

In today's politics, voting for vs. against

If my Facebook news feed is anywhere close to being a reliable barometer, Donald Trump wouldn't stand a chance in November. It's not like I don't have Republican Facebook friends. But only one of them seems to like The Donald. Others continue to post articles and memes reflecting their conservative (or libertarian) views on taxation, regulation and other hot buttons, but have not given any hints as to which candidates in the GOP field they might be backing.

I suppose most of them will support the Republican nominee, whoever it turns out to be. That includes Trump, although I suspect most Republicans I know would have to hold their noses in the voting booth. To them, it's ABC: Anybody but Clinton. Or Bernie Sanders, definitely not him.

Which brings me to the other trend on the ole news feed. Several of my Facebook friends passionately "feel the Bern," and let me know it. Every. Single. Day.

And every one of them apparently refuses to consider voting for Hillary (the presumptive Democratic nominee) in November. They cannot abide her acceptance of massive campaign contributions from fossil-fuel producers and big banks, her vote for the Iraq War as a U.S. senator and other transgressions.

But five will get you 10 they hold their noses in November too. They will ultimately decide having HRC pick the next Supreme Court justice would be preferable to having a Republican add yet another right-wing ideologue to the court.

Bottom line: No matter what your politics, we don't seem to vote for someone nearly so often as we vote against someone.

The occasional exception seems to come mostly at the local level. In the last race for Howard County executive, for instance, the overwhelming majority of people I encountered who had an opinion supported Allan Kittleman or Courtney Watson because they believed one or the other was the person who should get the job, not because they thought the other is a crook or a demagogue or evil incarnate.

But as the pay-to-play culture of American politics becomes more entrenched and the major political parties



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become increasingly incentivized to vilify each other, we will see the politics of negativity creep further into local elections and government.

This is one of the reasons that we must take measures such as a proposal from County Council members **Jon Weinstein** and Jen Terrasa to put to referendum the idea of public financing for local election campaigns. Democracy is a fragile thing.

Green with empathy

Back when my hair was still red, people would assume that I'm Irish. Genealogical explorations by relatives, though, point to origins in Germany (Dad's side) and England (Mom's side).

Nonetheless, everyone is supposed to be Irish today. Like Christmas and Halloween, St. Patrick's Day started out as a simple religious observance but evolved into a more generalized celebration, an occasion to have fun. As such, it's something everyone, no matter what their religion or ethnicity might be, can enjoy.

Cinco de Mayo has taken root north of the border as Mexicans migrate and bring their traditions to the United States, much as the Irish did in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Cinco de Mayo has taken on much the same tenor as St. Patrick's Day. Granted, to most of us it now means little more than drink specials, only with Corona instead of Guinness. But in its U.S. incarnation, the holiday has become a sort of Mexican St. Paddy's Day. On May 5, we're all Mexican. Chinese New Year has that same flavor in some places.

Could that chance to walk in the shoes of another culture, even superficially, lead us all to a greater understanding of one another? Perhaps it's too much to hope for, but what if every one of us throughout the year got to the chance to be from someplace else, to better appreciate our cultural differences by inhabiting them one by one?

On Bastille Day, we'd all be French. At Passover, we'd all be Jewish. On Juneteenth, we're all black. On the first day of Ramadan, we're all Muslims.

I've had worse ideas.

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