

For clean elections

A reason for 1997 campaign law

JIM LYNCH
SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

In spite of its natural outdoor beauty, cultural amenities and quality neighborhoods, our wonderful Little Rock still has its controversies. A recent headline-capturing topic is the November 2018 city election for mayor and whether two potential challengers to our incumbent mayor are violating a good government reform ordinance that prohibits collecting campaign funds prior to five months before election day.

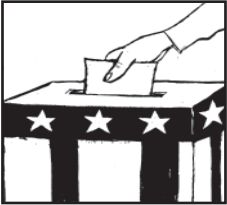
In other words, despite a 1997 city law banning the receipt of any campaign funds before June 1 in an election year, it seems two mayoral candidates already are hard at work doing exactly that. One says he already has raised \$150,000.

I was one among many grass-roots advocates in 1995, 1996 and 1997 who strongly and vocally supported the five-month limit for city candidate fundraising. This time limitation is aimed at an age-old problem—far, far too much money in politics! City policies are especially vulnerable to special-interest money because city councils convene almost every week and vote, among other decisions, to rezone land and approve high-dollar contracts to vendors. City council members weekly make decisions that someone else would like to influence with a “campaign donation.” In other words, corrupt behavior potentially can emerge 52 times a year!

The “money-in-politics” issue at Little Rock City Hall commanded the spotlight in December 1995 when our grassroots groups learned that a high-stakes rezoning vote on six acres of land near the Shackleford and Kanis roads intersection was entangled with two large “campaign donations” from the land developers seeking the rezoning. City planning staff and the city manager each recommended against the rezoning because the added commercial zoning would compound the existing snarled volume of traffic in the vicinity. City planners said the intersection already was awash with retail zoning, and the six acres of added retail was not justified by any rational planning criteria.

Nonetheless, land developers gave \$1,700 to the re-election campaign of one city board member in August 1995 as the rezoning worked its way through City Hall. Remember, the actual campaign was not scheduled until November 1996, 18 months in the future! The same land developers gave an added \$1,000 to a second city board member’s re-election in October 1995, only a few weeks before the same high-stakes rezoning vote, but 13 months before election day.

The irrational yet successful rezoning and the land developers’ tandem big campaign gifts did not go unnoticed. A coalition of grass-roots groups across Arkansas then propelled a door-to-door petition campaign to gather tens of thousands of voter signatures to place a “money-in-politics reform” statute on the November 1996 statewide ballot. Our proposed law reduced allowable campaign donations to \$300 for state elected officials



Guest writer

and enabled city governments to adopt their own campaign finance limitation ordinances. The reform law captured 487,432 votes (66 percent) in a landslide triumph for clean government.

Three months later in February 1997, the Little Rock City Board adopted the five-month time limit for receiving campaign donations. Year-round “pay-to-play” rezoning ordinances were no more in Little Rock!

You now know the history of Little Rock’s reform ordinance to limit money in politics. The reform ordinance was sound in 1997 and it is sound today. Everyone in Little Rock should be proud of its enactment.

As noted earlier, two candidates for mayor now are willfully ignoring this ordinance because they have declared themselves to be “exploratory candidates” (as opposed to real candidates) which allows their “exploratory campaign committees” to lawfully collect campaign funds two years prior to the actual election.

The City Board recently directed the city attorney to ask the Circuit Court for a declaratory judgment by a judge to decide the legal controversy. Last week the circuit judge said the exploratory candidacies were legal but largely ignored the city’s reform ordinance. A city appeal to a higher level court may be necessary. I hope the city’s ordinance, a genuine light of reform in the darkness of our money-addicted political system, will prevail in the end. Our city elections will be cleaner as a result, just as they have been for the last 21 years since the ordinance was enacted.

Apparently what is inflicting heartburn on the two 2018 mayoral challengers is an ancillary provision of the 1997 reform ordinance that requires candidates to return or donate to charity any “excess campaign funds” (donations less expenses) after election day. All city candidates complied with this city rule until 2010 when the state Legislature redefined “excess funds” as any sum greater than the salary of the public office sought by the candidate.

In 2010 the city attorney acknowledged the new statute and told city candidates about the new rule allowing them to keep a portion of their excess campaign money. In 2018 the mayor’s salary is \$160,000 per year and the incumbent mayor, Mark Stodola, may lawfully “carry over” an equal sum if he has it. As of this writing, Mayor Stodola, according to his public campaign reports, has approximately \$78,000 in “carryover” funds. His two challengers do not like this circumstance despite the fact that it has been allowable under state law for the last eight years. Thus each challenger has employed the “exploratory committee” device to get a running head start.

Jim Lynch has been active in Little Rock grass-roots politics for 40 years.

LETTERS

What Dad would say

During the height of the civil rights movement in the early 1960s, I remember my father, a farmer in East Texas, passing the room where the TV was playing. He stopped. A news story about Martin Luther King had caught his attention. He listened, then started out the door to start his day farming.

Under his breath I heard him say, “That man has a backbone of steel.”

My father was a man of few words, but the ones he uttered were generally well thought out and to the point—often bluntly so. He was a member of what’s been called the “Greatest Generation.” While Franklin Roosevelt was securing his place as the third greatest president behind Lincoln and Washington, my father had done his part: from the invasion of North Africa, Sicily, Normandy and Central Europe. He didn’t talk about the war much, but I think he thought about it a great deal in the quiet hours of the night when he was alone. He did not like war nor parades.

I often wonder what my father would say if he were alive today watching the tweeting, babbling, saber-rattling, posturing and half-thought-out policies emanating from the Mar-a-Lago White House from our current self-labeled “Great Man” president.

I can imagine him saying quietly to himself, “I don’t think this feller is up to the job.”

DANNY HANCOCK
Lonoke

Of disparaging words

I began observing politics when President Harry Truman upset Republican Thomas Dewey in November 1948. I know that former presidents have lied, but President Trump will lie, and walk down the hall and

deny it. His unyielding political base calls it “walking it back.” Today, I worry about the fate of truth.

President Trump has a well-stocked quiver of slurs and innuendos and he’s quick with the bow string and he knows his targets, and his political base loves it. He’s good with quick descriptors and pejorative words. His slurs such as “look at that face” when Carly Fiorina was one of the 17 or so GOP candidates in 2016. “A disgrace,” “a nut job,” “one of the dumbest human beings” to Sen. Lindsey Graham. Al “Frankenstein” for Al Franken. And the many pejorative words to Megyn Kelly, even about “blood coming out of her ... wherever” (Trump’s words), just to name a few of his aspersions given to hundreds of his opponents.

Not a disparaging word have I heard Trump say about Vladimir Putin or Trump’s consistent political ally, Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton. Trump is good with words that can accurately depict adversaries like a cartoonist can draw caricatures. I shouldn’t bring it up, but if Senator Cotton ever crosses Trump, Trump will pluck Tom “the Giraffe” Cotton from his quiver. To be fair to Trump, the caricature of Cotton, a good man, is giraffe-like. Think about it. And have fun.

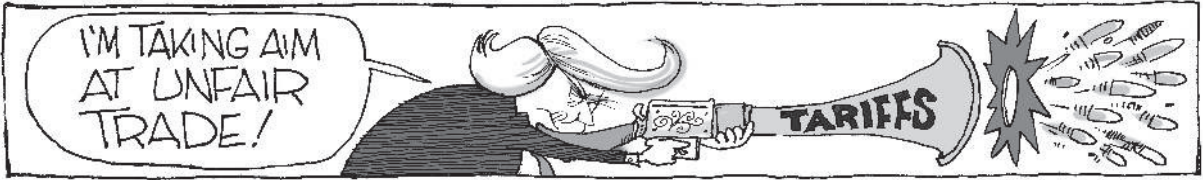
WILLIAM C. KRAMER
North Little Rock

Set up a new hot line

“See something, say something.” In Arkansas, there is a hot line to report child abuse. There could also be a hot line to report potential gun violence, staffed by the state police. The Legislature would have to fund it. Privacy laws would need to be amended to allow for issues in the name of public safety.

CHARLES VERMONT
Prescott

Voices



Loxy News

Dana D. Kelley



“Fox News” has been elevated to generic status as a synonym for “extreme conservatism” by a growing number of left-wing elitist groups. Few *ad hominem* slurs are slung with such lacerating ill will as the various incarnations of [insert name] must be watching too much Fox News.”

Frankly, it’s surprising Dianne Feinstein was spared the accusation as part of her resounding repudiation by the off-the-deep-left California party hounds.

From the entertainment glitterati to the DNC *haut monde*, “Fox News” are the preferred weaponized words of malignant association used to machine-gun conservative messengers bearing inconvenient facts.

Conservatives need a counterbalance term, and maybe the new nickname for left-leaning MSM outlets ought to be “Loxy News.” Oxymorons are contradictions in terms, and “Loxy” represents an abbreviated contraction for the liberal oxymorons that permeate and pervade political news.

Loxy News tells us, for instance, that some national interest is served by an expensive and exhaustive investigation that results in indictments of 13 Russians for trying to influence American election outcomes. But if we’re really interested in protecting our national election apparatus from foreign meddling, why does the worry of a literal handful of Russkies outweigh the risk of ballot-box mischief presented by 11 million illegal immigrants?

Even if they’re not all voting fraudulently, they march and protest and otherwise apply improper political pressure. As unlawful residents consuming benefits reserved for lawful citizens, their conflict of interest is absolute—and discounted absolutely by Loxy News.

Indeed, keeping with its namesake, Loxy News gives favorable headlines to “sanctuary” efforts by various states and cities.

Consider the concept behind sanctuary laws in a broader sense. Suppose a metropolitan city coun-

cil somewhere decided that federal self-employment tax law was unfair to entrepreneurs and small businesses within its confines. After all, the self-employment tax is peculiarly punitive. A sole proprietor who makes \$50,000 one year and loses \$50,000 the next has a net income for the two-year period of zero. Her self-employment tax bill for that two-year period is \$7,650, however, even though she literally made no money.

Back to our enterprising council example. Because it wants to support entrepreneurs who provide local jobs to support the municipal economy, the council declares itself a sanctuary city against the self-employment tax. Municipal employees, funds and resources are prohibited, by city ordinance, from assisting with IRS agents or efforts seeking to enforce the law, which penalizes good, hardworking small-business owners. The mayor volunteers to help people evade the tax authorities.

Maybe council members hope entrepreneurs will flock to their city, bringing jobs with them; maybe they would if this ever actually happened.

In a couple of more polarizing hypotheses, imagine (1) a local ordinance announcing a sanctuary city against the federal age requirement for handgun purchases because council members view it as an affront against law-abiding citizens who are old enough at 18 to be conscripted for battle in foreign wars; or (2) a sanctuary state whose legislature decreeing that unborn children within its borders warrant protection from federal court rulings and case law that allow their destruction.

If sanctuary strategies are a good (i.e., politically effective) thing, who died and left immigration as the holy grail of safe haven issues?

Maybe conservatives need to tune in and learn a thing or two from Loxy News, and form some strong sanctuary movements around their own sacred causes in select states and localities!

If only it weren’t for those pesky law and order instincts.

In a nation of laws, sanctuary statutes and ordinances weaken the republic because respect for the law is a requisite for the preservation of liberty under the law. They also make a mockery of officials sworn to uphold the law, and deliver a truly damnable indignity on individual immigrants who obeyed it.

What does it say to someone who endures personal difficulties and trying circumstances in order to do the “right thing” and follow the law, when a city or state turns around and gives sanctuary to all the “wrong thing” doers?

It hardly sends a high-road message consistent with lofty American ideals.

Rewarding those who take the crooked path over those who walk the straight line is one of the cruelest oppressions a government can inflict.

How Loxy News has led so many to misfocus on the issue is puzzling. Redeeming behavior has never been accepted as a justification for tolerating lawlessness. Otherwise we’d happily look the other way if white-collar frauds also donated generously to charity, or petty thieves used their ill-gotten proceeds to pay tutors for their kids.

Loxy News is a superior moniker to Fake News, too, which isn’t typically fake so much as hypocritical. For a textbook dissection of the latter, research the real facts behind the story claiming “18 School Shootings in 2018.” That kind of bunk withers under the most rudimentary scrutiny for journalistic integrity, but it warrants recurring airtime on Loxy News.

So unless you enjoy special-interest sound bites being substituted for substance, don’t fall prey to watching too much Loxy News.

Don’t watch anything. Read more.

Dana D. Kelley is a freelance writer from Jonesboro.

LETTERS

Anticipation of doom

While reading the homeschooling piece in Sunday’s Perspective section and its discussion of parental fears in light of recent school shootings, I couldn’t help but think of the poem “The Goodnight” from the late American poet, veteran, PTSD sufferer, etc., Louis Simpson, which I prescribed to my own children as they were growing up.

Speaking to/of a daughter, he writes: “Though she may have intelligence, and charm, and luck, they will not save her life from every harm. The lives of children are dangerous to their parents ... some, for a child’s sake anticipating doom, empty the world to make the world safe as a room ...”

I spent 34 years thoroughly enjoying teaching in a very large and diverse public high school in the Northeast. I would do it again, despite all the chancy goings-on in this land. And I would surely refuse to add being armed to my bag of tricks which constantly

had to adapt to societal changes.

WILLIAM J. WEEKS
Mountain Home

Leaders endorse trail

I write today on behalf of myself and the mayors of Marvell, Elaine, Lakeview, Lexa, Marianna, West Memphis, DeValls Bluff, Hazen, Carlisle, and Lonoke, and the county judges of Phillips, Lee, Monroe, Crittenden, Lonoke, and Prairie counties.

As elected leaders of communities along the route of the envisioned Memphis-Little Rock bicycling trail that would cross the White River via the historic bridge at Clarendon, we have been following the unfolding drama of the bridge with great interest.

We’ve come to realize that what’s interesting is not the bridge alone, but rather the compelling bike trail that emerges only when there’s a historic bridge bisecting two refugees at its heart. This “River, Ridge, Row crop and Refugees” trail, as someone referred to it in

a recent article, takes assets from across our communities and packages them into a marketable whole that is dramatic and varied enough to draw visitors from all parts of the world. As the trail utilizes only existing infrastructure (with the exception of the updates that would be made to the historic bridge), the trail is also otherwise ready to go.

The economic impact of overnight bicycle tourism is 19 times greater than that of traditional automobile tourists, a benefit that extends beyond traditional businesses to enterprising individuals who can earn extra income by providing special services such as renting an empty room in their home to passing cyclists.

We hope that the efforts to realize the bridge-trail vision are ultimately successful as we believe the final product will be of great benefit to our communities and the region.

JAY HOLLOWELL
Helena-West Helena

Jay Hollowell is mayor of the city of Helena-West Helena.

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