

# Don't let political division turn violent

Moves against White House officials reveal a deepening and noxious divide



Cathy Young

In the wake of the Trump administration-created border crisis in which unauthorized migrants seeking asylum were detained and separated from their children, there has been a surge of anger directed at administration officials and other public figures who defend President Donald Trump.

Over the weekend, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders and her fellow diners were asked to leave a restaurant in Lexington, Virginia. In a more confrontational scene, Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen was run out of a restaurant in Washington by protesters yelling "Shame!" and then targeted by demonstrators at her home. At a rally in Los Angeles, Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), a fiery leader of the anti-Trump resistance, encouraged her followers to "absolutely harass" Trump Cabinet officials in pub-

lic places.

In an already hypertoxic political environment, this is a dangerous turn.

In social media debates, those urging against escalation of hostilities have been derided as appeasers. "We're really having a debate on whether we have to be civil to people who tear babies & children away from their parents, leading to incalculable trauma? [Expletive] civility," tweeted Jeet Heer, editor-in-chief of The New Republic.

The problem with such reasoning, of course, is that it opens the door to harassment of public officials and public figures for a wide range of reasons. America is a big and polarized country. A sizable portion of the population, for instance, passionately believes that abortion is equivalent to child murder. What happens if right-to-life activists decide that their cause is more important than peaceful coexistence with fellow Americans, and that it's absurd to debate whether to be civil to people who (as they see it) rip babies apart in the womb?



Press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders was booted from the Red Hen restaurant in Virginia because she works for the president.

Plenty of other issues could be seen as urgent enough to justify throwing out basic civility. Why not go after public officials who are portrayed as soft on rapists or sympathetic to suspected Islamist terrorists? Why stop at officials and spare, say, journalists accused of promoting evil causes or "fake news"?

The issue is not that shaming Trump administration officials is too mean. For what it's worth, I believe the Lexington restaurant owner was perfectly within her

rights to turn away Sanders. It's that confrontations can easily descend into violence. In her remarks at the rally, Waters declared, "If you see anybody from that Cabinet in a restaurant, in a department store, at a gasoline station, you get out and you create a crowd, and you push back on them!" What she is advocating probably amounts to criminal harassment — but it could quickly turn into something much worse, especially if Trump supporters show up to defend

their own.

Meanwhile, some left-wing Twitter posters who mock calls for civility defend riots. And there are commentators both on the right (columnist Kurt Schlichter) and on the left (Brooklyn-based writer David Klion) who openly fantasize about violence toward political enemies.

To be sure, pro-Trump politicians such as former House Speaker Newt Gingrich deserve only derision when they lecture people on civility and respect. But Trump critics should beware of joining the race to the bottom. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) were right to condemn Waters' remark.

"Civility" need not mean politeness: One can have vigorous protests and harsh words without crossing the line into harassment. Sometimes, extreme action is necessary; but in 2018 America, we still have normal avenues of political action from demonstrating to voting.

The least we can do is dial down the language of war.

Cathy Young is a contributing editor to Reason magazine.



The MetroCard is to be replaced with a "tap-and-go" system, right. There will be a six-year phase-in starting next year.

## Top priority should be to fix the subways

I think most of us who ride the New York City subway system can live with using a MetroCard for the foreseeable future, but what we cannot continue to live with are the delays, cancellations and over-

crowding that we face on a daily basis ["MetroCard in its last days, News, June 14].

If the Metropolitan Transportation Authority has its way, we'll have a state-of-the-art payment system for one of the most broken-down transportation systems in the country.

The MTA should invest the time and money into fixing the system instead of putting lipstick on a pig!

Karen Boldizar, Garden City

## Long Beach tragedy raises concerns

Another summer starts, and we read about adults and children missing in the surf on Long Island ["Boy, 8, missing in ocean," News, June 20].

The article reported that two U.S. Coast Guard helicopters were dispatched from Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and Atlantic City, New Jersey to assist in the search for an 8-year-old boy. That sentence had to scare any Long Island boater, swimmer or parent. Nassau and Suffolk counties alone have a population of about nearly 3 million, many of whom enjoy the ocean.

Out of more than two dozen Coast Guard bases in Nassau and Suffolk, which were

opened as far back as the 1800s, only seven stations remain.

Our local and state police do an excellent job with air support, but our federal tax dollars should justify at least one Coast Guard station equipped to respond with air rescue 24/7 to emergencies anywhere on Long Island.

Rick Hannsgen, West Islip

Anyone can access the ocean in Long Beach, even though some of the beach entrances have signs indicating swimming is not permitted when no lifeguards are on duty.

Nobody should expect signage to keep children away from the water! On nice spring days, the city should offer minimum wage part-time jobs for people who would like to sit on the lifeguard chairs and catch sun, play with their cellphones, read books or whatever else they want to do, as long as they watch the beach and notify au-

thorities immediately if someone enters the water.

Undoubtedly more people would apply for the jobs than are needed, from college students to retired senior citizens!

Ken Gillespie, Freeport

## Chef Anthony Bourdain is missed

Thank you Verne Gay for your wonderful reporting on Anthony Bourdain's death ["Top chef, storyteller," News, June 9].

We cannot travel with him anymore, for he is now out in the universe using the Big Dipper to collect stars to put into his bowl of noodle soup. He was the best!

Susan Starley, Medford

SEND MAIL to letters@newsday.com. Letters become the property of Newsday. They will be edited and may be republished in all media.