

# Opinion

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## EDITORIAL

# Pearl Harbor, and personal history lost

Two years ago today, we commemorated the 75th anniversary of one of America's milestone events — the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941.

The Dec. 7, 2016, issue of the Herald featured excerpts from stories in the paper during the week or so after the Pearl Harbor attack. We focused on the reactions of local residents and on the immediate preparations for war that dominated headlines then, and indeed would dominate them for most of the next four years.

But we also added perspective to the feature by interviewing several longtime Baker City residents about their recollections of that day and its aftermath.

I was rereading their stories the other day, as the anniversary neared, and it struck me, with some force, that of the six people we talked with in 2016, three have died — Doug Smurthwaite, Bill Wendt and Carl Kostol.

This in itself isn't shocking, of course.

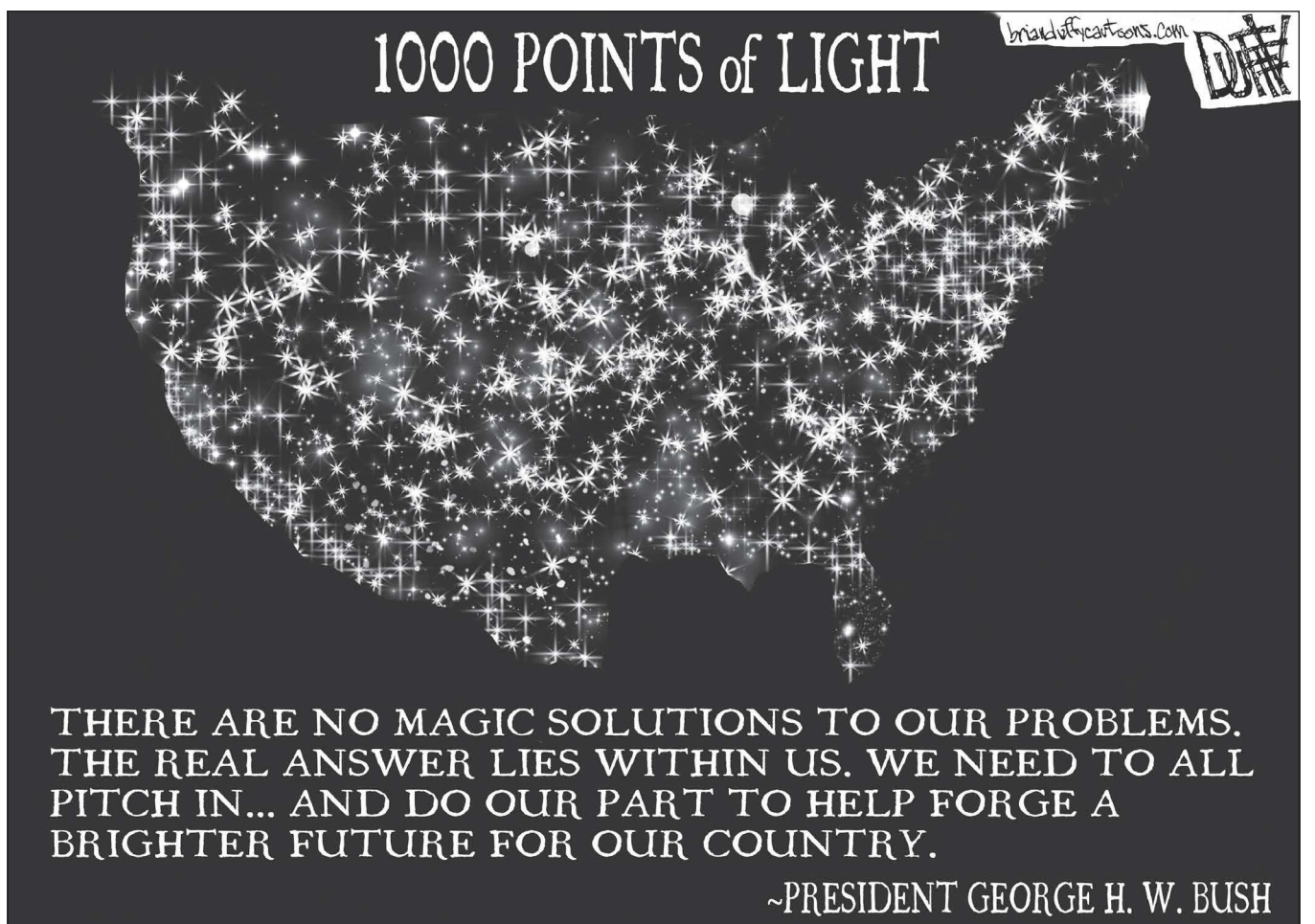
Seventy-five years is a goodly span. Wendt was 93 when we interviewed him, Kostol 94 and Smurthwaite 85.

The significance, it seemed to me, is that not many years will pass before we can no longer replicate that story from 2016. The history of Pearl Harbor is amply documented in newspapers and magazines and in thousands of books, to be sure.

Yet there is something irreplaceable about being able to listen to people tell their stories, to hear the timbre of their voices and to see the emotions transform their faces.

I was reminded, as I often am in this business, of the potential price of procrastination.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



## Life lessons from a president

Oh, cut it out, some leftist critics have said of the adulation now being visited on the late President George H.W. Bush.

But what they might want to do is learn from him. They might want to reflect on his courtesy, his kindness, his honesty, his forgiving nature, his courage, his strength of personality, his sense of what is right and wrong at a given time, his love of country, his overall character.

We could most of us take a lesson or two or maybe a hundred from him, and then there's his presidency. Disabled folks, listen, he made life a lot better for you with a law addressing all kinds of ways in which you could be aided when necessary and made equal with everyone else when applying for jobs. He took on economic mishaps and got the better of them. He helped reunite East and West Germany.

The list goes on and on, but a real biggie is the way he followed up on his predecessor's work on ending the Cold War and facilitating the dismemberment of the Soviet Union. While rearrangements were tough and perilous, Bush pulled it off with calm, cool decorum that avoided the worst possibilities and abetted the best. Critics often say Bush and President Ronald Reagan were not prime players in what happened, and obviously, as in any major historic event, myriad forces were at play. But these two took

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charge and made choices in a manner crucial to things unfolding the way they did, and to say otherwise is just politics.

So why didn't he win re-election? Well, he had said no new taxes in his campaign and he helped produce new taxes and this was a killer, as he knew it would be even though he had decided to put his view of what was right over his political future. Then there was Ross Perot taking votes from him as a third-party candidate — he would almost surely have won otherwise — and a politically brilliant opponent in Bill Clinton, someone happily indulging in trash talk for the sake of victory.

The interesting thing here, of course, is that the endlessly, recklessly bashed Bush was as good-hearted and helpful to Clinton after the votes were counted as anyone could be. Clinton grew to love him. The two were like father and son. This says so much about the man, as does his graduating from Yale in two and a half years, his 73-year marriage to the great Barbara Bush, the way he raised his sons, his heroism as a Navy aviator, his enormous success as a businessman and his respected service as a member of the House, as CIA chief and as an

ambassador.

As a journalist for more than a half century, I've known lots of politicians on the local, state and national level. There are those I admire and too many who have done damage to my hopes and expectations. A chief fault is ego and self-interest, of putting one's own political success above the common good, if with a ready means of justification. What is sometimes said behind closed doors is that they have to do this to win, but that their victory will produce more good than a trivial misstep. No, not if it becomes a way of things.

I only met Bush once. He was vice president then, and it was just a brief press conference in which he outlined his precise, detailed understanding of an issue. I was impressed but I have been far more impressed by all the testimony about his exceptionalism, private as well as public. Obviously, he made mistakes as president and he's as vulnerable as any leader to questions about decisions interpreted by some as dreadful or worse. But his overriding decency, his focus on serving his country above any personal consideration, make me salute him with all my heart.

Jay Ambrose is an op-ed columnist for Tribune News Service. Readers may email him at [speaktoday@aol.com](mailto:speaktoday@aol.com).

# Honoring Bush, without mentioning Trump

The bacillus-like effect that Donald Trump has had on American political commentary is so pernicious that even the death of a former president, historically an event that transcends partisan bickering, no longer inoculates us from nastiness.

I was disappointed, but not surprised, that some editorial boards and columnists, in reflecting on the death of George H.W. Bush on Nov. 30, could not resist comparing the 41st president with Trump.

This was predictable given political punditry's unprecedented disdain for the current president.

But predictable does not equate to necessary.

There's no legitimate reason to lard these ostensible tributes to the elder President Bush with criticisms of Trump — criticisms that are so familiar by now, more than two years after Trump's election, that most of us could write them ourselves, perhaps with the aid of a Mad Libs-style form allowing us to supply an occasional adjective.

In almost every example I read, the authors obviously felt justified in contrasting Bush and Trump because they felt this highlighted the former's more admirable qualities.

Perhaps, in the echo chamber in which these writers seem to work, this seems self-evident.



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But outside that cloistered environment — which of course is where most readers live — I believe the tactic fails, by and large, and for at least two related reasons.

First, it's a mistake to assume that everyone, or even most people, loathe Trump.

(If that were the case his 2016 victory would be even more stunning than it was.)

It follows logically, then, that readers who either support Trump or who are ambivalent about him — categories that combined surely include tens of millions of Americans — might well deem these references to Trump, wedged into eulogies to Bush, as inappropriate distractions.

Or worse.

I'm decidedly in the ambivalent camp when it comes to Trump — I find his personality deplorable and many of his statements and tweets offensive, but some of his economic policies, such as his orthodox Republican approach to taxation and federal regulations, commendable.

Some of the editorials and

columns I read struck me not as sincere efforts to laud Bush but rather as cynical, and transparently so, attempts to stir a new ingredient into the familiar anti-Trump recipe.

The impulse must have been all but irresistible.

Here was a chance to lionize Bush, and thus deflect the common complaint that the liberal media hate Republicans, but without losing any momentum in the campaign to demean Trump.

Yet it seems to me that any thoughtful reader — and notwithstanding the political climate I believe there are plenty of them around — understands that it's quite possible to honor a former president without mentioning the current one.

Indeed, it's preferable.

Even accounting for the widespread repugnance that media commentators have for Trump (and considering his statements about the media, this aversion is hardly irrational), these Bush-Trump comparisons seem to me the product of reaction rather than sober contemplation.

After all, if you're writing from the perspective that Trump is a cretin, why would you choose him as the standard by which to measure Bush? What bar could be lower?

This hardly seems like a compliment to Bush.

The approaches among the writers varied from the subtle to the blatant.

As an example of the former, Newsday's editorial praising Bush concluded with the sentence, "America could use a president like him today."

But in my admittedly cursory assessment, this technique was less common than the more direct approach of, in effect, combining a memorial to Bush with a repudiation of Trump.

The Chicago Tribune, for instance, ended its editorial by writing that Bush's "gravity, moderation, vast experience and serious purpose could hardly be less like the qualities for which Trump is known."

Michael McGough, the senior editorial writer for the Los Angeles Times, penned a column in which he uses the first four paragraphs to celebrate Bush and condemn Trump.

But McGough, to his credit, at least acknowledged that using Bush's death to highlight Trump's shortcomings weakens the apparent sincerity of any purported ode to a dead president.

But even so McGough, having

invested a few hundred words in what amounts to a tirade against Trump, won't concede that the technique, even though it smacks of a backhanded compliment, is inappropriate.

"Instructive as these comparisons are, it diminishes the contributions of Bush to regard him simply as an anti-Trump," McGough writes.

He's right, of course.

The best eulogies, it seems to me, are the simple ones, those that focus on the qualities the speaker, or writer, found most admirable about the deceased.

I believe each of us would prefer to be remembered this way, rather than to have someone else intrude on what's supposed to be a celebration of our own life.

Too many writers, I think, have in effect turned Trump into a sort of party crasher, an unwelcome presence at a solemn gathering.

Contrasts between Bush and Trump are inevitable, of course — they're both presidents.

But we have ample time to indulge in that sort of analysis.

Surely President Bush deserved a brief period in which he didn't share headlines with Trump.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.