

COLUMN

2 mistakes Democrats can't afford to make



BY ALBERT R. HUNT

Two top Democrats made dangerous blunders over the past few weeks that should serve as a warning for politicians opposing Donald Trump.

Former Vice President Joe Biden told college students that Trump's comments and actions about women were so offensive that if they were in high school, "I'd take him behind the gym and beat the hell out of him."

In India, Hillary Clinton suggested that her voters in 2016 were from "optimistic, diverse and dynamic" venues, while Trump appealed to voters who "didn't like black people getting rights" and who "don't like women getting jobs."

There was a backlash: When you insult voters you may need someday, they probably aren't going to vote for you; and when you mud-wrestle with pigs, the pigs enjoy it.

Biden, who immediately heard from friends and family, quickly realized the error of his impulsive threat and apologized. "I shouldn't have said what I said," he explained. "I don't want to get down in the mosh pit with this guy."

Other Democrats will be similarly tempted when insulted by something Trump has done or said, sometimes viciously.

That became evident in the 2016 Republican primaries, when Trump repeatedly slandered his opponents. Marco Rubio decided to respond in kind. He ridiculed Trump's physical appearance, even suggesting a lack of sexual prowess. It backfired. "My words were embarrassed by it," the Florida senator said, and "if I had to do it again, I wouldn't."

The porn star Stormy Daniels recently said in a "60 Minutes" interview that when she had an affair with Trump a dozen years ago, she spanked him with a magazine that featured him. There was a private suggestion among a couple of Democrats to ridicule him with a reference to the old pop band, "Spanky and Our Gang." Bad idea. Leave that to late-night comedian Stephen Colbert.

There are legitimate criticisms of Trump's policies, personnel choices, temperament and integrity. These should be pointed and sharp without getting in the pit.

Hillary Clinton's remarks should be cause for greater concern. During the 2016 campaign, she derided half of Trump's followers as "deplorable." Her speech in India created a field day for Fox News and Republican campaigns that are trying to tie her remarks to Democrats like Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill, who is running for reelection in a state that Trump easily carried in 2016.

The right-wing response is a cheap shot, but Clinton's remarks reflect a condescension too prevalent among some Democrats, who convey a disdain for less educated, non-urban Trump voters as ignorant, prejudiced rubes.

That's a problem. It turns out that 2016 Election Day exit polls were flawed, exaggerating the number of college-educated voters and undercounting working-class whites, as Tom Edsall has convincingly written, based on data and experts. More reliable than the exit-poll data is a recent Pew Research Center survey that estimated that 44 percent of the 2016 electorate was white working class.

To be sure, there are significant numbers of misogynists and especially racists in the Trump coalition. I went to fewer than a dozen Trump rallies in the presidential campaign and heard racial epithets at each one. Trump has pandered to racial prejudices for years, and continues to do so as president.

But there were many non-bigots who voted for him, venting their anxieties and frustrations, feeling that elites - politicians, personified by Clinton, academics, the media, Wall Street - looked down on them. They relished that Trump was giving those elites hell.

If Democrats are to score big in the midterms this November, they must capture some of these voters. If they don't, they'll lose incumbents in Missouri, West Virginia, Indiana and elsewhere.

The focus on the Democrats' battle to win a majority in the House is on suburban districts. But to achieve the necessary two dozen or more victories, they will have to win in districts like one in Maine that is rural and working class, or like one in small-town southern New Jersey, or in downstate Illinois, or in California's Central Valley.

Looking ahead to 2020, if Trump runs for reelection, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin will be must-win states for Democrats. The Pew survey indicates that Clinton got 28 percent of the white working-class vote in 2016; in 2012, Obama won 36 percent of these voters. If Clinton had matched Obama with this group, she would have won those three states.

There are valuable lessons for Democrats, if they heed them: Don't get in the gutter with Trump and get over a mindset that tells voters they are not part of an "optimistic, diverse and dynamic" America.

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JACK OHMAN The Sacramento Bee

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Show of support needed

A recent CDT article highlighted several "high-crash" intersections in the county, along with potential fixes. One of the intersections singled out was I-99/I-80, improvements to which are one of two major transportation projects identified by a coalition of local/regional business, government, academic and community leaders as critical to safer and more efficient travel in Centre County and the region.

Last fall, the CBICC, Centre County Metropolitan Planning Organization, Penn State and other stakeholders launched "DRIVE Forward," a sustained, broad-based grassroots campaign designed to garner community support for the construction of a high-speed I-99/I-80 interchange and a local access interchange to replace the Bellefonte exit (as well as eventual upgrades to U.S. Route 322 from Potters Mills to the I-99/I-80 area).

In February, "DRIVE Forward" stakeholders met with key congressional leaders and PennDOT Secretary Leslie Richards about the importance of the project, and the status of PENNDOT's application for INFRA grant funding that will enable the project to move forward. The CBICC presented a "statement of support" that included the signatures of business and individual supporters to demonstrate the level of interest in this project.

As the federal government begins its review of some 200 INFRA grants, a continued and strengthened show of support will be paramount to achieving a favorable outcome. Business and individuals can help fix this dangerous intersection by signing on as supporters of "DRIVE Forward." To learn more about the effort, the projects and stakeholders, visit www.driveforwardcc.com.

- Vern Squier, president and CEO, Industry of Business & Chamber of Centre County

Evangelicals and Trump

I recently listened to conservative religion writer for the New York Times Ross Douthat answer a question posed by Mika Brzezinski on "Morning

Joe": Why is it that we are not hearing anything from Christian evangelicals about their support for this president who, quite obviously, stands for everything they ostensibly oppose?

Douthat's answer was basically: Many evangelicals do not believe the reports about Trump (which, Douthat adds, is just a form of denial); and many evangelicals are opposed to what Trump is doing and the lack of character he embodies, but they are "drowned out by opportunists" like Jerry Falwell Jr., who seek some notoriety hitching their wagons to Trump.

In the days after World War II, a convenient story was told of church leaders and ordinary Christians that defied the Nazis from the beginning. Recent research has uncovered a very different story. Rather than resisting, the greater part of the German church saw Hitler's rise in 1933 as an act of God's blessing, a new chapter in the story of God among the German people." (Robert Ericksen, from his book "Theologians Under Hitler")

"Think it can't happen here? Seems to me I heard a congressman speak out quite strongly recently about the blessing of God that is Donald Trump. As Trump would tweet, SAD, VERY SAD.

- Gina Leon, State College

Stop denying the role of guns

In his letter to the CDT, March 24, "A People Problem," Jimmie Miller argues that we shouldn't blame inanimate objects, i.e. guns, for gun violence. Indeed, to prove people are the problem, his experiment involved placing a loaded magazine next to his handgun to see how long it would take load itself. After five years his gun didn't load, of course, so his conclusion was that attempting to keep people from being shot to death by regulating guns is misguided.

Yes, people are the problem. It sure takes a person to load a handgun and use it to settle a domestic dispute. Indeed, blaming the gun because a person animates a high-capacity magazine and uses it to activate an assault rifle in a schoolhouse is an oversimplification when you

ignore the human factors. But, please, let's stop the nonsense of denying the central role of guns in the equation, and stop deflecting meaningful discussion on how to sensibly regulate gun use.

School students across the U.S. marched in protest, and they're not buying it. They realize it's a people problem. They recognize that people in public office are not addressing the misuse of guns in any meaningful way, that adult people refuse to meaningfully confront the gun violence against them, and that guns should not be as easily accessible for people to use in destructive ways. Over 5,000,000 of those teenagers are eligible to vote this year. They will call us to account for our selves.

- Jack Sulzer, Lemont

Nestle should get out

I suggest, emphatically, that Nestle gets out of Centre County. If they want cheap water, they can set up their factory on the shore of Lake Erie where water is plentiful and Nestle's activity will not invade the environment of the communities that have existed for years without the likes of Nestle's overbearing imposition.

We need not be on the list of communities that they have taken advantage of.

- Carl Wendler, Pine Grove Mills

Enforce current laws first

I would like to respond to the editorial, Shameful Response (CDT, March 28).

The countries that the writer references probably follow the leads they receive about potential mass shooters, unlike the FBI. It is disappointing to see all of the anger and frustration directed at the NRA (who are not responsible for mass shootings) while the FBI escapes all scrutiny. They were warned several times about the Stoneman Douglas High School shooter and failed to act upon that information. The local sheriff followed the FBI's example and did nothing.

While there may be ways to make the United States a safer place to live, we should start with enforcing

the laws we already have, not adding more.

- Joshua Bourne, Pennsylvania Furnace

Competing for a cause

This past year, we've seen some major polarization in Congress. However, when it comes to environmental sustainability, bipartisan cooperation is making great innovations in policy. Most recently, the House Climate Solutions Caucus introduced a bill called the Challenges and Prizes for Climate Act of 2018. This bill would establish a Department of Energy "Climate Solutions Challenges" program to fund clean-energy prize competitions between private businesses, with direct benefits to the climate.

Essentially, it provides a competitive incentive for companies to compete with each other to produce the best clean-energy products. This program would not only tap into our country's huge market potential for clean energy (\$2 billion in Pennsylvania alone), but would also encourage movement toward environmental stewardship in the private sector. That means that while we're waiting for slower policy change to happen in Congress, competing businesses would give our climate and our economy the jump start they need immediately.

If you agree that this bill has a real chance at improving our clean energy industry, call our 5th District Rep. Glenn Thompson at his Bellefonte office - 353-0215 - or his Washington, D.C., office - 202-225-5121 - and ask him for his vote.

- Isabella Teti, State College

YOUR OPINION

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