

Useful Thinking: The Beauty of Town Halls

“A lady spoke about her father at Pearl Harbor seeing the blips on the radar and his supervisor didn’t want to wake up the general at 5 a.m. on a Sunday. The lesson “wake up, see the attack on our democracy.”

On Saturday April 26, an estimated 300-plus people gathered for a town hall meeting in Bismarck. The gathering was at the Horizon middle school where two of my children had been students. I had flashbacks to my earliest memories of town hall meetings.

I started school at Heaton, ND. Heaton had a “hall” which was the gathering point for that community. Students from the school would walk the two short blocks from the school to the hall for play practice. The high school kids put on a play, Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” and during intermission between acts of the play, I pulled a Radio Flyer wagon across the stage with a box of apples. My line was “oh boy, Snow Boy” which was the brand of apples you could buy at Jasper Brown’s grocery store. My youngest brother Charles was Tiny Tim. Heaton is an official ghost town — school, grocery store, elevator, bank, hardware store, and hall are all gone. On Saturday at Horizon, I recognized many of the people there.

Marcia and I have now been in Bismarck 40 years this month. I was given a chance to speak to the group before the open mic sessions. I looked at the crowd gathered and was nearly overcome.

My opening line was “I have not come to speak truth to power, rather to harness the power of truth to stop America’s descent into madness.”

The people I saw in front of me were kind, vastly intelligent, courageous people. Some had taught my children, some were neighbors, others were in my Bible reading group, and some were people I had worked with in government and through the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives.

Two other speakers followed me and then 24 people waited in two lines for their turn at the microphone. One speaker said the revolutionary war was fought by farmers against the most powerful military in the world. It took 8 years, he said, but we kicked their a—. The lesson, “endurance wins.”

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Patrie to wake up the general at 5 a.m. on a Sunday. The lesson “wake up, see the attack on our democracy.”

One lady spoke about her metastatic breast cancer that had spread to her spine. She asked the congressional delegation, “cancer has weakened my spine, what is your excuse?” The lesson, “stand up for your constituents.”

One lady in a wheelchair declared herself a 3rd generation Ukrainian. Her lesson “do not abandon Ukraine.”

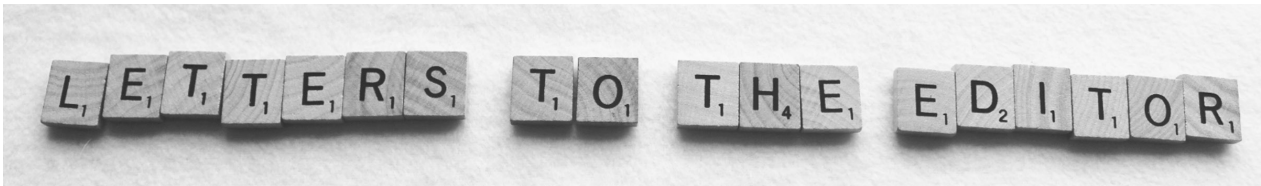
One speaker asked the delegation “are you becoming the kind of person you always wanted to be?” The lesson, “don’t give up on your own integrity.”

Senator Hoeven, Senator Cramer, Congresswoman Julie Fedorchak, you need not fear a public town hall. You do need to say what greater good you intend by slashing vital programs for Americans. I shared lines from my Son Ben’s poem “If we stick-we’ll win,” a throwback to the Non-Partisan League days.

“Stick out from the crowd,
the false prophets of profit,
the forked tongue purveyors of policy, we see now
hawking pews from the church of democracy to pay sacrifice to their other gods.

Have some faith!
If we stick, we’ll win!”
You know how “A Christmas Carol” ends? Ebenezer Scrooge has a conversion after being visited by three ghosts, and my little brother Chuck, as Tiny Tim, is on the shoulders of Bill Brown, who played Bob Cratchit, at the Heaton Hall. Chuck says “God bless us everyone!”

Bill Patrie is a retired planner and economic developer having worked in regional and state-wide positions. He is the author of “Creating Co-op Fever” printed by USDA as a service bulletin, and “100 Stories of Hope” a book about his interviews with 100 people in poverty.



Honoring the Legacy of our ‘Retiring Community College President’

Dear Editor,
After decades (actually 36 years) our community college president, Doug Darling, is doing the unthinkable: trading meetings and emails for hunting and fishing!

As he prepares for this new adventure, I find it fitting to pause and reflect on the remarkable legacy he leaves behind — not just within the college’s walls but throughout the entire community.

Doug often appears understated and low key, but he quietly works hard and just “gets it done!” I remember when he was interviewing for a position as a marketing teacher, I asked him if he thought he was up for the job. With a twinkle in his eye, he listed his achievements and confidently assured me he was. As we worked together over the years, he more than delivered on his promise!

For the past 13 years our president has been the guiding force behind the institution, steering it toward excellence with both wisdom and heart. Under his leadership, the college stabilized enrollment, even through Covid and started new programs. He spearheaded the

installation of a wind turbine that supports energy at the college and with it, the wind turbine program. With the support and assistance from legislators and community members, President Darling brought the first capital project in 35 years to Lake Region State College: The Bergstrom Building, giving updates to other career and tech programs on college campus. His efforts also led to the introduction of a precision ag program and its success led to more growth on campus: the addition of the Hofstad Precision Ag Building.

Doug has always supported initiatives that make education more accessible for everyone, including scholarships and outreach programs that welcomed students who might have otherwise never considered higher education. Additionally, he championed an extensive apprenticeship program in which students get work experience throughout the state. the program started with a whopping \$485,000 grant to kick it off.

During Doug’s tenure, the college hired a skilled grant writer and secured several

million in grants. With the support of the college staff, the community, and state matching grants the college foundation assets grew from \$4,535,862 to \$16,250,000. Great job everyone!

Doug could often be found cheering at local sports events especially in the hockey arena supporting the hockey program he initiated at the college. He understood that a thriving college is intertwined with a thriving community, and he worked hard to foster that connection. Those additional activities not only increased student numbers, but also the numbers of community members attending events at the college. He leaves having started one more dream: an activity center LRSC can call its own, complete with its own colors and logos.

Of course, no tribute would be complete without acknowledging his quiet humor and his love for the outdoors. To those who know him, it is no surprise that he started the first Collegiate Shooting Program in the state, which rapidly grew to the other campuses. He also coaches the high school Firebirds team

and the 4-H teams, both which serve as great feeder programs for the college team — and one more avenue for student success.

As he steps into retirement, I imagine his calendar filling up with fishing and hunting trips, and perhaps an attempt at perfecting a new recipe. He and Teresa excel at organizing events, whether it’s a book club party or a President’s dinner to raise funds for the College foundation.

We will miss his steady hand at the helm, but we know that his legacy is firmly anchored in the achievements and progress he inspired with the support of a strong and vibrant community, a remarkable wife, Teresa, and extremely capable faculty and staff, and a tremendous student body! I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our retiring president. May his next chapter be filled with as much joy, laughter, and accomplishment as the years he gave to us.

Warm regards,
Sharon Etemad, Ed D, former Lake Region State College President.

Verified by phone, May 15, 2025 — LAO

LETTERS POLICY

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The Devils Lake Journal welcomes letters to the editor and guest columns (preferably on local issues). The writer’s full name, signature, home address and telephone number must be included

with the submission so we can verify it. Including letters with multiple signatures. Address and telephone number are not published in the paper. We reserve the right to edit all submissions for potential libelous content,

good taste, grammar, punctuation, length and spelling. Due to space limitations, we request letters to be 300 words or less and guest columns 800 words or less. Submissions should be sent to the Devils Lake Jour-

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Exception: During an election year cycle all submissions favoring one candidate over another, or one party over another must be a paid political advertisement.

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