

Opinion Exchange

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COUNTERPOINTS

GOP isn't what it was. Good riddance.

It's no longer the old insiders' echo chamber. Those members have been shown the door.

By JASON LEWIS

Talk about having your finger on the pulse. In 2008, Sen. John McCain marched out of St. Paul and the Republican National Convention as the GOP's presidential nominee — and promptly lost Minnesota by 300,000 votes.

The senator from Arizona was followed in 2012 by Mitt Romney running on his private-equity platform. He lost our state by 226,000.

The swamp calls this progress. In comes Donald Trump in 2016, with little money and no paid staff on the ground, and he nearly pulls off an amazing upset, losing Minnesota by just 44,000 votes or 1.5% — the closest margin for a Republican since Ronald Reagan in 1984.

Yet none of this stops Minnesota's own clique of never-Trumpers from their tiresome attacks ("Minnesota Republicans, what are you going to do?" May 15) on the president and those Republicans who dare to back him — who appear to be quite numerous. Indeed, Trump has by far the highest approval ratings among Republicans since Reagan.

For practical purposes, David Durenberger hasn't been a Republican for some time, and Tom Horner literally left the party long ago. But that hasn't stopped the media — in particular the Star Tribune — from treating them as grand old patrons of the Grand Old Party.

Their criticisms, however, ring as hollow as their brethren on cable news spewing the most vile invective at Trump Republicans. It's easy to see why — their cozy world of inside baseball has crumbled faster than the national pastime under the police-state national lockdown they admire.

The fat-cat public relations contracts political mercenaries have fed off are gone, replaced by a Republican Party that's representing the working class at the expense of the carried-interest crowd. And by a president who eschews unilateral disarmament in favor of fighting back.

That's what really explains the inscrutable hysteria from a few establishment Republicans who joined Democrats in trying to remove a duly elected president from office on charges they knew to be false. It betrays a particular kind of rank pettiness coming from 11th Commandment has-beens who lectured conservatives on how they needed to circle the wagons around Messrs. McCain and Romney.

Make no mistake, these are the folks who backed Republicans only when party leaders weren't interested in getting tough on China, securing the border or putting America first. These are globalists backing industry bailouts along with open borders and the welfare state. Yet now they rail against Minnesotans who know they will never get the freedom and prosperity they deserve from anyone espousing green new deals at the expense of the Iron Range or from former senators who could never quite gather

enough votes for single-payer insurance. It won't matter. The realignment is already too far along to stop Minnesota from turning red. Democrats may never let a crisis go to waste, but their credibility has taken a massive hit.

From Russian and Ukrainian impeachment hoaxes to Michael Avenatti to defaming Covington high schoolers and Brett Kavanaugh. And now they and their dwindling band of political miscreants are backing former Vice President Joe Biden — "personal flaws" and all.

No doubt Durenberger and Horner will also support Democratic incumbent Tina Smith in this year's Senate race, along with all the politically correct CEOs and their big corporate PACs pouring beltway cash into my opponent's coffers. In fact, Smith has already taken tens of thousands of dollars from companies outsourcing jobs to China while selling the family's stock during a coronavirus crash.

These folks are giving hypocrisy a bad name, yet a day doesn't go by where the media doesn't eagerly promote some never-Trumper's last ditch and desperate attempt at relevance.

Are we really to believe the "ethical and moral roots" of two pro-abortion rights advocates attacking Republicans while refusing to mention a Democratic Party that's all in on what Daniel Patrick Moynihan once called infanticide?

Or candidate Biden promising Beto O'Rourke "will be the one who leads" gun-control efforts in order to "save lives?"

Why, "hell yes." When I was a kid visiting my grandparents in north Minneapolis, I'd ask them for a dime, walk a block from their apartment on the second story of a neighborhood house and head down to the five-and-dime on Dupont and Broadway for hot chocolate on a cold winter's day. My maternal grandparents didn't have money, but they had a safe neighborhood.

But for far too many residents, the "good life in Minnesota" has faded faster than the credibility of the magazine that coined the phrase.

The primary reason for today's polarization is clear: the Democrat Party has shifted so far to the left as to be unrecognizable to average voters. A recent Pew Research Center study reveals this leftward lurch which explains much of the partisan gap in public opinion.

Perhaps the "resistance" Democrat drift is why so many of the malcontents are lashing out these days. But I suspect another reason is that the GOP is finally showing these impostors the door and they know it.

Here's hoping it doesn't hit them on their way out.

Jason Lewis represented Minnesota's Second Congressional District in the U.S. House, 2017-2019. He is a Republican candidate this year for the U.S. Senate.

Republicans: Take your party back!

Minnesota's primary filing period is now open.

By BOB "AGAIN" CARNEY JR.

Former GOP U.S. Sen. Dave Durenberger and Tom Horner — Durenberger's former chief of staff and the Independence Party's 2010 candidate for governor, recently asked on this page: "Minnesota Republicans, what are you going to do?"

I'm with them on one part of their suggested answer — vote for former Vice President Joe Biden. And I agree with their citing of the Lincoln Project's mission: "Electing Democrats who support the Constitution over Republicans who do not."

Both Durenberger and Horner have become what can best be described as "politically homeless." They're not alone. All across Minnesota are legions of politically evicted Republicans, who for decades made the Minnesota GOP the dominant political force for good in the state that the two describe.

They write: "At best, the party's role now is to control a portion of state government and be the brakes on the DFL Party." Today that's a more important role than many realize. To see this, let's examine the authors' timeline of doom featuring Newt Gingrich's 1994 campaign for U.S. House Speaker.

I, too, see this as a malevolent turning point in American politics. But please consider that from 1994 forward, Minnesota has had divided government for 24 out of 26 years.

During that time GOP Gov. Tim Pawlenty was arguably the single most impactful governor in 50 years — by breaking a fever of state spending. For the previous 40 years state spending had increased at an average unsustainable rate of about 10% a year. Pawlenty's eight-year legacy was a painful downshift to a rate of 2.5% annual increases. It was an overcorrection in my view, but something had to be done.

Gov. Mark Dayton's watch was somewhere in the middle. Most recently, DFL Gov. Tim Walz and Senate GOP Majority Leader Paul Gazelka have worked together constructively — and brought forth a budget closer to Pawlenty's benchmark.

Today Minnesota has a rainy-day fund and we're looking at a \$2.4 billion deficit. Even in the COVID-19

era that is far less than what Dayton faced in 2011.

Finally, it's notable that the 2018 campaign for governor was one of the most civil in memory. The GOP's Jeff Johnson won the second highest number of votes for governor in Minnesota history. However, a record-setting midterm turnout spike obscured that and Walz won comfortably.

Still, the Trump disaster truly is a disaster. Once the "party of ideas," today's Minnesota GOP has become a vacuous personality cult. The 2020 state convention platform committee's recommendations shy away from foundational U.S. Constitutional values — such as the preambles' "establish justice" and "promote the general welfare." Social Security and Medicare are not mentioned.

In his most recent book, Sen. Durenberger wrote: "America's political middle no longer has a party." Fortunately, a lot of "politically homeless" Minnesota GOP has an opportunity to stand up and take action. Minnesota's primary filing period began Tuesday and continues for two weeks.

If you are dismayed by what has happened to the Republican Party, please "take arms against a sea of troubles." The filing fee for the State Legislature (House and Senate) is \$100. Given today's circumstances, please consider yourself qualified if you are a reasonable, prudent, open-minded person with some time to volunteer between now and mid-August. Warning: You might get elected.

We need to call out Minnesota's GOP political militia.

After the filing period closes everyone has two days to withdraw. That would be a good time for people who have come forward to mask up and meet at some social-distancing gatherings around Minnesota, mull over the situation and then decide whether or not to go forward as a group — to restore the Minnesota Republican Party to open sanity. Fortunately, there still are a lot of hunkered-down, in-the-closet-sane Republicans — including in the Legislature.

To wrap up — Tom, please do something about the compelling case and plea you just made. Plop down \$400 and file for the GOP U.S. Senate primary. Somebody has to take the initiative on this.

Bob "Again" Carney Jr. lives in Minneapolis.

THE STATE OF AMERICA

It's now clear we must restore decency, civility to politics

Even before the pandemic, fear and anger were rampant in the U.S. We need to listen and learn in order to move forward.

By TIM PAWLENTY

In the modern western TV series "Yellowstone," the character John Dutton battles enemies who threaten the future of his beloved ranch which

has nourished the pocketbooks and souls of his family for generations. As the saga unfolds and Dutton faces a crossroads, his son urges him not to make a "deal with the devil." Dutton flatly replies, "All the angels are

gone, son. There's only devils left." Modern American politics too often reflects similar dark sentiments. The seething disdain with which many political leaders and their enablers currently view the other side has made yesterday's version of polarization seem quaint. The difference between seeing

the opposition as evil — rather than just wrong, ill-informed or naive — is not a small distinction. If in our politics each side sees themselves as combating an evil that poses an existential threat to the future of our country, there's no limit to the dark tactics, behaviors and alliances we can rationalize.

While aspects of the current pandemic will be debated for years to come, one thing is clear: All the angels are not gone.

We see them every where every day. Nurses, doctors, volunteers, first responders, researchers, service employees, other front-line workers and family members are providing heroic services that affirms the goodness within people. Their kindness does not rise or fall based on their political views or the views of the people they serve.

Maybe their example can inspire more of us to do our part to improve our politics in America. People who don't share our political views are simply fellow citizens who have life experiences and perspectives different from our own. They are not all evil operatives intent on destroying America as we know it.

Politics, of course, has its share of people who are up to no good and they often get much of the attention. But they're not the majority. Most Americans are decent people with common sense and good hearts — and we can all take a couple of simple steps to improve America's political climate.

Each of us can do something we don't do very often: Genuinely listen to the other side and give them a fair chance to demonstrate their sincerity and thoughtfulness.

And we can learn. Democracy requires citizens to be informed, not entertained. Our current culture places near worship-level value on being entertained, but it's impossible to make rational decisions without credible information. Quality information can be difficult to find, considering most media platforms have enthusiastically embraced a bias that aligns with their particular political market segment. But if we listen to and learn from sources that don't just confirm what we already believe, it may provide insights that promote common understanding.

None of this will likely yield big breakthroughs, but we may get to know and respect each other a bit more — and treat each other a bit better.

Even before the pandemic, there was a great deal of fear and anger stirring in America. Massive demographic, cultural and technological change — combined with a growing sense of economic injustice — severely stressed America's common understandings and fabric. Many understandably feared being left behind — while others were angry over feeling not included in the first place. The American fabric may be frayed, but it's not yet completely torn. It can be repaired, but we need to find ways to work together.

Let's start by treating each other as Americans with different views, not as evil opponents. Let's grace each other with the benefit of the doubt — and know there are indeed more than devils left.

Tim Pawlenty was governor of Minnesota from 2003-2011.

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