

Opinion

The best type of Kentuckians are those who hate to see you down

By EMILY BURTON SHERMAN



Emily Burton Sherman

The measure of a man is not the amount of suffering he inflicts without remorse. Creating a wretched world for those poor souls already suffering - the homeless, the hungry, the impoverished, the ill - is an unoriginal dirge repeatedly performed by countless regimes.

Trodding our neediest neighbors into the dirt hardly befits a nation founded on the dignity of the individual and the strength of the American Dream.

No, the measure of mankind is not the blood it sheds but the suffering it assuages. It's the understanding that we cannot move forward towards greatness if the least of us is left to die in the ditches along the way.

This is a profound truth that Governor Andy Beshear knows all too well, and believes in whole-heartedly, to the benefit of us all.

During his tour of the London tornado disaster, Beshear was visibly moved. Not once did he rest on "thoughts and prayers" but instead asked us to mobilize in service over self to lessen the suffering of our neighbors.

This latest Kentucky calamity makes clear that we can no longer afford to be team red or team blue. Instead, our governor has called upon us to become Andy's People.

Andy's People don't care if your neck is red or your truck is a short bed. Andy's People probably knew your granddad, fished with your uncle or helped you move in last month. It's no matter - you're family the minute your kids share the tram-poline.

Andy's People know communities cannot survive on handshakes alone. When the creeks rise,

you don't ask your neighbor who they voted for. You ask them where they'd like your boat.

"I'll always be there for my neighbors in times of need," Beshear has said. "That's what we do best as Kentuckians."

Take for example Catch'n Dealz. Or Head Spa. Or Moody Cows LLC. When the recent deadly tornado upended their towns and destroyed lives, these local businesses stepped up without hesitation to offer clothing, hair care supplies and food.

At Moody Cows LLC, the offer was immediate and genuine. "We are ready to serve meals anywhere they are needed (free of charge, we just want to help,)" the downtown London restaurant posted on Facebook.

First responders could stop by Wildcat Harley-Davidson for a free hot meal, where they were also collecting donations, as were many churches. Among the standard necessities, someone had added a few items that made the community supply drive more than just neighborly duty: books and toys for children, pet food, adult diapers, stuffed animals.

It takes a genuinely good soul to not only think of others after a natural disaster, but to empathise with them so deeply as to understand the importance of not just tents but teddy bears, not just pillows but pet supplies.

These are the people our governor would be proud to call his own - those who don't know you but hate to see you down. They are the best type of Kentuckians. They are the local businesses that don't just write a check, but shake your hand and open the door when you have nowhere else to go. They are truly Andy's People.

Whether kneeling down to wash a neighbor's feet or handing out salon products so they can wash their hair, the parallels are not hard to find.

The greater we stand united during such calamities, putting aside the old aches of lingering racism and politics, the stronger our nation becomes. In communities such as London, or Bremen, recovery from natural disasters rests in the hands of neigh-

bors as much as federal responders. In this way, we celebrate one another even as we mourn our losses.

"In Kentucky, we take the time to celebrate each other - because all our neighbors deserve that," Beshear posted while attending the Derby. But we shouldn't stop there.

We can celebrate one another by bringing boxes of batteries and bags of work gloves to clean-up crews after a storm. We can celebrate one another by refusing to let our neighbors stand alone in the muddy aftermath of a flood. We can celebrate one another by becoming what our governor strives for himself - "We are all each other's neighbors," he tweeted last year.

"My faith teaches me the golden rule: love your neighbor as yourself," he has written. "We believe in an America that lives out these values. Let's end anger politics and remember we are all Americans."

For centuries, our great melting pot recognized the blending of America's voices as tantamount to the advancement of society. We recognized that a symphony of only one note, one voice, could never rally the weak of heart. Yet lately, we've forgotten how to harmonize.

Though maliciously devastating, such natural disasters like the London tornado negate this cacophony of division. They remind us of the power of good neighbors, great bourbon and communal grit.

Human suffering is an easy scab to pick, to reopen and exploit as someone else's fault, as we have seen in Washington this month. It is much harder to heal such wounds. Thank God Gov. Beshear is determined to try, one podcast - or tornado - at a time.

Call it pollyannaish optimism. Call it a fatal case of Sunday School faith.

Just don't call it impossible.

Emily Sherman is a columnist and educator who resides in Muhlenberg County with her family of miscreants, saints and the odd stray cat.

Federal cuts threaten to undo Kentuckys hard-won progress on addiction and recovery

By TARA HYDE AND VAN INGRAM
The Kentucky Lantern

As the White House and Congress weigh difficult budget decisions, Kentuckians are watching closely, especially those of us who work to address the opioid and overdose epidemic. Proposed federal cuts to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) threaten to dismantle the programs responsible for a 30% reduction in overdose deaths in Kentucky over the past year.

On May 1, Gov. Andy Beshear announced that overdose deaths in the commonwealth decreased for the third year in a row, with a 30.2% decrease in 2024 over the previous year.

Fatal overdoses decreased among Black Kentucky residents from 271 in 2023 to 170 in 2024 — a 37.3% decrease that reversed a recent trend.

According to the 2024 Kentucky Drug Overdose Fatality Report, 1,410 Kentuckians lost their lives last year to a drug overdose.

In 2023, Kentucky reported a 9.8% decrease compared with 2022. In 2022, there was a decrease of 2.5% from 2021, marking the first year Kentucky saw a decrease in overdose deaths since 2018. By working together, the governor said, Kentucky is saving lives. He credited the state's continued decline in overdose deaths to several factors including:

- More than \$29.7 million was distributed in grant and pass-through funding from the Office of Drug Control Policy;
- 170,000 doses of Narcan were distributed;
- 84 syringe exchange program sites served 27,799 unique participants;
- More than 17,390 Kentuckians received addiction treatment paid for by the Kentucky Opioid Response Effort;
- More than 17,980 Kentuckians received recov-

ery services (housing assistance, employment services, transportation, basic need services, etc.) in their community paid for by the Kentucky Opioid Response Effort;

- 19 Kentuckians sought treatment through the Kentucky State Police Angel Initiative;
- More than 3,320 incoming calls were made to the KY HELP Call Center with more than 14,080 outgoing follow up calls,
- And 21 counties are now certified as Recovery Ready Communities representing nearly 1.5 million Kentuckians.

As the leaders of People Advocating Recovery and the Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy, we have seen the impact of this crisis firsthand — and we have seen the transformative impact of smart investments from public safety and recovery organizations working hand in hand for overdose prevention, treatment and recovery.

Let us be clear: we strongly support responsible governance. Government efficiency, fiscal discipline and strategic workforce development are essential for a thriving nation. But these proposed cuts, particularly to frontline recovery and public health services, will not achieve those outcomes; they will undermine them.

The proposed restructuring of HHS would eliminate approximately 20,000 federal jobs within that agency, including layoffs within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). These are the very institutions leading our nation's response to addiction and mental health. Weakening them now is like pulling fire crews off duty during wildfire season, while the fire is still smoldering.

Equally alarming are reports that Congress is weighing as much as \$880 billion in cuts to Med-

icaid over the next decade. These cuts would devastate the already strained safety net especially in rural areas, like Appalachia, leading to hospital closures, spikes in ER use and inevitably increased incarceration of people with untreated behavioral health needs.

Cutting essential recovery infrastructure is not a pathway to economic stability. In fact, it threatens the very workforce development efforts policymakers want to prioritize. We cannot grow the economy by sidelining millions of Americans who are in or seeking recovery in the midst of this crisis. Instead, we must invest in them. When people recover, they return to work, support their families, contribute to their communities and economy.

This is not the time to abandon our efforts to end this deadly public health crisis. Now is the time to reaffirm our promise to curb addiction, save families and children, and erode this deadly disease once and for all. Kentucky and the nation have made great progress, it's time we turn that progress into prosperity for all and make recovery a national priority.

Tara Hyde is the CEO of People Advocating Recovery, a nonprofit based in Louisville that works to eliminate barriers to recovery from substance abuse disorder.

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