

GUEST EDITORIAL

America getting torn apart by partisanship

In general, Americans are pretty happy about the state of the economy, which is approaching nearly a decade of sustained growth. But behind that general feeling, there is a divide. If you think the economy is doing better, you're likely a Republican. If you think it's doing more poorly, you're likely a Democrat.

That's a trend reflected in a recent poll of nearly 10,000 people conducted by the online polling firm SurveyMonkey for *The New York Times*, released in an article in the paper last week. This trend is one more indicator our current public life is driven by artificial divisions that have more to say about the fears and concerns of Americans than they do about our actual beliefs and aspirations.

The data came in response to questions about respondent's feelings and outlook on the national economy; pollsters found the perception of the direction of the country was more closely tied to a person's political leanings than any other factor, including their financial condition. The survey found this may be helping Republicans as they attempt to fend off a so-called "blue wave" in November.

"Among registered voters, more than 80 percent of those who judge themselves better off now than a year ago say they are at least leaning toward voting for Republicans in the mid-terms," the *Times* article about the survey reads.

But at the same time, the survey might not indicate that this time, as in 1992, the salient issue is "the economy, stupid." The story goes on: "Complicating that story, though, is the fact that views on the economy have become starkly partisan in recent years. Hardly any Republicans — 5 percent — say they are worse off now than a year ago. At the same time, very few Democrats — 14 percent — say they are better off. Other questions reveal a similar split."

Roll back to when Barack Obama held the office of president, and those posi-

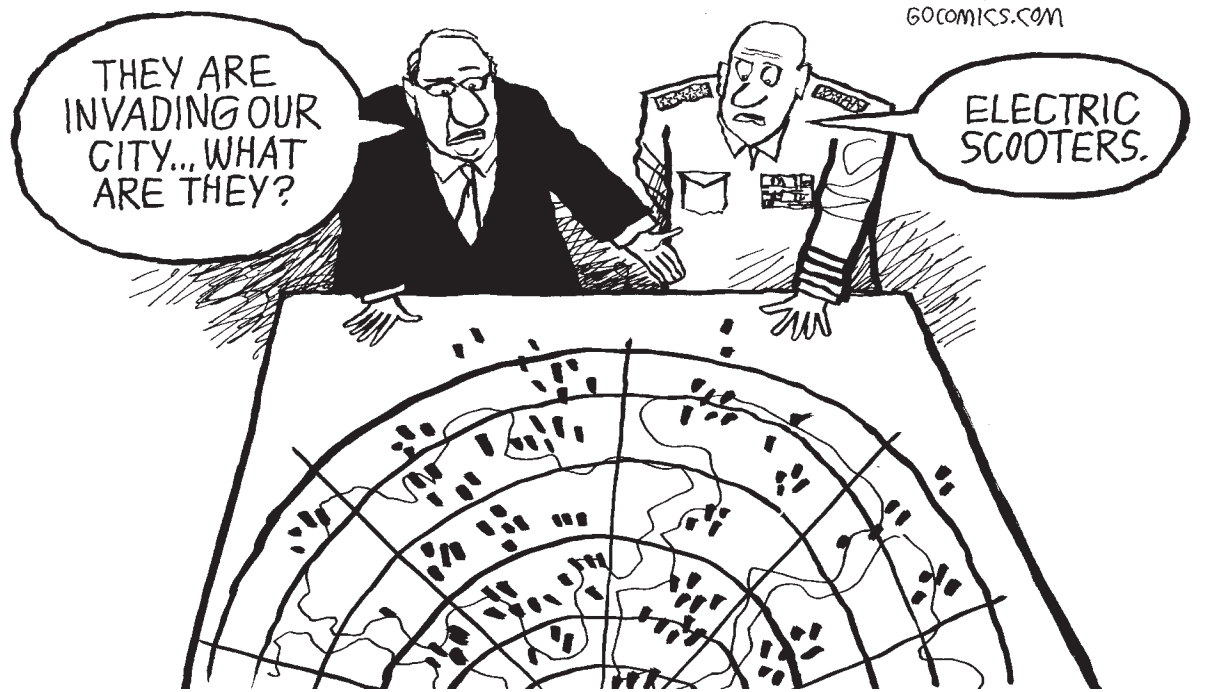
Rutland Herald
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tions were reversed: Republicans felt badly about the economy, while Democrats felt better, according to prior research along these lines. The truth is that the economy is on roughly the same course it has been for the last seven or eight years — steady growth, with stagnant wages. Yet public perception is framed more by party affiliation than other factors.

This divide is at the heart of the problem with America right now. Without a place of common ground to start from, finding a way to debate how to tackle the vast problems we face becomes much more difficult, even insurmountable.

Has it always been like this, and we just haven't noticed? That's hard to say, because research into this phenomenon has not been as focused in years past. But in general, this partisanship has become more pronounced, even as there were political campaigns, battles and debates that were just as bitter and nasty, if not more so, stretching back to the founding of our democracy. It does feed into the general sense — which Donald Trump taps into during his campaigning — that the country has lost its way.

When people identify the problems in the country as having to do more with party and politics than underlying issues, it's easy for politicians to pitch partisan success as a feel-good moment, or motivate the so-called "base" with attacks on the other side. While this works in the short term, this nation has always depended on the ability of its citizens to see beyond red and blue to tackle the great challenges. America has always been able to embrace competing visions and perceptions of our shared experience, while holding on to a broader sense of belonging to a great, imperfect but ever-improving enterprise. The current climate of partisanship has lessened that sense of belonging.



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Dems demonize Kavanaugh

With Senate hearings on President Trump's Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh slated to start on Sept. 4, Senate Republican leaders are poised to propel Judge Kavanaugh onto the High Court bench seat left vacant by the retirement of Justice Anthony Kennedy.

Conversely, Senate Democrat leaders are determined to delay and possibly derail these hearings. Given Judge Kavanaugh's sterling credentials, attacking him on the merits of his case is a tough task. Therefore, these detractors have opted to attack him and those who support him personally and viciously.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-CT, has characterized Kavanaugh as tantamount to "your worst nightmare." Sen. Kamala Harris, D-CA, has warned darkly that Kavanaugh's confirmation would lead to the "destruction of the Constitution of the United States." Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-OR, upped the ante by claiming Judge Kavanaugh "wants to pave the path to tyranny."

Sen. Cory Booker, D-NJ, recently declared any one supporting Kavanaugh's confirmation is "complicit (in) evil."

As the days dwindle down for the hearings to begin, Kavanaugh's detractors continue to raise the level of rhetoric against him. Moreover, they have put their money where their mouth is by pouring millions of dollars into political ads impugning his character.

Whether these tendentious tactics help or hurt the Democrats' cause to delay or derail Judge Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings remains to be

seen. My guess is he will be confirmed on time despite their spitefulness.

Meanwhile, 10 Democrats are up for reelection in states won by Donald Trump in 2016. In my view, the five most vulnerable Democrats are in Indiana, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota and West Virginia.

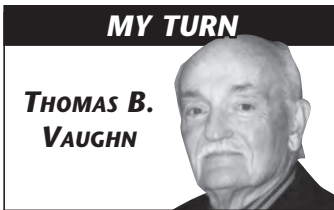
Indiana has shifted to the right since moderate Democrat Joe Donnelly was elected to the Senate six years ago. His GOP opponent, businessman Mike Braun, "blew away two incumbent House members in the primary." Braun has been endorsed by Vice

President Pence, Indiana's former governor, who reportedly, "will go all out for Braun to avoid an embarrassment in his home state."

Missouri has also shifted steadily toward the GOP's way. Their Senate candidate is 38-year-old Attorney General Josh Hawley. Despite his considerable credentials and support from GOP conservatives, he's been called a "lackluster candidate" by some. That said, two-term Democratic Sen. Claire McCaskill is not that inspiring herself. So, it could be close in the "Show Me" state.

North Dakota Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, Sen. Joe Donnelly, and Sen. Joe Manchin are the only three Democrats who voted to confirm Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court in 2017. Senate Democrat leaders hope they won't do so for Kavanaugh. Senate Republican leaders pray they will. Either way, they could hold his destiny in their hands.

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



MY TURN

THOMAS B. VAUGHN

Legacies made in Chicago

The whole world was watching. And for the past 50 years, the whole world has dealt with the fallout from what happened a half-century ago in Chicago when the Democrats convened, demonstrators marched, police raged, Hubert Humphrey was nominated — and Richard Nixon reaped the benefits.

In a tumultuous end to a tumultuous month, the Democrats split apart, overhauled their procedures to marginalize the political bosses who had determined the party's nominees for decades, alienated the core of their governing coalition, set themselves on a course that would see them lose five of the next six presidential elections, prompted a furious conservative insurgency, set the stage for the ascendancy of Reagan Republicanism and prepared the ground for the defection of working-class voters to Donald J. Trump.

All that in a few days of tumult in the very city where Franklin Delano Roosevelt proclaimed a New Deal for the American people and ushered in 28 years of Democratic control of the White House and more than a third of a century of big-government philosophy, starting with the New Deal and continuing through Harry Truman's Fair Deal, John F. Kennedy's New Frontier and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

The presumptive winner of the Chicago convention was actually the biggest loser of the Chicago convention. Hubert H. Humphrey, a liberal crusader for civil rights and worker dignity who fought gamely against John F. Kennedy for the 1960 Democratic presidential nomination, was destined to be remembered as the man who was nominated after Robert F. Kennedy was killed and Eugene

McCarthy flamed out.

Diminished by his role as Johnson's vice president and imprisoned politically by LBJ's conduct of the Vietnam War, Humphrey won the 1968 nomination but was regarded as a tool of the political bosses and the labor barons, two groups themselves discredited by the new forces in the Democratic Party. He wasn't able to break free of those burdens even after he broke with Johnson on the war in late September.

For a man who was alternatively beloved and ridiculed for being garrulous, there was little Humphrey could say to alter the course of the presidential campaign after the Chicago convention.

There are many legacies of Chicago 1968. It took decades for Chicago to cleanse its reputation as the home of police officers who, in Mailer's characterization, moved "like a wind blowing dust, or the edge of waves riding foam on the shore." Humphrey returned to the Senate and gradually assumed the senior-statesman approbation his career deserved. Nixon became president.

"The demonstrations in Chicago," John Froines, a member of the Chicago Seven who were tried for inciting riots at the convention, said in an interview, "reflected the overall changes happening in the United States — changes in lifestyle, changes in politics, and, at the end of the demonstrations, you began to see changes coming out of the emergence of the women's movement." The whole world was watching. It watches, still.

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

JUST A THOUGHT

LISA HOBBS



Jail expansion can't be delayed

I'm about to be a Warren County Jail inmate advocate. Someone has to do it.

To members of the Warren County Commission: This jail expansion needs to take place. Take the word "need" in the strongest way possible.

I've sat through years of official discussions regarding the need to do something; expand, begin programs to reduce recidivism, both. In the end, nothing happens. No expansion and no programs. Government wheels keep spinning, while the inmate population continues to climb and officials from the state keep repeating, "Do something."

I've already spoken to one commissioner about this, which prompted this column to speak to the other 23. The commissioner said, "Lisa, what we need are programs out there."

I questioned how long programs would take to make a noticeable improvement in the jail population. Answer, "Oh, it might take five years for there to be any noticeable different. Programs are not a quick fix."

No, programs are not quick fixes. Because they are not, you've waited too late to begin offering them. The jail houses 251 inmates. You have over 300 on a daily basis. On Thursday of last week, the total was 315. That's 63 over capacity.

Maybe the problem is the words we're using. "Inmates" allows some sort of disconnect. Inmates are people. That's 63 people, potentially, without a bed to sleep on.

I was told by one commissioner he toured the jail and he saw people sleeping on mats on the floor. Mats are nice. Real nice. However, when the floor is concrete, that mat needs to be several inches thick in order to be even slightly comfortable. I don't see a jail mat being more than an inch or so thick.

During several meetings, jail officials have said they have turned every available space possible into areas to house more people. That being the case, you don't have room for programs, even if you want to start them. If you want programs, I'm all in favor of it. However, this expansion needs to take place first.

I've sat through meeting after meeting and listened to discussion after discussion about this expansion and where the overcrowding problem truly lies. While this verbal battle drags on, the population keeps increasing.

If this new commission also decides to turn a blind eye to the need and decides against expansion, I hope they have a better reason than cost. Cost isn't important when you are talking about people's constitutional rights. It's inhumane to sit in a meeting and talk about need and then do nothing.

Hopefully, I won't do anything that would cause me to be housed inside the walls of Warren County Jail or any jail. However, if I do and they hand me a mat because they don't have an available bed due to long-standing overcrowding, I'm walking into an attorney's office when I walk out of the jail.

Hopefully, an expansion is on the horizon before someone with my mindset files a lawsuit.

Standard reporter Lisa Hobbs can be reached at 473-2191.



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Patricia Zechman, Publisher
James Clark, Editor

Phyllis Vanatta, Business Manager
Dale Stubblefield, Circulation Director

Phone: 473-2191
105 College St., McMinnville, TN 37110
FAX: 473-6823

Email: standard@blomand.net
Website: www.southernstandard.com

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