

Voter standards for candidates continue to be lowered

How can Graham Planter, who might win the Democratic nomination for senator from Maine in next Tuesday's primary election ever be seriously considered for such a job, given the amount of personal baggage he carries?



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The answer is we have so lowered our standards and think so little of our politicians that, as the saying used to go, anyone can grow up to be president, or senator.

Planter has been accused of so many things that just one would have been enough to derail his candidacy in another era when character mattered. Today, power is all that appears to matter and the way in which one achieves power seems less important than the objective.

Corrupt politicians are nothing new because everyone has a flawed human nature. Some control it, others don't. Just a few examples of those who didn't exert self-control.

Randall "Duke" Cunningham (R-CA) is among those who didn't. Cunningham was widely considered one of the most corrupt congressmen in American history. Given the levels of indictable and non-indictable corruption within the profession, that's saying something. Cunningham was sentenced to eight years and four months in federal prison in 2005 after pleading guilty to taking at least \$2.4 million in bribes from defense contractors. The bribes included a yacht, a luxury mansion, private jet travel and expensive antiques.

The list is too long to name them all, but here are a few others. Corruption may be the last bipartisan activity in Washington.

William J. Jefferson (D-LA) was convicted in 2009 on 11 federal corruption counts, including bribery and racketeering. FBI agents raided his home and discovered \$90,000 in cash wrapped in aluminum foil which he had hidden in his kitchen freezer.

James ("beam me up, Scotty") Traficant (D-OH) was expelled from the House (a rarity) in 2002 following his conviction on 10 felony counts, including taking bribes, racketeering, tax evasion, and forcing his congressional staff to perform manual labor on his private farm.

On the Senate side Bob Menendez (D-NJ), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Com-

mittee, was convicted on all counts of a massive federal bribery scheme. Federal agents discovered hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash, a luxury vehicle and more than \$100,000 worth of solid gold bars hidden in his home. He was sentenced to 11 years in prison in January 2025.

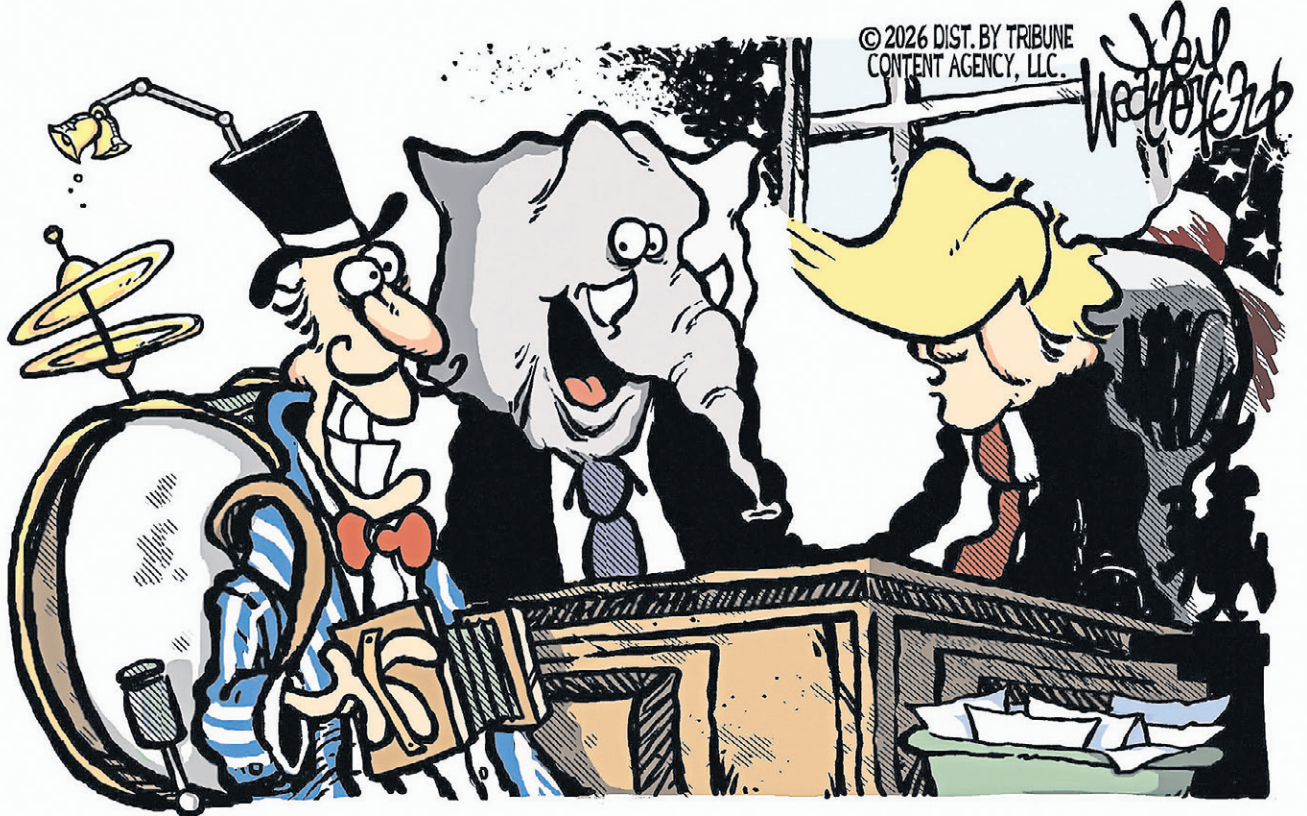
In the late 1980s, five sitting U.S. senators — Alan Cranston (D-CA), Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ), Donald Riegle (D-MI), John Glenn (D-OH) and John McCain (R-Ariz.) — intervened with federal bank regulators on behalf of Charles Keating, a corrupt savings and loan executive. Keating had gifted the senators more than \$1.3 million in campaign contributions. The subsequent collapse of his bank left thousands of investors penniless and cost taxpayers billions.

To demonstrate corruption is not a modern phenomenon, William A. Clark (D-MT), a 19th-century copper tycoon, literally bought his way into the U.S. Senate in 1899 by directly bribing Montana state legislators with envelopes of cash. The Senate refused to seat him, prompting Clark to declare, "I never bought a man who wasn't for sale." A profound line and one every member of Congress should put over his or her office door.

John Hipple Mitchell (R-OR) was a sitting U.S. senator when he was indicted and convicted in 1905 for his involvement in the Oregon Land Fraud Scandal. He used his legislative influence to help a syndicate illegally seize thousands of acres of public federal land for private speculation.

Bipartisan committees have been established in the House and Senate to control such behavior, but members intent on gaming the system for their personal and professional benefit will not be deterred by ethics committees. If you don't subscribe to a high code of ethics before coming to Congress, you are not likely to develop one when you get there.

An Article 5 Convention of States with term limits and a balanced budget would help rein in corruption. If Maine voters elect Graham Planter, it may be coming sooner than anyone expects.



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YouGov
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WE HAD SEVERAL PERFORMERS BACK OUT OF THE AMERICA 250 CELEBRATION, BUT I FOUND US A ONE-MAN BAND...

Is a UFC fight at the White House who we really are?

Polls indicate that President Donald Trump is doing a lot that most Americans don't support: The war with Iran; the arbitrary tariffs; the retribution campaign against his perceived enemies; the 250-foot Triumphal Arch; the \$1.776 billion fund intended to reward Trump loyalists. (Even Republicans don't like that one!)

There's so much that it's hard to know what's important. In the middle of a war against Iran, does it really matter if Trump's vanity leads him to appropriate top billing at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts?

Still, it's hard to predict the consequences of acts that seem trivial at the time. Consider the Ultimate Fighting Championship cage fights that Trump is sponsoring on the White House lawn on June 14 as part of America's 250th anniversary celebration. June 14 also happens to be Trump's 80th birthday.

It's not clear why any sport needs to be part of the celebration of our country's nativity, but

if we're going to stage a sporting event on the White House lawn, why UFC?



JOHN CRISP

Trump, of course, is pals with Dana White, the president and CEO of UFC. White, in turn, is an outspoken supporter of Trump and has donated at least a million dollars to Trump's campaigns for the presidency. A cynic might say that a valuable UFC gig is just payback for services rendered. In other words, business as usual under Trump.

But I suspect there's more to it: A cage match at the White House suits Trump's personal tastes in sport, which tend to favor violence and "manliness." He's a big fan of boxing, wrestling and UFC, and he complained bitterly when the NFL modified its kickoff rules in order to reduce injuries. Trump called the new kickoffs "sissy" football.

But there's nothing "sissy" about UFC. In fact, if you're unfamiliar with mixed martial arts and are imagining a UFC bout as a harmless athletic contest, consid-

er watching a few UFC fights on YouTube.

Boxing may be The Sweet Science, but UFC combat is pre-science, the original, primitive blood sport, no more complicated than two men inflicting as much damage as possible on each other without much in the way of rules to get in the way. Blood flows copiously from the fighters' noses and mouths and from cuts around their eyes. Human blood bespatters the canvas at their feet.

UFC bouts are scored similarly to boxing, but the Holy Grail is the knockout, which, by definition, is an injury to the brain, temporary or permanent. The knockout cannot be separated from the effort to injure one's opponent. Watch a half-hour compilation of UFC knockouts and you're unlikely to retain any illusions about the damage UFC does to its fighters.

Still, if two citizens, of their own free will, want to beat each other up, and other citizens want to pay to watch them, I'm reluctant to say they shouldn't have that right.

But what does it say about America if we're showcasing a bloody and dangerous battle between

aggressive opponents to help celebrate the birth of our nation—and of Trump?

Podcaster Joe Rogan says, "There's no more American thing than having a UFC fight on the White House lawn. It's so America. It's so Trump. It's so crazy."

Certainly, a UFC fight is "so Trump," but is it "so America"? A YouGov survey indicates that only 17% of Americans approve of the bouts at the White House; the rest disapprove, are unsure or have no opinion.

Further, of the 12 fighters currently scheduled for June 14, only half were born in the U.S., and only five appear to be white. The rest appear to be brown-skinned. And no women. Too DEI, maybe.

Autocrats love to celebrate grand occasions — such as their birthdays — with spectacle and entertainment. Thus, on June 14, we'll have a president who is fond of violence — especially other people's — presiding over brutal cage fights.

Certainly, this is consistent with Trump's image of America. But is it really who we really are?

Let's hope not.

How voters can fight gerrymandering in an era of remapping wars

It began with the president asking Texas to redraw its congressional map to give Republicans additional House seats in the 2026 midterm elections.

This prompted California to redraw its map, giving Democrats a comparable number of additional seats to balance the Texas gains. Virginians voted for a redraw, which would have given Democrats additional seats, until the state Supreme Court nullified the

vote. Then Florida followed suit with a new map to give Republicans additional seats.

Several other states are now redrawing their maps or plan to do so to effect partisan advantages.

As one state gives seats, another takes them away.

The likely end result in the battle for control of the House is a modest edge for Republicans. But there is a problem here. For voters, representation is no longer determined on Election Day. It will have

already been carved out by state legislators who control the House map-drawing processes, effectively making voters innocent pawns in a high-stakes war to control the levers of government in Washington.

Holding a majority in the House is about more than having nicer offices on Capitol Hill. It is about holding the speaker's gavel and controlling the chairmanships for committees that ultimately carve out laws and dictate how taxpayer dollars are spent. The 2026 midterms are particularly important; if Republican

lose their majority in the House, the president will be more constrained. The 119th Congress has ignored its responsibility to maintain the necessary checks and balances on the executive branch. If Democrats regain a House majority, that will come to an abrupt end on Jan. 3, 2027, when the 120th Congress convenes.

What's more, the damage done by this remapping chaos will also impact the 2028 and 2030 elections. After that, apportionment will reallocate the number of House seats to each state based on population changes reported in the census. States like Texas and North Carolina are positioned to gain seats, whereas states like California and New York are likely to lose them.

IN MY VIEW GUIDELINES

In My View is a column for readers. Criteria for accepting In My Views are largely subjective and at the discretion of the editorial board of the Messenger-Inquirer. Generally, content must require the space (350 to 850 words), which is substantially longer than letters to the editor. The subject must appeal to a wider audience, usually be about a local issue and the column should clearly argue a point and present an easily understood point of view. Assertions of facts should be accompanied by attributions. After submission, the writer may be asked to reduce the column to letter length (250 words or less) if the longer length is not justified.

If you would like to write an In My View column, call Don Wilkins at 270-691-7299 to talk over your idea.

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