insurgents who attacked her convoy, braving heavy mortar and machine gun fire to engage the enemy on foot.

These stories of courage, selflessness and sacrifice are so much more than just stories to tell on Veterans Day. They are a crucial part of our nation's history, and the foundation upon which its legacy has been built.

Countless millions of American lives — with more to come — have been lived in the freedoms secured by the blood and service of our veterans.

Despite this rich history of military service that continues to this day, our country has not drafted a single soldier in over 45 years.

Since the draft ended in 1973, no person has been compelled to serve their country. And yet, each year, an estimated 180,000 young Americans voluntarily enlist in the United States Armed Forces.

One of the many things that makes this country so great is that its people have the will to serve. They have the will to lay down their own freedoms, and even their own lives, to defend those of others.

Our veterans didn't have to be told to serve or to sacrifice. It was already there, in our DNA.

This is why I believe it is so important to honor, remember and celebrate our veterans, not just on Veterans Day, but every day. And it's not only because they have earned it — though they have.

But it's also because in honoring and remembering our veterans, we reveal the values that matter to us as a nation: Courage. Sacrifice. Selflessness. Dedication. The willingness to give up one's own life so that others might live and be free, which we call "heroism."

We reveal ourselves and our values in what we remember, and in what we give our time to. This Veterans Day, I encourage you to spend your time in a meaningful way.

Say, "Thank you," to a veteran, yes, but also take some time to hear their story. I guarantee you: It's a story you won't hear anywhere else.

Kelly Fitzpatrick is the director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs and Governor Kate Brown's policy advisor on veterans' issues.