



Carmage Walls **Commentary Prize**

2019 Entry Form

Name of Author(s): David Plazas

Author's Title (editor, columnist, etc.): Opinion and Engagement Director

Newspaper: The Tennessean

Address: 1801 West End Avenue

City: Nashville

State: TN

ZIP: 37203

Phone: 615-259-8063

Fax:

E-Mail:

dplazas@tennessean.com

Submitted by: David Plazas

Title of Person Submitting: Opinion and Engagement Director

Phone Number: 615-259-8063

E-mail Address: dplazas@tennessean.com

What is the subject/title of the entry? Civility Tennessee

Date(s) of publication? Throughout 2018 and 2019

Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? Above 50,000

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)

Civility Tennessee is a campaign of The Tennessean Editorial Board, based in Nashville, Tennessee, to promote, practice and encourage civil discourse in our community.

Conventional wisdom, after the 2016 presidential election, was that civility was impossible, that people felt comfortable in their echo chambers, and they felt distrustful and even disgusted by those who held different viewpoints or aligned with different political perspectives. Many were not in the mood to be nice, a common definition of civility.

However, the goal of the campaign is to redefine the term civility to align it to its original definition from the Latin word "civitas," which speaks to the responsibility of the citizen to uphold and improve the community.

The values of Civility Tennessee are:

- To encourage conversations, even if they are hard, but in a respectful way
- To enhance civic participation in important conversations of the day
- To help promote voter registration and turnout efforts
- And to increase news literacy and enhance trust of media organizations

We launched on Jan. 12, 2018, and the intention was for it to be a one-year campaign, but given public interest and support, we extended the campaign into 2019.

The foundation of Civility Tennessee is a combination of monthly thought pieces and events in the virtual and physical spaces. (Landing page: <http://civility.tennessean.com> – see specific links for the contest below this explanation)

In addition, a closed Facebook group has allowed people a safe, moderated place to express viewpoints about a variety of difficult issues (<http://facebook.com/groups/CivilityTennessee>).

Part of the success of the campaign has come in the partnerships with key community institutions like the Nashville Public Library, Belmont University, Lipscomb University and Vanderbilt University, where we held our first event, an author Q&A.

Live interviews have revolved around framing how to have tough conversations: On racism, gun violence and the #MeToo movement.

We aligned our midterm election efforts around the values of Civility Tennessee and held a series of debates and forums for governor and U.S. Senate, a special Nashville mayoral election and a transit referendum. Plus required that candidates answer “yes” or “no” to a question on our survey about whether they would commit to being civil.

The biggest event of the year was a conversation at Lipscomb University about “Why Tennesseans Aren’t Voting Like They Should,” which preceded the midterm elections and helped explain why the state was at the bottom of voter turnout in the nation and how to turn that around.

The campaign helped us grow as a trusted community leader and brought people together who would not normally intersect. It also continued the transformation and evolution of the role of the opinion editor to be someone who is heavily engaged in the physical and virtual communities and helps develop solutions to the challenges citizens face.

Column links for contest – PDFs attached to email

Nashville, vote hopefully, not fearfully, but please vote (May 23, 2018 online, in print May 24)

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/columnists/david-plazas/2018/05/23/nashville-vote-hopefully-not-fearfully-but-please-vote/632860002/>

Trump should rise above theater, be more civil (May 30, 2018 online, in print June 3)

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/columnists/david-plazas/2018/05/30/donald-trump-should-rise-above-political-theater-set-civil-tone/656192002/>

On civility: Don't be nice, be a good citizen (June 26, 2018 online, in print July 1)

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/columnists/david-plazas/2018/06/26/civility-means-practicing-citizenship/735882002/>

How to make voting great again in America (July 20, 2018 online, in print July 22)

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/columnists/david-plazas/2018/07/20/how-make-voting-great-again/802233002/>

Clinton, Holt prove incivility is bipartisan (Oct. 18, 2018 online, in print Oct. 19)

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/columnists/david-plazas/2018/10/18/hillary-clinton-andy-holt-incivility-bipartisan/1669205002/>

How to be civil at Thanksgiving gathering (Nov. 20, 2018, in print Nov. 22)

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/columnists/david-plazas/2018/11/20/thanksgiving-stress-family-civil-david-plazas/2054590002/>

Opinion

■ **OUR PURPOSE:** To actively influence and impact a better quality of life in Middle Tennessee.

■ **OUR MISSION:** We stand for the First Amendment and freedom of information. We stand for civility. We fight for the voiceless. We welcome a diversity of opinions.

Nashville, vote hopefully, not fearfully



David Plazas
Columnist
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENN.

On May 12, I cast my ballot for Metro Nashville mayor at Casa Azafrán on Nolensville Road.

It is my favorite early voting place because it inspires hope, especially among the newcomers, the marginalized and the dreamers in our city.

I left the voting booth hopeful about my pick and hopeful for this great city.

We need hope more than ever in Nashville, which has been disoriented by the immediate past mayor’s scandal and resignation, which led to Thursday’s special election to finish out the term until the next election in 2019.

Despite these events, I have been hopeful as I have been traveling around the city these past few weeks, visiting classrooms and coffee shops.

I am hopeful for the sixth-grade children of STEM Prep Academy in South Nashville — those from places like Egypt, Nigeria, Mexico, Honduras, who shared with me last Friday their essays about how Tennessee’s sanctuary city bill would harm their families.

On Monday, Gov. Bill Haslam allowed

the bill to become law without his signature. Even so, I believe that these children’s teachers, parents and neighbors will help sustain their hope.

Turn ‘Heartbreak City’ into ‘Hope City’

I am hopeful for the ordinary citizens who want to contribute to their community.

On Tuesday, I accompanied a member of the Civility Tennessee Facebook group to her first Metro Nashville Public Schools board meeting.

Afterward, we talked about shared values — quality schools, safe neighborhoods and a healthy community — over pie and coffee.

The candidate I chose is promising to move us forward, but I hope this person will also help us atone for the errors of the past — not just the sins of slavery and Jim Crow, but also the consequences of the past mayor’s scandal.

Many people had their hopes dashed: the unhoused; those who are barely-above-water; aspiring creatives who are struggling to pay the rent; public servants, like teachers, police officers and firefighters; citizens seeking justice; and workers looking for equity.

The next mayor has a responsibility

to restore that hope.

That means fighting for storm water upgrades for Antioch and sidewalks for Madison and Green Hills as much as for flood protection in downtown.

That means not reaching for every shiny bauble offered to Nashville and, instead, taking a moment to ensure that the city’s growing prosperity is accessible to all.

Youth poet laureate Haviland Whiting poignantly described Nashville today as “Heartbreak City” in her poem before Mayor David Briley’s May 4 State of Metro address.

The good news is that hearts mend, and hope and love can heal.

I am hopeful that the citizens of Nashville will choose hope over fear.

Let’s allow better angels to guide us

May they allow their better angels to guide them — a concept explored by Pulitzer Prize winning author and Vanderbilt University Visiting Professor Jon Meacham in his new book “The Soul of America.”

Meacham makes several calls to action to citizens, including: “enter the arena,” which means vote, and “resist tribalism.”

The latter is rearing its ugly head in the mayor’s race, particularly surrounding Carol Swain, a polarizing candidate whose signs are popping up all over the Davidson County.

Swain has opined unapologetically about a variety of subjects, and has demeaned marginalized groups like Muslims and the LGBT community in her writings and statements.

While these positions may appeal to some voters, others are attracted to her slogan: “Government for the people: Integrity, honesty, commitment” — a clear shot at former Mayor Megan Barry.

The social media chatter has been ugly — with her detractors discrediting her and her most fervent supporters discrediting anyone who criticizes her.

Voters benefit when they coalesce around a candidate who will raise their hopes, not prey on their fears.

Scripture tells us: “Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous.” (Joshua 10:25)

So, are you voting?

And, when you vote, are you voting for your hopes or your fears?

Fellow citizens, cast your ballot with strength, courage and hope.

Contact David Plazas at (615) 259-8063 or dplazas@tennessean.com.

One thing Parkland survivors, NRA agree on

Your Turn

Yramnna Smith, Nicole Kanew and Justin Kanew
Guest columnists

“He did not shoot students he did like so he could have his story told.”

The above quote is an excerpt from a probable cause statement released by authorities after the 17-year-old Santa Fe, Texas, shooter surrendered to police and confessed to murdering 10 and injuring 10 others.

We have a very real, very tragic mass shooting problem here in America. We also have very different ideas of how address it. Some call for gun safety legislation. Others point to mental health. Still others highlight school security, Hollywood, video games ... the list goes on. And then there’s Congress, which continues to focus on thoughts and prayers and little else.

At times it seems we can’t agree on anything, but there’s one thing even those on opposite extremes of this heated dialogue see eye to eye on.

First, a quote from National Rifle Association spokeswoman Dana Loesch:

“(The media) has got to stop creating more of these monsters by oversaturation. I’m not saying don’t responsibly report on things as they happen. I understand it. But constantly showing the image of the murderer, constantly saying their name, is completely unnecessary.”

Next, a recent tweet from Parkland survivor-turned-cun safety-advocate David Hogg: “I don’t know the shooters name and don’t want to. ... We make these sick people known worldwide for their horrifying acts, let’s stop that.”

There. Did you catch that? That was two people who could not be further apart on the issue of how to stop mass shootings in America agreeing that one thing we should do as a society is make a commitment not to give these killers the fame they seek.

The Santa Fe killer is not alone in wanting his story told — the Santa Barbara self-described “Angel of Death” wanted to be a “God”... The racist murderer in Charleston said “someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me” ... Virginia Tech ... Newtown ... Aurora ... the list of shooters who were hungry for

media attention is long, and we’re here to tell you that the evidence-based science of behavior analysis backs up the idea that a society-wide commitment to not giving that attention to them has a very real chance of preventing the next tragedy.

According to applied behavior analysis, all behaviors occur to achieve one of four functions: 1) Escape/avoidance. 2) Access to a tangible/activity. 3) Access to sensory input. 4) Access to attention/being attended to. What the aforementioned killers have consistently displayed falls into the fourth category: “Attention-seeking behavior.” When the function of attention is present, any type of feedback — positive or negative — can increase (reinforce) the behavior. If an attention-starved individual has seen the behavior of another garner access to attention, the chance they themselves will engage in the observed behavior increases.

The intensity of the “reinforcement” a school shooting behavior receives allows for others to learn through observation (modeling) how effective engaging in school shooting behaviors can be

to access attention. From a behavioral perspective, to limit school shootings, behaviors should be placed “on extinction” while increasing replacement behaviors.

Media platforms should remove access to reinforcement (extinction) by not running stories which garner fame and attention for those who carry out school shootings, and instead increase replacement behaviors by shifting the focus to providers of mental health support and preventative strategies and “helping behaviors” within the communities affected, while providing direct contact with local mental health professionals and wrap-around services for students and their families.

When the NRA and Parkland survivors are on the same page, and there’s science to back them up, it’s time for us all to take notice, and to play our part.

We don’t even need Congress for this one.

By Yramnna Smith (Psy.D, BCBA), Nicole Kanew (M.Ed., BCBA, Rutherford County Schools), and Justin Kanew (candidate for Congress in Tennessee’s 7th District).

LETTERS TO EDITOR

Guns: The common denominator

This is for Mr. Trump and his NRA buddies and the men and women of the U.S. Congress, who receive NRA funds.

What is the common denominator for all of the school shootings and mass killings?

Guns, but you all are quick to blame it on mental illness. I guess Mr. Trump will now want to arm the students. More gun sales equals more dollars in their pockets.

Knox McCharen, Nashville 37217

Violence unavoidable

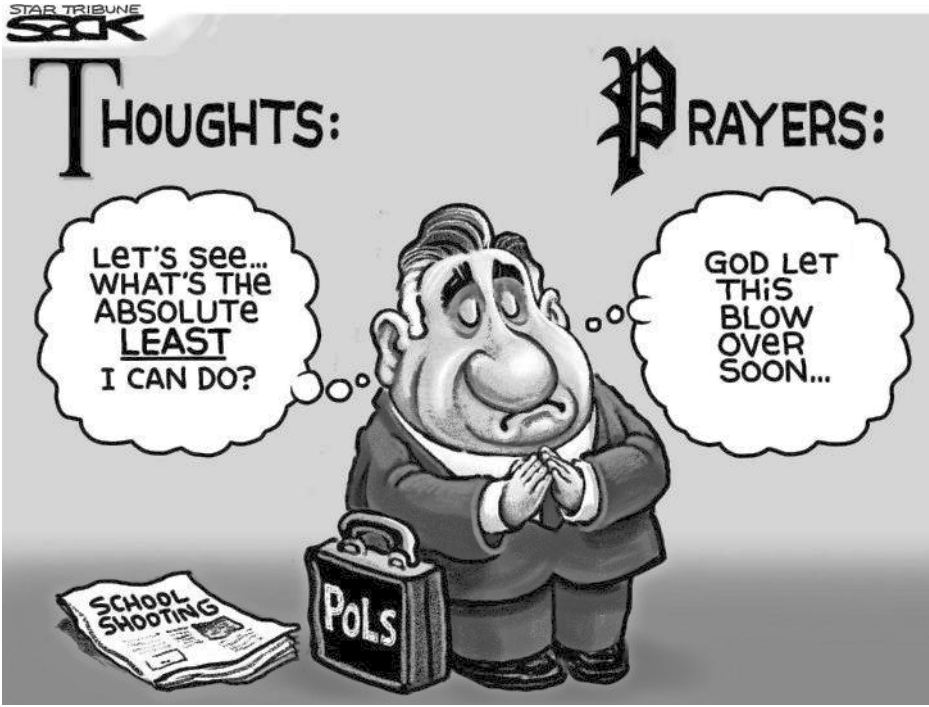
People have been killed by guns, sometimes in large numbers. People have been mowed down by cars and trucks.

People have been hacked to death by machete. People have been blown to bits by bombs. People have been incinerated by arsonists.

Murderers live among us. They have jobs, go to church and are your neighbors.

Is there really any answer to violence? When will people understand that if someone wants to do harm to one or to many, even the police will tell you that until someone pulls a trigger, runs over people, decapitates, burns or blows up an entire building, there’s nothing, let me say it again, nothing that can be done.

Don’t even attempt to tell me that dangerous people with evil in their broken



minds can be stopped before the carnage by simply telling someone what you know. Maybe idealistically, but not realistically.

This country and this world is full of evil people who will do what they want to

do and there is nothing or no one that can stop them if they are determined.

You are responsible for your own safety. Only you and you alone. It’s never been any other way.

Hugh Collins, Cane Ridge 37013

Protect our kids

Once again, we hear the politicians “commiserating” with the victims and their families after 10 people are murdered and another 13 injured in yet again another school shooting, this time in Texas.

Where will the next shooting incident happen — we know it will happen — the only thing we are not certain of is just where.

And then again there will be much sympathy expressed and offers of help given — all empty tokens of concern.

When will the people of this country come to their senses and offer our children some real protection? We attended a concert at Bridgestone Arena a few weeks ago and everyone had to go through a metal detector before entering the building. I believe all NFL, NBA, etc. games also have this requirement.

Even the Vanderbilt emergency room has a metal detector.

Surely, our children are important enough to have this same protection in their schools. I would certainly welcome paying additional taxes to save the lives of innocent children.

We should all be ashamed of ourselves for not demanding this protection for innocent children. Gun control will not fix the problem in my opinion. Security for our schools is so important.

Jean M. Poulsen, Old Hickory 37138

TENNESSEAN.COM/OPINION

Go online to see the week’s editorials, Tennessee Voices and letters, and share your view on the issues. Subscribers, please go to www.tennessean.com/activate to access additional digital content.

QUESTIONS?

Opinion Engagement Editor David Plazas
615-259-8063; dplazas@tennessean.com

WRITE US

Letters: 250 words or fewer. Name, city and ZIP are published. Address and phone number required for verification only.

Tennessee Voices op-eds: 500-600 words or fewer. Include a short biographical sentence and high-resolution JPEG headshot (at least 200 KB).

Email to: letters@tennessean.com

Mail to: Opinions, The Tennessean, 1100 Broadway, Nashville TN 37203

Fax to: 615-259-8093, Attention: Opinions

EDITORIAL BOARD

MICHAEL A. ANASTASI

Vice President/News, USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee
Vice President & Editor, The Tennessean

MARIA DE VARENNE, Executive Editor, The Tennessean

DAVID PLAZAS, Opinion & Engagement Director,
USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee
Opinion & Engagement Editor, The Tennessean

Insight



President Donald Trump speaks at a rally at Municipal Auditorium on Tuesday in Nashville. LARRY MCCORMACK / THE TENNESSEAN

Trump should rise above theater, be more civil



David Plazas
Columnist
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENN.

Civility Tennessee

Civility Tennessee is a campaign created by USA TODAY NETWORK-Tennessee in partnership with civic institutions and individuals:

- To encourage conversations that are civil and respectful, even if they are hard.
- To enhance civic participation in important conversations ranging from racism to gun violence and from #Me-Too to local elections.
- To help promote voter registration efforts.
- To increase news literacy and enhance trust of local media organizations.

Learn more at civility.tennessean.com and join the closed Facebook group at facebook.com/groups/civilitytennessee.

Inside

Readers sound off on the Nashville Trump rally. **Page 2H**

Phil Bredesen had every right to strike back hard after President Donald Trump dismissed him, then insulted him, and then could not stop talking about him.

Trump mentioned Bredesen early into his remarks at his rally Tuesday night at Municipal Auditorium in downtown Nashville.

“I never heard of this guy, who is he? Who is he?” said Trump, before then declaring: “He’s an absolute total tool of Chuck — of (Senate Minority Leader) Chuck Schumer.”

Bredesen, a Democrat and former two-term Tennessee governor, is running for U.S. Senate against Republican Congressman Marsha Blackburn, who introduced Trump. The president was in town for a Blackburn fundraiser.

Bredesen responded by staying civil, which does not mean ignoring an insult, but rather directly addressing the slight without becoming disagreeable.

These days, that is not easy to accomplish.

Bredesen’s campaign Press Secretary Alyssa Hansen issued this statement:

“Governor Bredesen has made it clear that if President Trump proposes something that’s good for Tennessee, then he’ll support it. Likewise, if the president suggests something that’s bad for Tennesseans, then he’ll oppose it. That’s what senators ought to do.

“Bottom line: Phil Bredesen is an independent thinker with a proven record of working with Democrats and Republicans. In Washington, he’ll vote in the best interests of Tennessee and Tennesseans.”

Even as there is a desire among people to improve civil discourse, it is not uncommon to get distracted, especially when the most powerful man in the world does not set the tone.

That is too bad, because while Trump’s political rallies are notorious for being all about political theater, for exaggeration of facts or obsession with his extremities (“Look at these big, beautiful hands”), they are circuses that do not reflect real life and create the impression that a diatribe of insults is OK.

It is not. What the president says matters to the nation and to the world, and the president should set a tone that unites, that empowers, that inspires and that enlightens people.

There were several names that Trump did not mention, like:

- Roseanne Barr (whose racist tweet caused the cancellation of her popular show);
- John McCain (though the president alluded to the Arizona senator’s vote against repealing Obamacare);
- James Shaw Jr., the hero of the Waffle House

shooting; or

- The heroes of the civil rights movement, such as Diane Nash or John Lewis, who in the 1960s defiantly sat at racially segregated lunch counters at the Woolworth (now Woolworth on Fifth), just a half mile from the auditorium.

The latter makes the conclusion of Trump’s speech so disappointing.

“We are taking back our country,” he said. “We are returning our country back to our great American patriots.”

What does that mean? Who does that mean? Does that mean returning to a time when Nash and Lewis had to fight for their right to get served at a lunch counter?

Our nation was designed to move forward and to help us rise above our basest instincts and away from those things, like slavery or segregation, that favored some and marginalized others.

The preamble to our Constitution is our north star: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

Past presidents’ quotes can also illuminate us on how we can elevate the tone.

“You have to appeal to people’s best instincts, not their worst one,” said President Harry Truman.

“... the moral force of the Presidency is often stronger than the political force,” said President Lyndon Johnson.

We need our leaders from the mayor to the president to provide a selfless, civil leadership at a time when basic facts, history and institutions are under assault.

During her introduction of Trump, Blackburn did not say anything inflammatory, however, she was forced to be a bystander as Trump performed.

Then, the president introduced the members of Tennessee’s congressional delegation. When he mentioned Sen. Bob Corker, with whom he has clashed, some members of the crowd booed loudly.

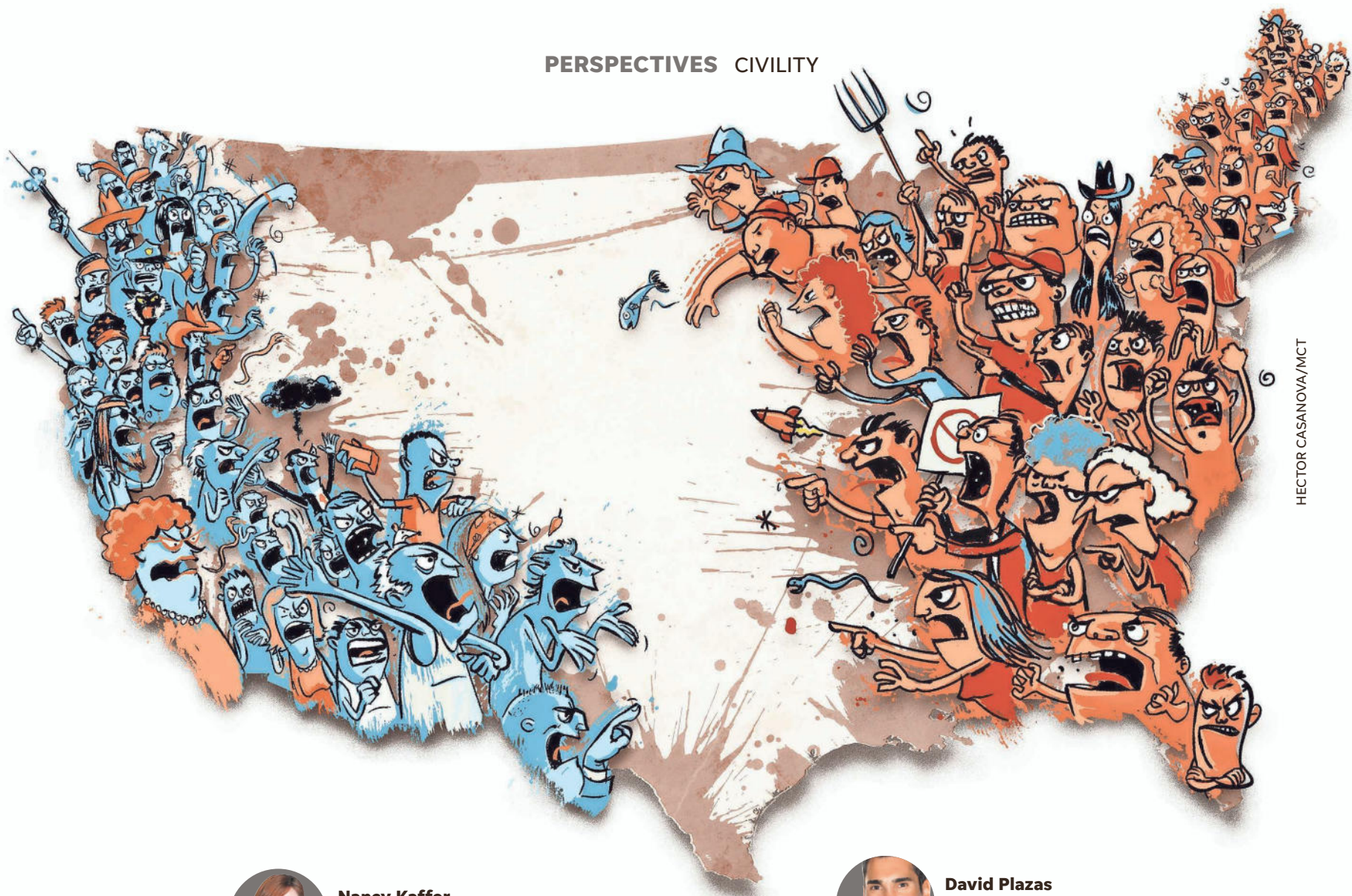
Trump said nothing about it, though it would have been a good time for the president to urge the audience to be touched by their better angels.

That might have dampened the emotion of the show, but it would have been the right thing to do.

David Plazas is the opinion and engagement director for the USA TODAY NETWORK – Tennessee. Call him at (615) 259-8063, email him at dplazas@tennessean.com or tweet to him at [@davidplazas](https://twitter.com/davidplazas).

Insight

PERSPECTIVES CIVILITY



Nancy Kaffer
Columnist
Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

Civility is for chumps: In the defense of anger

MACKINAC ISLAND, Mich. — I’ve got to be honest: I’m not feeling very civil about civility.

At the Detroit Regional Chamber’s annual policy conference, civility took the main stage. It was a central theme of the conference and, in his final keynote speech, Gov. Rick Snyder called a lack of civility his greatest concern for America right now.

From someone who presides over a state that contains Detroit Public Schools Community District, the ongoing Flint water crisis and an unemployment insurance crisis in which thousands of Michiganders were falsely accused of committing fraud, that is kind of a jaw-dropping statement.

As a tool, civility has value. As a goal? It’s lipstick on a pig. I want Americans to be able to discuss hard subjects and find common ground without calling each other mean names.

But I’m skeptical: too often, a claim of incivility is a means of control, a new kind of respectability politics that allows the listener to disregard some arguments, not on the merits, but because of how the argument is made.

Take the opposition to the NFL protests. Some Americans simply refuse to engage with the substance of the protests — players who take a knee during the national anthem hoped to draw attention to the ways in which law enforcement harms people of color — because they’ve deemed the manner of protest disrespectful.

They invoke the same excuse to dismiss students staging school walkouts to protest gun violence. And when Wayne County Executive Warren Evans responded to a moderator’s question by affirming that yes, race is part of our region’s difficulties with mass transit, critics charged that Evans was attempting to inject race into the subject — nimbly avoiding the question itself.

A plea for civility can camouflage a distaste for uncomfortable truths, a hallmark of that bygone era when people were nicer, and some were forced to sit down and shut up because of who they were, not what they had to say.

And really, if your objective is to strip health care from the state’s most vulnerable, systemically neglect the state’s largest school district, maintain a dysfunctional status quo that keeps people who need jobs from the places where jobs are, and pollute our air and water, does it really matter if you’re *nice* about it?

“Ideally, you want people who can reach across the aisle because they can have actual conversations,” said Dana Nessel, the attorney general candidate who is the first openly gay candidate to seek statewide office in Michigan. “If you can recognize that a political opponent is a human being, it makes it easier to have a fruitful discussion about policy.”

If civility is a tool, if it is attached to empathy and respect, it can create space for productivity and collaboration. But detached from empathy and respect, civility is nothing but lip service.

“I used to do these debates on ‘Let It Rip’ with (state Rep.) Gary Glenn (then head of the rabidly anti-LGBT American Family Association), and he was such a gentleman as he was disparaging me as a human being, communicating that I was a lesser form of human so my family deserved significantly less rights than his,” Nessel said. “You can have such a complete lack of respect for a person based on who they are as a human being, it doesn’t matter if you put a pretty face on it.”

See KAFFER, Page 3H



David Plazas
Columnist
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENN.

On civility: Don’t be nice, be a good citizen

*“Inconceivable!” Vizzini exclaimed.
“You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means,” Inigo Montoya replied.*
— “The Princess Bride” movie (1987)

Civility has become a four-letter word to some people. In fact, critics of restoring civil discourse in this hyperpartisan era have described these efforts, like The Tennessean’s Civility Tennessee campaign, as stupid, insipid or tone-deaf.

It is as if they are saying it is inconceivable in the Age of Trump that anyone should even try to be civil.

After all, consider the president’s incendiary tweets, his over-the-top rhetoric, and his insults toward his target of the day.

A few days ago, the term civility entered in the national debate with the news of Virginia restaurant Red Hen refusing to serve presidential spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders on principle.

Sanders tweeted: “I was told by the owner of Red Hen in Lexington, VA to leave because I work for @POTUS and I politely left. Her actions say far more about her than about me. I always do my best to treat people, including those I disagree with, respectfully and will continue to do so.”

There were calls for civility, including from the Washington Post’s editorial board, which argued “Let the Trump team eat in peace.”

Meanwhile, detractors like Los Angeles Times columnist Michael Hiltzik claimed that civility amounted to quashing dissent.

So, what is civility?

I embrace the classical definition of the word “civility,” which comes from the Latin word for “citizen.”

- This refers to a citizen’s responsibility to society:
- Making contributions and sacrifices,
 - supporting our democracy,
 - exercising our rights while defending the rights of others,
 - speaking truth to power to the people who govern us,
 - demanding truth from our public and civic institutions, and
 - not least important, voting.

It is easy to be tempted to regress to incivility, which I would describe as all-consuming rage, apathy or disdain toward the other.

In my job, I regularly receive phone calls and correspondence from people who say some of the ugliest things.

Most harrowing for me was a message from a man who said he hoped someone would break into my house and rape my spouse because he disagreed with an editorial I wrote about immigration enforcement last summer.

I was stunned, but I shook it off. I wonder, though, what possible response would I have for him?

Tips on getting to that better head space

Today, what helps me overcome temptations to stop practicing civility are meditation and prayer, exercise and music (from listening to recently taking up guitar lessons).

I reflect upon the need to recharge myself daily to be self-dis-

See PLAZAS, Page 3H

US full of contradictions but try to unite



Alex Hubbard
Columnist
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENN.

Al McIntosh was the quintessential small-town newspaperman.

Born in 1905, McIntosh moved as a youth around the Midwest and set into a journalism career. He bought the Rock County Star in 1940, which served tiny Luverne, Minnesota, later merging it with the Rock County Herald.

McIntosh may have been relegated to forgotten history if it were not for Ken Burns, the incomparable documentarian who discovered McIntosh’s World War II-era columns and featured them prominently in his extensive film on the war.

This is what McIntosh wrote on July 4, 1944. The column appeared on July 6.

“We’ve had a couple of letters from boys out in the South Pacific asking for more of those columns describing how life ‘goes on’? back in Rock County. Well, this is being written the evening of the Fourth of July -- the quietest Fourth that Rock County has spent in many a decade.

“First, people hung out their flags either at their home or their place of business. You never saw so many flags being displayed in Luverne. Then about noon they headed for the park down by the river under the big trees.

“Some of the others, with their elders, were busy in a soft ball game. The old timers drifted over to the horseshoe pitching headquarters and as far away as the highway you could hear the familiar ‘clink’? of the

shoes hitting the steel peg.

“We said the Fourth was a quiet day. There wasn’t excitement -- no speeches, no parades, no band music. Everybody spent the day quietly -- but they were all thinking of you boys and hoping and praying that this would be the last Fourth of July you’d spend away from home.

“Well, that’s about the story as to how things are going back home.”

Trying to make sense of it all

This is, many people would say, the best of America. A small town, in war time, quiet and reflective, yet partaking in the simple joy of being together.

But that’s not all that was happening in the country at the time. On the west coast, thousands of Japanese-Americans, many citizens and some native born, spent July 4 imprisoned in camps, forced to give up their homes and businesses, guilty only of being born to a nationality that was, at the moment, politically inconvenient.

In Europe, Japanese-Americans endured the irony of proving their fighting skills even as American forces grappled with the tough and fierce Japanese military on the other side of the world.

Black troops fought against fascism only to return to a segregated South and to defend a segregated military. Over and over again, this country put up a confused and contradictory face.

What of this? The United States is a big place. Many things happen at once, and they do not always point in the same direction.

As the people of Luverne placidly celebrated July 4, many other American citizens grappled with what it

meant to fight for a government that didn’t seem to fight for them very often.

But the vast majority of that World War II generation, of all races, religions and nationalities thought about it and decided, as complicated and confusing as the country can be, the best parts of it were worth fighting for and dying for, in the hope, if nothing else, that we could make good on a better future.

A little unity is not a bad thing

Here we are in another moment, very different, yet with something crucial in common.

These days we seem more interested in fighting amongst ourselves. There is no end game except the immediate victory. We excuse our own bad conduct by blaming the other guy, refusing to see that our own extremes do not cancel out the extremes of others, but only serve to make the atmosphere more extreme.

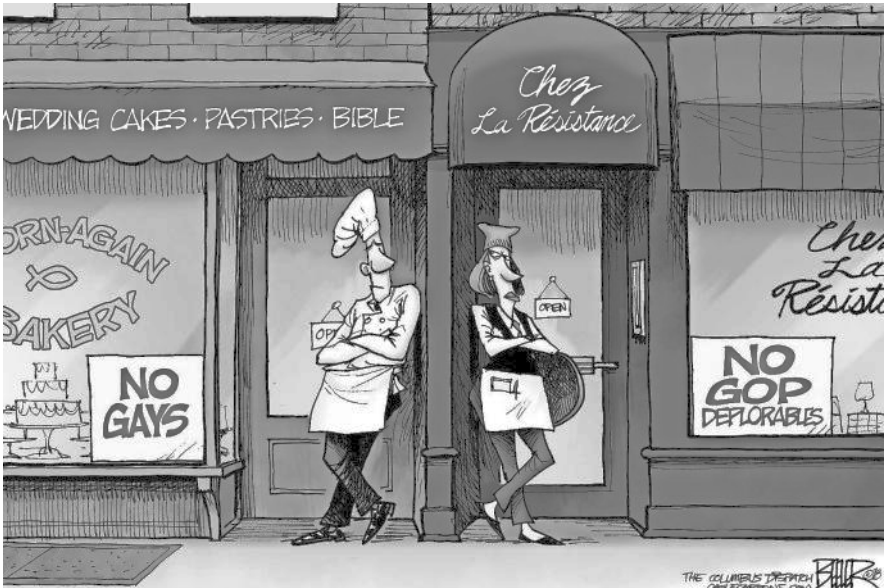
But, there are still good things happening. There are still good people out there, of all political ideologies, all races and religions, doing good, often without recognition. It’s that American contradiction all over again.

Whatever becomes of this era, we should remember something that Al McIntosh’s generation understood even though it often went unsaid and sometimes unrealized.

Like it or not, we have to live together in the same country, and we better find a way to make it happen. We have no choice.

And maybe, just maybe, a quiet Luverne July 4 will help us remember how to do it.

Alex Hubbard is a columnist for the USA TODAY NETWORK Tennessee. Email him at dhubbard@tennessean.com.



Plazas

Continued from Page 1H

ciplined and to work hard to respect the dignity of my neighbor.

This year, I gave up Twitter feuds as a New Year’s resolution because I spent too many countless hours engaging in pointless virtual swashbuckling.

I gave myself permission to mute and ignore cyberbullies and trolls. Sparingly, of course.

And, I’ve moved a lot of conversations from the social media space to the physical world — where I can grab a cup of coffee or a meal and discuss issues face to face.

A meal is a great place to have those conversations. So, while Red Hen owner Stephanie Wilkinson was in her rights to deny Sanders service, it was a missed opportunity.

‘Finding peace within yourself’

On June 11 a few colleagues and I attended Nashville’s Community Iftar, a public celebration of the sunset meal during Ramadan to break the daily fast.

Despite enduring abuse, vandalism and suspicion, local Muslims opened their tables to people of all faiths to enjoy a meal and a talk.

The evening’s topic: civility. The keynote speaker: attorney Samar Ali, a former state official who faced abuse from detractors just because of her faith.

She smiled throughout her speech, and these remarks really spoke to me:

“Being civil requires an inner sense of security. When you are a secure person, it is easier for you to be

■ Deadline to register to vote: Voters in the Aug. 2 primary election must be registered by Tuesday, July 3, to vote. You can register online at <https://ovr.govote.tn.gov/>

■ Coming 9 a.m., Wednesday, July 4: Live reading of the Declaration of Independence on The Tennessean’s Facebook page.

civil and open yourself up to learning about another person’s beliefs, even if they are different than your own.

“Being civil is therefore actually finding peace within yourself first. Start there. If you find yourself being uncivil to another person, it is sadly and dangerously likely coming from a place within.

“Being civil also does not mean being quiet or shutting down protest and critique from non-majority cultures. Quite the contrary.

“In fact, our country’s democracy demands of us as citizens that we speak with the purpose of contributing to the American debate that leads us to a more perfect union. Without that, we’ve missed the point.”

She is right.

Civility is not the end; it’s a means to an end. It’s a framework to create conversations of substance where people agree to listen to each other and not belittle one another.

Civility is essential to our republic, and we are better off practicing it, as hard as it is today.

David Plazas is the director of opinion and engagement for the USA TODAY NETWORK Tennessee and The Tennessean. Call him at 615-259-8063, email him at dplazas@tennessean.com or tweet to him at [@davidplazas](https://twitter.com/davidplazas).

Kaffer

Continued from Page 1H

Civility is meant to be a framework, says Tonya Allen, president of the Detroit-based Skillman Foundation. Defining the rules of engagement for a conversation should be where the work starts, not where it ends, and it should never be used to silence opposing views. “I’m exhausted with us being polite,” Allen said. “I’m exhausted with everyone not talking about problems.”

And it is important to understand who is expected to be civil, and whose uncivil behavior is yet tolerated. Civility, says Anika Goss-Foster of Detroit Future City, often seems to mean “I’m expected to be tolerant of things I am not able to be tolerant of.” And sometimes, she said, “Me being civil is me being quiet when I’m being talked over.”

When I told folks here about why I’m not always keen on civility, I got one of two responses: Immediate recognition and agreement, or bafflement that came just as quickly.

The plea for a return to civility, for a lot of people, is tied to President Trump, for whom incivility is a personal calling card and who swept into office on a wave of white anger.

But anger isn’t inherently destructive. A person who is angry is telling you something important about her life. And some things — the poisoning of a city’s water, for instance, or decades of disinvestment in the state’s largest school district — are still worth getting angry about.

Nancy Kaffer is a columnist for the Detroit Free Press, where this piece first appeared.

Can America ‘build that wall’? Watch and see.



David Plazas
Columnist
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENN.

Zero tolerance policy on the U.S.-Mexico border. The affirmation by the Supreme Court to uphold President Trump’s authority to impose a travel ban for national security reasons.

Stymied efforts on reform in Congress.

The immigration issue is front and center in our politics again, and not just nationally.

Republican gubernatorial and congressional candidates in Tennessee have aired television ads railing against sanctuary cities — already banned twice by the Tennessee General Assembly — and for building President Donald Trump’s promised border wall.

While immigration is a federal responsibility and the border is about 1,000 miles away from Nashville, it obviously concerns residents across the Volunteer State, where 5 percent of the population is made up of foreign-born people.

That is why it is fitting to have a conversation in Nashville about how to build that wall and whether it is even possible to do it along the 2,000-mile border.

On Tuesday, July 24, The Tennessean will show “The Wall,” the hour-long documentary from the USA TODAY NETWORK’s Pulitzer Prize-winning series of the same name. (Learn more at <https://borderwallmovie.usatoday.com>).

How to get your tickets

You can RSVP for free tickets at: <https://tickets.usatoday.com/e/the-wall-a-usa-today-network-film-1>.

The Nashville Public Library is our sponsor and the public is invited to watch it at the downtown branch, 615 Church St. Doors open at 6 p.m. and the movie starts at 7 p.m.

Following the screening, I will be moderating a panel to discuss the movie:

■ Don Barnett of Brentwood, who has contributed to national media outlets and the Center for Immigration Studies, a research organization focused on pro-



Barnett



Gonzalez



Teatro

viding information on the consequences of legal and illegal immigration.

■ Jose

Gonzalez, co-founder and finance director of Conexión Américas, a Nashville-based nonprofit whose mission is to build a welcoming community and to create opportunities where Latino families belong, contribute and succeed.

■ Stephanie Teatro, the co-executive director of the Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition. She recently announced the creation of a new political action committee, TIRRC Votes, focused on empowering refugees and immigrants to engage in politics.

David Plazas is the director of opinion and engagement for the USA TODAY NETWORK – Tennessee and The Tennessean. Call him at (615) 259-8063, email him at dplazas@tennessean.com or tweet to him at [@davidplazas](https://twitter.com/davidplazas).

Insight

Event on voting and election security

What: “Why aren’t Tennesseans voting like they should? A conversation about security, disenfranchisement and democratic renewal”

Who: Organized by The Tennessean and Lipscomb University’s Nelson and Sue Andrews Institute for Civic Leadership

When: Monday, Aug. 27, 6-8 p.m.

Where: AM Burton Health Sciences Center, Collins Alumni Auditorium, Lipscomb University, 1 University Park Drive, Nashville, TN 37204

Specifics: Exploring this issue in a panel discussion and Q&A with: U.S. Congressman Jim Cooper, D-Nashville; Secretary of State Tre Hargett (Republican); State Sen. Steve Dickerson, R-West Nashville; and Shanna Singh Hughey, president of Think-Tennessee

Tickets: RSVP for your free tickets at event.tennessean.com

Don’t forget to vote

The Tennessee primary election is on Aug. 2.

Early voting goes through July 28.

Learn more at:
<https://sos.tn.gov/elections>



How to make voting great again in America



David Plazas
Columnist
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENN.

Here is an important takeaway from the infamous July 16 Helsinki, Finland, press conference between U.S. President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin:

After-the-fact affirmation that the Russian government meddled in the 2016 presidential election and that Putin’s regime may do so again in the 2018 midterm elections.

Put aside the president’s clumsy “would”-“wouldn’t” flap for a moment. Republican and Democratic lawmakers loudly sided with intelligence assessments that the meddling happened and that it is unacceptable, and that Russia is no friend to the United States and our democratic principles.

American voters deserve to know that their votes count and that they will be counted fairly and securely. This is our system.

We have seen numerous instances where voting has been compromised or placed at risk. Russians targeted 21 states in the 2016 election, according to the U.S. Homeland Security Department. While Tennessee was not among them, in May, a cyberattack occurred on the Knox County election commission website.

That is precisely why federal and state governments need to invest in making and keeping voting safe – and instilling confidence in citizens that our system works.

Another way to instill that confidence is to work hard – at the governmental, societal and individual levels – to ensure that voters actually come out to the polls to vote.

Take Tennessee, which ranked 50th in voter turnout and 40th in voter registration, according to the latest data from Pew Research Center. That’s unconscionable.

Moreover, voting in Tennessee midterm elections has been falling since 2006, according to data from the Tennessee Secretary of State’s office:

- 1998: 1,026,017
- 2002: 1,687,543
- 2006: 1,868,363
- 2010: 1,620,542
- 2014: 1,430,117

That is an 11 percent drop from 2006 to 2014. During that same period, Tennessee’s population grew by 7.4 percent. Something’s wrong.

Sure, it’s a failure of the citizen who chooses not to do his or her duty, but it is also a failure of government that could have made voting more

accessible and less onerous.

While the voter ideally should be informed and knowledgeable coming to the polls, he or she should also have the opportunity to exercise a choice in the most accessible way.

And there are things that Tennessee can do to make voting great again in the state.

What’s working in Tennessee

Despite accusations by the president and a short-lived commission on voting integrity that there was systemic voter fraud that involved millions of people, there were only 42 statewide cases of fraud found by Tennessee Secretary of State Tre Hargett and his staff in the 2016 election.

That’s a plus, and there are other positive things about the way voting works in the Volunteer State.

- Consider
1. We have early voting.
 2. We finally have online voter registration (<https://ovr.govote.tn.gov/>).

3. In 2017, the Tennessee General Assembly changed the “use it or lose it” law so that citizens’ names would not be purged from voter rolls if they had not voted after a few election cycles.

However, in light of the June 11 Supreme Court 5-4 decision to affirm a similar “use it or lose it” law in Ohio, Tennessee lawmakers might be tempted to change the law again.

They should resist that temptation.

What’s not working in Tennessee

Voter registration deadline

Right now, Tennessee voters must register to vote no later than 30 days before an election.

That sounds like enough time, but it is a disincentive in our “just-in-time” 21st century world.

What would happen if that changed to same-day registration?

Fifteen states now allow for same-day registration, according to Demos, a public policy organization, and that has led to higher voter turnout.

Voter fraud system

Tennessee uses a system called CrossCheck, which was developed by Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, who led Trump’s short-lived voter fraud committee.

CrossCheck checks names of voters and recommends purges. But, in 2017, research from Stanford University, the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard, Yale, and Microsoft Research

showed that the system was 99 percent inaccurate.

How can our state leaders have confidence in that? You get what you pay for, I guess.

Tennessee might consider using the Electronic Registration Information Center. Twenty-three states and the District of Columbia are using it, as of July 9. The most recent state is South Carolina.

The average cost per state is about \$32,000 annually.

That is a small investment for a state with a \$37 billion budget.

In addition, in a March guest column, Shanna Singh Hughey, president of the Nashville-based ThinkTennessee public policy organization, wrote that a report last year showed that Tennessee left \$30 million unspent for elections upgrades.

In addition, a 2018 ThinkTennessee poll showed 68 percent of Tennesseans believe the state should be doing more to safeguard elections.

“We can do more to safeguard our elections, and we need to do it before it’s too late,” she wrote.

Other ideas: Allowing for more types of IDs besides a driver’s license or state IDs to be used to vote; allowing automatic voter registration when someone gets his or her driver’s license; and allowing for mail-in ballots or absentee ballots that don’t require an excuse to use them.

According to the National Council of State Legislatures, 27 states and D.C. allow for an absentee ballot without an excuse and three states – Washington, Colorado, and Oregon – allow for all-mail voting.

Be a good citizen

I have written a lot about civility over these past few months for The Tennessean’s Civility Tennessee campaign.

Civility, in my mind, is not about the suppression of dissent or fake niceness. It is about being an active citizen.

I am encouraged by efforts like Project Register, created by U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper and state Sen. Steve Dickerson, to engage, first, high school students, and, now, employers to encourage active citizenship.

Our republic is depending on all of us.

David Plazas is the director of opinion and engagement for the USA TODAY NETWORK – Tennessee and opinion and engagement editor for The Tennessean. Call him at (615) 259-8063, email him at dplazas@tennessean.com or tweet to him at @davidplazas.

Opinion

■ **OUR PURPOSE:** To actively influence and impact a better quality of life in Middle Tennessee.

■ **OUR MISSION:** We stand for the First Amendment and freedom of information. We stand for civility. We fight for the voiceless. We welcome a diversity of opinions.

Clinton, Holt prove incivility is bipartisan



David Plazas
Columnist
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENN.

Solve this riddle: How are Hillary Clinton and a conservative Tennessee lawmaker alike?

Give up?
Clinton, the unsuccessful 2016 Democratic presidential nominee, and Rep. Andy Holt, R-Dresden (West Tennessee), both have drawn a line in the sand by claiming their side is the only one that is right.

It is proof positive that incivility is bipartisan.

This week, Clinton and Holt made it into my Civility Tennessee campaign presentation, which I delivered to nearly 100 Minneapolis business and civic leaders during their InterCity Leadership Visit to Woolworth on Fifth in downtown Nashville.

In case you have not followed Civility Tennessee, it is an effort started by The Tennessean Editorial Board earlier this year to encourage, promote and practice civil discourse through in-person and virtual events, thought pieces and community conversations.

Our main purpose is to do the opposite of what most people think civility is

all about.
It is not about fake niceness, and it is not about avoiding hard conversations. Rather, civility is about being good citizens who confront tough issues, solve problems, make efforts to foment respect among diverse groups of people, and participate in civil society, for example, by voting.

So, what did Hillary Clinton and Andy Holt do wrong?

In an interview last Tuesday with CNN’s Christiane Amanpour, Clinton, the former first, lady, U.S. senator from New York, and Obama era secretary of state, made a shocking statement for someone whose presidential campaign slogan was “Stronger Together.”

Clinton told Amanpour: “You cannot be civil with a political party that wants to destroy what you stand for, what you care about. That’s why I believe, if we are fortunate enough to win back the House and or the Senate, that’s when civility can start again.”

That kind of language is divisive, which might win some elections, but it does not heal or restore communities at a time when we need more optimism, hope and goodwill.

Clinton should know better.
Holt, on the other, seems to be proud-

ly boorish.
On Sunday, in reply to a tweet by the Twitter account Nashville Resist, Holt wrote: “What bunch of idiots...” (preceded by three smiley face emojis).

That was Holt being Holt.
What was disappointing, however, was his decision to denounce and boycott a series of lunches of the West Tennessee Economic Development Caucus that would include presentations by, of all people, Democrats — among them, U.S. Senate candidate and former Tennessee governor Phil Bredesen.

On Oct. 1, Holt wrote an email to dozens of state House and Senate members, saying: “I’m a member of this Caucus, but I want it to be VERY CLEAR, that I am not, and have no intention of EVER hosting Phil Bredesen at any event with which I’m associated! Who’s (sic) idea was this?”

The message Holt — a leader of this state — sent is that you only listen to people who think like you.

What would Howard Baker do?

The late legendary U.S. Sen. Howard Baker of Tennessee, a Republican, had a famous saying about listening and keeping an open mind: “You should always go through life working on the assumption that the other guy might be

right.”
Maybe the other guys or ladies are wrong, but how would you know if you tune them out?

Our imperfect nation formed out of a compromise between people with wildly different views on a variety of issues and has endured through war, bloodshed and controversy.

That is why civility — and substitute it with the word “respect,” if you like — matters.

We have been asking dozens of candidates in Tennessee if they will commit to be civil during this campaign.

So far, all have checked the “Yes” box.
While the tone of some negative ads seem to be a tacit rejection of that, they are on the record saying they would commit to being civil toward their opponents.

Voters should take note and consider favoring those candidates who are following through.

Maybe Clinton and Holt will be inspired to change their tune.

David Plazas is the director of opinion and engagement for the USA TODAY NETWORK Tennessee and opinion and engagement editor for The Tennessean. Call him at (615) 259-8063, email him at dplazas@tennessean.com or tweet to him at @davidplazas.

#BeTheGift that saves lives with organ donation



Your Turn
Jill Grandas
Guest columnist

I am sharing a picture of myself with a Big Red Bow on my head to draw attention to the need for more organ and tissue donors, and I hope you’ll do the same.

Here’s why: 115,000 Americans are on the organ transplant waiting list; 20 die each day, still waiting. More than 90 percent of Americans believe registering as an organ and tissue donor is the right thing to do, but only 38 percent of

eligible Tennesseans actually do it.
To close this gap and end the waiting list, Tennessee Donor Services recently launched a nationwide social media campaign called #BeTheGift. It’s a fresh and fun way to encourage people to register online as organ and tissue donors. Everyone can use the Big Red Bow filter and register in his or her own state.

Organ and tissue donation is not a subject on everyone’s mind. People generally avoid talking and thinking about death, which means we also avoid talking and thinking about donation. #BeTheGift aims to break through that silence. It appeals to Americans’ sense of service, calling on all of us to #BeThe-

Gift to others.
If more people #BeTheGift, more people live. If everyone takes a minute to register online, we can save and improve thousands of lives. Even if you’re already registered, we need you to share your Big Red Bows. It’s a fantastic way to spread the word.
To participate in the #BeTheGift campaign, simply:
■ Go to www.BeTheGiftToday.com/.
■ Register as a donor (if you’re not already).
■ Use the Big Red Bow photo filter to gift-wrap yourself.
■ Share your photo across your social media channels with the hashtag #Be-

TheGift.
■ Challenge your friends to #BeTheGift, too.
As a proud resident of the Volunteer State, I encourage you – my fellow Tennesseans – to participate in this life-saving campaign. If you believe in organ and tissue donation, go to www.BeTheGiftToday.com, put a Big Red Bow on your picture, and share it. #BeTheGift that helps us save lives. It’s fast. It’s fun. It’s free. And it’s important.
You can #BeTheGift that saves lives.
Jill Grandas is executive director of Tennessee Donor Services.

LETTERS TO EDITOR

Blue wave is coming

I am disappointed in Lamar Alexander’s yes vote for Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation.

I hope he is aware that his actions have awakened the fury of Tennessee women and we are counting down the days until November 2020 when we can remove him from office.

He does not represent the people of Tennessee. By his actions, he has told the women of Tennessee that the stories of assault victims are invalid and they will not be believed.

He has placed another member of the “good old boys” club on the Supreme Court and told the men of America their actions do not have consequences. The blue wave is coming for Sen. Alexander.
Terrie Peterson, Antioch 37013

Blackburn not listening

It’s been widely reported that Kentucky and Barkley Lakes are victims of an invasive species of fish known as Asian carp.

These fish have migrated into our rivers and streams from the Mississippi River. The Asian carp are threatening the ecosystem and associated fishing and water recreation that is enjoyed by millions on these two lakes.

However, Congresswoman Marsha Blackburn has done absolutely nothing to combat these very harmful fish. I have not seen or heard where she has voiced any



support to the ongoing efforts by the state and federal governments to save our two lakes from this menacing aquatic animal even though both of these lakes are within her Congressional district. These fish cross county, congressional and state lines.

Our representatives in Washington need to take note of the harm Asian carp is having back home. How can she ignore

the pleas of anglers and boaters in her own backyard?

When you compare Congresswoman Blackburn to Phil Bredesen, the contrast is clear. Phil Bredesen heard about problems fishermen have with Asian carp back in May and immediately came up with a plan to try and get these fish under control. Since he announced his proposal, other Senators and Representatives have

joined Bredesen’s chorus. But not Marsha Blackburn.

Blackburn’s been in Congress 16 years. That’s long enough. I’m voting for Phil Bredesen.

Joe Hill, Union City 38261

Lee’s misunderstanding

Candidate for governor Bill Lee has revealed on his website and been quoted in the Tennessean a lack of understanding of the principle and practice of separation of church and state.

Lee said, “The phrase ‘separation of church and state’ has been twisted. It was intended to keep the government out of the church, but not to keep people of faith out of the government.”

It is not keeping people of faith out of government.

The Founders knew the prejudicial and detrimental effects of unions and partial unions of church and state from Europe and the colonies. They decided to take a different course.

They said that no government official may promote or subsidize his religion. They would oppose the school vouchers advocated by Bill Lee by which money mostly goes to certain religious schools. To make things worse, it is taken from the public schools.

We have inherited a great gift: the absolute right of conscience resting on a wall of separation between church and state. We must defend the First Amendment.

Charles Sumner, Nashville 37221

TENNESSEAN.COM/OPINION

Go online to see the week’s editorials, Tennessee Voices and letters, and share your view on the issues. Subscribers, please go to www.tennessean.com/activate to access additional digital content.

QUESTIONS?

Opinion Engagement Editor David Plazas
615-259-8063; dplazas@tennessean.com

WRITE US

Letters: 250 words or fewer. Name, city and ZIP are published. Address and phone number required for verification only.

Tennessee Voices op-eds: 500-600 words or fewer. Include a short biographical sentence and high-resolution JPEG headshot (at least 200 KB).

Email to: letters@tennessean.com

Mail to: Opinions, The Tennessean, 1100 Broadway, Nashville TN 37203

Fax to: 615-259-8093, Attention: Opinions

EDITORIAL BOARD

MICHAEL A. ANASTASI
Vice President/News, USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee
Vice President & Editor, The Tennessean

MARIA DE VARENNE, Executive Editor, The Tennessean

DAVID PLAZAS, Opinion & Engagement Director, USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee
Opinion & Engagement Editor, The Tennessean

Opinion

■ **OUR PURPOSE:** To actively influence and impact a better quality of life in Middle Tennessee.

■ **OUR MISSION:** We stand for the First Amendment and freedom of information. We stand for civility. We fight for the voiceless. We welcome a diversity of opinions.

How to be civil at Thanksgiving gathering



David Plazas
Columnist
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENN.

I have broken a lot of bread with very different people this past year.

This has yielded some rich and sometimes uncomfortable conversations with people holding a wide range of political views, from left to right, and living in urban and rural areas.

Most have been in the Nashville area, though I have traveled around Tennessee a few times for others.

One memorable conversation involved a retired conservative African-American female professor and a white liberal gay activist over biscuits and coffee at a Cracker Barrel. There were some tense moments, but the breakfast ended with a hug.

Not all discussions end like that, but I have entered them with the intent of living up to the expectations The Tennessean Editorial Board set up when we launched Civility Tennessee:

- 1 Get out my comfort zone
- 2 Listen more and speak less, but more thoughtfully
- 3 Find respectful ways to respond to

people with whom I disagree.

While the official start date for Civility Tennessee was in January, the soft launch happened last November when we asked readers to share their best advice for how to handle conversations at Thanksgiving.

It was the first Thanksgiving of the Trump administration after a polarizing presidential election.

Thanksgiving can be such a stressful time with family and friend drama. Mix politics in and it can make for a strenuous, stomach-churning and sweat-inducing day.

The advice that readers gave is timeless.

Three big takeaways:

- Challenge your own views
- Don't start unnecessary fights
- Our leaders need to model civility.

After the most recent midterm election, the last of these did not always materialize.

That is why, if we care about being civil to each other, citizens need to model that behavior and not wait for others to do it for us.

Here are 5 tips to keep your sanity

Civility Tennessee has produced

multiple articles; monthly physical and virtual events, including a book club; Facebook Live conversations on talking about racism, gun violence and sexual assault; and a yearlong drumbeat on improving voter registration and turnout.

The lessons from this year inspired me to share these tips that will hopefully make for better conversations at the table.

- 1 If you go to a Thanksgiving meal, be present and attentive to others
- 2 You don't have to talk about politics if you don't want to
- 3 Take some time to free yourself from your phone to listen to the conversation
- 4 Speak up if you have something to say, but be willing to listen to others' replies
- 5 If there is an expectation that tough topics will come up, set some ground rules.

This last tip is what has kept our events remarkably free of drama.

We have set the expectation that these events will be "third places" where ideas will be discussed, where questions and comments will be respectful, and where people understand they have a responsibility to be present.

Return to 'dignity and discipline'

Even setting ground rules will not prevent a rude comment or an argument. We are only human.

Rather than playing the blame game or punching back, hosts should encourage the practice of apology and forgiveness when things get heated.

Some people have told me that civility is impossible in this political era.

I disagree.

It is tough, no doubt, but I remind myself of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s call for "dignity and discipline" and that civility is more than manners.

Civility is about being a good citizen.

Civility is about treating others with respect and expecting them to treat us with respect.

Civility is not faking niceness, avoiding hard conversations or being a passive bystander.

Civility is about taking responsibility for our actions and for the betterment of our community.

Happy Thanksgiving!

David Plazas is the director of opinion and engagement for the USA TODAY NETWORK in Tennessee and opinion and engagement editor for The Tennessean.

US 'nicest place': Syrian refugee's falafel shop

Your Turn

Bruce Kelley
Guest columnist

I want to tell you a classic Reader's Digest story.

One day in February, residents of Bennington County in Vermont gathered to discuss an influx of refugees into New York City that had brought headlines of dislocated, suffering children.

Despite bitter cold, the meeting hall was standing room only. The Vermonters, who generations earlier spirited fugitive slaves from farmhouse to farmhouse until they reached Canada, cooked up a plan to help: They would invite 60 of the children to Vermont that summer to learn the language and customs of their new home while their parents in New York put their lives together.

Any lingering doubts about welcoming refugees from a foreign country into American towns were swept away when

the children piled off the train from New York. To quote from the piece we published, "Why they were just children!"

The year? It was 1939. The refugees? Europeans escaping the Holocaust.

For 96 years, Reader's Digest has told stories of Americans who come together to do good things — and often those tales involve a community welcoming outsiders. One such community is Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh, where 11 people were murdered last month by a gunman who resented their welcoming spirit toward refugees.

As we mourn this tragedy, it is heartening to know there are places in America where love is blooming in place of hate. We became acquainted with many of them in our annual search for the "Nicest Place in America."

There's no more classic American tale than that of Yassin's Falafel House in Knoxville. Its proprietor, Yassin Terou, is a refugee from a horrific civil war in

Syria who came here in 2011 with almost nothing but a gift for preparing Syria's signature food, the falafel.

Just six years later, his well-loved restaurant is a place where Knoxvilleans of all faiths, preferences and political persuasions come together to share meals in a "safe place" for "all types," as signs around the restaurant declare.

Inspired by his generosity, Yassin's neighbors and customers nominated his restaurant for our contest.

After a public vote (63,000 votes were cast), Yassin's Falafel House emerged from the pack.

Here's one more classic Reader's Digest story that I hope will remind you of how welcoming America can be.

A small group of locals gathered at the First Baptist church for an annual holiday event called Welcome the Stranger. It's a Christian ritual with Jewish roots, where neighbors greet neighbors, friends, and anyone else who

passes by with warmth and compassion, celebrating the season.

But this year, not everyone was in the spirit. As the speakers stood before the crowd to share their holiday thoughts, a man draped in an American flag began yelling that he was out of a job and immigrants were to blame.

As it happened, a local businessman who was an immigrant took the stage, preparing to speak. He invited the man onstage so immigrant and native-born American could hold the flag together. The man refused. So the immigrant waded into the crowd, invited the man to dinner and offered him a job. When they parted, they shook hands.

As you may have guessed, that immigrant businessman is Yassin Terou, whose restaurant is the 2018 Nicest Place in America.

Bruce Kelley is the editor in chief of Reader's Digest. Follow him on Twitter: @brucekelley

LETTERS TO EDITOR

Me first

Re: "Disrupting and disrespecting," by Mike Dioguardi, Nov. 12.

I am responding to the letter by Mike Dioguardi published in The Tennessean. The second paragraph indicates that the protester resisted the request of the "uniformed Nashville policeman." However, he describes the intervention and aid from a "short but stocky Black Officer."

So, why was such a specific description of the black officer necessary? Are we to assume that the "uniformed Nashville policeman" was tall and white? These kind of subtle thoughts and innuendos continue to fuel racial unrest.

I do not condone disrespect and disruptions at any time. However, racism and discrimination seem to be on national and international display every day from our leaders and their political party. Compassion for others has taken a back seat to selfishness and "me first."

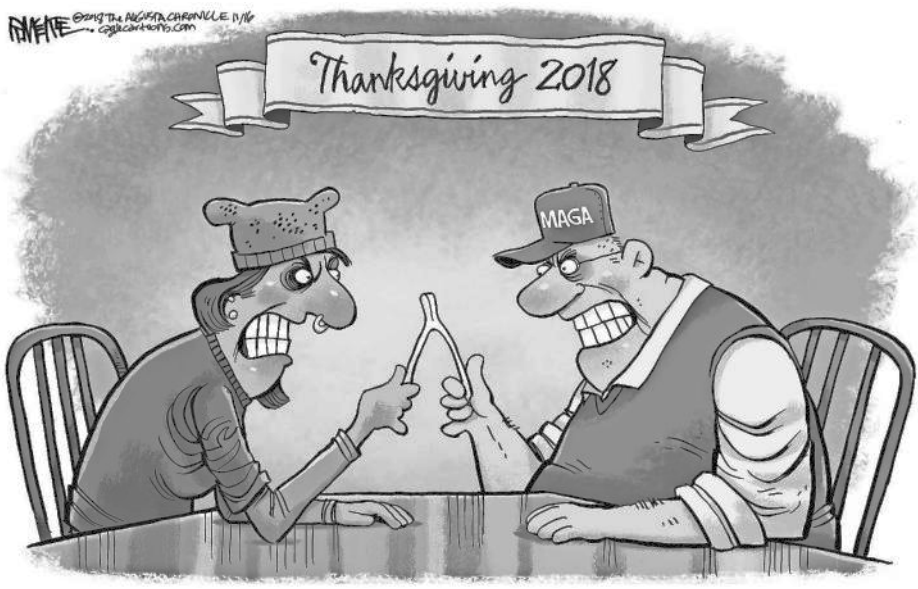
Anne McNair, Nashville 37207

We know what works

Re: "Shape up Tennessee" by Michael Bolduc, Nov. 9.

In his somewhat insulting letter to the editor, Mr. Bolduc says Republicans are either rich white guys or uninformed rural diehards. I think the letter writer is the one who is uninformed.

As has been shown in the past two



years, the conservative form of government has worked beautifully. The economy is booming, unemployment would be zero if it weren't for those who choose not to work. In my opinion, we Republicans are the ones who know what works and what doesn't work.

Instead of moving toward the center, Democrats are steadily becoming socialists. This is not good for our country.

John Bridges, Nashville 37217

The inability to forgive

Say what you will about Christianity and how its tenets and structure have been misused through history, but one of the great central ideas of the belief is forgiveness.

This is so important because when we feel that we have received forgiveness in our lives, we understand how important that gift is and we give it to others. Un-

derstanding and admitting to flaws can lead to empathy and understanding.

When asked about his religion and if he had asked for forgiveness, president Trump said, "No. I don't have anything to ask forgiveness for." This is so central to understanding him. He has an inability to forgive and is driven by revenge and getting even for the smallest of slights.

His mentor, Roy Cohn, taught him to never admit to anything. Life is a scorecard for him. Altruism or good for goodness sake just doesn't make sense to him.

He is damaged. And we see this as his anger and lashing out increase when he is questioned on possible mistakes. He always takes credit, never takes responsibility.

Admitting that you're human and fallible can actually be a freeing and positive experience. It's a shame that no one ever taught this man the power of giving and receiving forgiveness.

Matthew Carlton, Nashville 37216

Dorms should not be co-ed

On Nov. 7, this newspaper ran a story that seven rapes had occurred in University of Tennessee residence halls during the fall 2018 semester.

What did those who decided that co-ed dormitories were a good idea expect? Less campus sexual activity? Higher moral standards, generally? What?

Gene A. Russell, Nashville 37215

TENNESSEAN.COM/OPINION

Go online to see the week's editorials, Tennessee Voices and letters, and share your view on the issues. Subscribers, please go to www.tennessean.com/activate to access additional digital content.

QUESTIONS?

Opinion Engagement Editor David Plazas
615-259-8063; dplazas@tennessean.com

WRITE US

Letters: 250 words or fewer. Name, city and ZIP are published. Address and phone number required for verification only.

Tennessee Voices op-eds: 500-600 words or fewer. Include a short biographical sentence and high-resolution JPEG headshot (at least 200 KB).

Email to: letters@tennessean.com

Mail to: Opinions, The Tennessean, 1100 Broadway, Nashville TN 37203

Fax to: 615-259-8093, Attention: Opinions

EDITORIAL BOARD

MICHAEL A. ANASTASI
Vice President/News, USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee
Vice President & Editor, The Tennessean

MARIA DE VARENNE, Executive Editor, The Tennessean

DAVID PLAZAS, Opinion & Engagement Director, USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee
Opinion & Engagement Editor, The Tennessean