

FEATHER RIVER DEMOCRATIC CLUB

Monthly Newsletter

August, 2016



General Meeting

Third Thursday of each month, 7-8 PM
Yuba City High School. Room 322,
850 B Street, Yuba City, CA

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E-Board Meeting: August 10
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Special Events

Newsletter Editor

Joene Tranter

Justice Ginsburg's Remarks

Richard Cohen, *The Washington Post*, July 13, 2016

The editorial boards of both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* have rebuked Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg for her intemperate — but true — words about Donald Trump. In three separate interviews, she took Trump to task for being totally unfit for the presidency. The facts are with her, but she broke with a worthy tradition. Justice, as we all know, should be blind. Sometimes, it should be mute as well.

This is one of those times. As the *Post* pointed out, it was just 16 years ago that the winner of the presidential election was decided by the Supreme Court. It chose George W. Bush, in the most wrong-headed decision since Caligula, the late emperor of Rome, promised to name his horse a consul but instead made him a priest. Should the current election wind up in the court, Ginsburg would have a hard time appearing impartial. She did wrong.

But something else needs to be said about her remarks. They are the doleful consequence of how low Trump has driven American political discourse. The once unimaginable — or, at least, unusual — use of schoolyard insults as a matter of course is his staple rejoinder. Hillary Clinton, his last remaining opponent, is "Crooked Hillary" — this from a man who is renowned as a heroic deadbeat and practitioner of the fine art of bankruptcy.

Ginsburg was surely being hyperbolic when she said that if her husband was still alive, a Trump victory *might have caused him to say*, "It's time for us to move to New Zealand." She was, however, not exaggerating in the least when she characterized Trump as an egomaniac and a "faker" who "has no consistency about him." Trump, in his usual manner, responded by suggesting the 83-year-old jurist was in her dotage. Asleep, she has more wit than Trump awake.

The damage Trump has done to what was always a veneer of politeness in American politics and government may well be irreparable. There is a utility to such seeming hypocrisy. The rule has always been to avoid going personal. Break that rule, and bones will quickly be broken as well. It has always surprised me to learn how much some politicians hate each other. They disguise it well. It's good that they do so. Violence always lurks.

I am sorry that Ginsburg descended to Trump's level. But her words should be seen as a precursor of what's to come in a Trump presidential campaign or — it is hard to type these words — a Trump presidency. Mud will replace thought.

Turning the Tide on Voting Rights Richard L. Hasen, *New York Times*, August 2, 2016

Has the tide against restrictive voting laws turned? In the last few weeks, voting rights groups, in some instances working with the Department of Justice, have posted a series of victories that seemed unlikely when their cases against these laws were first brought. The rights of hundreds of thousands of voters are at stake.

The United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, perhaps the most conservative federal appeals court, ruled 9-6 last month that Texas' strict voter identification law had a racially discriminatory effect on African-American and Latino voters. Not only did the Fifth Circuit send the case back to the trial court to establish a procedure to make it easier for those who lacked one of the narrow forms of identification to be able to vote, but also to decide if Texas had acted with racially discriminatory intent. Such a finding could lead the courts to put Texas back under direct federal supervision.

Last Friday, a Fourth Circuit panel ruled that a North Carolina voting law, possibly the largest rollback of voting rights since the 1965 Voting Rights Act, was enacted with racially discriminatory intent. The court threw out not only the state's strict voter ID law, but also other voting restrictions that could make it especially hard for minorities to vote.

In the Seventh Circuit, a panel of conservative judges gave a trial court permission to soften Wisconsin's strict voter identification law. In response, the trial court recently issued an order giving people who lacked one of the few IDs accepted for voting in Wisconsin the chance to vote by filling out an affidavit of identity. Then last week another federal court threw out more of Wisconsin's strict voting laws. On Monday, a federal court told North Dakota to soften its ID law, which adversely affected Native Americans.

Meanwhile, over in the Sixth Circuit, two federal judges have held that Ohio's rollbacks of early voting violate the Constitution and the Voting Rights Act by making it harder for African-Americans and others to vote. Another case on appeal challenges Ohio's planned voter purge. In Michigan, a district court judge rejected the state's elimination of straight-ticket voting. Finally, in Kansas, federal and state courts have beaten back numerous attempts by Secretary of State Kris Kobach to make voter registration harder in the name of preventing noncitizen voting (a minor problem in Kansas, to say the least).

These battles are not over, and further appeals could still lead to reversals. But there are two reasons to be optimistic that we are nearing the end of an era of increasingly restrictive voting rules imposed just about exclusively by Republican legislators and election officials over the objections of Democrats and voting rights groups.

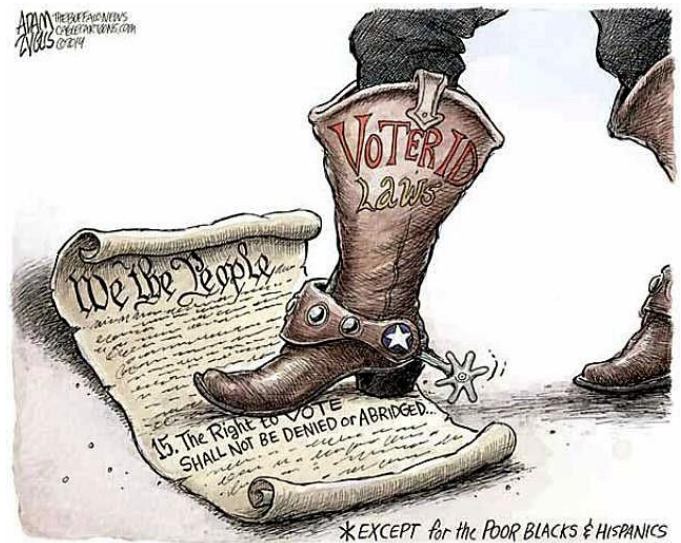
First, the changing composition of the Supreme Court and the lower courts makes sustaining such rules less likely. If the conservative Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia were still alive, Texas would have raced to the Supreme Court with an emergency petition, but there are no longer five justices willing to uphold restrictive voting laws. The lower courts are also changing. A few years ago, if North Carolina had appealed the decision to the full Fourth Circuit, the state probably would have won. But retirements and new judges have turned the Fourth Circuit into a much more liberal court.

Second, Republican legislatures overplayed their hand. After the Supreme Court gave the green light in 2008 to Indiana's strict voter identification law in *Crawford v. Marion County Election Board* and effectively gutted preclearance in *Shelby County v. Holder* in 2013, Republican legislatures, offering ever flimsier justifications, made laws even stricter. That's why even the conservative Fifth Circuit thought Texas had gone too far. It is heartening and astonishing, given the court's conservative reputation, that a majority of these judges are willing to have the district court take a second look at whether Texas engaged in intentional racial discrimination.

Judge Richard A. Posner of the Seventh Circuit and the retired Supreme Court justice John Paul Stevens, both of whom voted to uphold Indiana's voter identification law in the *Crawford* case, have since expressed misgivings about their decisions and now see identification laws as a means of voter suppression. But this turning tide could easily turn back. A Donald Trump presidency could lead to the appointment of more justices in the model of Justice Scalia (as Mr. Trump has promised), reversing these gains.

States and localities will continue to look for ever new and creative ways to disenfranchise minorities. Voting rights groups will have to fight each change individually, without the benefits of a preclearance system that the Supreme Court wrongly eliminated in *Shelby*. This drive to limit the franchise and the findings of the Fourth Circuit in the North Carolina case show the fallacy of Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr.'s contention in *Shelby* that intentional racial discrimination in voting is a thing of the past.

The struggle is not over, but this wave of court decisions means that more eligible voters should get a chance to register to vote and cast a ballot in November. These votes will help elect a president whose choices for judges and justices will very likely seal the fate of voting rights (and much more) for a generation.



The Political Process Isn't Rigged - It Has Much Bigger Problems

David Wasserman, 538.com, August 4, 2016

All right, I need to vent. For months, I've watched Donald Trump decry as "rigged" everything from the Democratic primaries, the Republican primary rules (that's right, the same rules that helped him win the nomination) and the fall debate schedule. And I've winced as many Bernie Sanders supporters have accused the Democratic National Committee of "rigging" the primaries and thrown around wild, roundly debunked conspiracy theories about deleted votes.

Here's the truth: Washington is rigged, but not in a literal sense and not in any of the nefarious ways those loud voices are contending. Instead, the blame may lie more with *voters* than politicians: Our legislative process is not designed to withstand the current levels of partisan polarization in the electorate. Voters' vexation with standard-issue, do-nothing D.C. politicians and party elites helps explain the Trump and Sanders phenomena of 2016, and the "rigging" theories seem to arise out of that frustration and suspicion. Yet much of this anger with "insiders" is misdirected. If only our political problems were due to "rigging" elections, we could arrest someone and get on with it. But our problems are much more structural.

In 2012, my colleague Nate Silver wrote: "Why is compromise so hard in the House? Some commentators, especially liberals, attribute it to what they say is the irrationality of Republican members of Congress. But the answer could be this instead: Individual members of Congress are responding fairly rationally to their incentives." That's truer than ever: When narrow primary bases dominate elections, everyone loses. And politicians as a whole get blamed.

Sure, many politicians on both the right and left fan the flames of partisan hysteria and feed off their base's fire — and they tend to get disproportionate attention. But in my experience, most candidates and officeholders don't see the world as red versus blue: They genuinely run for office to solve problems, not to please special-interest groups or for self-glorification. Unfortunately, they increasingly find themselves trapped in a voter-driven vicious cycle that shows no sign of abating.

Here are the five steps to how it works:

1. Geographic sorting — Voters tend to cluster near other people who share their cultural and political values, and the parties' coalitions have become far more geographically isolated in recent decades. In the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon election, 52 percent of the nation's voters lived in states decided by 5 percentage points or less. In the 2012 Obama-Romney race, just 17 percent of all voters lived in such states. As a corollary, there are far fewer truly competitive congressional districts. Just 90 of 435 House districts had a Cook Political Report Partisan Voter Index score, an attempt to measure the partisan lean of an area independent of the candidates on the ballot, between D+5 and R+5, down 45 percent from 164 in 1998. Sure, gerrymandering has played a role in the House, but sorting is the dominant factor: In the impossible-to-gerrymander Senate, the number of seats with a score between D+5 and R+5 has declined from 52 in 1998 to 28 today.

2. Straight-ticket voting — Voters are splitting their tickets at lower rates than we've seen in decades. They're just not making distinctions between parties' presidential and congressional candidates like they used to. The decline of local news readership probably plays a role — these outlets have traditionally provided an avenue for candidates to build a personal brand independent of their party's. Even a 53 percent Democratic district or 54 percent Republican district can now be considered a safe seat in most cases. Most races are no longer contests between two candidates with unique backgrounds and qualifications; more often they are censuses of how many Republicans or Democrats live in a given state or district.

3. Primaries have become the new general elections — The Cook Political Report currently rates just 37 of 435 House seats as competitive this fall, less than 9 percent of the House. As a result, primary elections have become tantamount to general elections in the vast majority of seats. Because primaries are held on many different dates, they tend to generate less national attention and attract disproportionate shares of hardcore, ideological party activists to the polls. In 2014, only 14.6 percent of eligible voters participated in congressional primaries — a record low. That means a tiny fraction of voters who are the most hardened partisans are essentially electing more than 90 percent of members of Congress. And these low-turnout primaries are often easy prey for ideological interest groups who demand purity.

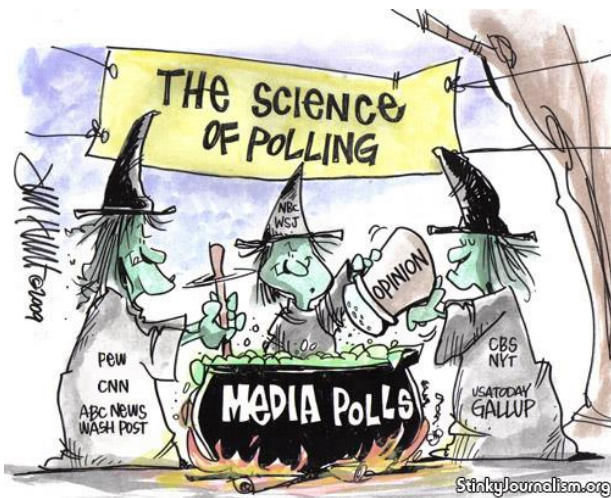
4. Congress grinds to a halt — The enormous pressure to please narrow, extreme and grossly unrepresentative bases of primary voters has straitjacketed members who would otherwise be willing to collaborate across the aisle, ditch or behave in a way that reflects their true conscience. No one wants to risk alienating their base unnecessarily for fear of becoming the next Eric Cantor. One vehemently anti-Trump GOP member recently confessed to me that the NRCC, his party's campaign committee, had pressured him not to declare #NeverTrump until after his state's candidate filing deadline had passed, for fear that his stance would generate a primary challenge on the right and jeopardize the seat. My hunch is that some GOP members will be more willing to speak out against their nominee after their primaries pass. The big picture, however, is that the tyranny of primaries has turned Congress into a legislative graveyard. The last two full Congresses, the 112th and 113th, were the two least productive in history. Last week, federal officials confirmed the first local transmission of the Zika virus in Florida, yet Congress is still struggling to pass emergency funding because of partisan squabbling over abortion and environmental regulations.

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5. Anger at politicians grows — Every year, legions of candidates take to the airwaves with trite tropes about how “Washington is broken” and how they can fix it, in most cases by just fighting the other party harder. But most candidates end up contributing to the very problem they’re decrying. When no one gets anything they want and Congress can’t address basic problems, voters grow even more disillusioned with D.C. and hungrier for an outsider. This has been especially true among Republican primary voters, who hold their own leaders in contempt for having fallen short of overturning President Obama’s agenda after hearing overzealous campaign promises in 2010 and 2014. So while Hillary Clinton was barely able to turn back an insurgent in the Democratic primaries, Trump was able to co-opt the entire GOP by capturing 14 million votes from a pool of 220 million eligible U.S. voters.

How do we escape this insidious cycle of polarization? I have no easy solutions. But it might be time for a national conversation about how we can structurally modernize our system of elections to incentivize bipartisanship instead of fringe behavior. I tend to think redistricting reform is a bit overrated and primary reform is underrated. Left untouched, our politics will reach a breaking point — maybe we’re already there. And ultimately, voters get the government they deserve.

Are Hillary Clinton’s Strong Poll Numbers Misleading?
Jon Wiener, *The Nation*, August 8, 2016



Political science tells us Hillary Clinton will win the election—the poll numbers are clearly in her favor. As of this moment, the authoritative FiveThirtyEight “polls only” forecast says Clinton’s chance of beating Trump is 86.6 percent. But polling is an inexact science, and a lot of pundits are asking: Could the polls be wrong this time?

The first problem they point to is that some Trump voters might be lying to the pollsters. Some voters don’t want to tell a live interviewer that they back a candidate who has been so offensive and outrageous. The pollsters call this “social desirability bias”—“the desire of respondents to avoid embarrassment” in speaking with interviewers on the phone. But on November 8, in the privacy of the voting booth, they will cast their secret ballot for the Republican.

It’s happened before—in California, where I live, we call it “the Bradley Effect.” Tom Bradley, the first black mayor of LA, ran for governor in 1982, and all the polls said he would win—but on election day he lost. White voters broke with Bradley in far higher numbers

than polling predicted, and many at the time wondered if it was because he was black. This year we wonder how many men will refuse to vote for Hillary because she’s a woman. They know they’re not supposed to say it, but that won’t stop them from doing it.

The second problem is that the pollsters’ standard criteria for “likely voters” may not work this year. If you are in the polling business, it’s not hard to call people and ask whom they plan to vote for. The hard part is deciding whether to count them as “likely voters”—because more than 40 percent of Americans eligible to vote have not cast a ballot in the last two presidential elections. So all pollsters rank the people they poll on the likelihood of their voting.

On this count the 2012 election was a nightmare for the venerable Gallup poll: They predicted Romney would beat Obama. In their *mea culpa* afterward they said their number one error was “misidentification of likely voters.” A Pew Research study this year declared that “incorrect forecasts about who will vote . . . may be the most serious” problem facing pollsters. Gallup in 2012 missed Obama supporters because they were ranked “not likely” to vote; pollsters worry the same thing might happen this year with Trump supporters.

Nate Silver of FiveThirtyEight has complained about the traditional “likely voter” methodology. It’s pretty straightforward: They ask if the voter is registered, if he intends to vote, if he knows where his polling place is—and whether he’s voted in the past. The most important criterion for a “likely” voter is whether they voted in the last election. If they didn’t, they are typically judged “not likely” to vote, and they are not counted in the poll results.

But the scientists are not unanimous about this methodology. “A voter can tell you he’s registered,” Nate Silver wrote in 2008, “tell you that he’s certain to vote, tell you that he’s very engaged by the election, tell you that he knows where his polling place is, etc., and *still be excluded*” from the results if he didn’t vote in the past. Silver thought that if a voter said he intended to vote, he should be counted in the poll results. So pundits like Silver are worrying that pollsters are using the wrong definition of “likely voter” this time. In fact, that’s what Trump is counting on. His campaign is betting on people who have not voted recently—especially white working-class men alienated by the whole system, who wouldn’t vote for Obama because he is black, but wouldn’t vote for Romney because of his corporate-CEO status. They may get themselves to their polling place this year, for the first time in a long time, to cast a vote for Trump.

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Pollsters do measure “intensity” of political preferences. Gallup, for example, asks whether support for a candidate is felt “strongly” or not. The assumption of course is that those who hold their views “strongly” are more likely to show up on election day than those who say they are simply expressing a preference. In 2012, 60 percent of Obama backers supported him “strongly” (the comparable figure for Romney supporters was 38 percent).

You’d be forgiven for thinking that this election has seen voter “intensity” reach new heights. However, a July poll found the level of “strong” support was about equal for both Clinton and Trump—and strikingly low: Pew found in that poll that “fewer than half of both candidates’ supporters said they backed their candidate *strongly*,” with 45 percent each. The equal proportions suggest intensity is not going to skew the poll results this year.

The final problem is one everyone knows: the uniqueness of Trump himself. All of political science is based on history, on the idea that patterns in the past will continue in the future. It makes sense: People who voted for Obama in 2008 and 2012 are unlikely to vote for Trump this year. But Trump is so different from every other candidate in the recent past that pundits fear he could break out of the historic patterns of voting. That’s pretty much what happened in the primaries, when so many experts said with great conviction that Trump couldn’t win. Their reasoning was strong: He had no ground game, no field operation working to get his supporters to the polls on election day; he had no TV ads, which candidates all consider essential; he wasn’t raising money, or spending it. He had no real campaign organization and no experience in politics. In the past, candidates like that never won. But, of course, the Republican primaries were different this time.

But here’s the thing: The problem with the predictions about the Republican primaries wasn’t actually the polls. The polls’ predictions were largely borne out by the results. In fact, the problem was that the pundits were ignoring the polls. “Trump led in the vast majority of polls,” Harry Enten of FiveThirtyEight wrote at the end of the primaries. FiveThirtyEight had 549 polls in their national primary polling database during the primaries; Trump led in 500—in 91 percent. Most if not all of those polls used conventional definitions of “likely voters,” and any “social desirability bias” didn’t end up making the pollsters wrong about the extent of Trump’s support.

So for all the hand-wringing over the polls, maybe the best way to predict the results in November is not to discount the polls. Instead, maybe we should rely less on the pundits who say the polls could be wrong, and more on the polls themselves, which have been pretty accurate about Trump’s support so far this election season. Of course things could change in the next 90 days, but the polls right now are clear: Our next president is Hillary Clinton.

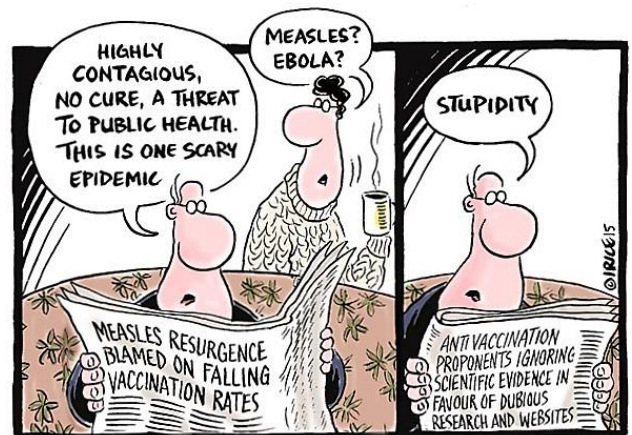
Take Your Medicine, or Not, Candidates Shawn Hubler, *Sacramento Bee*, August 2, 2016

Doctors and scientists overwhelmingly agree that childhood vaccines work and save lives. Candidates for the White House this year? Not so much. Just when you thought this 2016 presidential race couldn’t defy another law of nature, Jill Stein, Green Party candidate and Harvard-trained physician, told The Washington Post there were “real questions” about the safety of vaccinations, and that “I don’t know if all of them have been addressed.”

Stein quickly clarified that she merely believes federal drug regulators are too easily swayed by drug companies. “She’s not anti-vax,” her spokeswoman told a member of The Sacramento Bee editorial board Monday.

California’s vaccine resisters will surely be disappointed. But they still have Donald Trump, who last year repeated discredited claims linking vaccines and autism during the primary debates and, of course, on Twitter. Or Gary Johnson, the Libertarian contender, who tweeted “no to mandatory vaccines” in 2011.

Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton remains the sole voice of science on this issue. “The earth is round, the sky is blue, and #vaccineswork,” she tweeted last year. “Let’s protect all our kids.”



RNC Message: Be Very Afraid
Connie Schultz, *The Progressive Populist*, July 20, 2016

My first up-close glimpse into the enduring power of political fearmongering came through a two-way mirror in 2006. I was watching a focus group of women in southern Ohio discussing a variety of issues, when the topic turned to terrorism. One young mother shared her fear that foreign terrorists might attack her children's playground in their small town. "It could happen," she said, looking around the table. "We all know it could." Several of the other women nodded their heads. My notes from that evening describe one of the women shivering as she pulled her cardigan tighter and said, "Really, it feels like it's only a matter of time before they find us."

There was no logical reason for these women to believe that in their remote patch of Ohio, a suicide bomber from the Middle East would fly a plane into their children's school or blow himself up on their playground. But Republican rhetoric had worked its magic, and these women lived in constant fear for their families' lives. They also seemed likelier to vote for Republican candidates because, not remotely coincidentally, the Republican Party was vowing to protect them from this nonexistent danger. I marveled at the cynicism of it all, even as I felt utter disgust for the tactic.

Ten years later, the Republicans are still at it, bringing their doom-and-gloom show to Cleveland. In one of the more memorable moments, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who recently called the Black Lives Matter movement "inherently racist," offered an unhinged screed. Repeatedly jabbing the air with his hands as he screamed, Giuliani declared: "The vast majority of Americans today do not feel safe. They fear for their children. They fear for themselves. They fear for our police officers, who are being targeted with a target on their back."

The Republican Party's platform insists that parents of gay children should be allowed to force them into "conversion therapy." Abuse, in other words. The platform also includes a prescriptive for Donald Trump's long-touted war on America's immigrants: "The border wall must cover the entirety of the southern border and must be sufficient to stop both vehicular and pedestrian traffic." Because, you know, Mexicans.

The Republican Party of Trump wants us to fear *the other*. If we're straight, we should fear the LGBT community. If we're working-class, we should fear the poor. If we're white, we should fear African-Americans. If we speak English, we should fear anyone who speaks with a foreign accent, which is any accent that doesn't sound like ours. We should fear Muslims, all of them, always. In Trump's world, we should fear anyone who is not like us. What a long, miserable list that would be.

In 1950, Eleanor Roosevelt addressed this fear of *the other* in a keynote speech to Americans for Democratic Action on Individual Liberty: "Somehow we must keep ourselves free from fear and suspicion of each other. I sit with people who are representatives of communist countries, and to sit with them is a lesson in what fear can do. Fear can take away from you all the courage to be an individual. You become a mouthpiece for the ideas that you have been told you must give forth."

Some might argue that Roosevelt spoke for a different time in our country and therefore for a different world. Fortunately, there is no expiration date for wisdom. As a country, we are as much at risk today of fear rob us of the courage to think for ourselves as we were in 1950, when Red-baiting ruined lives.

I understand the seduction of fear. It can feel easier to believe the worst about our world — and rely on someone else to save us — than to take charge of our own lives. If we tell ourselves we are in constant danger beyond our control, we are also more willing to surrender our duties as citizens to those who claim to know better what is best for us. The Republicans count on this.

This fear takes its toll, whittling away at our self-esteem and rendering us timid in a country that needs our strength. It takes courage to accept the truth that though terrorism is surely a threat in the world, most of us Americans are free of danger every day of our lives. Living this truth unleashes our own powers as citizens, emboldening us to elect leaders who reflect the enduring optimism that continues to make this country imperfectly great.

A leader is not someone who reflects the worst within us, leaving us cowering in the shadows.

A leader reminds us who we are — and inspires us to try harder.

SEE WHAT OUR CALIFORNIA DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATORS THINK ABOUT CURRENT ISSUES
Congressman John Garamendi, California 3rd Congressional District: www.garamendi.house.gov
Senator Barbara Boxer: www.boxer.senate.gov
Senator Dianne Feinstein: www.feinstein.senate.gov

If you would like to join our club, please call Janet Brown at 530-674-9227 or attend our August 18 meeting. We meet from 7PM – 8PM at Yuba City High School, Room 322, 850 B Street, Yuba City.

Why Putin Prefers Trump Mikhail Zygar, *Politico*, July 26, 2016

With signs of Russian involvement in the damaging Democratic National Committee email hack, questions have been increasing about just what Putin's motives might be when it comes to the US presidential election. We put that question to one of Moscow's top Putin observers, Mikhail Zygar, the former editor-in-chief of TV Rain, the only independent Russian national television network, and a recipient of the Committee to Protect Journalist's 2014 International Press Freedom Award.

The year 2005 was a turning point in Vladimir Putin's foreign policy and worldview. Until then, he'd had the sense that he was in control on the world stage, that he knew the rules of the game, that he understood whom he was dealing with and who his partners were. But in 2005, everything changed, and slowly the ground started moving out from under his feet.

That was the year Putin's friend and partner Gerhard Schroeder lost the German elections and resigned as chancellor. Schroeder and Putin, who spoke German after serving in the KGB in East Germany, understood each other well and established close diplomatic and personal ties. But in 2005, Schroeder was replaced by Angela Merkel, whom Putin didn't understand—and doesn't understand to this day. In the intervening 12 years, he started suspecting Merkel of deceiving him, spinning intrigues and weaving conspiracies against him. He showed his distrust by bringing his dog to meetings with Merkel, knowing full well that she had an intense fear of canines.

Now, Putin seems to be experiencing déjà vu: In the upcoming U.S. election, the battle is, once again, between a Gerhard Schroeder and an Angela Merkel—but with the differences and the stakes hugely amplified. The American Merkel is even more unpleasant to Putin. Hillary Clinton is already inclined to dislike him and Russia from her experience as secretary of state. Their personal interactions have not been positive; there is no love lost between the two. And then you have the American Schroeder, who seems to be an even better fit for Putin than the German one, and better even than Putin's favorite international partner, former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi. Donald Trump, in the Kremlin's view, is extremely pragmatic, extremely unprincipled and extremely cynical—which makes him easier to reach an understanding with. Not to mention that Trump, unlike Clinton and just about the entire rest of the Wasn foreign policy class, has explicitly expressed admiration and sympathy for Putin.

This is the kind of relationship with a US president the Kremlin has dreamed about, and has been unable to attain, for years.

From the very beginning of his presidency, Putin has bet on personal relationships with world leaders as the basis for his foreign policy. It is almost as if he has tried to recruit all of them, trying to find each one's personal key. He realized very quickly that all foreign leaders can be divided up into two important categories: those who believe in certain values (usually, democratic ones) and those who are totally cynical, concerned with self-advancement and power for its own sake. Sooner or later, attempts to build a relationship with leaders of the first category run aground on the rocks of mutual incomprehension. With leaders of the latter category, everything is on the table.

Putin formulated what he wants from the outside world at the very start of his presidency: respect for him and for Russia. When he spoke at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, he described in great detail what that should look like. There needed to be a new world order and a new global security arrangement in which Russia's interests were taken into account. Later, for example in his speech last fall at the U.N. General Assembly, Putin was even more precise: He wants a new agreement, a Yalta 2.0. In 1944, Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin gathered at Yalta to divide the world into spheres of influence. But in the 1990s, as the Cold War came to an end, those borders were washed away. Putin now wants to draw them again, but more reliably, and to determine who are the new masters of the world and where the zones of each of their interests are. He wants the West to recognize that Russia isn't just another country, but a power that can and should influence its closest neighbors without being condemned and punished.

Western leaders have told Putin many times that this is impossible: that the day of vast acknowledged "spheres of influence" is in the past, and that the globalized era just doesn't have room for the antiquated approaches of the 19th or 20th centuries. Putin, however, doesn't believe them. He thinks the new globalization is just a fig leaf for what's really going on, which is that Western leaders want to divide up the world without him and leave Russia without a slice. Putin has always suspected that Western leaders are every bit as cynical as he is, and that all politicians are the same: they simply want more power, even if their efforts at attaining it might be veiled in terms like "democratizing" or "nation-building."



Putin is not alone in this view. He has kindred spirits: Schroeder and Berlusconi, as well as Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Syria's Bashar al-Assad. They have always shared his approach. They never made themselves out to be saints. They didn't pretend to care more about human rights than about business or power. They are the cynics who aren't embarrassed by their cynicism and even openly acknowledge it. But the other category of leader, to Putin's mind, is far worse: They hide their true motivations, but deep down are just as cynical. Merkel and Barack Obama belong to the second category, in his view, and nothing will convince Putin otherwise.

All of Russia's recent propaganda—TV, the rest of the press, and think tanks—has been built on this premise. Russian television doesn't suggest that Russian leaders are any better or less corrupt, or more honest and just, than Western leaders. Rather, it says that everything is the same everywhere. All the world's politicians are corrupt—just look at the revelations in the Panama Papers. Everywhere, human rights are being violated—just look at what American cops do to black people. All athletes dope. All elections are falsified. Democracy doesn't exist anywhere, so give it up. Putin watches Russian television, and over and over again it reassures him that he's right. Its message perfectly matches what he thinks of the world. (There are also several American television shows that have made a big impression on Putin. He has watched *House of Cards* and *Boss*, and came away convinced that American politicians really are frauds. On TV at least, the president of the United States can kill someone, even several people, with his own hands, and then mouth platitudes about democracy and justice.)

Trump fits perfectly into that worldview. He's a cynic who doesn't appear to care about international moral issues like human rights. He's a populist who doesn't pretend to be a saint. He's a normal businessman with whom you can always cut a deal—as he has said himself many, many times. And if necessary, as Putin seems to believe, one could figure out how to carve up the world with Trump. At least he won't lie to you and fill your ears with nonsense about democratic values.

The point isn't about whether any hypothetical financial ties between Trump and Russian businesses actually exist. A source close to Putin's administration assures me there are no serious ties, for what it's worth. That's not to say they can't crop up in the future, but even if Trump shied away from such opportunities, that wouldn't be Putin's main concern. As a former intelligence officer, he thinks of assets differently. "Putin never saddles his allies with responsibilities that might get in their way," says one former Kremlin official. "That goes against the rules of recruiting someone. On the contrary, if the client is successful, he'll show up and do everything that's needed of him on his own."

A year ago, when the U.S. presidential campaign was just getting started, one retired senior Kremlin official went to the United States to meet Jeb Bush. At that point, the Kremlin believed he was the favorite and the candidate most likely to win. When the calculus changed, people around Putin quickly reoriented themselves toward Trump. That doesn't mean there have been any real negotiations between the two camps. For Putin, that isn't necessary. Two cynics can always find a common tongue.

Trump Economic Plan Calls for Every American to Inherit Millions from Father
Andy Borowitz, *The New Yorker*, August 8, 2016



DETROIT (The Borowitz Report)—At a speech in Detroit on Monday, the Republican Presidential nominee, Donald J. Trump, spelled out the details of his economic plan, which calls for every American to inherit millions of dollars from his or her father.

"There are people at my rallies, desperate people, desperate because they want jobs," he told his luncheon audience at the Detroit Economic Club. "Once they inherit millions from their father, they will never want a job again."

Using an anecdote to show how his economic plan would work, Trump explained, "A man with zero dollars who inherited forty million dollars from his father would become forty million dollars wealthier."

"We are going to make America rich again," he said.

Tearing into "the failed economic policies of the Obama Administration," he argued that children in China are inheriting

money from their fathers at a much higher rate than American children are.

"We don't win at anything anymore," he said. "We don't win at inheriting."

Trump's plan for wealth creation drew strong praise from his team of economic advisers, including Ivanka, Eric, Tiffany, Barron, and Donald Trump, Jr.

Liberal-In-Chief
Adam Gopnik, *The New Yorker*, May 23, 2016

The American Presidency has developed an unfortunate resemblance not so much to an imperial throne, as some insist, as to the medieval papacy, with an obsessive pomposity of office producing all those hangar-size libraries and bricklike memoirs. We talk solemnly about "his Presidency" (so far), just as people in the Middle Ages talked about "his papacy," not as a powerful office but as an epoch of spiritual leadership. For good or ill—mostly ill—it means that we expect our Presidents to shape the meaning of their times. If this is the eighties, it must be Reagan's. One of the oddities of this development is that we also expect the departing swan's song to be its truest. Almost sixty years ago, this magazine noted in this space that President Eisenhower, at the end of his two terms, "seemed to be speaking out on all kinds of subjects in a fashion less equivocal than ever before, and that because he seemed to be enjoying it, we had been somewhat uplifted ourselves." Indeed, that new candor led to his sermon on the military-industrial complex and its hazards, which remains perhaps the only one of Eisenhower's speeches that is still remembered.

President Obama seems to be enjoying his own freedom to say what he thinks, as his time in office winds down, and perhaps it hasn't been sufficiently noted that he has been offering a rationale for his views on social change. In a series of events—including a podcast recorded in the comedian Marc Maron's garage; an interview with George Stephanopoulos, which turned into a discourse on tolerance; and, most recently, his commencement address at Howard University—he, too, has been speaking out unequivocally, and doing some uplifting along the way.

His words have been varied, but his purpose has been consistent and his point simple: liberalism isn't centrism. It isn't a way of splitting the differences between two sides, and finding an acceptable soft middle. Liberalism of the kind he practices, the President has been saying, is the most truly radical of ideologies, inasmuch as it proposes a change, makes it happen, and then makes it last. Someone proposes a more equitable world—the enfranchisement of working people, or of African-Americans, or of women, or marital rights for homosexuals—and then makes it endure by assuring those who oppose it that, while they may have lost the fight, they haven't lost their dignity, their autonomy, or their chance to adapt to the change without fearing the loss of all their agency. "The civil-rights movement happened because there was civil disobedience, because people were willing to go to jail, because there were events like Bloody Sunday," Obama told Stephanopoulos. "But it was also because the leadership of the movement consistently stayed open to the possibility of reconciliation, and sought to understand the views—even views that were appalling to them—of the other side." Liberalism is a belief in radical change made through practical measures.

In the interview with Maron, the President, confronting frustrations with the fact that he wasn't able to alter the world with the wave of a rhetorical wand, offered an alternative view of how big democratic societies work. They are, he said, like ocean liners: you turn the wheel slowly, and the big ship pivots. "Sometimes your job is just to make stuff work," Obama said. "Sometimes the task of government is to make incremental improvements or try to steer the ocean liner two degrees north or south so that, ten years from now, suddenly we're in a very different place than we were. At the moment, people may feel like we need a fifty-degree turn; we don't need a two-degree turn. And you say, 'Well, if I turn fifty degrees, the whole ship turns' " over. Note that the President wasn't saying that big ships aren't worth turning, just that it takes time. Their very bigness is what makes them turn slowly, but their bigness is also what makes them worth turning.

Beneath this pragmatism lies a deeper understanding that humanity is various, that the changes we work for will never be universally accepted, and the test of our politics is extending sympathy to those who seem to stand in the way. Change "requires more than just speaking out," the President said, at Howard: "It requires listening to those with whom you disagree, and being prepared to compromise. You know, when I was a state senator, I helped pass Illinois's first racial-profiling law, and one of the first laws in the nation requiring the videotaping of confessions in capital cases. And we were successful because, early on, I engaged law enforcement. I didn't say to them, 'Oh, you guys are so racist, you know you need to do something.' I understood, as many of you do, that the overwhelming majority of police officers are good and honest and courageous. . . . The point is, you need allies in a democracy. That's just the way it is. It can be frustrating and it can be slow. But history teaches us that the alternative to democracy is always worse."

Obama's liberalism is not therapeutic. You don't listen to others to make them feel better. You listen because without their cooperation, or at least their tacit acceptance of the moral urgency of change, that long arc won't bend and progress won't happen. Your opponents have to understand that reform, even if it makes their fixations unsustainable, will not make their lives unlivable. Freedom didn't happen because your opponents saw the light. It happened because they no longer found it necessary to live in the dark. Their hands may never move toward a candle, but their eyes adjust. Allowing for the adjustment and the time that it takes is part of the intelligence of politics.

What we have passed through in these eight years is perhaps much larger than we know. (When an ocean liner changes course, the people on deck are often the last to notice.) An African-American President in a nation long ruled by the rage over race, a potential female President at hand: these are big changes, even though made slowly. Of course, the case for evolutionary change can suddenly seem futile, even Pyrrhic, when we spy a meteor hurtling toward Earth, threatening an extinction event for incremental improvement of all kinds. This may give the President's words an added pathos, but it leaves them no less true.

At Annual Experts' Debate on Strategy, Zero Republicans Make the Case for Trump
David Ignatius, *The Washington Post*, August 9, 2016

ASPEN, Colo. – For 32 years, a group of Republican and Democratic foreign-policy experts has gathered here each summer to debate strategic issues facing the country. This year the bipartisan group had a strange imbalance: None of the Republicans was prepared to argue the case of the GOP nominee, Donald Trump.

Trump would probably be pleased to know that he failed to muster support from the [Aspen Strategy Group](#), as this gathering is known. In a sense, he's running against the elite foreign-policy establishment that the group represents. He is happy to lose the Aspen primary if that strengthens his populist appeal in November.

Trump's shadow hung over the meeting here. Fifteen prominent Republicans who had served in past GOP administrations met Sunday for a private soul-searching session that one attendee described as "painful and empathetic." The next day, eight of them joined in signing the public declaration by 50 top GOP former national security officials warning that Trump would be "the most reckless President" in U.S. history.

"We're seeing a mass exodus of senior and experienced Republicans from Trump on national security. They are deserting him because he has denigrated NATO, appeased Putin and shown little faith in American power," argued Nicholas Burns, director of the Aspen Strategy Group, who served as undersecretary of state under President George W. Bush. Burns had earlier announced that he would support Hillary Clinton for president.

Trump seemed to relish this defection by the establishment. He described the 50 signers of the declaration as "nothing more than the failed Washington elite looking to hold onto their power" and thanked them "for coming forward so everyone in the country knows who deserves the blame for making the world such a dangerous place."

What does the foreign-policy elite discuss in a time of anti-elitism? Partly, this year's Aspen gathering (of which I'm a member, along with several other journalists) explored why experts had missed early warnings of the public anger over trade and immigration that have fueled Trump. But the conversation focused mostly on the technical details of strategic planning: How should the National Security Council staff be organized to give better foresight and maximize efficiency? How can U.S. technology be leveraged to deter Russia and China? A convention of machinists likes to talk about its tools; so too with this collection of experts.

What's unusual about the Aspen group is that in a time of deep political polarization, it struggles for bipartisan consensus. Explains Peter Feaver, a Duke University professor who served on Bush's NSC staff: "Principled disagreement of the sort that happens in the ASG opens the door to both pragmatic compromise and persuasion, where you actually learn from the other side." However elitist this may sound, such a consensus-building process is part of what makes American democracy work.

Stephen Hadley, who served as national security adviser during Bush's second term, is a prime exemplar of quiet, principled, bipartisan public service. He didn't sign the letter denouncing Trump, and he cautioned me here that foreign-policy experts should pay careful attention to the growing public anger that "globalization was a mistake" and that "the elites have sleep-walked the country into danger."

"This election isn't just about Donald Trump," Hadley argued. "It's about the discontents of our democracy, and how we are going to address them. The genius of our political system is that these discontents are being worked out this year within our political parties. Whoever is elected will have to deal with these discontents. If not, the anger against the system may be played out next time in the streets, as in the 1960s."

Philip Zelikow, a University of Virginia professor who also served in the Bush State Department, argues that the global engagement Trump resists can be summed up in two simple sentences: "The future of America depends on partners and friends in the world. The future of America depends on doing business in the world." Most Americans, even Trump supporters, would endorse these principles if they could be articulated more clearly, he says.

With Trump running so hard against the traditional foreign-policy consensus, there's an unusual opportunity for Clinton to rebuild this framework in a way that speaks to voters' discontent — and also reweaves the narrative of American power for the 21st century.

Prominent Republicans are helping Clinton make her argument. But she has to convince skeptical voters that updated global engagement on trade, security and economic issues as discussed by this group of professors and diplomats in a pristine mountain resort will benefit the ordinary citizen.

Sense is often in short supply in politics. After a characteristically brilliant speech by Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic nominee for president in 1952 and 1956, a supporter bellowed, "Every thinking American will vote for you!" Stevenson shouted back, "That's not enough. I need a majority!"