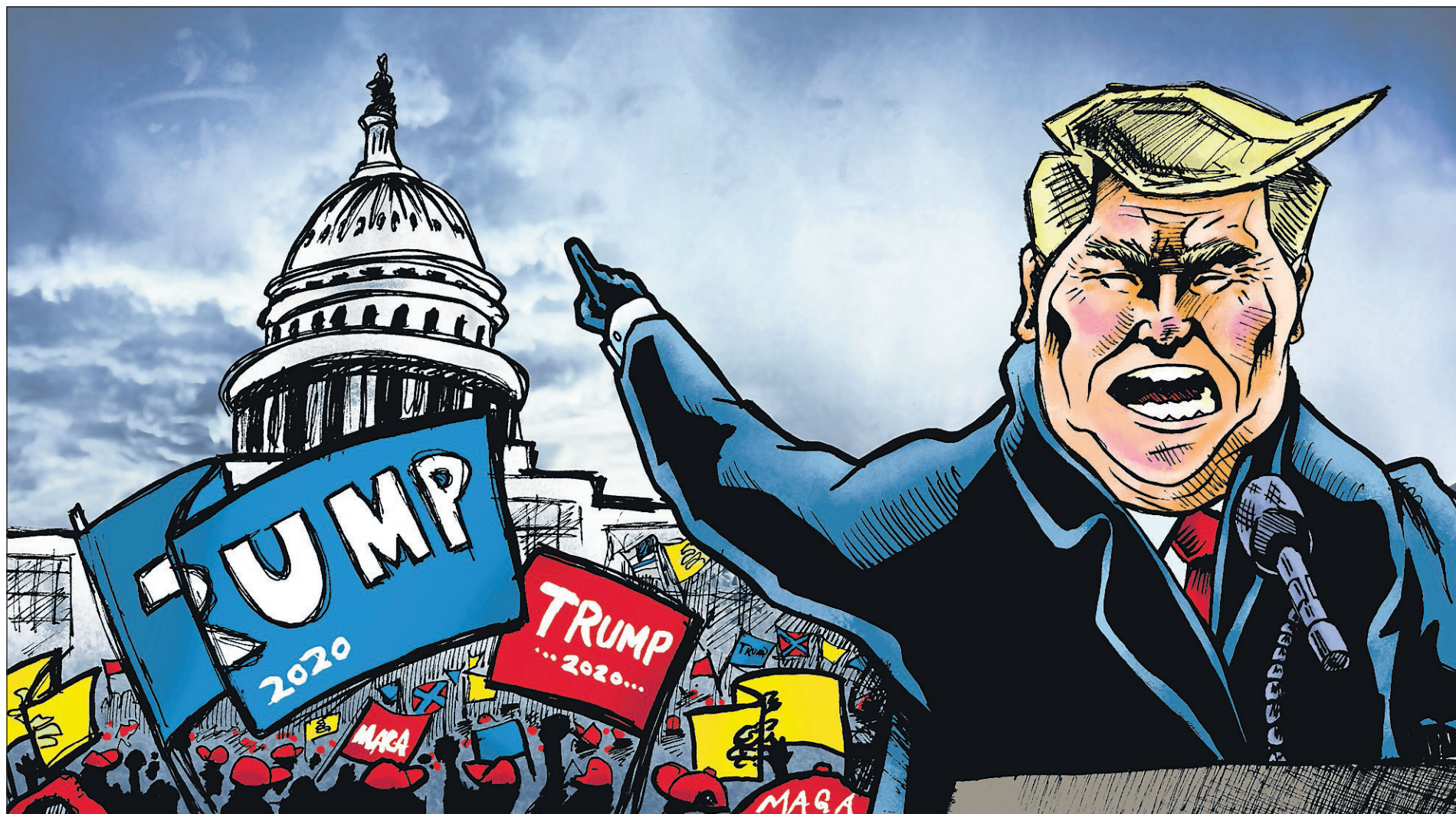


TONING DOWN ANGRY RHETORIC



DWAYNE CARPENTER/TIMES-DISPATCH

Demagoguery and the great insurrection

Since the deadly assault on the U.S. Capitol by an angry mob, any number of people have asked me to put that unsettling event in historical perspective. I answer that frankly, I can cite nothing from our history that helps us understand the Jan. 6 orgy of violence and destruction.



Charles F. Bryan Jr.

If anything, I keep thinking about Eric Larson's bestselling book, "In the Garden of Beasts," an account of William E. Dodd's term as American ambassador to Germany in the 1930s.

Dodd, a one-time history professor at Randolph-Macon College, and his wife and two adult children arrived in Berlin in late 1932. His daughter, Martha, soon became enamored with the handsome young men who enthusiastically supported restoring Germany to world promi-

nence as promised by Adolf Hitler and his Nazi followers.

On the other hand, Ambassador Dodd soon grew concerned over Hitler's rhetoric, and the actions he and his supporters took. He watched the persecution of Jews with mounting alarm. He witnessed the elimination of personal freedoms, including muzzling of news sources that dared question the actions of the Nazis.

Dodd reported his concerns to his superiors in the State Department and President Franklin D. Roosevelt to little avail. State Department officials doubted Dodd's claims, and argued that Hitler merely was a flash in the pan. The German people surely would come to their senses and reject him and his cronies, they argued.

Their prediction turned out to be horribly wrong. Hitler continued to strengthen his position and increase his power. By the time Dodd left his

post in 1937, he was convinced that his voice was not being heard in Washington.

In the meantime, the dictator was poised to conquer much of western Europe and to begin the mass murder of millions of Jews and others deemed as "undesirables."

How does Dodd's story relate to this past week's attack on the U.S. Capitol? The common element that ties them together are the roles played by two demagogues — Adolf Hitler and Donald Trump — who attracted huge followings despite the unsavory characters of both men.

The word "demagogue" is Greek in its origin and has been applied to the likes of Caesar, Napoleon, Benito Mussolini, Josef Stalin and Venezuela's Hugo Chavez.

By spreading a message of fear and hate, demagogues have a genius for attracting large numbers of followers. They heavily rely on repeated lies to convince people to

become their followers.

They persuade those followers to believe they are victims of any number of grievances caused by "enemies of the people," often in the form of a conspiracy. Hitler singled out Jews, while Trump has targeted, among others, immigrants.

They often reach out to other demagogues to strengthen their own positions, as Hitler did with Mussolini, Spain's Francisco Franco and, at one time, Stalin. Trump has shunned many of our traditional allies, while cozying up to the likes of Russian's Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un of North Korea.

The advent of modern communications such as radio became powerful tools for Hitler to get his message across, while Twitter and Facebook have allowed Trump to reach even larger audiences.

Whatever the Jan. 6 event is labeled, it likely is to be considered a

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STRESS TEST

Coping does not mean copping out



Michael Paul Williams
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"You know, sometimes we're not prepared for adversity," saxophonist Cannonball Adderley says during the intro to the 1966 soul-jazz classic "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy."

"When it happens sometimes, we're caught short. We don't know exactly how to handle it when it comes up. Sometimes, we don't know just what to do when adversity takes over."

"Mercy, Mercy, Mercy" is an apt theme for the past 12 months.

We've absorbed — far from equally — two presidential impeachments, a deadly pandemic, a cratering economy and social isolation. Police brutality, street protests, face mask wars and business closures. Elections, an attempt to subvert democracy, and a pathological president pro-



Supporters of President Donald Trump confronted U.S. Capitol Police officers outside the Senate chamber during Jan. 6's insurrection.

moting lies, chaos, division and sedition. A violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, an historic break in peaceful transitions of power and a death toll from COVID-19 approaching 400,000.

Mercy, mercy, mercy.

Few of us were prepared for this level of adversity. Some of us are hanging on and hanging in there. Others are clinging to

the twilight zone of alternate reality — a dimension not of facts and reason, but of preposterous conspiracy theories about stolen elections.

Some knowledgeable people argue that we've been through worse: namely 1968. For sure, that year was a doozy.

The war in Vietnam cleaved

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VOTING BILLS

Protecting democracy in Va.

In a year in which American constitutional democracy has faced the dual challenges of COVID-19 and false attacks on our elections' legitimacy, one of the essential lessons has been the paramount importance of making it easy and secure for people to vote.



Schuyler VanValkenburg

As essayist Adam Gopnik recently noted, "The way to shore up American democracy, is to shore up American democracy."

Even if we never face another pandemic in our lifetime, the election reinforced how much easier and more effective it is to allow people to vote early and by mail. We can avoid long lines at polling places, enfranchise people working long hours or who have mobility problems, and give everyone flexibility, from harried parents to traveling workers.

Further, the 2020 election

also showed how important transparency and security are in the voting process. The clearer the process is to the public, the harder it is for people to cast doubt on a legitimate election outcome.

That's why I am proud to be the sponsor of The Virginia Voting Rights Act, as well as an omnibus bill containing dozens of enhancements to absentee voting. Both of these bills would put Virginia at the forefront of the nation in fostering a healthy democratic culture.

Virginia already has made tremendous progress. In 2018, a Northern Illinois University study on voter access ranked Virginia 49th out of the 50 states. Because of legislation passed by the Democratic majority in the General Assembly this past year, including no-excuse absentee voting, Virginia moved up in that ranking, becoming the 12th easiest state to cast a ballot — an improvement of 37 places.

This year, House Bill 1888

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