

School Daze: The Roundtable Searches for Class Acts

Written by Jack Sparacino
Tuesday, 24 January 2017 16:26

"This is the problem with the media. You guys took everything that Donald Trump said so literally. The American people didn't . . . They understood that sometimes, when you have a conversation with people, whether it's around the dinner table or at a bar, you're going to say things, and sometimes you don't have all the facts to back it up." - Corey Lewandowski

"The goal of education is the advancement of knowledge and the dissemination of truth." - John F. Kennedy

Jack: Well, Roundtablers, here we are, getting our first stiff dose of 2017. Our weather has been lovely while horrid ice storms blast our northern friends. Even that quintessential northerner, Garrison Keillor, glowed about how lovely it can be to hang out in the South. Evidently he liked being called "sweetheart" by his waitress in Charleston's Jestine's Kitchen. And he loved their fried chicken and collard greens.

Meanwhile, I've been reading commentary on how Trump's already burned through the traditional honeymoon period for new presidents which is supposed to last something like a hundred days – *after they take office*. Fox commentator Charles Krauthammer pointed to a number of reasons for this, including the Russian hacking and vaccines, of all things. Quote,

"In a week packed with confirmation hearings and Russian hacking allegations, what was he doing meeting with Robert Kennedy Jr., an anti-vaccine activist pushing the thoroughly discredited idea that vaccines cause autism?"

Tom: Thoroughly discredited is right. Knucklehead fodder. Kind of takes us back to Lewandowski's point that we're not supposed to take Trump literally. I wonder if there's enough salt in the universe, though, to keep ingesting with his blathering. I'm also reminded of Al Hunt's recent column where he talked about Trump being "probably the least qualified president in American history." Not the kind of language that Bloomberg people toss around willy-nilly, by the way.

Alex: I'm VERY hopeful about our country in one respect. Over the last 20 years I think many people became lethargic, complacent, uncaring, uninterested, leading into the election. Trump

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awakened The Sleeping Bear and it's time to rise up and do something. Obama had some good suggestions the other day – roll up your sleeves, get a clipboard, actually talk face to face with people, do something! May it happen and start to make a difference. Polls show Trump support at 37% - what happened to all his enthusiastic voters? And Obama's support is above 55% as he leaves. Something's fishy. Whole—I mean hol-y mackerel!

Wayne: Glad you're hopeful and kept your sense of humor. Maybe all those years in education are still paying off. You know, the big divide in this country right now *is* education. If you've only got a high school degree you're out of luck. Education turns out to not only drive higher earnings and well-being. People with at least a bachelor's degree have unemployment rates of 2.8% or less. For those with doctorates or professional degrees the rate is only about 1.5%. Just earning an associate's degree makes a big difference in this country. And then we had Trump saying how he quote "loves the poorly educated." That would make for quite the vicious circle, wouldn't it? Drop out of school, lose your job, hang onto fake news, vote for me.

Jack: Huh. Speaking of Pizzagate and such, Brooke Borel at fivethirtyeight.com laments that media outlets keep flailing away at fake news. She says this won't work, quote "particularly for readers who have already decided that the traditional press

is fake news — and, fair or not, partisan." Research shows that the more partisan a topic seems to be, the more people on one side of the issue double down even when they're practically bonked over the head with facts to the contrary. Like we were saying last time.

Kent: Wayne, I agree with you completely . . . having gone to college makes all the difference when it comes to job prospects, future earnings, and it shapes people's political views, values, and readiness to accept Trump's basic economic messages.

What concerns me almost as much as loss of voter rights is loss of education. The outright disdain for education and intelligence is scary. Trump did say – in Nevada – "I love the poorly educated!" It does feel like the folks who supported him the strongest were the poorly educated who didn't let facts or truth intrude into their political world view. That also seems to be a Republican strategy: the dumbing down of America. What started out as a Republican war against unions in general and the teacher unions in particular has turned into a culture war against the "educated elite."

Tom: Yikes!

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Kent: Take Wisconsin for instance. Governor Walker and the Republican legislature dismantled public employee unions, and the teachers' union especially. All the public school teachers lost their contracts. I've told you, Jack, about my friend who's been teaching music in Ellsworth [WI] for almost 30 years. He lost his contract and took a \$15,000 per year cut in pay. Worse, he lost his benefits, including health insurance. Considering that he has MS and his wife has had multiple cancer episodes that could have been catastrophic except that Obamacare allowed them to get insurance with their pre-existing conditions.

Now they'll probably lose all coverage when the Trump-ites repeal Obamacare. And the war on education continues. The proposed Education Secretary is an avowed anti-public school person. Trump's pick, Betsy DeVos, is a pro-voucher billionaire who wants to "advance God's Kingdom" in public education. If public schools continue to lose funding under a federally proposed voucher system we surely will have even more "poorly educated" voters. Since all polls show Trump mopping up among the least educated whites in particular, it looks to me like the Republican war on education is based on a political strategy.

Terry: It's all tied together in a giant stringy mess. PolitiFact, the Pulitzer Prize winning fact checking people, rated 19% of Trump's statements as mostly false, 33% as false, and 18% pants on fire. That's about *70% bogus in total* or nearly six times worse than Clinton, who was bad enough on her own.

Joe: Leapin' Lewandowskis!

Terry: And no way only the poorly educated fell for all that baloney.

Ira: As for our new president, a lot of the white working class particularly from the upper Midwest swung his way, not just the so-called poorly educated. With many manufacturing jobs lost over the years, he said he was going to bring those jobs back and they believed him. But he can't do much to bring those jobs back, they are lost forever. Unless they put huge tariffs on steel, cars and other imports, which might mainly serve to spike up prices that Americans pay for currently cheap goods. I think better and more education is the only real rope out of the tree, gang.

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Jack: You bet, old buddy. Hey, all, how about we end on an up note today? The U.S. economy grew at a respectable 3.5% in the third quarter last year. Unemployment has been cut in half in recent years. The U.S. stock market is flirting with record highs. We've talked about education a lot here and guess what, the high school graduation rate has reached a new high at 83%. Retirement assets, renewable power and car sales have soared. The Medicare Trust Fund has stabilized—we're 100% funded through 2028. On and on go these recent successes in America. We're already pretty great. Do I need a hat?

Granted there are still plenty of problems to work on—gun violence in Chicago, my old home town, just for one, increased opioid addition for another, police assaults . . . but *jeepers*. What other country would you—or our friends and neighbors and yes most people in the so called Rust Belt—rather live in? Seriously! And how the dickens did we get mired in a so-called change election? Clean up your

kitchen

, yeah sure, but not with a danged

bulldozer

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As for education, a theme here today, don't we have a lot of teachable moments ahead? And speaking of kitchens, hey who's up for Jestine's? Pass the fried chicken and collards!