

Chapter Chair Chat July 2023

The Multiplier Effect of Division

By Carole Mintzer, Chapter Chair

If you are even a little bit observant, you've noticed that our nation seems more divided than many of us have seen in our lifetimes. I've read any number of articles about the origins of this divide and although the authors don't always agree, it's clear this didn't just happen in the last few years. Long before Trump, the seeds of division were planted. He just was better at exploiting it than others.

Now the political center is a hypothetical, and the choice is more and more between democracy and authoritarianism. In a June 7 article, Robert Reich described the disarray at CNN when the network failed to grasp that. New management tried to play to the "center" only to discover it wasn't there. Chris Licht, the former Chairman and CEO of CNN, was given the task of redefining journalism at CNN and making it more neutral in its coverage of the political scene.



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Licht promptly green-lit the infamous Trump "town hall." As Reich commented, "The lesson is that Licht's goal of shifting CNN from anti-Trump confrontation toward an imagined political center was doomed from the start, because there is no longer a political center." Reich went on, "What especially confused Chris Licht and the rest of CNN's management was the difference between being politically partisan and standing up against authoritarian demagogues. They assumed that holding Trump accountable for what he did (and continues to do) was inconsistent with so-called 'balanced journalism.'"

Locally, we see the division playing out among the SLO County Board of Supervisors. On one side, three supervisors, Bruce Gibson, Dawn Ortiz-Legg, and Jimmy Paulding, bring a more liberal/progressive perspective to the Board. John Peschong and Debbie Arnold represent conservative viewpoints.

The Board of Supervisors had three resolutions before them in June that should have received unanimous support. If you've read this far, you know they didn't.

The first was an anti-hate resolution condemning "racism, bigotry, bias and hate speech in our community." After debating whether the name of the city where a white pride banner was flown should be included in the resolution, and having it removed per their request, Peschong and Arnold still voted against it. The resolution passed 3-2.

Then they considered a resolution declaring the first Friday in June National Gun Violence Awareness Day. Supervisor Arnold said she condemns gun violence and the criminal use of firearms, but mired herself in a procedural issue, claiming the resolution was submitted too late to be considered. Seriously. She and Peschong voted no. The resolution passed 3-2.

Two weeks later, the supervisors had one more chance to show their true colors. This time they were asked to pass a resolution designating June 2023 as Pride Month. Supervisor Arnold questioned why the county – like thousands of municipalities across the country – would single out the LGBTQ+ community for special recognition. (Why does that sound a lot like "All lives matter," which fails to recognize the history of oppression of Black people in this country?) In response, Supervisor Ortiz-Legg pointed out that most of us are unaware of the unique struggles and daily traumas experienced by LGBTQ+ people.

Supervisor Arnold complained that the resolution was "divisive." Proving her point, Arnold and Peschong voted against the resolution. It passed 3-2.

Adoption of these resolutions supporting basic human rights shouldn't be partisan, but in today's climate they are reflective of the great divide.

I suspect Peschong and Arnold didn't intend to be racist; they just were.

I can't imagine they approve of gun violence; they just did.

And they claim to support our LGBTQ+ neighbors; they just didn't.

Until next time, pay attention, vote every chance you get, and choose democracy.

Carole