

PERSPECTIVE

Social Media and Civility

I'm not very good at the social media thing. I've had moments in my old business (investment management) when I'd been told to embrace it and "build a personal brand." More recently, as a teacher, writer and speaker, I've had others urge me to "get my ideas out there" via social media. I've dabbled, with some success and comfort with the more professional, longer-form oriented content sites such as LinkedIn – less so with the 280 character-limit, free-for-all that is Twitter.

by
PETER M. LUPOFF

On Twitter, what is seductive is also its (and our) failing: you can reach and react to anyone – you can be "heard," but likewise, anyone can single you out as well. On paper, assuming a medium and participants committed to civil discourse, it's an awesome idea! But these qualifiers aren't the real world. The forum is largely indifferent to courteousness and its participants mostly seem to relish in verbal fist-cuffs and mob-style attack. So while it might feel liberating to tell a politician he/she is a "jackass," you must be prepared to hear back from them – perhaps by a mass of people (or bots) that disagree in none to polite style.

The dilemma is: that as technology advances and we opt for the convenience of consuming media through our devices, we digest information in ever-smaller morsels. A consequence of this is that civility seemingly reduces commensurate with characters, perhaps exponentially so. In the haste to be heard, to make a point, discourse becomes bombast.

It may smack some as old thinking to bemoan the reduced importance of the long form: books, lengthy articles, for that matter, extended debate, discussion and documentary. After all, the internet is "democratizing" -- we reach more people with more digital content, but ideas delivered in bytes lack subtlety. In choosing breadth over depth we may be moving the notion of discussion and reason, of reasonableness at all, to bytes as well. And therefore, as we strive to make a point in hyper-short-form to

a broader, anonymous mass of potential participants, we sacrifice civility.

I had my own run in with this last week. My puttering on Twitter has mostly been about business and investing. But I saw a topic I was hot about and read a particularly idiotic, untrue short missive regarding it. I called BS (with reasoned explanation) on the writer in a response. Not only did he engage ungraciously, but his followers piled on – some re-tweeting ugly, belligerent comments and accusation ... I was shocked. I thought I could dish it out, albeit in a reasoned way, and receive back in like-kind. Nope.

So no, I do not think Twitter is liberating in any real sense, though its rise as a means of engagement on content dovetails well with angry and anxious Americans that want to be heard. But in this short form 280-character digital yelling, is anyone really listening?

In the field of behavioral science, it's been well tested and considered that we humans have a hard time changing our minds once it's made up. Given this genetic predisposition, what chance do any of us have in influencing others through platforms like Twitter, when we are 1) predisposed to harden in our

views, 2) engaged with often nameless, faceless people in the ether who we will never likely meet or connect with again and 3) afforded only 280 keystrokes to make a point? Maliciousness and a narrowing of the mind is hastened by Twitter use – as when we see comments or reactions that we might have simply disagreed with in the past, articulated in short-form ferocity, we'll block those users to avoid this venom. We are then left with self-selected participants like us on the issues. How is this helpful?

Long-form publications like newspapers (like the *Putnam County News & Recorder*), books, magazines and public forums, dear reader, are the way we can make the effort to connect. Through thoughtful, articulate, coherently considered and heard perspective, we can reach a better understanding of one another – even if we do not likely have a shot at changing minds.

Thank you for taking the time to read this – you can burn me/heart me on Twitter at @peterlupoff, though I'm only posting pictures of food on Facebook from now on.

Peter M. Lupoff and his family have a home in Putnam Valley. He teaches at Yale and Fordham Universities.

Fleming Criticizes Spending Plan

By ERIC GROSS

Kent Town Supervisor Maureen Fleming criticized County Executive MaryEllen Odell for proposing a 2 percent increase in the county's 2019 budget.

Fleming, a Democrat, who is challenging Odell next month, was joined on Thursday by a handful of supporters, including Assembly hopeful Vedat Gashi and legislative candidate Nancy Montgomery, on the steps of the historic Putnam Courthouse for the news briefing.

Fleming said it was wrong for Odell to "proudly roll out a budget containing a 2 percent tax hike with a reliance of almost \$4 million of general funds in order to balance the expenditure. Had she not used the fund balance, the tax increase would have risen to 4.5 percent."

Fleming criticized Odell for telling the public that "zeroes don't work. My budget in the Town of Kent contains a zero percent tax increase for the fifth time since first elected as supervisor. Ask the people of the Town of Kent if zero doesn't work. To a person, our residents are very happy to see their town taxes remain the same every year."

Fleming also criticized Odell for her constant support of the Putnam Golf Course in Mahopac: "The budget for 2018 anticipated the county would make a profit on the golf course of \$156,000. So far this year, county taxpay-



PHOTO BY ERIC GROSS
Kent Supervisor Maureen Fleming addresses a news conference last Thursday attended by Vedat Gashi, Nancy Montgomery and other supporters.

ers are footing the bill for the golf course in the amount of \$223,000."

Odell did say during her address that weather failed to cooperate this year when it came to golf, with rainy weekends and Fridays commonplace throughout the late spring, summer and early autumn.

Fleming has proposed hiring a company to manage the "entire golf course. The private firm will want to make a profit, resulting in the county making a profit. During my door-to-door campaigning, many residents don't even know that the county owns a golf course and others are unaware of where it is located. The golf course is not benefiting most of our residents. County government

should govern. It should not be an entertainment venue."

When asked whether next year's budget would contain a 0 percent tax hike should she be elected next month, Fleming replied: "I was greeted during my first term with a tax hike plus a reliance of \$420,000 of general fund to balance the budget. I returned almost \$400,000 to the general fund during that first year. The county budget contains a lot of fat. We have a director of Constituent Services who serves as a driver for the county executive. I know a lot of people who would like a driver. If I am elected, I'll ask my husband to chauffeur me around if needed, but he won't be paid."

Deadlines Near For November's General Election

If you desire to vote in the general election next month and have not yet registered, deadlines are approaching.

Putnam Elections Commissioners Kathy Croft and Anthony Scannapieco reminded the public Monday that applications must be postmarked by this Friday and received at the Board of Elections office in Carmel by next Wednesday, Oct. 17.

Those desiring to register in person must sign up by this Friday.

The two commissioners also reviewed absentee ballot deadlines.

The last day to postmark an application by mail is Oct. 30 while the last day to postmark a ballot is Nov. 5 with ballots received by the Board of Elections no later than Nov. 19.

The last day to apply in person for an absentee ballot is Nov. 5 and the last day to deliver a ballot to the Board of Elections by an individual other than the voter is November 6.

Questions concerning the process may be directed to the Board of Elections at 808-1300 or on line at www.putnamboe.com.

-Eric Gross

Our Medicare team experts will explain coverage, answer questions, and show you how MVP Health Care® is offering more coverage, more benefits, and more extras in 2019...for less.

Mahopac Public Library

668 Route 6, Mahopac

Monday, October 15, 2018 11 am

Thursday, October 25, 2018 5:30 pm

Thursday, November 8, 2018 11 am

Thursday, November 15, 2018 2 pm

Thursday, December 6, 2018 5:30 pm

Town of Patterson Recreation Center

65 Front Street, Patterson

Thursday, October 18, 2018 10 am

Wednesday, October 24, 2018 10 am

Tuesday, November 13, 2018 10 am

Tuesday, November 20, 2018 10 am

To reserve your spot,
Call 1-833-368-4619 (TTY: 1-800-662-1220)
Seven days a week, 8am-8 pm Eastern Time.
Or visit MovetoMVP.com/compare

★★★★★
4.5 Star Rated
Out of 5 Stars
Overall by Medicare
2018



For accommodations of persons with special needs at sales meetings, call 1-833-368-4619 (TTY: 1-800-662-1220).

Every year, Medicare evaluates plans based on a 5-star rating system. The annual election period for MVP Health Care Medicare Advantage health plans is October 15–December 7, 2018.

MVP Health Plan, Inc. is an HMO-POS/PPO/MSA organization with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in MVP Health Plan depends on contract renewal.

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