

Bangor Daily News

Founded in 1889

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TRUMP’S TRANSGENDER BATHROOM COMMON SENSE

Donald Trump never fit the role of Republican Party standard bearer well. To start, his campaign has been all about him and not at all about the party. Policy-wise, it’s skimpy and incoherent.

But from that incoherence occasionally springs common sense — common sense that serves as a real test for the Republican Party: Does the GOP line up behind North Carolina’s newly passed and discriminatory transgender bathroom law and laws like it popping up in legislative bodies throughout the South (and in South Dakota)? Or does the party decide it should move beyond a focus on stigmatizing and discriminating against a particular class of people?

Speaking Thursday on NBC’s “Today” show, Trump adeptly fielded a question about his thoughts on the North Carolina law, which requires people on public property to use the bathroom consistent with the sex on their birth certificate, even if they’re living their lives with a different gender identity.

“There have been very few complaints the way it is,” Trump said. “People go. They use the bathroom that they feel is appropriate. There has been so little trouble. And the problem with what happened in North Carolina is the strife and the economic — I mean, the economic punishment that they’re taking.”

When host Matt Lauer asked Trump if any transgender people worked for him, the candidate’s response was more revealing — and it demonstrated the absurdity of Sen. Ted Cruz’s hyperbolic and inaccurate characterization of transgender people.

“I really don’t know. I probably do. I really don’t know,” Trump said.

That’s because transgender

people are people. They’re normal. They don’t fit Cruz’s ugly characterization of “grown adult men, strangers ... alone in a bathroom with little girls.” One doesn’t necessarily notice when the person in the next stall going to the bathroom is a transgender person. A transgender person going to the bathroom is just like anybody else going to the bathroom. That explains why, as Trump said, there have been few complaints and problems with bathrooms set up as they are.

Online magazine Slate described Trump’s comments as a “rare moment of lucidity.” Trump demonstrated that he sees the humanity in transgender people in a way Maine Gov. Paul LePage does not.

To be sure, Trump’s moment of lucidity does not crown him the candidate of inclusivity. Trump, after all, is the candidate who suggested banning all immigrants who adhere to the world’s second-largest religion. He characterized Mexican immigrants as “rapists,” and one of the few consistent planks in his policy platform is the construction of a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border — paid for by Mexico. Trump has also brought the Republican primary to a low point through his failure to fully disavow the support of white supremacist David Duke and through his sexist behavior.

But Trump’s comments Thursday on the North Carolina transgender law further illustrate that he has little regard for the policy convictions of the Republican Party. He’s perfected the art of a campaign based on personality and anger at an ill-defined elite class. When he challenges policy views considered dominant in the GOP, he demonstrates that support for Trump doesn’t translate into support for Republican policies.

OTHER VOICES

INDEPENDENTS AND THE BALLOT

Imagine if states prohibited some citizens from voting based on their political beliefs. The reaction, justifiably, would be outrage. Yet about a dozen states already do exactly that, with hardly a word of protest.

Much of the current national debate over voting rights has centered on overly stringent voter identification laws. But the single largest impediment to voter participation is a system that barely arouses notice: closed primaries that exclude anyone who declines to join a political party.

In the most recent presidential primary election, New York’s on Tuesday, about 1 in 4 voters were prohibited from casting ballots because they do not belong to either major political party. On April 26, the same fate will befall independent voters in Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland and Pennsylvania.

Democrats and Republicans alike have tended to defend or discount the wholesale disenfranchisement of independent voters in closed primaries, arguing that it’s their choice not to join a party. But membership in a party should not be a prerequisite for equal access to the polls when the election is paid for by the public and administered by the state.

More than a dozen states require voters to join a party in advance of primary day. New York sets the most egregious deadline: People must sign up by October of the previous year to vote in a primary. This year, New York will hold three separate primaries: one for president (April), one for Congress (June) and one for state offices (September) — at a cost to taxpayers of about \$25 million each.

Some states with closed primaries and caucuses (including Iowa and New Hampshire) permit independents to declare a party affiliation on the day of voting, then allow them to revert to their independent status after casting their ballots. This practice at least ensures that no voter is turned away because of his or her political beliefs.

Nationally, more than 40 percent of voters identify as independents. Compared to party regulars, they are more likely to back outsider candidates and those who buck the party line, which is precisely why many party leaders and ideological activists prefer to exclude them. This year, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump are doing well among independents, who helped propel Barack Obama and John McCain to the general election in 2008.

Of course, requiring open primaries may lead some state parties to switch to caucuses, which have lower turnout and tend to favor partisans over independents. But parties may find that abandoning primaries backfires on them, by making it even harder to reverse their membership declines and fueling support for outsider candidates.

If parties wish to take on the expense of running their nominating process, as they do with caucuses, they are free to set their own rules concerning participation. But when they act in official partnership with state and local governments, and taxpayers spend millions of dollars to administer the nominating contests, then all registered voters should have equal access to the ballot box.

Bloomberg View (April 20)



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A gift to Veazie

On April 25, the Veazie Town Council will decide whether to accept the gift of a riverside park from the Penobscot River Restoration Trust.

This strip of land runs along most of Veazie’s shoreline, and includes the small park area, created by the trust, where people can enjoy our beautiful waterfront.

The trust is offering the land to the town at no cost.

If the town does not accept this offer, the land will undoubtedly end up in the hands of a private owner. To me, this makes no sense. A private owner can do whatever he or she wants with the property, within the legal statutes. Even if the owner is conservation-minded and wants to keep the park a park, there is nothing to prevent this owner’s heirs from feeling differently about it.

With the town as owner, there is no guarantee the park will be developed in the way any individual resident wants it to be developed. But we, the people of Veazie, will always have the possibility of developing the park in a democratic fashion — through our elected town government, using the tools available to residents willing to participate in running our town.

It’s unfair to expect a handful of residents who sit on the Town Council to make such an important decision all by themselves. Please write to or email the councilors this week, and come to the April 25 meeting at the town building to support them in accepting this generous gift.

Jane Livingston
Veazie

Salt merger

In an April 12 Bangor Daily News article about the merger of the Salt Institute and the Maine College of Art, the former executive director of the

Salt Institute said that “80 percent of alumni” support the merger. This is patently false.

The survey Donna Galluzzo refers to had responses from 112 alumni (out of hundreds). And those responses supported a merger only if more information was provided. The BDN reporter quoted her without context, thus misleading its readers about support for the merger.

The truth is Salt’s management drove the school into a ditch. The merger was the last in a line of bad decisions.

Mike Eckel
Alexandria, Virginia

WRITE TO US

Letters must be 250 words or fewer and include a full name, town of residence and daytime phone number. OpEds may be 700 words. Letters may be edited or rejected for clarity, taste, libel and space. If a letter or OpEd is published, submissions by the same writer will not be considered for 60 days.

Letters may be sent to letters@bangordailynews.com. OpEds may be sent to OpEd@bangordailynews.com or P.O. Box 1329, Bangor, ME 04402-1329.

Cable tax hike

Thanks, Gov. Paul LePage, for the transparency and “true” conservatism.

I notice Time Warner Cable bills have increased again, but the increase was added to the State Service Provider Tax, which is a tax on telephone and other services. I called the Tax Division of Maine Revenue Services in Augusta and found the tax increase was on standard television packages, which were exempt from the tax until Jan. 1, 2016.

Nice job of transparency, “hide-it” conservatism. Increase the taxes for those who can least afford it. Good job. I guess I’ll have to downsize to the basic

television package. It will be easier to decide what to watch and cover the cost of the tax increase at Time Warner Cable’s expense.

James Foreman
Fort Kent

O’Neill for state Senate

I agree, making affordable health care available to all Mainers is common sense. That is why I am voting for Moira O’Neill for state Senate on June 14 in the Democratic primary for District 7, which includes most of Hancock County.

O’Neill has been a nurse for 25 years. She has lived health care in every setting, from the hospital to living room. But she also has worked in state government holding people accountable for how health programs are run and tax dollars spent. O’Neill has a Ph.D. from Yale University, where she studied health policy under top experts on health care in the country. Today, she teaches health policy to nursing students at Husson University. When there are so many complicated, expensive health-related issues before the Legislature, it is common sense to vote for someone who understands health policy.

In her previous career with the Office of the Child Advocate in Connecticut, O’Neill evaluated mental health programs and promoted standards to keep patients and staff safe. I think her experience would be helpful with problems at Riverview, the Maine psychiatric hospital, that promise to cost Maine \$20 million per year once the federal government stops paying for substandard care. And it is common sense that a nurse would understand and help translate the needs of people with opiate addictions and help identify the best solutions to the problems.

I urge District 7 voters to vote for Moira O’Neill.

Paul Schnall
Surry

.COMMENTS

OpEd contributor Sue McKay, “What drove me out of the Republican Party”:

A big part is in the refusal to accept diversity and conflicting truths. What’s right for you might not be right for me, but that’s fine. There should be a respect for that.

The Republican Party doesn’t coalesce around policy ideals and consensus anymore. Rather, they rally around common enemies instead. They don’t respect differences and they don’t have much concern for the needs of others.

— wolfndeer

A well-stated OpEd. It’s

amazing that an established political party can adopt a platform based almost entirely on anger, hostility toward the poor and minorities, and be so completely vacant in terms of actual, meaningful ideas. Here we are in 2016, and the party platform is little more than tax cuts, discrimination masquerading as “religious liberty” claims and obsessions with gun rights. We have serious problems, and this is the nonsense they spend all day on.

— Engaged Reader

No one seems to remember that Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton supported traditional marriage until four years ago.

I’m all for gay marriage, but it’s funny that people treat it like the Democrats have forever been the more gay-friendly group. It’s a recent change, and no one seemed to mind that Clinton and Obama were against gay marriage just a few years ago.

— olamon

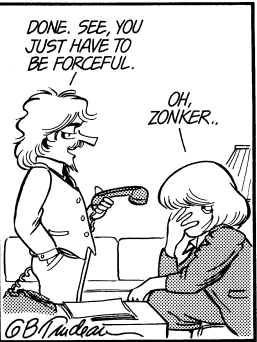
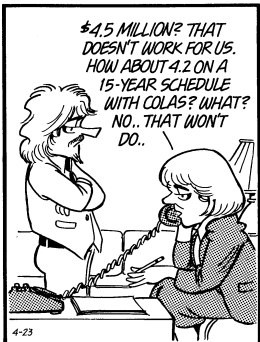
It is not a bad thing that our politicians evolve.

— pbmann

I voted for Ronald Reagan, twice, and then George H.W. Bush. By then, the Republican Party had become a religion and I left it.

— 10isace2

DOONESBURY



GARRY TRUDEAU