

Looming specter of the political-industrial complex

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OPINION

After the 2012 general election, I obsequiously offered an opinion-piece to the Arizona Capitol Times suggesting we heed former President Eisenhower. He cautioned Americans ever-vigilance against the creeping influence of the military-industrial complex, a term of deliberate trepidation, and one I felt compelled to augment as we consider the political-industrial complex. As we observe America's, or more specifically Arizona's, 2018 political field of battle – the carnage is not the bloody heaps of wartime eradication, but the numbing loss of our political psyche. A different war displayed an uncivil disposition on how we disagree.

Gibson McKay

Our political-industrial complex, of which I belong, supplants reality with the soul-sucking mechanisms whose purpose it is to triumph. There is no bigger proponent of winning than me, however the process by which we formerly debated issues is now designed to tear down our opponent and thus exterminate civility. The notion of civility, in this case as with most cases, requires tolerance of your opponent even if we have differing viewpoints.

Political consultants and the ilk exploit the lowest common denominator while attempting to influence large blocks of demographic sub-groups. Who will “move”

their opinions on an issue, and what argument will move them? Usually that argument is negative. Let's face it, we are human and we remember the reprimand above the praise.

In spite of our views, we are either alarmed by the loss or promised safe passage through life as we are marketed to about an ill-defined American dream. Thus, we see micro-targeted messages to sub-groups through direct mail, social media and every airwave that can be purchased. “Paid for by”... all of us, in different ways and derived from a constant barrage of dial-polls (i.e. push 1 if you love me; push 2 if you hate me) and the silly analytic dimensions that ameliorate the selling of a wedge issue vs. the deliberation of an ideal.

Wedge issues are created by sophisticated processes that frame the debate so you may only be pro or anti one thing. We, as a tolerant democracy, must be skeptical and resist black and white thinking that our complex society longs to devour. To be clear, I am not Pollyanna about this; in fact, two years from now people or organizations may likely engage me to illuminate them with the electoral language that moves demographic sub-groups in order to win. Many news outlets play along with “identity politics” as defined by the political-industrial complex. The news cannot resist reporting “who” (blacks, whites, suburban

women, Hispanics, etc.), instead of what the issues are. They have been coopted to report exactly what they are being programmed to report. And, that is where the news partially gets it wrong, however, they are NOT the enemy. I still believe in the Fourth Estate but they are, today more than ever, less immune from the influence by the political-industrial complex. News outlets need to stop reporting polls, they don't understand them.

How do I know this? The news outlets are now knowingly "what and who" we debate as opposed to the forum in which we impartially examine the story. Americans are as much to blame – we likely change the channel to receive the news we want to hear about the groups most or least "for or against" us. I mean really, is the news so dissimilar that we can select the news we like? Actually, the answer is yes. That is the most dangerous and needed course-correction in American history. But the world of our liberal democracy is not failing. There are no bloody coups, nor is our republic crumbling. But beware.

Look, I am not telling you something you don't already instinctively know. However, sometimes we lose context. Let's, for a moment, understand the context. America has been around about 2,900 months. That means, roughly based on the average age of a voter in America who has lived 720 months, they have been alive for about 25 percent of the time America has been a country. In that time, we have survived the death of 620,000 Americans who fought brothers over owning another human being, nuclear meltdowns and attacks from foreign elements. We have lived through scourges of disease and desolate dust bowls. Our country will not drown in a wave of red or blue, nor be diminished by a tweet.

Democracy works, and so we must be vigilant yes, but fearful, no. We are doing it right, but beware the political-industrial

complex. They cannot be allowed to define the debate.

Eisenhower said five decades ago, "...Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing,... so that security and liberty may prosper together." So vote, because what we know is voting is a behavior. Engage civilly, because tolerance renounces bloodshed. Mostly, love thy neighbor.... Unless he is a bowtie-wearing, espresso-drinking, data-geek who can tell you the price of everything and the value of nothing — that is a political consultant. Stay away from them.

— *Gibson McKay is a nationally recognized, award winning local and national political strategist, campaign authority and lobbyist.*

The views expressed in guest commentaries are those of the author and are not the views of the Arizona Capitol Times.