
THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



a newsletter for Iowa's Democratic Left

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Security theatre in our schools

Almost 18 years ago, three months after the Twin Towers were destroyed, a British terrorist on a plane flew toward the US with explosives packed in his shoes.

Within a few weeks, American airplane passengers were required to remove their footwear before boarding. This was a classic government response to fear, dubbed “security theatre”—a meaningless gesture designed to say “see, we’re doing something.”

School shootings have sparked a similar reaction. Children across the land are being subjected to lockdown drills, some that include fake blood, guns firing blanks, and teachers feigning injuries. The shootings, despite being statistically rare, have inspired the growth of a \$3 billion industry (just as “the war on drugs” spawned and was driven by an explosion of drug-testing companies). A high-profile example is ALICE training. Its web site boasts of “a solution for your organization. ALICE works in any industry and organizations of any size. We can prepare your organization to respond to violence.”

The Iowa City Community School District has held ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) training for staff, but hasn’t yet mandated it for students. The School Board has so far resisted another fear-based initiative: posting armed police officers in its schools. SRO (school resource officers) efforts have failed over the years, and the current board is firmly opposed.

What the Iowa City School Board has not yet resisted is the creation of a “Threat Assessment Team.” The US Department of Justice has just awarded a Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grant of \$187,000 for a “School Violence Prevention Program,” to be housed in the IC school district office. The district’s administrative staff is working out the details of how a Threat Assessment Team will help to prevent school violence. A primary stated goal is “collaboration with our local police departments to establish policies defining prohibited behaviors that are unacceptable and therefore warrant immediate interventions.”

Funding for more mental health counselors, suicide prevention programs, or research on the effectiveness of law enforcement involvement and shooter drills might be more valuable than a COPS grant. Dewey Cornell, the psychologist who designed the threat assessment model under consideration by the ICCSD, pointed out in testimony before Congress that “children are 67 times more likely to be murdered outside a school than in one.” Cornell also stated that “schools are one of the safest places in a community,” far less likely than workplaces, public spaces, and homes to experience violence.

Security theatre frightens people while appearing to protect them. Students, parents, and teachers should question whether this DOJ/COPS initiative is a wise use of money or is a back-door effort to post armed police officers in our schools.

Wherever you live, now is the time to question and educate your school board members and candidates. Prairie Progressive readers in Iowa City can email all School Board members as a group: Board@iowacityschools.org

—Prairie Dog

The first line of defense

Our current political leaders have deprecated and even scorned some of Americans' most fundamental values. One of them is respect for education.

Though learning and scholarship are demeaned across the board, science (think suppression of scientific treatises on climate change) and history (where were the Kurds if not at Normandy?) receive particular trouncing. Across the country many faculty members have been trolled and threatened by far-right groups and individuals seeking to silence them in the classroom, in publications, and in private speech. Iowa members of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) confronted one such incident involving Kirkwood Community College this year.

In mid-August, an adjunct faculty member at Kirkwood learned that two of his personal social media posts prompted a number of complaints, including threats of violence, to the Kirkwood administration. In the most recent post, the faculty member, a member of a local antifa (anti-fascist) group, responded angrily to President Trump's angry denunciation of the antifa movement nationally. Some of the complaints also looked back to a much earlier post from 2012 in which the faculty member quoted from a World War II era Russian poet to express his response to the Christian right. Kirkwood does not claim that either post was made or quoted in the classroom, nor that either had any connection to the faculty member's duties at Kirkwood.

Within two days of being informed of the complaints, the faculty member was told that he could not continue to teach at Kirkwood and offered the choice of resignation or forced termination. Confronted with this choice, he resigned. It is important that Kirkwood's reluctance to allow him back in the classroom stemmed from fear of violence from those complaining about his posts rather than from any fear that the faculty member might himself be violent. The events happened very quickly without any sort of formal investigation or opportunity for hearing. The faculty member was not notified of any sort of right to appeal or challenge the decision to terminate his employment with Kirkwood.

For more than a century, AAUP has been acknowledged as the national repository of core academic values including academic freedom and due process. Its policies and procedures are the gold standard that have guided the relationships between college and university governing boards, administrations, faculty, and students for more than a century. AAUP policies coincide with Iowans' commitments to fairness and acting only after diligent search for truth.

Accordingly, the Iowa AAUP affiliate and chapters at Regents universities spoke up in opposition to the faculty member's treatment. The AAUP protest, published in local and statewide newspapers, pointed out that the faculty member's social media posts were not work-related. It went on to note that both AAUP policies and civic values of fair treatment require that a public employee

facing termination be given an opportunity to challenge that termination in an unbiased procedure. In the case of AAUP policy, that process should involve a panel of faculty members. AAUP requested the faculty member's reinstatement, fair procedures in connection with terminations generally, and resort to the many other mechanisms available to protect staff and students from threatened violence.

AAUP policies and procedures are academic standards, not law. Yet they share with the First, Fifth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution and parallel provisions in the Iowa Constitution a deep concern that full and fair procedures should precede any adverse action against an individual. They are designed to promote truth-finding. When the political climate is as hostile to education as it is now, schools themselves—our public schools as well as public and private colleges and universities—must be the first line of defense in ensuring that teachers may speak and publish without fear of ideology-based retribution from either the right or the left. But sometimes they fail to carry out that duty. When that happens, AAUP will continue to speak out in support of academic freedom and due process.

Fair procedures were not granted to this Kirkwood faculty member. Others might reasonably be concerned that they would be treated the same way.

—Lois Cox is a Clinical Professor of Law Emerita at the University of Iowa

The walls in our heads

I've had walls on my mind lately. A lot. No, not the wall someone wants to build on our southern border. I've been thinking about walls because, as we approach the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, that has unleashed a flood of memories. I lived it. And it has propelled me to think more deeply about both physical and metaphorical walls and the effect they have on our lives. Yes, even our local, here-in-Iowa-City-in-the-middle-of-Johnson-County lives. And just maybe, especially in those lives.

By way of background, I was a first tour U.S. Foreign Service Officer (aka diplomat) assigned to our small embassy in East Berlin. I'd been there for 18 months when the East Bloc began to splinter. West Berlin – comprised of the American, British and French sectors of that post-war oddity – was actually an island in the middle of East Germany. Yet the freedoms that island represented such a threat to the East German communists that they walled it off.

The people pushed back, starting visibly on October 7, 1989, the GDR's 40th anniversary. Because guess what: You can't wall off thoughts, you can't wall people off from hopes and dreams. You can't wall them off from trying to improve their lives. Many, including environmental activists in the East who were among my incredibly committed and courageous contacts, had been pushing back much longer.

I was in DC on October 3 because the German Ambassador invited those of us who served at our Embassy in East Berlin at that

time to German national day—the day of German unity—to celebrate our work. It was an amazing party in so many ways. And it brought back a flood of memories. Some East Germans risked everything—literally everything. If they were deemed dissidents, they could not practice their profession; they risked their kids' educational opportunities and their families' futures. They were harassed and haunted by the Stasi (secret police); for some, their partners were co-opted by the Stasi to report on them.

Walls are both physical and mental. The Germans coined the phrase “Mauer im Kopf” - walls that exist in our heads. In English, I've concluded, that often translates into the need for social justice; the need for people to recognize their implicit biases; the need to move the needle for those who face almost insurmountable barriers.

Looking back on the people I knew in East Germany—who had to be courageous even to meet with a representative of the U.S. government—it caused me to fast forward to today, and to ask you: Please step up. Please advocate for what you care about. This is local government. We are so fortunate to have a say in our lives, to be able to demonstrate, to speak out—to effect change. If East Germans could do it at risk of their lives and livelihoods, surely you, local citizens, can step up and speak up on issues of import to you.

Here are a few thoughts. Iowa City has the highest cost of living in the state. Way too many people

live at or below the poverty line—they are barely getting by. Way too many people can't afford day care or are working multiple jobs just to try to make ends meet. We have to break down walls in housing—the school board, for example, should not have to gerrymander elementary districts because of the distribution of our housing, based on how we have zoned. Let's look at our zoning laws and see what makes sense in order to allow housing to be built at a lower price point. Let's look at creating new forms of zoning—small lots, for example – mixed in with larger lots, and zero lot lines, zero entry homes, that can create truly mixed and diverse neighborhoods. Let's find ways to welcome students into neighborhoods—maybe you have a room or a basement apartment that's standing empty. Let's make sure our public transit system runs where and when it needs to, so people can get to their jobs without having to go to the center of town and back.

And as we examine the mechanics of all this, I also challenge us all to need to tear down the walls in our heads that prevent some of us from recognizing NIMBY behavior—latent discrimination. This includes a whole host of issues—race, religion, LGBTQA+, people with disabilities. We are hardly risking our lives, our professions, or our children's future. All we are risking is making our city more open, more welcoming, and more inclusive. That seems to me a risk well worth taking.

—Janice Weiner is an at-large candidate for the Iowa City City Council

Back to the jungle

I will pay you \$10.50 an hour to just stand outside by the parking meter for two and one-half hours. You don't need to do a thing, or you may do anything you like, just as long as you don't move one foot from the meter in any direction." That was an offer I made to a farmer in the mid-1980s when we were on strike.

Farmland Foods in Denison, Iowa is a pork slaughter and processing plant. The wages were good when I worked there in the 1970s and early 1980s; I went from making \$3.14 per hour in 1973 to making \$10.50 an hour in the mid '80s. Before going on strike, we were not asking for a wage increase, we proposed a reasonable offer of keeping what we had. The company offered concessionary wages amounting to approximately three-quarters of what we were making. There were other demands by the company: cuts to our pension; increases in premiums for health insurance; and several proposals that did nothing more than pit employees in one department against employees of another.

The farmer did not take me up on my offer, he just crawled into his new Ford F-150 pickup with all the new bells and whistles available at the time and drove away. He had told me that no one was worthy of making over \$10 per hour. Of course, I was making the point that it is not easy standing in the same place for 8 hours a day, getting a twelve-minute break after two and one-half hours, and a half-hour break after five hours.

This memory was triggered when I read a business news article last month about how the pork production industry was elated that a federal rule ended the limit on line speed. When I left the packing plant for greener acres in 1990, the line speed

was right around 1,000 head of hogs per hour. That's over 16 hogs per minute – a breakneck speed as it is. Imagine performing the same task over and over and over again without a break for two and one-half hours, only to get 12 minutes to use the restroom, and be back on the line again before that first hog after the break is in front of you (that 12 minutes includes removing safety equipment, removing aprons, rinsing off knives and washing hands). Try it at your desk, or at the kitchen table, or in the garden, or anywhere else where it's possible to repeat something for a few hours. You barely have enough time to wipe the moisture off your forehead, much less keep your knife sharp.

As a union representative, I witnessed numerous repetitive motion injuries. These injuries were not limited to carpal tunnel syndrome, but included tendonitis, bursitis, shoulder injuries, back pain, and other maladies associated with doing something over and over and over again. In Iowa, you must report these injuries to the company nurse, who sends you to the company doctor, who diagnoses you with a sore arm and sends you back to work with a note that you are to be assigned "light duty" for a period of two weeks. Many of those so-called "light duty" tasks are just as damaging as the one that gave you the pain in the first place. A worker will often acquiesce and return to the job from which the employee complained of pain. That's the company's goal.

Now, the sky's the limit on line speeds. The incentive to hold down line speed over the years has been meat inspection. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) meat inspectors, union men and

women who are employed by the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), who work aside company employees, ensure that the pork you eat is safe and clean. The only way meat inspectors can be sure that you're getting disease-free wholesome pork is to examine each individual liver, lung, heart, and other internal and external organs and parts. The training manual is 58 pages. This is a separate matter that will be examined in the next *Prairie Progressive*.

The New Swine Inspection System, which went into effect on October 1st, allows pork slaughterhouses to have its own employees examine the offal and carcasses, thereby cutting out valuable independent inspectors. This process will create and encourage short cuts. Company supervisors are not as concerned about the safe supply and cleanliness of a final product as much as being concerned about a line not stopping.

One purpose of this new system is to cut down on the number of hours it takes to slaughter a certain number of hogs. Prior to the inception of this rule, a facility with a cooler capable of holding 10,000 carcasses would have to schedule 10 hours of work in order to fill the cooler. Now, with an unlimited rate, the cooler may fill up as soon as 10,000 hogs are slaughtered, probably in fewer than eight hours, thereby eliminating overtime costs.

In 113 years since Upton Sinclair wrote "The Jungle," the only thing that has changed is the country of the immigrants working in slaughterhouses.

— Marty Ryan is a native Iowan

Iowa's Child Care Crisis

When I first joined the Iowa Women's Foundation as a volunteer in 2015, they were already embarking on an ambitious goal: to discover the barriers to economic self-sufficiency for women in the state of Iowa by creating a listening tour. I had no idea of the juggernaut we were about to launch. Ready to do "helper" activities—contribute a comment here and there, or offer a suggestion to already created plans—I instead found myself as part of the core planning committee: a small crew of 6 bound by a sense of urgency and determination. We were going to draw on the experiences of community members to drive our mission. What did women need? I was put in charge of drafting the content to pose to community leaders because of my background in facilitating panels and crafting discussion questions. It remains the most momentous agenda I've created to date. What we created became the SHE MATTERS: We Listen and Iowa Wins Tour.

After travelling 4,800 miles to 18 communities across Iowa, and talking with 37 local partners from community nonprofits, educational institutions, and businesses, the IWF found that lack of childcare was the second greatest barrier to economic sustainability, and that this lack of childcare also impacted the first barrier, employment opportunities. In fact, women were unable to take and maintain jobs without reliable childcare and there wasn't enough of it. Anywhere.

The facts are stark. According to the Iowa Department of Human Rights, "Iowa has one of the highest raters with both parents in the paid workforce...[and] 81% of women in Iowa ages 20-64 (with children under 18) are in the labor force."

Yet Iowa has lost 42% of its child care businesses since 2012 (Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral) and the remaining child care spaces have also shrunk from 178,895 in 2012 to 167,817 in 2017 (Des Moines Register May 17, 2018). The cost of child care, when it can be found, averages just under \$140 a week per child. And the impact isn't simply a "family issue," though the anxiety and stress of finding, paying for, and maintaining quality child care is reason enough to see this for the full-blown problem it is. Businesses also are impacted, losing approximately \$4.4 billion due to absenteeism as a result of child care breakdowns (Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2011-2015.)

Jump to present day and the IWF has a laser-focused mission: to help communities in Iowa find their own right solutions for the child care crisis. But how? We devised a tool kit that would provide different ways to conceptualize, create, and implement child care solutions that are tailor-made for individual communities. Some regions in Iowa do not have before and after school programs, while other areas have appropriate brick and mortar space, but no providers. Still other areas, like Iowa City, have a robust college community, which creates both opportunities and challenges. There may be more potential entrepreneurs and caregivers, for example, while at the same time, there are plenty of parent-students who themselves need child care. The tool kit we created includes options for building new centers, expanding existing centers, working with community colleges to educate and train child care providers, offering entrepreneurs the resources and information to start child care businesses, working

with businesses to expand and add benefits or even to create on-site caregiving. We also included the incredibly needed and complex option of availability for 2nd and 3rd shift workers.

Now the IWF is touring partnering communities again, this time to facilitate action. I participated in a recent summit in Iowa City, where, based on discussion, commiseration, and thinking out loud, the Iowa City Chamber of Commerce, local small businesses, elected officials (City, County, and State), the University of Iowa community, and committed individuals agreed to work on creating more affordable quality child care for this diverse community. I am excited to be part of a team devoted to working with businesses in the area to improve child care and bolster the workforce at the same time.

There is no magic bullet, just a lot of hard work to be done. To ensure the successful expansion of child care to Iowa communities in need, we must have state and city support through funding and legislation. In Iowa City, we are lucky to have Representative Mary Mascher and Senator Zach Wahls already advocating for early childhood education and increased access to child care. But local governments must also address the child care crisis because it affects an entire community in terms of economics, social and racial justice, quality of life, education, and workforce. The IWF has the research, a network of resources, and potential solutions for communities to assess; now it is up to us to begin the work.

—Megan Alter is an at-large candidate for the Iowa City City Council

These boys and their fathers

Robin decides to join me in Iowa to work on a novel after I accept a temporary teaching position at the University of Iowa, which extends the Midwest adventure. My novel gets published by the university press, accompanied by a few decent reviews, and then quietly disappears from shelves.

When the teaching job ends, we roll westward, back to Portland, this time to the east side of the Willamette River, the younger and hipper side, where we move into an old craftsman bungalow built in 1922. We paint walls, arrange furniture, discuss what should be done with our new bloodred kitchen, and tend to Mercy's leg injury, which happened while she chased after a tennis ball at the beach.

It's summer again in the Pacific Northwest, and when there's time, I drive to the coast and surf. A finished room in the basement becomes my workspace, where I've been writing this memoir. I'd like to complete a draft before I begin work as a visiting assistant professor at Lewis & Clark, a liberal arts college in Portland.

Robin and I still talk about it. A small room beside our bedroom would make an ideal nursery. We imagine installing a crib and hanging a mobile. For now, Robin uses the space as her office.

It hasn't happened naturally. We've made an appointment with a fertility clinic to discuss options. We make a plan. We want a child. Our new home is large enough for a family. At least that's our growing hope.

A lab tech in a white coat calls my name. I look up from my magazine. She's young, mid-twenties, with bright blue eyes, and sharp strawberry blonde bangs against snowy skin. Many of the office bees are pretty young things, I've noticed, and for a moment I wonder whether the doctors hire them to inspire a clever atmosphere of health and fertility.

I stand. "Hi, I'm Heidi," she says with an open smile. "Follow me."

Of course her name is Heidi. She may as well wear pigtailed. Heidi escorts me down a series of nicely carpeted hallways adorned with cheap, blocky, maroon artwork that reminds me of Rothko. At the end of the hall, we pass through a heavy steel door. Heidi shows me a room with a plastic couch, sink, toilet, TV, and five-disc DVD player.

The room is in the rear of the clinic, off a concrete hallway, and near the back exit, where I'm supposed to slink out anonymously after I complete my task.

Heidi hands me a plastic cup with a twist lid.

"After you finish up, just place the cup in there." She points to a small steel door inset in the wall. "Have you done this before?" she asks. Her cheeks immediately redden.

"Sure, I've done this plenty of times," I say.

"I mean, what I mean," she says.

"I get it. After I finish, I put the cup inside that door. And you'll retrieve it from the other side. Easy."

She leaves me alone.

Inside, I shut the door and lock it. I've been tested before at another clinic in Iowa, but this time they're going to really examine everything, even though I don't know what they could possibly learn. First thing, I spread a sterile blue medical sheet over the plastic couch. It's impossible not to visualize the incalculable number of bare ass cheeks that have sweat all over the couch. This room serves only one purpose.

The TV is on a wood console and looks supremely out of place in the medical setting. I hunt through the drawers to see whether the lab techs left anything interesting. But it's just the same typical boring porn. At the bottom of the stack

are several gay mags. I close the drawer. Five porno DVDs are already loaded into the player. It doesn't play. And the remote is busted. I wash my hands.

It's ridiculous to think that one ingredient in creating a human life begins in this weird den of iniquity. I sit on the sterile blue sheet.

This part is so peculiar. The walls are uncomfortably thin. Each small shift on the couch produces a low discordant plasticky burp. Not to mention I can hear nearly every word of Heidi's conversation with her co-worker on the other side of the wall. And I'm fairly certain, if they stopped talking, they'd hear me. The clinic is nice enough to provide earphones for one's porno-viewing pleasure, but there's no way in hell I'm touching them. Coated, most likely, in an invisible veneer of seminal fluid. For a moment I wonder whether there are men out there—and I'm certain they exist—who loudly traipse into this room, yank the headphones from the TV, and shamelessly whack away at full volume.

I'm an expert at the job. There's no need for mags or the TV, but after I finish and seal the lid on the plastic cup, I suddenly feel strange placing the cup in the little steel cubby. I know I shouldn't be embarrassed, but I am. What might my speedy expertise communicate to the pretty blue-eyed lab tech?

What if I have to do this again? What if I have to see her again? And what will she learn about my semen?

But then, who really gives a shit about my stupid feelings on the matter? We're trying for a child. Robin's already been through far more invasive procedures than jacking off in a Portland medical complex.

— Don Waters, a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, lives in Portland, Oregon. This is an excerpt from his new memoir, *These Boys and Their Fathers* (University of Iowa Press)

Breaking down barriers

I was recently asked, “If you had \$1 million to add to your city’s budget to be spent however you wanted, what would you do?”

This is a tough question because \$1 million is so much, and yet so little, in the context of my community, Iowa City. Not enough for a new city building. Only two-thirds of what we spent on road resurfacing in a single year. Enough to purchase only two new city buses. Yet this amount would be a 100-percent increase in the city’s most recent annual contribution to its Affordable Housing Fund, and would be a significant start on, say, a community solarization project.

I was tempted to choose one piece of infrastructure, or to boost one housing, transportation, or sustainability project. Instead, I chose an initiative that I believe would be more widely impactful: empowering people to effectively engage their government; building skills to be shared, and taught, and used for lifetimes.

Civic engagement is low. Only nine percent of registered voters cast ballots in Iowa City’s last city council election, which was the special election in October 2018. According to the Johnson County Auditor, in June 2019 there were 47,383 registered voters in Iowa City, which is 62 percent of an estimated 76,290 Iowa City residents. This means only about five percent of Iowa City residents participated in the selection of our last seated councilor.

While voting is just one way to measure engagement with our government, we can see other examples of low participation. Iowa City is continually seeking applicants to fill vacancies on boards and commissions. Many of these positions have no required qualifications other than being a resident adult. Also, few individuals comment—in writing or in person—on matters in front of city council.

Why don’t people show up? Many barriers come to mind: time, transportation, child care, language, literacy; and, for many, a significant factor is that showing up is intimidating. Few people know Robert’s Rules of Order. It’s hard to learn the vocabulary for municipal zoning or budgeting. The people who are already there talk like anyone should know, for instance, about the type and caliper of trees that should go into the parking lot medians on this or that development (even if I just have questions about the height of a building or the impact of development on the water in my yard).

This is where \$1 million can go a very long way. It could fund a few dedicated staff, at a living wage, for years. These folks would reach out into the community, educating about what cities do. Educational initiatives on how to be involved could be presented in schools, neighborhood centers, places of worship, and workplaces.

It could be as simple as flyer-ing for volunteer opportunities, or as complex as presenting the annual budget process in digestible, intelligible ways. We would leverage collaborations with groups who already do great work in basic civic education, like the League of Women voters.

Neighborhood associations play a huge role in educating and engaging residents, as they already know many issues of concern or import for a particular area, and they serve as a conduit between government officials and their representative communities. We can enlist volunteers to serve as buddies or “wingmen” for new participants, making personal introductions to decisionmakers, teaching

vocabulary, and modeling good process and procedure.

Iowa City is already offering some new and creative ways to encourage public engagement. For instance, the city took input on residents’ budget priorities this year with a simple and fun “chip in” activity, out at Party in the Park events. People could review posters showing the city’s goals and services, chat with staff to answer questions, then vote on their priorities using brightly colored poker chips.

A well-organized and effective website could facilitate a lot of public education, where users self-select their interests and depth of inquiry. Similarly, well-run social media campaigns will engage residents of all ages and abilities, including many who can’t or would not come down to city hall for a formal meeting. Iowa City’s recent addition of a digital communications specialist has already greatly enhanced the responsiveness and approachability of this city government’s online presence. These are just a few examples of how resources directed at public education and effective communication can have a wide, positive impact in one community.

A well-informed electorate is a prerequisite for democracy, but it is also what ensures its healthy survival. Increased civic engagement has many benefits: trust in societal structures; feelings of belonging to a community; empathy borne from contact with people different from ourselves; mutual accountability based on government transparency; and more people with the skills and experience to lead.

We can, and should, bring local government to the people, show and tell how it works, and joyfully invite everyone to join in. Turning out to vote in a local election is an excellent start.

—*Laura Bergus is an at-large candidate for Iowa City City Council*

Who can deliver a new New Deal?

The mainstream media likes to depict the Democratic Party as divided between centrists and progressives. An equally important divide is between defeatists who think that Trump supporters have taken over the country, and optimists who look to a bright future for Democratic Party ideas.

The pessimists are wrong. The plain fact about Donald Trump's presidency is that his policies are unpopular with an electoral majority. All of the talk about which Democrat is the most electable misses the key point: as of now, Donald Trump is unelectable. Almost any of the Democrats still on the debate stage will have an excellent chance of defeating him by holding him accountable where he should be held accountable: at the polls. The majority of American voters are not on board with Trump's racist and cruel immigration policies (little children in cages!), environmental policies that encourage rapid global warming, racist changes to voting rights, judicial appointees openly hostile to women's rights, hateful persecution of LGBTQ people, arbitrary and unpredictable foreign policy decisions, and a low-wage recovery with no job security and no health care security. The list goes on, but the worst and most damaging of his legacies is his open incitement of racist violence, seen on a broad screen in the gunning down of Hispanic Americans and Mexican citizens in the El Paso Wal-Mart by a Trump supporter directly inspired by his hate-filled rhetoric.

It's at the polls where Trump should be held accountable by the American people. Democrats can defeat Trump if they campaign on his record as

president, and avoid blowing it by running against Vladimir Putin or following the lead of MSNBC and CNN and talking 24/7 about impeachment.

If I am right, and Trump can't win, which Democrat should we hope to see in the White House? Almost any Democratic President can be counted on to regulate Wall Street, protect consumer rights, combat racism, misogyny and homophobia, restore voting rights, appoint judges who support women's rights, stop leasing our public lands to the fossil fuel industry, and end the worst excesses of ICE's cruelty to immigrants on the border.

Other than rolling back Trump's vile and evil policies, what positive steps will a Democratic president take to deal with the crises that Americans care about? How will the White House deal with unaffordable health insurance premiums, medical care bankruptcies, lack of access to higher education, a crippling burden of student debt, a low wage recovery, big money in politics (including Democratic Party politics), highly visible environmental degradation (our flooded rivers and coasts), and sending our young people to die or be traumatized in unwinnable wars that do not have the support of the American people?

Who can we trust to deal with these issues from the White House? The short answer to that question is Bernie Sanders. Both he and Elizabeth Warren understand that the problems we face require bold answers that require a New New Deal from the Democratic Party, one that will insulate the country in the future from a revival of

racist corporate Republicanism. The difference between Sanders and Warren lies in the strength of their commitments to Medicare for All, free public college tuition, a workable Green New Deal, grassroots funded political campaigns, and doubling union membership,

On every one of these issues, we can trust Bernie Sanders to turn the White House into a political bunker to fight for what is truly needed, especially on health care and education.

Elizabeth Warren is equivocal on every issue, qualifying and holding back and making concessions before the fight even begins. To take only one example, her version of the Green New Deal promises federal spending that is only 20% of that in Sanders's version. As everyone who has been involved in diplomatic or labor or legal negotiations knows, you don't begin by giving things away in advance.

Bernie Sanders also understands the need for broad public mobilization to achieve anything in our corporate-dominated political world. Elizabeth Warren, who has a lot of really good ideas, has a touching faith in the sheer power of those ideas to win political fights. I will be delighted to see her in the White House, and will do whatever is needed to support her both in the general election and after she is elected. We have an opportunity, though, for a New New Deal, one that will lead to permanent Democratic electoral majorities at every level of government. To see that happen, the safest bet is Bernie Sanders.

—Jeff Cox

The ritual begins

You know, it really was not that long ago—three years—but it seems like forever.

I don't think many of us realized how quickly it could all go away, being a first time and everything.

The outcome—especially with a late surprise that seemed to flip the table in one direction—didn't seem likely except to true believers.

And then, three years later, as things seemed to be pointed toward a tight finish once again, we saw an unimaginable collapse over a matter of a few weeks.

I am of course talking about baseball and how things changed for the Chicago Cubs since they wiped away a three games to one deficit in the 2016 World Series, taking Game 7 in extra innings. But I could just as easily be talking about national politics and the presidency.

A sports analogy draws the immediate eye-roll... this of course is one reason worth using it.

Yes, as a Cub fan, the parallels with national politics seem about as close as you can get. In six days, the fall of 2016 turned from the stuff of dreams with the Cubs' first championship in 108 years to the stuff of nightmares with the election the following week. If only we were just dreaming. If only we could wake from this.

Now, I have friends who really detest this sort of thing. A sports analogy draws the immediate eye-roll, or red pen, or delete key. This of course is one reason worth using it. It will at least draw a reaction.

Perhaps, many of us have wondered, attracting a response is the reason the President of the United States sometimes does the things he does. At best, as a distraction for things of greater importance that are spinning out of control because of economic incompetence and neglect for our shared—or at least stated—American values of equity, opportunity and civility toward each other.

But think about every morning when you wake up to the news. An eye-roll comes immediately, with disbelief or shame at the latest national or international crisis driven by, or responded poorly to, by the White House.

We might as well be stealing bases with a 10-run difference in the score, because such distractions ultimately are meaningless. The outcome already should be clear.

Yes, wake up. It is almost 2020. The Iowa caucuses are upon us and after that night, the ritual begins anew. Pitchers and catchers start reporting a week later.

But there is a big difference between now, right before the World Series and ahead of the first caucus and primary votes, and three years ago: We knew who the Cubs' manager would be in the spring, and we knew shortly afterward who would be the President of the United States, presumably for four years.

Actually, at this point, we do not know who will hold either position by the early spring of 2020, and what that means for our "team." We do know this: Our nation is not living a dream, and this is not a game.

—Mike Owen is executive director of the Iowa Policy Project and a former sports writer for the Associated Press

“The only kinds of fights worth fighting are those you're going to lose.”

—I.F. Stone

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