

A PATH FORWARD

RECLAIMING A CIVIL STATE OF THE UNION AMID D.C. DISCORD

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

If civility isn't dead, then it's on life support. And after watching President Donald Trump's State of the Union speech, I fear that the prognosis isn't good.

After the address, I heard from a reader who was disturbed but not surprised by what he called "crass tit-for-tat disrespectfulness" on display for the entire country to see. If you weren't among the 37.2 million viewers or didn't catch the online frenzy that followed, here is what happened:

• House Speaker Nancy Pelosi broke congressional tradition with her short introduction of Trump. She didn't say that it was a "high privilege and distinct honor" — introductory words that House speakers typically use to acknowledge the president's position as the sitting commander in chief.

• Trump shook many hands as he entered the House chamber. When he reached the front, he gave a copy of his speech to Pelosi but refused to shake her outstretched hand. Nor did he make eye contact.

• As the audience rose to applaud at the conclusion of the speech, Pelosi ripped up her copy. Most observers agree that she knew she was on camera — but



MANDEL NGAN AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Vice President Mike Pence claps as Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi reads a copy of President Donald Trump's speech after he delivered the State of the Union on Feb. 4.

beyond the handshake snub, the gesture was intended to convey her disapproval of Trump's remarks. Her facial expressions sent the same message as he spoke.

Reflecting on the discord, Washington Examiner writer Alexandra Hudson said, "True civility means that even unreasonable minds deserve some basic level of respect. This is because

our disagreement doesn't negate our value as people. Our national motto is, 'E pluribus unum': Out of many, one. When you have a lot of people living in a nation together, there will be differences, but we ought to be connected and unified by our common humanity."

Hudson links civility to our freedom to self-govern. She cites

the importance of small acts of civility: holding the door open for the person behind us, standing in line instead of jumping to the front, resisting the urge to cut off someone in traffic. "When too many of us fail to exercise self-restraint and common courtesy," Hudson continues, "people will begin calling for the government to restrain us through burdensome laws and regulations."

The belief that we're in a civility drought is widely shared by the American public. A December 2016 study of 1,126 adults nationwide by Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate with KRC Research found that 84 percent of us have experienced incivility. More than half of us expect the problem to get worse, largely because of politicians, the Internet and social media, and the news media. Seventy-five percent of us think that incivility has risen to crisis levels and we fear it will lead to intimidation and threats.

How then do we respond when even our nation's leaders demonstrate uncivil behavior? Along with the everyday courtesies mentioned by Hudson, participants in the Weber Shandwick study suggested solutions that include setting a good example by practicing civility; encouraging friends, family members and colleagues to

be civil; and speaking up against incivility when you see it.

Arthur Brooks, a Harvard professor and the former president of the American Enterprise Institute, spoke at the National Prayer Breakfast two days after the State of the Union address. Brooks says "nonsense" to calls for more civility and tolerance, believing that the standard is too low. He added, "If I told you that my wife and I were civil to each other, you'd tell us that we need counseling." Brooks intends that a competition of ideas is right and good, provided that it's done without contempt.

Brooks, author of the book "Love Your Enemies," will be honored with the National Peacemaker Award by the National Conflict Resolution Center at our April dinner. Brooks' message — to answer hatred with love — is vitally important to resurrecting civility. Let's follow his advice and bring this patient back to life.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center (NCRC), a San Diego-based organization that is working to create innovative solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. NCRC is nationally recognized for its conflict management and communication strategies. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit www.ncronline.com.

NOTEBOOKS

From Union-Tribune reporting staff

PUBLIC SAFETY: TERI FIGUEROA

Mom died day before girl's birthday

CHULA VISTA Janet Alicia Chavez died the day before her daughter turned 5 years old.

Her family isn't sure why the 24-year-old San Diego woman was driving in Chula Vista in the predawn hours of Feb. 1, but think perhaps she was delivering food, a gig job she sometimes did, to earn money for her daughter's birthday gift. Chavez had wanted to get the girl a Barbie car.

The San Diego mother died in a pre-dawn crash involving seven vehicles on Interstate 5 between J and L streets.

Nearly two weeks later, answers as to what happened remain elusive. The pileup is still under investigation, a California Highway Patrol spokesman said Thursday.

On the day of the crash, a CHP spokesman said that right before the crash, someone reported seeing a black truck headed the wrong way on southbound I-5 in the South Bay. The pickup reportedly was moving fast, and its headlights were turned off.

There was no black truck found at the crash scene. The two drivers who died were in

four-door cars. Chavez was driving a Chevrolet Malibu. The other driver who died, 23-year-old David Ramirez, was driving a Ford Focus. Each was the sole occupant.

Two others were hospitalized. Four more vehicles were hit by flying debris.

Like Chavez, Ramirez was the parent of a young child. A GoFundMe page for his family states that he was an Army veteran. His death, the page reads, left his family "in disbelief."

Chavez's death also left her family devastated.

"We feel so cheated by having lost her," sister-in-law Cheyenne Chavez said earlier this month. "The world would be so much better off with a thousand Janets."

Chavez was a community college student who played violin, loved to paint and enjoyed boxing.

Chavez's family made sure the girl who lost her mother got a Barbie car. And they made sure she knew it was from her mom.

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THE READERS' REPRESENTATIVE: ADRIAN VORE

Readers' contribution to reporting

Readers play an essential role in the newsroom. They provide feedback that can factor into decision-making; they give reporters tips; and they flag factual errors.

To give readers more perspective on what they bring to the table, I asked U-T Watchdog reporter Jeff McDonald and U-T public safety editor and former courts reporter Dana Littlefield about reader contributions.

"Some of my best stories have come from reader tips," McDonald said.

He pointed to a scandal he exposed in 2005 at the San Diego Food Bank in which some groups had been stealing hundreds of tons of donated groceries and selling them at flea markets and to discount stores.

He can't use all tips. Some are personal gripes, and some are fueled by a malicious motive, but he said he won't dismiss tips outright.

He also said readers have given him historical context and institutional knowledge that he otherwise would not have had. "This doesn't always show up in archives and Google searches," he said.

And readers will tell him about errors to correct. "Readers are our eyes and ears," he said. "We can't be everywhere and know everything."

Littlefield agreed on the usefulness of tips and corrections. One of the most common corrections she deals with on the public safety beat is the location of incidents. Reporters rely on police information, but that could be wrong. A crime might have actually occurred in Sorrento Valley, not Sorrento Mesa, for example.

Readers can question fairness. For instance, to call attention to a person's occupation in a headline might have no relevance to the crime being reported. It might be a piece of information to include farther down in the story, but not one that should be played up with large and bold type in a headline.

The best way for readers to reach a reporter is through email. The email convention is first name - dot - last name@suniontribune.com

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BALBOA PARK: LILIA O'HARA

Festival celebrates Don Quixote

The seventh Cervantes Festival will be held Feb. 29 in the lawn area surrounded by the cottages of the House of Pacific Relations in Balboa Park.

Some 150 attendees are expected, most of whom will be students from different San Diego schools who will read excerpts from Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's famous work, Don Quixote de la Mancha.

Sarah Heras, who teaches Spanish at Southwestern College and at The Children's School in La Jolla, will bring to the festival about 15 sixth-graders who are studying Spanish. The teacher says the children are "super excited about the adventures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza." Moreover, three of her students won first places in the Don Quixote poster contest related to the festival.

Penélope Bledsoe, a former Spanish teacher who is also president of the San Diego-Alcalá Sister City Society, organized the Cervantes Festival. San Diego and the Spanish city of Alcalá de Henares are sister cities. Cervantes was born and baptized in

Alcalá de Henares in 1547.

The local mission, San Diego de Alcalá, is named after a saint who lived and died in Alcalá de Henares. "The explorer, Sebastian Vizcaino, gave the name of San Diego to our bay and settlement when he arrived in our waters on the day of that saint in 1602," Bledsoe said.

The Cervantes Festival consists of the reading of passages from the novel by students and other readers. The reading is done in several languages to emphasize the universal reach of the novel.

Students from the participating schools also prepare drawings or paintings that represent some scenes from the novel. These are presented to a jury that chooses art for the official festival poster. "On the day of the festival we exhibit all the drawings and paintings the students have created," Bledsoe said.

The festival runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission free.

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FAIRGROUNDS: LUKE HAROLD

Thoroughbred Club budget approved

DEL MAR The Del Mar Thoroughbred Club's 2020 budget was approved by the 22nd District Agricultural Association's board of directors last week, as club officials hope their continued commitment to improve horse racing safety assuage public outcries about horse fatalities.

"The status of horse racing is a major issue that reverberates through everything we do," fairgrounds board member David Watson said.

Watson added that the fairgrounds board of directors is "more and more subsidizing racing" in ways such as allocating funding for concerts and other events on race weekends in an attempt to draw more people to the races, who then spend money on parking and concessions.

A surge in horse fatalities at the Santa Anita racetrack last year drew scrutiny from animal rights activists and media, and contributed to lower attendance and wagering levels during Del Mar's summer race meet.

"The safety of our athletes, both equine

and human continues to be Del Mar's top priority, but we understand more must be done," Mike Ernst, executive vice president and CFO of the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club, said in a letter to 22nd District Agricultural Association CEO Tim Fennell.

He mentioned the Thoroughbred Safety Coalition, formed last November when the club joined with other organizations throughout the country to set industry standards for safety and transparency. "The TSC provides for a comprehensive and centralized set of standards that include medical, operational and organizational reforms not only in California but across our organizations nationally," Ernst wrote in the letter.

The 2020 summer race meet opens July 18 and runs through Sept. 7. Revenues for 2020 are projected to be approximately \$37 million, an increase of 6.4 percent from 2019. Expenses for 2020, before other payments such as rent to the fairgrounds are factored in, are estimated at \$33.9 million.

Harold writes for the U-T Community Press.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

REMEMBER THE MAINE

On Feb. 15, 1898, the U.S. battleship Maine mysteriously blew up and sank in Havana Harbor, killing more than 260 crew members. A Navy court of inquiry ruled that a mine had exploded outside the hull of the ship, setting off explosions in the ship's magazines. Other experts blamed a coal bunker fire.

"Remember the Maine!" became a national battle cry that helped propel the United States to declare war on Spain two months later.

From The Evening Tribune, Wednesday, February 16, 1898:

A NATIONAL CALAMITY The Battleship Maine Blown Up in Havana Harbor

NEARLY THREE HUNDRED MEN ARE DEAD

Thrilling Story of the Survivors - The Explosion Believe to Have Been Accidental - List of Those saved - Expert Opinions

Associated Press Special Leased Wire Havana, Feb. 17 - The United States battleship Maine was blown up in this harbor at 9:40 last night, and was practically destroyed, fire starting in the wood work after the explosion. The explosion occurred in the fore part of the vessel and was terrific. It is believed that a charge of dynamite in the torpedo magazine was discharged in the bow of the battle ship, but this cannot be ascertained definitely until divers examine the wreck. At this writing Lieut. F. W. Jenkins and Assistant Engineer Darwin R. Merritt are missing and 280 of the crew, many of the latter being killed by the explosion. The boats of the Spanish man-of-war, Alphonso XIII, and the Ameri-

can mail steamer, City of Washington, were active in rescuing the survivors. The Spanish admiral thinks the explosion was caused by a hand grenade hurled over the navy yard.

Many of the wounded crew and an officer have been taken to the military hospital by order of Captain-General Blanco:

The wounded corroborate the statement that they were asleep when the explosion occurred. Captain Sigsbee says the explosion occurred in the bow of the vessel. Orders were given to the crew to save themselves as best they could. They were literally thrown from their bunks in their night clothing. The officers gave the orders



from Key West for crew and few pieces of equipment still above water. No one had other clothes than those upon him. Public opinion should be suspended until further report. All officers are believed to be saved. Jenkins and Merritt are not yet accounted for. Many Spanish officers, including representatives of Gen. Blanco, are now with me and express sympathy.

"SIGSBEE."

DISPATCH FROM LEE

Washington, Feb. 16 - Secretary Day this morning received the following dispatch from Consul-General Lee:

"The explosion occurred on the Maine, well forward under the men's quarters; consequently many were lost. It is believed all the officers were saved, but Jenkins and Merritt are not accounted for. Cause of the explosion is yet to be investigated. The captain-general and the army and navy officers rendered every assistance. Sigsbee and most of the officer are on board the steamer City of Washington. Others are on the Spanish gunboat and in the city."

"LEE."

THE SHIP AND HER OFFICERS

The Maine was a battleship of the second class, and was regarded as one of the best ships in the new navy. She was built at the Brooklyn navy yard, at a cost of \$2,588,888 without her equipment, and was 318 feet long, 57 feet broad, 21.6 mean draught, and 6682 tons displacement...

HISTORICAL PHOTOS AND ARTICLES FROM THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE ARCHIVES ARE COMPILED BY MERRIE MONTEAGUDO. SEARCH THE U-T HISTORIC ARCHIVES AT NEWSLIBRARY.COM/SITES/SDUB

with great self-control.

CAPTAIN SIGSBEE'S DISPATCH

Washington, Feb. 15 - The secretary of the navy has received the following telegram from Capt. Sigsbee:

"Maine blown up in Havana harbor at 9:40 and destroyed. Many wounded and others on board Spanish man-of-war and Ward line steamer. Send lighthouse tender