

EDITOR'S DESK

Looking for common ground in a divided nation

This Friday, Sept. 11, marks the 19th anniversary of the terror attacks that toppled the World Trade Center and left one side of the Pentagon in smoking ruins.

While Sept. 11, 2001, is a dark moment in our nation's history that left scars on our collective psyche, it is easy to romanticize the sense of unity and patriotism that followed that day. Muslims in America feared for their lives as they faced hostility and paranoia, but for most of us, the memories that stick out are American flags flying from every front porch as we sang "I'm proud to be an American" at candlelight vigils.

Once again, in 2020, our country is facing a crisis of historic proportions, but this time, there is no sweeping sense of national unity. Social media is a never-ending parade of people bickering in the comments and posting inflammatory rants about why "the other side" are all evil and stupid. People have mostly abandoned local newspapers in favor of smirking, seething cable news commentators. A couple of weeks ago saw people resort to literally, not just metaphorically, screaming at each other from opposite sides of the street during protests in Hermiston.

We can't even agree about the postal service, for goodness' sake.

It feels like if tomorrow President Donald Trump said he doesn't think pineapple goes on pizza, some of my



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Members of the Hermiston High School football team set up the Avenue of Flags at the Hermiston Cemetery in May 2017.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell, File

Republican friends would be posting commentary about why pineapple is a communist plot to destroy our country and must be banned immediately from all pizzas, while some of my Democratic friends would be posting about why pineapple is an essential component of our democracy that must be mandated on every pizza.

This is not how democracy was meant to function. Human beings don't naturally fall into just two distinct categories of thought, where everyone either believes everything in Column A or everything in Column B.

George Washington, in his fare-

well address to the nation, spent much of his speech warning that no alliance to a political party or geographical region can be an adequate substitute for the nation working together for the good of the whole body.

"One of the expedients of party to acquire influence within particular districts is to misrepresent the opinions and aims of other districts," he said. "You cannot shield yourselves too much against the jealousies and heartburnings which spring from these misrepresentations; they tend to render alien to each other those who ought to be bound together by fraternal affection."

He warned that political parties would become engines for "cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men" to secure power for themselves before destroying the very engines that built them up. He warned that the focus would shift from improving the nation to "the alternate domination of one faction over another" and that such animosity between parties "agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foment occasionally riot and insurrection ... (and) opens the door to foreign influence and corruption."

A wise man, indeed.

What we must ask ourselves, then, is whether we are personally contributing to this sort of divisiveness that has weakened our nation. Are we focused on what we can do together to make our community, our state, and our nation a better place? Or are we more focused on landing insults? Do we care more about what is right or about what will make our side look good? Are we looking for common ground or do we refuse to believe anyone on "the other side" is capable of having a good idea?

Are we providing a calm, factual voice of reason to those who are searching for answers, or letting the conversation be controlled by the most extreme points of view?

Reasonable people are capable of finding common ground with other reasonable people. Let's start there.

COLUMN

Taking the time to share my mind

One thing the novel coronavirus has given me is time — an abundance of time.

Rather than sleeping the pandemic away, I have engaged in activities that I normally wouldn't take the time to do. Some are frivolous and fun, while others I had hoped would make my voice heard.

I haven't engaged in area peaceful protests — mostly because I'm concerned about social distancing. Also, I have some philosophical differences regarding each cause. However, I have some serious frustrations regarding fallout from the pandemic and actions taken by our elected officials and leaders, as well as fellow citizens.

I learned long before the 'rona hit that things are rarely solved by expressing your opinion on social media. Too often, those dialogues turn into arguments and quickly result in condescending attacks on people's character.

In April, I decided to email the legislative co-chairs of the Joint Special Committee On Coronavirus Response — Sen. Arnie Roblan and Rep. Greg Barreto.

A day later, I received a two-sentence response from Roblan's legislative policy advisor. Although not much, in retrospect, it at least addressed me by name and was more



Tammy Malgesini

than the generic reply I received one minute after clicking send to Barreto.

"Thank you for your email. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak the Capitol Building is closed to the public until further notice and staff is instructed to work from home. Your email has been received," said the response generated from Barreto's legislative assistant.

I'm sorry, but lots of people have been working from home — and they are doing a better job than merely setting up their email system to send a cursory response.

But even that canned reply is more than I received after reaching out to the governor's office on Aug. 20. After clicking "submit" on the website, this message popped up:

"Thank you for contacting Governor Brown's office. Due to the heavy volume of e-mails sent to Governor Brown, we may be unable to respond personally to each one, but please know that your input means a great deal to her."

Somewhere along the line, I think elected officials forget who they work for. Everyday citizens are encouraged to contact their representatives with concerns. The message I received loud and clear is that electric correspondence is easily dismissed. If this is the response everyone is getting, then no wonder people are protesting.

And I have a bit of advice for those participating in peaceful protests — you have to get closer to

those who you want to hear your message. Holding a sign along Highway 395 in Hermiston has little impact on policy or systems. Don't get me wrong, I don't think it's a waste of time, as it serves to rally additional support. However, to really effect change, your target audience has to hear you.

As for elected officials and leaders who don't have time to respond to concerns of your constituents, maybe you need to hire more staff. By the way, I have experience and skills in both verbal and written communication — and have proven results.

Case in point, after writing "Pandemic creates Pepsi panic" about my problems finding Pepsi Zero Sugar, I've had an outpouring of support. In addition to several friends finding, purchasing and delivering soda to my house, Dan Mooney, sales manager for Pendleton Bottling Company, reached out.

After my column made the rounds at the local distributor and its regional office, they decided to provide me with a couple of cases of Pepsi Zero. Dan came to my house the following day with the motherlode, along with a bunch of Pepsi swag.

Tammy Malgesini, the former Hermiston Herald community editor, enjoys spending time with her husband and two German shepherds, as well as entertaining herself with random musings and drinking Pepsi Zero.

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Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call (541) 564-4533 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters Policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for the Hermiston Herald readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters should be kept to 250 words.

No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

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The Hermiston Herald publishes paid obituaries. The obituary can include small photos and, for veterans, a flag symbol at no charge. Expanded death notices will be published at no charge. These include information about services. Obituaries may be edited for spelling, proper punctuation and style.

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