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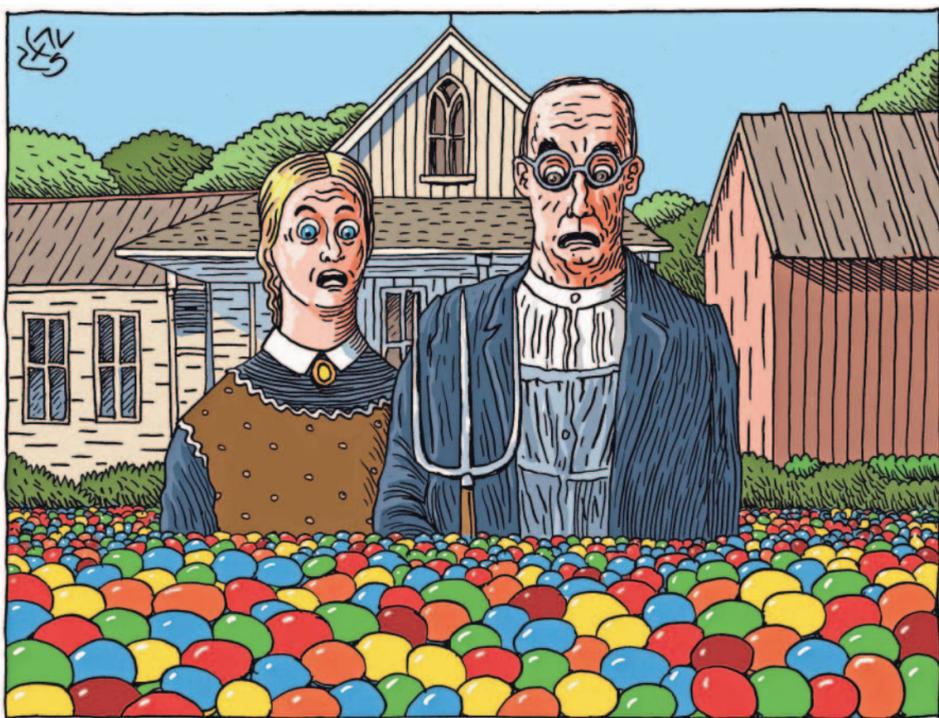
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Memo to Lester Holt: Don't try to become star of debate

Today's column takes the form of a presidential debate strategy memo — written not to candidates Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, but to the moderator, my news colleague Lester Holt of NBC News.

I'm writing it not because he particularly needs my advice, but just because I know my view on this has long been a distinctly minority opinion in our journalistic craft. And yet I'm sure it's something he'll at least want to consider before the camera's red light flashes on at 9 p.m. Eastern Monday at Long Island's Hofstra University, signaling the start of the first general election debate in what has already proven to be the most unusual and controversial presidential campaign in our nation's modern history.


Martin Schram

MEMO RE: A Debate Moderator's Strategy

Lester, I believe the most memorable thing you can accomplish in Monday night's debate is to moderate in a way that makes you totally forgettable. Let me explain:

We've witnessed many of our colleagues work hard at moderating in various ways that guaranteed we'd see them twirling in the debate spotlight. We've seen colleagues who were more peacocks than moderators (that's not a winking reference to your employer's peacock symbol; but it is an unspoken disapproval; of the way some moderators paced and paraded back and forth, posturing while interrogating).

And we have witnessed debates where the moderators clearly worked hard to craft gotcha questions, highlighting instances when a politician once said X, but later said Y, and now seems to be saying Z. That's our job when we conduct one-on-one interviews and are tasked with pinning down the politicians when they are being intentionally vague or dissembling (see also: contradictory or flat-out lying).

But in debates, it's the debater whose prime job is challenging and even questioning his opponent. Moderators aren't supposed to be the event's central interrogators. After all, a debate is not a three-way interview. And debates should never be about us.

A moderator's prime job is to first propose a

specific topic to be debated — such as: How will you keep America safe from the threats proposed by the Islamic State and other global terrorists?

Then the moderator must become the facilitator and even timekeeper, to assure each debater will indeed be able to debate the topic, challenge an adversary's position and statements, and respond to other follow-ups.

Debaters must have the time to fully explain their positions.

Moderators should interject themselves into the debate when one or both candidates are imprecise or wonky, to assure viewers will be able to understand. And yes, moderators ought to step in when debaters become evasive, to assure that truths don't inadvertently fall through the cracks. But moderators cannot be expected to serve as full-time, live-time fact-checkers.

Let's not forget: It's the candidates who must be able to win debates not only by providing highlight-worthy answers but also by effectively challenging and questioning their opponents. And — surprise of surprises — this can be done civilly.

In 1963, Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona, the father of the modern conservative movement, figured he would be the Republican nominee in 1964 and would be running against the incumbent President John F. Kennedy. So Goldwater talked with Kennedy and proposed a unique debate format that he disclosed in his 1988 autobiography: "Kennedy and I informally agreed — it seems a pipe dream in looking at some of today's negative campaigning — that we would ride the same plane or train to several stops and debate face to face on the same platform." Goldwater elaborated on the plan in an interview with The Washington Post's Bill Prochnau: "He'd get out in one place and start to debate and I'd rebut him. Then we'd turn it around in the next place. ... It would have saved a lot of money, we'd have a good time, and it would have done the country a lot of good."

That historic idea was shattered by an assassin's bullet in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. It might have changed politics for the better, forever. Its underlying civility need not be lost forever.

Martin Schram, an op-ed columnist for Tribune News Service, is a veteran Washington journalist, author and TV documentary executive. Readers may send him email at martin.schram@gmail.com.

VALLEY VOICE

These lessons are aimed at ending domestic violence

I am on the bus while a man in his early 20's in shiny new Nikes repeatedly questions a woman holding a sleeping toddler. The young woman is exhausted and is nodding off between attempts to answer a relentless, accusatory tirade. "Why did you do that? Why did you mess me up? I told you not to do that!" He is oblivious to her exhaustion. This is verbal abuse, the antecedent to domestic violence, and it is happening four feet from me.

I'm frozen in my seat. As a social worker I want to intervene. He is clearly escalating and there is a child involved. Do they live together? Is he her brother, her husband? Everyone, including the bus driver, is doing nothing.

Do I want that young man to turn his anger on me by asking him to stop? Do I want the young mother to turn on me for interfering in her private life? I am not in the office or in an ER; I am alone here on the bus as a citizen. As the young man quiets down, I am relieved because a critical moment seems to have passed. He is quiet, the woman and the toddler are both sleeping. So I do nothing — and think about this distressed family for days afterward.

My fear and inaction that day was a perfect example of a primary obstacle to community intervention in domestic violence. We just don't interfere in people's lives. We see the bruises, we hear the implausible explanations and we know our neighbors are screaming at each other at 2 a.m. But, as a culture, we tell ourselves "it's not my business."

We expect our kids to speak up when they see someone being bullied. We tell them to let someone know if a friend is being mistreated by their boyfriend. Where are they going to learn this? How do we help them connect the dots so they understand that domestic violence is simply bullying behind closed doors? Maybe if we started calling


Maureen Forman

Domestic Violence by a more tangible name, like Adult Bullying, we could begin to break the cycle.

Jewish Family Service and Palm Springs Unified took one small step toward that goal this year by developing a dating safety curriculum based on the website LoveIs-Respect.org. All junior high students in the district will receive three targeted lessons to help them recognize symptoms of dating abuse early in a relationship. They will receive information about Healthy/Respectful Relationships and what to do if you find yourself in an unhealthy or abusive relationship. It also helps teens say something if they think a friend is in trouble. Best of all, the website is free to everyone, has a Facebook page and even has trained peer counselors available for support.

This is a very important step in ending teen dating violence, which has been proven to correlate with domestic violence later in life. This is a small beginning at ending a silent scourge in our culture.

If you have children or grandchildren who are dating age, tell them about the website. We need to start making these connections early so abusive relationships are recognized sooner and teens get support they need.

Perhaps someday there won't be any more young men yelling on the bus. Or any old social workers frozen in their seats.

Email Maureen Forman, executive director of Jewish Family Service of the Desert, at mforman@jfsdesert.org.

SHARE YOUR VIEWS

The Desert Sun welcomes guest columns addressing local political and social issues.

General guidelines include:

- » Columns should be 500 to 550 words.
- » We print the author's photo and contact info (typically an email address) with the column.
- » Anonymous columns are never published.
- » Stick to a single topic and avoid personal attacks.
- » We reserve the right to edit and republish (including electronically) all columns.

Direct column submissions and questions to Al Franco, engagement editor/opinion, at al.franco@desertsun.com

YOUR VOICE
Gun ordinance makes sense

I support the Palm Springs Firearm Safety Ordinance. Gun safety laws protect not only against accidents, but also impulsive, destructive acts by angry, depressed, or unstable family members committed in a moment of rage or momentary madness. I'd like to tell you my story.

My dad was a hunter and I grew up with guns in the house. While dad was a generally responsible gun owner, his rifles were stored in our basement and weren't in a locked cabinet.

My mother suffered from occasional depression.

One day when I was home from college, during a disagreement, my mother pointed a loaded rifle at me. She threatened to kill me, herself and the entire family, a kind of suicide by family massacre. I managed to talk her out of it over 15 of the most frightening minutes of my life.

A locking device, or storage in a locked case, could have prevented this

incident and I wouldn't have to remember that my mother once threatened to kill me.

Gun safety can save our loved ones from committing acts that they will forever regret.

Kathy Weremiuk, Palm Springs

Allow CV Link votes

When you read the Sept. 18 article "La Quinta, Indio bank on voters approving sales tax," hypocrisy reigns loud and clear.

Palm Desert has a TOT increase on the ballot. La Quinta and Indio have sales tax increases on their ballots. La Quinta said it is following the recommendation of a 14-member advisory council, so if their Measure G is adopted, "a citizen oversight committee would be formed to ensure the money is properly spent."

These cities' residents have a vote ONLY because their councils cannot unilaterally impose tax increases. However, in the case of the CV Link, these

city councils have dictated their will on the people by not including that issue on ballots. These city councils would bear no additional expense by placing the CV Link issue on their respective ballots so why was it not included?

Is this a democratic process these politicians are trying to sell to their constituents? The answer is a resounding NO. Nowhere is there a mention of the unknown expense for the maintenance and operation of the CV Link. When this expense looms large, are they going to seek another tax increase? The silence is obvious, intentional and deafening.

DeeAnn Madsen, Rancho Mirage

Sign of the times

We recently closed the sale of some residential property we had in Seattle. There were approximately 25 pages of disclosures that we signed when we listed the place for sale, and another 25 or 30 when we accepted an offer. The closing documents contained about 36

pages and addendum's another 11.

It used to take four pages — an earnest money receipt and agreement, a mortgage, a deed, and the closing statement. When you realize that these pages must be copied for the buyers and sellers, their Realtors and the mortgage we are not talking about 97 total vs. four, we are talking about 485 pages vs. 16.

We've heard a lot about political correctness these days, and about unnecessary over-regulation. Doesn't this example drive it home? No wonder we are running out of trees.

Douglas Muth, Bermuda Dunes

SEND YOUR LETTER

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- » Letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number for verification
- » Letters should be fewer than 200 words
- » Letters may be edited for length, clarity and taste

See a complete list of rules online.