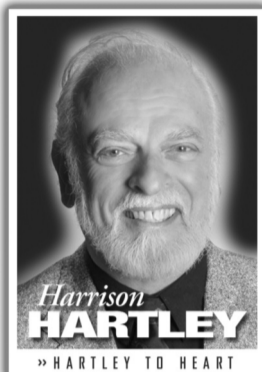


News, Theatrics, or Therapy?

Whoever first said "You are entitled to your own opinions but not to your own facts" ought to be given an award equal to the Nobel and Pulitzer Prizes combined. And certainly this ought to be engraved in letters of fire into the prefrontal lobes of anyone who goes into politics, education, history, medicine, law, or journalism. Science is not in this list because scientists are already supposed to know the difference between opinions and facts, although when they communicate with the public, many of them aren't as faithful as they ought to be to the principle of keeping the two separate.



Nevertheless, politicians and journalists are the chief offenders, and their coquetry is both silly and dangerous. The recent "outrage" about using reconciliation to pass a health care reform bill is a case in point. In the first place, most such "outrage" is pure theatrics calculated to appeal (as it unfortunately does) to the frenetic adrenaline junkies that make up an uncomfortably large percent of the population. Second, though in this case the phony "outrage" comes entirely from the hopelessly goofy end of the Republican congressional contingent, the use of manufactured "outrage" has become de rigeur throughout American politics and is

exacerbated by the sensation-hungry press.

And third (but only provisionally finally because there isn't enough space to go on with here) the American people (and this means most of us) aren't invested enough in their own future to get past the fakery. The American body politic is fat, spoiled, and lazy, and apparently averse to motion that doesn't involve hanging teabags from your gardening bonnet in order to get your picture in the news or protecting free speech by shouting down anybody with an opposing view. (In short, if politics involves real work and doesn't

resemble a tailgate party or a Saturday Night Wrestling match, we want no part of it.) Calmly thinking about things and checking facts is way too much hard work, and not nearly as much fun as pitching a fit. Consider again, for example, the "reconciliation" hoopla. Conservative Republicans (i.e. those who really do make up, as Congressman Anthony Wiener said, a "wholly owned subsidiary of the insurance industry") decry this as the "nuclear option" and claim that it is just unheard of as regular operating procedure. There are two serious problems with this, and neither speaks well for the Republicans.

First, the "nuclear option" (and please fact-check this at your leisure) has NEVER referred to reconciliation but to the proposal of eliminating the requirement of a super majority vote to pass bills without the threat of a filibuster. So, is the use of the term ignorance or an outright lie? Second, reconciliation has been used 22 times since the early 1980's and Democrats have used it SIX times whereas Republicans have used it SIXTEEN times! In the last Bush administrations alone, it was used at least six times on everything from the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans to our ill-advised, poorly managed war efforts (and vote after vote during those "wonderfully harmonious" years lead to virtual ties in the House and 51-50 in the Senate, giving Dick Cheney the power to be a majority of one and speak for all Americans whether they wanted him to or not.)

Outrage? Pfui! Pure hypocrisy. But our love affair with our own adrenal glands doesn't confine itself solely to news "professionals." If you'd like to be scared silly, have a look sometime in the local print media at the "Letters to the Editor" and the reader responses to such letters and other articles: usually a long litany of whining, complaining, blame-casting, scape-goating, and outright bigotry. Or, if you really want to loose some sleep, go to the

local call-in section. Most of these are nothing more than platforms for anonymous venting, and what bilious, fire-and-brimstone-belching stuff is spewed forth – all the above, only intensified! Granted, the occasional voice of reason makes an appearance, but the usual avalanche of hatred, anger, and authoritarian egocentrism buries it pretty quickly. Well, perhaps it serves a purpose. Perhaps, with a place to "get it off their chests," the writers will forgo action that really might, at least locally, tear the fabric of civilization apart (though, if an article called "Age of Treason" in the March/April, 2010, Mother Jones is right, we do have something to worry about nationally.) This would be the use of "news" as therapy; a kind of self-refreshing target for the paranoid among us who, like Pap Finn, find "the gummint" to be the root of all evil and who jump at any chance to blame somebody else for their own miserable little lives. But whatever it is, therapy or titillating theater, it isn't what it ought to be, and these days when you ask: "What's in the news?" you have to be set for anything from a tossed-salad of mind-numbing, voyeuristic trivia to pathologically irrational rant. It's too bad that those of us who actually do care about the facts have to dig through that garbage to find them.

After-Election Reflections of a Lame Duck

Hmmmm. What could possibly be on my mind this week?

Being a City Council member and newspaper publisher both has been a challenge and exciting at the same time.

Now, as a journalist and someone who just lost an election Tuesday many of you may be curious what's on my mind.

If I were to tell you all I know, it just might end up being a short story and you'll be finished reading quickly.

Of course I'm disappointed in losing. I wanted a second term and had promised to term-limit myself if I was reelected. I was not. The voters chose to term-limit me to one term.

Surprise would be another emotion. I spent part of Monday at the Downtown Library looking up friends I could ask for yard sign locations when I should have been knocking on doors around Hyde Park. *I joked with friends Tuesday night that I was bracing myself to lose in April, not in March.*

My Record

1) When I campaigned for Council four years ago I pledged to press for a Highway 59 overpass to help provide emergency services to the southwest residents of the city and the Stockyards Industrial District. I pressed for it to be included in the last CIP sales tax, for \$3 million. I've personally lobbied all of our local legislators as well as our two senators and

congressman in Washington. I serve as one of the city's representatives to the MPO--the area transportation planning committee.

2) I also pledged to work for sewer improvements. As chair of the Council Landfill and Water Protection Committee, I've worked with city staff to help guide us through our CSO sewer mandate. City staff revised it's sewer hookup policies to make it easier for unserved neighborhoods to hook on to sewers. In response to numerous sewer back up complaints,

I sponsored a one percent increase to pay for another full-time crew to do nothing but clean sewers.

I made two promises and kept both.

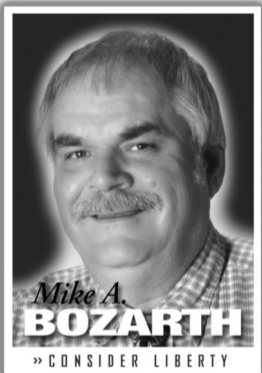
3) In response to complaints on alley maintenance, I supported a Council initiated policy change that added a crew 3-person crew to work on alley maintenance.

4) I supported Mayor Shearin and Deputy Mayor Mike Hirter's plans to make city government more transparent and to televise Council meetings.

5) On TIFF's, I was a moderate. I supported three and opposed two.

6) I earned the second or third best attendance record at all Council meetings, special Council meetings, work sessions and the three committees I was a member of. I also made a large majority of the meetings of committees I was not a member of.

7) I represented the city not just on the MPO, but also MO-KAN Regional Council of Governments



and the Community Alliance--an example of the city, county, school district, university, convention and visitor's bureau and the chamber of commerce working together. I also participated in Great Northwest Days, and the Missouri Municipal League.

8) I held regular "listening posts," for two years twice a month and once a month for the last two years. I tried to put myself in the community to best serve my constituents.

9) I tried to answer constituent contacts and complaints in a prompt and courteous manner.

10) I have been active in the largest neighborhood group in my district, the South St. Joseph Progressive Assn., missing I believe three meetings in the last four years. Two of those times I was at city meetings. I attended and volunteered at events and festivals.

11) I shopped largely in my district and regularly attended the meetings of the Stock Yards Industrial District Council.

12) I was frugal and watched after taxpayers' dollars.

What Did I Do Wrong?

I have to ask that question, because I'm not really sure how to answer it.

My conscience is clear. I've tried to be honest my entire life, so I don't have to worry about having misled anyone. I've had a listed phone number since I was 18 years old. I don't feel a need to hide from anyone.

I don't claim to have been any sort of an "angel." I'm not proud of every decision I have made or anything like that. But none of my bad decisions

have hurt or directly effected anyone else.

I'm really not sure what, if anything I would have done differently these last four years.

I ran an active campaign. In spite of bad weather I knocked on a couple hundred doors and had 124 yard signs placed. I attended nearly every forum and debate.

Yes, it is disappointing to lose. But I'm dealing with that ok. I've called P.J.Kovac and congratulated him. I promised to do anything I could to help make the transition easier and that I'm available if he had any questions.

My friends, the hardest part for me to deal with has been the outpouring of your calls and e-mails expressing disappointment over my loss.

It's very humbling to have so many people call and express support and friendship. From all over the city and even across the state. I feel unworthy. I've never claimed to be anyone special. But I deeply appreciate your friendship and confidence.

I also appreciate being able to serve the four years the voters gave me.

I may be beaten, but I'm unrepentant. I did my best. I have no regrets.

VERSE of the WEEK

Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge, but he that hateth reproof is brutish.
— PROVERBS 12: 1