

OPINION

TIMES-NEWS

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Quote of the day

“We still haven’t finished definitively breaking the chains of the empire.”

Venezuela Vice President Tareck El Aissami after militia members attacked legislators during a special congressional session.

IDAHO VIEW

Idaho’s ‘simple country lawyer’ gets promoted

This editorial was published by the Post Register of Idaho Falls.

It’s not often we get to discuss a nominee for U.S. Attorney for the District of Idaho with whom we are very familiar. Bart Davis provides such an opportunity. His long-expected nomination was announced last week and his confirmation is all but certain. What is Idaho getting in its next U.S. Attorney? We could scarcely do better.

As a member of Idaho’s Uniform Law Commission and possessing a natural passion for the law, he knows his topic. In his long service as Idaho’s Senate majority leader, he’s been the go-to person when a matter required a keen and studious review combined with an understanding of legal nuance.

But there’s a lot more to Davis, who likes to refer to himself as a “simple country lawyer,” even when the twinkle in his eye tells you he’s pulling your leg just a bit. Davis knows his stuff, and he wants you to know he knows his stuff. Ask him a simple question and you’ll rarely get a simple answer, not because he either obfuscates or wants to show off, but because he thinks. And then he thinks some more.

His wit is razor-sharp and dry as an Idaho July. He’s been tested by personal tragedy and the vicissitudes of politics. He’s one of the few people who would actually use the word “vicissitudes” in a conversation.

He was uniquely suited as the Idaho Senate majority leader, a post he’s held for eight terms. He will be missed by that body and all Idahoans who have appreciated the Senate’s sane approach to law-making during time when our House has often taken another path. Davis has led from behind the scenes, but his impact is well-known to anyone familiar with the halls of the Statehouse. It’s hard to imagine him not being there next January, and it’s a little worrisome.

Have a private conversation with Davis and you get doses of sincere humility, keen wit, thoughtful commentary and a listening ear. He often infuriated his colleagues when he wouldn’t immediately take a side on an issue, but he always seemed to have his reasons. Still, while his command of the English language allows him to circle an issue with dexterity and seeming equivocation, when push comes to shove he never hesitates to step up. When he chooses to be decisive, few stand in his way.

Above all, when it comes to legal matters Davis is professorial in his commitment to analysis and study. Even those who disagree with him usually come away from a conversation or debate knowing he had done his homework and thought through every nuance and complication.

For a person who doesn’t openly seek convenient political alliances or placate foes, he has many friends among Republicans and Democrats alike. At the end of this year’s legislative session when many of his colleagues knew this nomination was probably coming, the good wishes and warm handshakes came from every corner of the Statehouse.

Davis has run a quiet law practice in Idaho Falls and it’s not his style to make a public splash, but his impact has been undeniable. He comes to his new job uniquely prepared and with a temperament and perspective that will serve him, and us, very well.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

My vote will be no

Where does it end? Why do you have to go dirty and undignified with this? Do you only look good by dumping on someone else and make them look bad? To have our options and being able to voice them is a wonderful privilege we have in this country. Why is that this privilege has to be soiled and disgraced with lies, slander and sarcasm? This entire campaign has turned out to equal if not worse than Hillary and Trump — a bloody mess! Curt’s article was truthful, he did not point fingers or tried to make look anyone better or worse, he plainly stated the facts. Our employer does not have to throw us barbecues for working safe. They do not have to keep the fry booth fully supplied. There is a lot that goes into this amazing perk. The community appreciates the generosity of Lamb Weston to

make this amazing gift available. All these other little perks that everyone takes for granted: health credit, perk book, annual cost of living adjustment raise, movies, pictures with Santa, tickets to the racetrack, Haunted Swamp, Easter egg hunts and so much more. These are facts this is really happening at Lamb Weston, and the pro union people are enjoying everyone of those perks, in fact, they are first in line with open hands to collect. So give it a break, enjoy the right to your opinion gracefully, and be fair and truthful. My opinion: A union is not needed here at Lamb Weston Twin Falls, there is nothing better they can give us, we would probably actually lose. So my vote will be no. I am an employee of 30 years, and life experience thought me the grass is really not greener — it’s an optical illusion, life is reality.

Birgit Martinez, Twin Falls



OTHER VIEW

Voter data must be kept safe

MICHAEL CHERTOFF
Special to The Washington Post

The Trump administration’s Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity is asking states for voter-registration data from as far back as 2006. This would include names, dates of birth, voting histories, party registrations and the last four digits of voters’ Social Security numbers. The request has engendered controversy, to put it mildly, including refusals by many states and a caustic presidential tweet.

But whatever the political, legal and constitutional issues raised by this data request, one issue has barely been part of the public discussion: national security. If this sensitive data is to be collected and aggregated by the federal government, then the administration should honor its own recent cybersecurity executive order and ensure that the data is not stolen by hackers or insiders.

We know that voting information has been the target of hackers. News reports indicate that election-related systems in as many as 39 states were penetrated, focusing on campaign finance, registration and even personal data of the type being sought by the election integrity commission. Ironically, although

many of these individual databases are vulnerable, there is some protection in the fact that U.S. voting systems are distributed among thousands of jurisdictions. As data-security experts will tell you, widespread distribution of individual data elements in multiple separate repositories is one way to reduce the vulnerability of the overall database.

That’s why the commission’s call to assemble all this voter data in federal hands raises the question: What is the plan to protect it? We know that a database of personal information from all voting Americans would be attractive not only to adversaries seeking to affect voting but to criminals who could use the identifying information as a wedge into identity theft. We also know that foreign intelligence agencies seek large databases on Americans for intelligence and counterintelligence purposes. That is why the theft of more than 20 million personnel files from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and the hacking of more than half a billion Yahoo accounts were such troubling incidents.

Congress and the states need to be advised on how any data would be housed and where.

Would it be encrypted? Who would have administrative access to the data, and what restrictions would be placed on its use? Would those granted access be subject to security background investigations, and would their behavior be supervised to prevent the kind of insider theft that we saw with Edward Snowden or others who have released or sold sensitive data? What kinds of audit procedures would be in place? Finally, can the security risk of assembling so much tempting data in one place be mitigated by reducing and anonymizing the individual voter information being sought?

In May, President Donald Trump signed the executive order on cybersecurity to instill tough security in federal offices that handle critical government data. That order is a commendable initiative to hold officials accountable for safeguarding sensitive personal information, such as voter information. The president’s election integrity commission should live up to the president’s own directive.

Chertoff, U.S. homeland security secretary from 2005 to 2009, is executive chairman of the Chertoff Group, a security and risk-management advisory firm.

OTHER VIEW

N Korea’s intercontinental threat

This appeared in Thursday’s Washington Post.

It would be difficult to overstate the danger posed by North Korea’s launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile potentially capable of reaching U.S. territory. The exercise brought this country, and the world, that much closer to the moment — perhaps only a couple of years away — when the Pyongyang regime may be able to arm such a missile with a nuclear warhead and threaten not only Alaska and Hawaii but also Washington, Oregon and California. Against that deeply destabilizing threat, the Trump administration must now rally not only Republicans and Democrats within this badly polarized country but also the widest possible range of like-minded countries around the world.

Is President Donald Trump capable of doing that? He deserves credit for restoring urgency about North Korea’s weapons programs, having openly disavowed his predecessor’s ineffectual stance of “strategic patience,” before the latest missile test. Trump was also well-advised to seek help from China, Pyongyang’s sponsor, in

reining in the North, even if that is not exactly a new idea. Less admirable, alas, was the manner of his outreach to Beijing — a series of tweets about President Xi Jinping that ranged from embarrassingly fawning to prematurely frustrated. This is no way to conduct diplomacy, but then again, Trump has not yet even nominated anyone to fill key State Department positions for East Asia, international security and nuclear proliferation issues.

Trump is an unlikely orchestrator of a multilateral approach, given both his erratic conduct and his off-putting rhetoric about “America first.” Still, other countries might yet be induced to follow his lead if he can convince them both that he has a credible plan and that the alternative might be far worse — war in Northeast Asia. The third way between more fruitless talks and a catastrophically risky preemptive war would be to impose on the North, for the first time, truly stringent economic sanctions, comparable to the ones that brought Iran to the nuclear bargaining table.

To be sure, that could be a recipe for short-term tension with China, because it’s Chinese

banks that help North Korea trade in U.S. dollars and Chinese companies that continue to supply North Korea with food, energy and “dual-use” materiel that helps its nuclear program. And China might not be the only nation inconvenienced if there were a serious effort to choke off the North’s supply of hard currency; North Korean workers have been contracted out in Russia, Qatar and, until last year, even democratic Poland. Early indications were not auspicious for such an effort; on Tuesday, Russia and China jointly called on the United States and South Korea to abandon military exercises in return for a suspension by North Korea of missile testing.

Washington and Seoul rejected the false equivalence of that approach, demonstrating that their essential solidarity is intact despite recent disagreements between the new presidents in each capital — and Pyongyang’s obvious efforts to shake it. From this, Trump must construct a widening circle of cooperation against the North, a long-term effort that will require overcoming the resistance of skeptical governments — and his own most impulsive tendencies.

Doonesbury by Garry Trudeau



Mallard Fillmore by Bruce Tinsley

