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Do You See Unity or Division in Your Mirror?

A Column by Evan Barrett

July 25, 2020

I need to be comfortable with who I see in the mirror each morning. What kind of person am I? Do I live up to the standards set by my parents, my schools, my church? Am I living up to the values I espouse daily? Do my deeds match my words?

The truth is that I don't look every day. But, there are times when an "in the mirror" spot check is essential. One such time is our responsibility in voting to determine our future governmental leadership. The sum total of our collective in-the-mirror values reflect upward through the ballot box to create a collective political value for our state and nation.

As I think about voting this year, I ask myself where I am on the scale that stretches from hope to fear, from love to hatred, from tolerance to bigotry; from unity to division. And where are Montana and American citizens along that same spectrum? Are our values reflected in our votes to select our state and national leaders? Will the candidates you support reflect your values?

We live in a world where "spin" and outright lies are often the tools of political aspirants who wish to manipulate our thinking and perception of them to their advantage. As Montanans we need to cut through the rhetoric to find the truth.

Sadly, though we have a President [who has lied to America about matters big and small throughout his term \(nearly 20,000 times\)](#), we need not accept this as our new reality. We should seek the truth about those who ask for our vote. In seventy-five years of living and voting in Montana I have come to believe that truth-seeking and truth-telling are Montana traits and values.

Of those seeking our votes, which are really trying to [move us toward our becoming "a more perfect union."](#) toward the unity inherent in that fundamental Constitutional goal? Since [Patrick Henry, "united we stand, divided we fall,"](#) has guided us. Which candidate's actions demonstrate a commitment to that unity goal, a rejection of that division? Each day as our students recite the [Pledge of Allegiance calling for "ONE NATION, under God, indivisible ..."](#) we need to ask which candidates honor those words. Which seek to divide rather than unify?

This is not a partisan issue. I am a Democrat, but it was Republican President Ronald Reagan who said: ["We must condemn those who seek to divide us. In all quarters and at all times, we must teach tolerance and denounce](#) racism, anti-Semitism and all ethnic or religious bigotry wherever they exist as unacceptable evils. We have no place for haters in America -- none, whatsoever."

Seeds of division are scattered widely at the national level [where the president sees and sorts the world into those who are for him and those who are against him and demonizes](#) his perceived enemies in the worst possible ways. But where are we in Montana?

Which of the candidates for Governor will seek to unify Montana? Which candidate, [Mike Cooney](#) or [Greg Gianforte](#), will support laws and administer budgets that respect all Montanans and serve their needs? Will either candidate tilt the economic playing field to the advantage of the rich and powerful?

As to the United States Senate, which candidate, [Steve Bullock](#) or [Steve Daines](#), has a record of finding common ground, not just during the days and months when they want your vote, but for the last eight years?

I will explore those questions in future columns. But for now, look in your mirror, at the beginning, before the barrage of spending and spinning gets even worse. Focus your eyes clearly in your mirror, reflect on your values. See which candidates will help you to advance upward the things that you want to see from your government. Where are these candidates on the scale stretching from hope to fear, from love to hatred, from tolerance to bigotry; and especially from unity to division?

Look carefully at the political reality around you. Then look in your mirror to decide if you will insist on unity rather than division from those for whom you choose to vote.

Evan Barrett lives in historic Uptown Butte after retiring following 47 years at the top level of Montana economic development, government, politics and education. He is an award-winning producer of Montana history videos who continues to write columns and commentaries and occasionally teaches Montana history.

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