

Wyoming Tribune Eagle, February 27, 2016: “Worse politics than Wyo.?” Casper Star Tribune of same date: “Another one from Texas”

Texas politics are “much more manipulative than Wyoming’s,” my son recently opined. I thought that was saying a lot, though he should know. In an earlier career Walter headed the state veterinarian’s office under two different Wyoming governors. Thus, when in Texas, I sometimes pick up small newspapers to learn what the locals are saying. Recently, finding myself in Alpine, TX, I perused the Jeff Davis County Mountain Dispatch and the Big Bend Gazette.

The former carried a commentary by a Baxter Black, DVM, entitled, “The Gun Battle.” His column, under the banner, “On the Edge of Common Sense,” begins with, “As radical Islamic terrorists continue their penetration of the United States and mentally deranged psychos attack unsuspecting pedestrians . . .”

Mr. Baxter is on the edge, all right, but probably not in the way he sees himself. His introductory sentence marks him as someone who prefers to appeal to the emotions—in this case, fear of “the other”—rather than develop a reasoned argument. He appears uninterested in readers who want to think things through. His introduction forecasts a conclusion of diatribe. Here it is: “It’s very depressing to watch injustice, needless killing, and terrorist bombing in our own backyard . . . “ Makes you want to ask what blown-up backyards he witnessed in his neighborhood, or in his own or a neighboring county.

The Big Bend paper, on the other hand, carried a commentary by columnist Dave McNeely, “Anti-Planned Parenthood witch hunt in Harrison (sic) County, Texas, backfires.”

(Of the 254 Texas counties, one is Harrison; another, Harris. Apparently the editor composing the headline confused the two.)

Mr. McNeely proceeds rationally, even with a dash of humor. He begins with an introduction that summarizes the now well-known debacle: A Texas anti-abortion group released several videos alleging that the Gulf Coast Planned Parenthood office was breaking federal law by selling parts of aborted fetuses.

The writer adds his own salty comments: “Gov. Greg Abbott told the anti-choice posse to saddle up,” and “Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Atty. Gen. Ken Paton were already headed for their horses.

“Patrick demanded that his hometown D.A., fellow Republican and Harris County District Attorney Devon Anderson, perform a criminal investigation.”

The writer explains that it is legal for a consenting patient to donate fetal tissue to be used in medical research and, further, that the law allows clinics to “collect reimbursement for costs of transportation, implantation, processing, preservation, quality control, or storage of human fetal tissue used for research.”

It is widely known that the grand jury assembled by District Attorney Anderson indicted, not the Planned Parenthood office but the lawbreakers who produced the fraudulent videos, to wit: David Daleiden and Sandra Merritt. Posing as buyers from a medical group, they tampered with government records, providing fake California driver’s licenses, “a second-degree felony,” observes Mr. McNeely, and comments:

“So, since the investigation didn’t turn out as Patrick, Abbott, and Paxton had anticipated, they accepted the situation and called off their witch hunt, right?

“Wrong. They doubled down, if not tripled—if that’s possible. They’re still saddled up.” He then quotes Governor Abbott:

“The Health and Human Service Commission’s Inspector General and the Attorney General’s office have an ongoing investigation into Planned Parenthood’s actions. Nothing about today’s announcement in Harris County impacts the state’s ongoing investigation.”

Not to be outdone, the lieutenant governor expounds on the “horrific nature of these videos,” reiterating that the state will continue to “examine the practices of abortion providers and whether state law adequately protects the sanctity of life.”

Meanwhile, Attorney General Paxton held forth on the “horrific nature of abortion and the shameful disregard of human life” that, in his opinion, is documented in the fraudulently-produced videos.

Their rhetoric—“horrific,” etc.—is on par with that of the edgy Baxter Black of Jeff Davis County: exaggerated, vengeful, emotionally charged.

Inasmuch as the current president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America is the daughter of the late Texas Governor Ann Richards, Mr. McNeely gives voice to the Richards view: “I haven’t seen any indication that the governor or lieutenant governor of Texas cares what happens to women at all.”

He adds Ms. Richards’s comments in the Texas Tribune: “It seems to me their entire campaign against women here has been based upon their . . . beliefs.”

Mr. McNeely’s byline states that he began reporting on Texas politics in 1962. He earned a Congressional Fellowship in Washington, and a Nieman Fellowship for journalists at Harvard. He has written columns on Texas legislative sessions and Texas elections “for more than 20 years” for the Austin American Statesman.

With writers like Dave McNeely, there may be hope for Texas yet. Still, my son’s assessment doesn’t seem far off the mark—though that’s small consolation for Wyoming voters.