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When Personality Trumps Good Governance

By ERIC FISCHER
STAFF WRITER

The annual State of the Union address was a spectacle this year. Cameras panned to an obviously split House chamber after each sentence from President Trump. One side applauded enthusiastically while the other side sat stone-faced. Besides its theatrics, this year's State of the Union address brought forward an important question: Can we look past disdain for a politician's character in order to work with them to enact policy?

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Trump's dismal approval ratings, especially among the vocal progressive wing of the Democratic party, have intensified an unrelenting resistance to everything he advocates. This attitude was most noticeable when the president briefed the nation on the state of the economy. With the gross domestic product (GDP) having grown by 2.6 percent in the fourth quarter of 2017, unemployment at a low 4.1 percent, and inflation near its 2 percent target, the economy is strong. President Trump, however, can only take credit for one year of economic growth. In addition, he inherited an economy already in solid growth. Without regard to political allegiance, these strong economic numbers are impressive and should be applauded. The fact that such a controversial president sits in the Oval Office does not change the fact that African-American unemployment is at an all-time low and Hispanic unemployment is close to that. While Congress does not have to meet Trump with applause, we ought to celebrate these developments. Right after this line in his address, cameras panned

to the Congressional Black Caucus showing no outward signs of approval.

While displeasure with President Trump is one thing, some types of resistance have been more disruptive and obstructionist. Take, for example, the attempt by Rep. Al Green (D-TX) to begin impeachment proceedings against him. That is an overreaction to his unpopular policies and serves only as a publicity stunt for appeasing a staunch liberal base. Attempting to impeach the president does nothing to further Congress's mandate to legislate, yet 58 House Democrats joined Rep. Green in promoting this.

It is vital to the functioning of our democracy that our elected officials are able to separate personal animosity from public duty. Democrats, both elected officials and voters, should focus on policy instead of President Trump's personal antics. Most importantly, moderate Democrats should work to moderate the progressive resistance to him at every turn. Already, progressive groups are monitoring potential 2020 Democratic contenders for president such as senators Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Kamala Harris (D-CA), and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) to ensure unflinching loyalty to the cause of anti-Trump resistance. This is not the way forward. Voters should reward candidates with clearly presented policy positions who are willing to work across the aisle. Devotion to a policy outcome, and a willingness to negotiate, should take precedence over consistently toeing party lines.

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On the New Curator

By CLAIRE ANASTASIA KITZ
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

A London publisher, Laurence King, observed: "How many times have you heard the term 'curate' in the past few years? But what exactly does it mean? Curating has been a key concept both in and outside the art world in the past few years, with the role of a curator having changed and expanded with each new exhibition or biennale."

In the past, the curator's role was straightforward. It focused on compiling reams of research on a specific work or collection and an immersion in art history. Paintings and sculptures in a museum were placed in traditional categories related to a movement or period. Today, an art curator is less a constrained instructor looking backward, and more an experimental consultant or facilitator looking forward – called to realize innovative approaches, new trends, inspired installations, and emerging narratives.

The idea of the curator as an artistic emissary or catalyst arose in

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the mid-20th century. King explains: "the late 1960s witnessed a shift from the idea of curating as a caring, meditative, administrative activity toward one of a mediating and performative activity akin to artistic practice." The florid profession took on its present form beginning 50 years ago and became increasingly like King's description when graduate degrees in art management and curatorial studies were established

continued on back

in the early 1990s. Since then, the discipline has evolved diametrically away from its old definition.

The ‘old curator,’ so to speak, was the custodian of the museum or art collection, a permanent fixture. The new kind of curator is often independent of museums, a consultant with a contract and an iPad. He or she is expected to have skills commensurate with a myriad of divergent tasks or functions. The ‘new curator’ is part artist’s agent, part public relations expert, part marketing professional, part art historian, part visionary, part fundraiser, part website and catalog designer, part risk-taker,

and part business manager. ‘New’ curators cannot simply hold their places on the masthead by researching in the stacks of musty tomes. They must travel seamlessly from one city to another, from one space to another, from one screen to another, as they work on the invention, distribution, nuanced treatment, and support of art exhibits, installations, and openings. As the editor and founder of an online blog where art and business coalesce, Régine Debatty, contends, “while artists push boundaries, curators make ways for them to exist in the world.” (we-make-money-not-art.com, April 11, 2016).

In today’s art world the

contemporary curator, in addition to discarding an outdated job description, has jettisoned traditional categories - movements and historical periods - and moved along the continuum of ideas and mythos. He or she assumes the role of an intermediary between the artist and audience, in order to explore historical resonance, cultural context, and meaning through shows, descriptions, and analysis.

Curators, then, have been transformed from staid figures into people who push boundaries and proffer new ways of seeing art. This positive shift promises a continual stream of fresh and innovative approaches to showcasing artists and their work.

A Country Divided

By GRANT KIEFABER
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

The United States has never seen a more politically divided climate. With candidates like Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump, voters have taken sides and have continued to deepen their political stances.

In addition, social media platforms have allowed more connection among like-minded individuals. These echo chambers create an atmosphere lacking political discourse. Increasingly, people don’t have to interact with those of differing opinions, which tends to create two sides who do not want to interact. These differences appear to affect everyday life as well, with more people saying they simply can’t stand to speak with those who, for example, support a rival candidate.

The problem is not that citizens are fiercely involved and passionate about political issues. It is more like the opposite. Individuals are actually detached from the political climate—since they only care about their own views and dismiss others’ as un-factual. Recently, a friend of mine on Facebook posted that he had “purged” his account. He’d removed all his friends

who had a certain kind of political allegiance. I asked why, and he told me he simply couldn’t stand the political posts he was seeing. After further discussion, he let me know that all of these purged Facebook friends shared the same left-wing political beliefs. This is a representative anecdote for our current problems with political participation. In the age of social media, it becomes easier and easier to distance oneself from opposing beliefs.

This by no means is a partisan issue. Republicans and Democrats alike contribute to the problem. Whether on college campuses or online discussion boards, members of these political groups get together and further entrench their beliefs. A Pew Research study found that 83 percent of social media users ignore or avoid interacting with opposing political posts online. Opposing sides dislike each other so much that they shy away from one another.

While this is a complex issue, the first step in mending such a fierce divide is theoretically simple — open dialogue. In practice, however, it is hard

to implement. In the same Pew study, 59 percent of social media users found it stressful and frustrating to interact with those of opposing views. Many do not want to be challenged, choosing to remain comfortable in their political spheres. But it is imperative to come together and challenge each other.

People need to give up on feeling safe. They need to get comfortable with being challenged and with knowing it is acceptable to change their views. On campus, political organizations need to interact with those of opposing views. This is not to say that they must agree and find common ground. Hamilton College has tried to address this issue with the Common Ground initiative. When speakers Karl Rove and David Axelrod came to campus, they stressed that people of differing views must find common ground. Unfortunately, they did not stress the importance of dialogue on controversial issues, discussing more mundane issues instead. The goal of Common Ground should be to encourage dialogue on controversial topics. While it is stressful to engage in these conversations, they are an important first step in bringing Republicans and Democrats together.

It is time to remember that we are not just “a Republican” or “a Democrat.” While we have different ideas of what is best for the country, we must remember that everyone wants the best for its future.

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CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

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#TheNewCurator
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