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OPINIONS & VIEWPOINTS



HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

current events through a historical lens

Dr. James Finck, USAO History Professor

Prevailing Winds: Switching Political Parties over Candidate Support

By James Finck, Ph. D.

In a recent CNN interview, Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski hinted that he she is considering leaving the Republican Party. Murkowski has been a long-time opponent of former President Donald Trump and is struggling with the idea of Trump leading her party. Murkowski is not the first to leave the party over a personality, and historically speaking, switching parties has even brought great reward.

Murkowski, who was an avid Nikki Haley supporter, claims she is not the only Republican frustrated with the GOP's direction in supporting a controversial candidate like Trump, but she is not considering joining the Democratic Party either. She is just as frustrated with Biden as she is with Trump, so she is considering becoming an independent.

It should not be surprising that another president, Andrew Jackson, who had a large yet antagonizing personality, also caused dissatisfaction. Anyone who reads this column knows that one of the presidents I most compared to Trump was Jackson. Trump himself has drawn comparisons and showed his admiration of Jackson when he hung his portrait in the Oval Office. Like Trump, Jackson could rub people wrong, which was the case of John Tyler of Virginia.

Tyler entered politics in 1816 as a representative to Congress and part of the Jeffersonian Republican Party. Like his fellow Virginians, he was a strong supporter of states' rights and believed in a strict interpretation of the Constitution. In the short time that America had a one-party system (1816-1828) Tyler had become concerned with President John Quincy Adams' nationalist policies and began supporting the Jackson wing of the party who called themselves Democratic Republicans. When Jackson broke from the Republicans, now calling himself simply a Democrat, he ran against Adams and won in 1828 with Tyler as a loyal supporter.

While Tyler had always supported the Republican/Democrats, he started to find himself at odds with Jackson. While Jackson claimed he supported small government, his beliefs only seemed to apply to Congress and the courts. When it came to the power of the president, Jackson was seemingly doing more to strengthen the power of that office. During his term Jackson vetoed more bills than all the previous presidents combined and completely ignored the Supreme Court's ruling when it came to Indian Removal. Yet what put Tyler over the top was the Nullification Crisis of 1833.

Back in 1828, before Adams left office, he signed into law a high tariff that became known as the Tariff of Abominations by Southerners. Adams' vice president, John C. Calhoun, led the attack against the tariff but only went so far knowing that when

Jackson took office, he would rectify the problem. However, to Calhoun's surprise, now Jackson's vice president, Jackson kept the tariff to gain Northern support. In a tuff, Calhoun returned to South Carolina and led the state to officially nullify the tariff in their state. Jackson's response was to call up the army and march on South Carolina almost igniting a civil war 30 years before the actual Civil War. With Jackson's actions, Tyler left the Democratic Party to join with a new party founded to fight against Jackson known as the Whigs.

Jumping ahead to 1840, the Whig Part was looking for a first win, so they stole the Democrats' handbook and ran a military hero from Ohio, William Henry Harrison, the hero of the Battle of Tippecanoe. To appease the Southern wing of the party, round out the ticket, and possibly appeal to some Democrats, the Whigs put Tyler on the ticket as V.P. It also led to a nifty jingle, "Tippecanoe and Tyler, Too." With their catchy jingle the Whigs won the presidency only to lose. Harrison gave an incredibly long inauguration address in the cold, caught pneumonia, and died 31 days later. Suddenly instead of a Whig president, they had Whig in name only, but one who still supported the ideas of states' rights. Tyler spent his time as president fighting more with his own party than he did the Democrats, vetoing several bills passed by Whigs.

Because the Constitution did not say the vice president would become president, only exercise the power, many cabinet members felt they should have the true power and wanted Tyler to clear all decisions with them. Tyler rejected this idea, claiming he was the president now and would not address or open mail from anyone who referred to him as acting president or anything similar. In the end, his entire cabinet resigned. Tyler became a man without a party and was despised by both sides. My favorite Tyler story is that in his last month of office he held a grand celebration in the White House where he came out on the balcony and announced, "they cannot say now that I am a president without a party." Kind of a drop-the-mic moment.

It is unsure what will happen with Murkowski. She has not given any reason to think she would ever become a Democrat. But in a world of polarization, someone like her who could unite and pull from both sides of the aisle might look tempting for a party looking for a V.P.

James Finck, Ph.D. is a professor of history at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma and writes for the Southwest Ledger. You can follow Historically Speaking on Facebook or at Historicallyspeaking.blog.

A word, please

By June Casagrande

If you're reading this, you probably know a thing or two about punctuation. But nobody — including punctuation book authors (ahem) — knows it all.

So here are some advanced punctuation tips for good punctuators who want to get even better.

A single quote mark followed by a double quote mark comes after a period or comma. Let's say you're quoting someone who's talking about a specific word, so you put the quotation in regular quote marks and the word itself in singles, like this: "Stop saying 'whatever.'" The rule that says periods and commas go inside quotation marks applies to single quotation marks, too. The order is period, single quote mark, double quote mark.

An apostrophe comes before a period or comma. Apostrophes look a lot like single quotation marks. Depending on the font, they can be indistinguishable. But they're different. An apostrophe can represent an omitted letter: thinkin', talkin', sleepin', etc. And unlike a single quote mark that would come after each of those commas, an apostrophe is part of the word. That's why the apostrophe goes before a period or comma, even when it's within a quotation: "He's sleepin'."

An em dash can have a space on either side, or not. Different publishing guides have different rules for whether you put spaces around a dash — like this, or not—like this. Either way is fine.

If you can rearrange the order of adjectives, they require commas between them. Why are there commas in "a red, purple, yellow and green shirt" but none in "a bright red Hawaiian shirt"? It's because the adjectives in the first example all have the same relationship with the noun. You can swap the order and it doesn't affect the meaning: a yellow, purple, green and red shirt. But in our second example, some adjectives are more closely related to the noun than others, so you can't move them around. "A Hawaiian, red, bright shirt" just doesn't mean the same thing.

If you can insert "and" between adjectives, they require commas between them. Here's another trick you can use: Try "a red and purple and yellow and green shirt," then try "a bright and red and Hawaiian shirt." The first one works fine, but the second doesn't because "bright" describes not the shirt but the color red and because the word "Hawaiian" is more integral to the noun than the other adjectives. That's why experts say you put commas between "coordinate adjectives" that come before a noun — the commas are standing in for the coordinating conjunction "and."

Semicolons can make sentences less readable. Semicolons can be used to show that two independent clauses are closely related; for example, like this. But that makes the sentence longer and more cumbersome. Semicolons can also be used to separate complicated sentence elements that commas just can't handle. For example, if you were to write, "We visited Denver, Colorado, Augusta, Georgia, and Toledo, Ohio," it looks like "Denver" and "Colorado" are two different places. A semicolon after each state shows the proper relationships of these nouns. But state-city combos are the rare example when semicolons help more than hurt. Usually, if you need semicolons to make sense of complicated lists, it's better to break up the sentence.

Adverbs ending in -ly shouldn't be hyphenated. Rules say you should often hyphenate words that work together to modify a noun: a test-taking strategy, a family-friendly movie, a state-of-the-art technology. But when one of the words is an -ly adverb, you don't use a hyphen: a happily married couple, a recently renovated home.

A complete sentence before an ellipsis ends with a period. If you're using an ellipsis to ... indicate a delay or omitted words, you put a space before and after the three dots. But sometimes the stuff before the ellipsis is a complete sentence. ... In those cases, end that sentence with a period, then insert a space, then insert the three-dot ellipsis.

— June Casagrande is the author of "The Joy of Syntax: A Simple Guide to All the Grammar You Know You Should Know." She can be reached at JuneTCN@aol.com.

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