

Standard online reader survey



Q: President Trump has said he can pardon himself. Do you think the president is above the law?

YES 18 percent
NO 82 percent

GUEST EDITORIAL

All Americans should be accountable to our laws

Donald Trump once said during the 2016 presidential campaign that he could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot someone, and still not lose any voters. And who knows? He may have been right.

Now that he's president, could he also be protected from prosecution for pulling the trigger? Trump seems to believe so. That's the essence of his assertion Monday morning that he has the absolute right to pardon himself.

Of course the context of his tweet was not a New York shooting but the ongoing special investigation into alleged Russian interference in the election. But the claim would seem to be no more or less valid for one presidential action than any other. If federal prosecutions are merely extensions of the president's executive power, and if he could pardon himself as readily as he could pardon Joe Arpaio or Dinesh D'Souza, then it's hard to see how he could be held to answer for breaking any federal law. Prosecute me, Trump seems to be saying, and I will just pardon myself and we'll move on. So why bother prosecuting me in the first place?

In this view the president is like kings and emperors of ages past. By definition, he cannot violate the law. It's not that he is above the law. As president, the argument goes, he is the law.

That notion is foreign and unpardonable — a structurally monarchical presidency constrained by nothing but the president himself. White House Press

Los Angeles Times

Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders' later statement that "no one is above the law" offers little comfort, given that the president apparently believes that he is.

Trump is correct when he says that there are some legal scholars who back his assertion that the president can pardon himself. It is a claim not yet vetted in the courts because there has never before been a president willing to push the question very far. Richard Nixon fired his prosecutor but ultimately resigned because he knew he faced impeachment. President Gerald Ford did pardon Nixon and shielded him from criminal accountability for his actions, but by then Nixon was out of the White House, no longer a danger to the nation or a threat to the rule of law.

So perhaps impeachment, replete with the trappings of legal procedure but at heart a political action, is the proper check on the otherwise unfettered power of a president over how, or even whether, the law is enforced?

But then there is no check at all on any president who is sufficiently popular that he can, say, shoot someone on Fifth Avenue without fear from Congress, because it's not in the political interests of the GOP majority to stand up to him.

That would make us a nation of men (and women) and not of laws. That's not what we are.



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California the key primary

Primaries were held in eight states last Tuesday: Alabama, California, Iowa, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico and South Dakota.

Clearly, California was the main battleground as the primary drama unfolded last Tuesday night and on into Wednesday. At stake in the Golden State were seats in all 53 U.S. House districts, one U.S. Senate seat and the governor's office.

As usual, count on California to be controversial when it comes to politics. For starters, candidates in both parties must contend with the state's so-called "Jungle Primaries."

In place since 2010, this system gives the top two vote-getters in the primaries, regardless of their party, entry into the general elections in November.

That's why Republican John Cox will face Democrat Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom later this year. Derided by some Democrats as "Trump's Chump," Cox garnered roughly 25 percent of votes counted as of this writing, easily outpacing Democrat Antonio Villaraigosa, the former Los Angeles Mayor for the second-place finish.

California Democrats had hoped to target "vulnerable Republican" House incumbents by tarring them with the Trump brush. However, they could have shot themselves in the foot by flooding key districts with Democrat contenders who had to compete with each other for votes. In turn, that could have advanced two Republicans to the general elections, leaving Democrats shut out of the

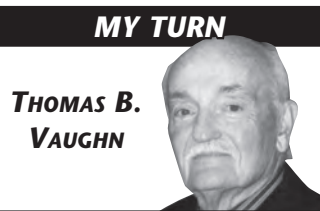
race. That worst-case scenario for the Democrats has not happened. With some districts still not decided, I doubt that it will happen.

The real challenge facing the Democrats, in California and beyond, is how to flip 23 House seats from the Republican side of the aisle to the Democratic side. With the biggest proportion of those seats being held by 14 California Republicans, the Democrats targeted 10 of them for defeat. As I understand it, they poured most of their money, priority and resources into the seven districts where voters stayed with a Republican in Congress, but voted for Hillary Clinton for president in 2016.

In three of the most closely followed California U.S. House races, Republican Young Kim finished first in District 39, followed by Democrat Gil Cisneros. In District 48, GOP incumbent Dana Rohrabacher finished first and Democrat Hans Kierstead second. In District 49, Republican Diane Harkey finished first, followed by Democrat Mike Levin.

California Democrats were hoping for a "blue wave" to sweep over the Golden State U.S. House races last Tuesday. What they got resembled a ripple. The real waves in California and beyond were made by women there and in the other seven primaries around the country. That's a good thing in my view. More on how and why later.

Retired Army Col. Thomas B. Vaughn can be reached at tbrovumi@blomand.net.



MY TURN
THOMAS B. VAUGHN

Reasons we can't get along

The Stanford alumni magazine may not widely be considered one of the leading journals of life in the United States, but turn the pages of its most recent edition and you will find an examination of perhaps the most important issue in American civic culture today.

The cover headline is "One Nation Divisible." In essays over a dozen pages, Stanford scholars seek to explain whether Americans are more or less polarized than before (mostly more), what that means (mostly not good), and why we find ourselves at this moment (it's complicated).

Here is a sample of what they had to say: "The political class is the public face of politics. These highly sorted, politically active people are those whom you see, hear and read about on TV and the internet. But they are not representative of the broader public." — Morris P. Fiorina

There he goes again: Mo Fiorina, Allegheny College '68, is one of the smartest political scientists in the country, mostly because he isn't focused entirely on the political elites.

"Partisan voting in Congress is the historical norm rather than the exception, and partisan voting in the past has been more intense than in the present." — David Brady

What? Things were worse before? Try the 1861 Senate vote to expel Southerners from the chamber or the 1935 vote on the Wagner Act that secured the rights of unions.

"While we think of such resistance as a Southern phenomenon, the backlash of the 1960s was, in fact, a national countermovement. And it was that pressure, or more accurately the politi-

cal opportunity afforded the GOP, that began to shift the party steadily to the right on matters of race." — Doug McAdam

He is speaking of "white backlash," which was harnessed by Richard Nixon in 1968. But it is important to remember that as a congressman, Nixon had what McAdam describes as "an impeccable civil rights voting record." Then he extracted some of the teeth of the Voting Rights Act. Thus, the Solid South of the Republicans is built on as cynical a base as the Solid South of the Democrats was.

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE



DAVID M. SHRIBMAN

"The old working class that had been at the core of the progressive coalition from the 1930s onward was, in the meantime, losing jobs and status as a result of globalization and technological change.

Simultaneously, a new upper class, defined by higher education and urban residence, had emerged, many of whose members had very different attitudes from the old working and middle class toward religion, family and patriotism. This new elite encompassed the leadership of both political parties as well as a large part of the mainstream media, think tanks and other key parts of the Washington establishment." — Francis Fukuyama

Throw away all those explanations for Donald J. Trump's presidency, including mine. In three sentences, the man who was wrong about the end of the Cold War being the end of history is right about the Trump ascendancy and earthquake the 45th president has created in the capital. And in this striking passage he sets out the dynamics of the presidential election of 2020.

Shribman is executive editor of the Post-Gazette (dshribman@post-gazette.com).

JUST A THOUGHT

LISA HOBBS



I'm eager for 30th class reunion

Does anyone know when the Warren County High School class of 1988 reunion is?

I've never attended one and I'm thinking about going, if I can find the information for it.

There's a story behind why I've never gone. Back in 1993, I think it was, I received a phone call from someone who asked for Ms. Childers. Without hesitation, I replied, "That's my mother. She doesn't live with me. Can I take a message?"

She said, "That's OK" and hung up.

It was sometime later my friend called and asked if I had received a phone call about our class reunion coming up. I had not. Somewhere in the recesses of my mind, it finally clicked the woman who called and addressed me as Ms. Childers was probably looking for me, not my mother.

Let me explain. By that time, I had been married five years. I had long ago made the name transition. I was no longer a Childers, at least when being addressed.

Here's a question: why wouldn't you start out the conversation saying "I'm in the class of 1988 and we are holding a five-year reunion. Are you Ms. Childers?" In lieu of that, you could have stated, "I'm looking for Lisa Childers" or "is this Ms. Childers from the class of '88?"

If I had been given a little more information, I would have known they were desperately seeking Lisa and not Mary.

Since that time and because of that misunderstanding, I've never received another call informing me about an upcoming reunion. So, here I am. Please call me! My information is located at the end of this column. It's all work-related contacts but that's OK, I'm at work more than I'm home.

If you haven't done the math on the years, this year will be our 30th reunion. I'm not sure I would recognize anyone. To be honest, I do not have many fond memories of high school. It wasn't, despite what others might say about it, the best years of my life.

Just for kicks, I Googled "reasons to attend your high school reunion" and I found what I was looking for with "5 Reasons to Attend Your High School Reunion" and it was worth the effort.

- The reasons:
- It's nice to see the popular people living ordinary lives.
 - The 10th reunion is high school part two.
 - The 20th reunion encourages interesting liaisons.
 - The 30th reunion is why spanx was invented.
 - The 40th reunion brings the memory wall.

Of the 30th, it says, "Middle-aged classmates have lost hair and gained bellies. They pull out reading glasses and show photos of their children. Some have grandchildren. The party is over by 10 p.m."

That is just hilarious. My friends and I joke about the days when the partying started at 9 p.m. and went all night. Now, we want it to end then.

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