

Community Comment
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The honorable act of governing

I have no idea how many times I've implored people to participate in their local government. We should all take the time to vote. We might want to volunteer for a committee or commission that interests us. We might want to run for an elected office position.

Why? As with so many things in life, the doing of something often is the best way to learn it. The doing of something is also often the best way to appreciate it. I can think of few things in life more important than knowing our form of self governance more intimately than what we can get out of a text book. We have been gifted with a Constitution, a Bill of Rights, and a format for self-governing that is perhaps the best form ever conceived. But, until you serve, it's hard to appreciate the human factor involved. This is not governing by step by step numbers. In the end, a human puts a face on governing; he or she learns over time the appropriate procedures and laws and traditions that have made for successful governing. Being elected is only winning the opportunity to govern. The individual then has to find their own way of being a success at actually governing. I spent sixteen years on the Arcata City Council and consider those years to have been a great honor, a great challenge, and the best American education I could have received anywhere at any school. It is hard. There is a tremendous amount of reading to do. There are Federal and State laws to be aware of and there is history and precedent to consider.

Most people that I have known in local government have quickly learned that they occupy a position. They have responsibility for fulfilling the requirements of that position but the position is by definition limited by legal statute and by the character and skills the person brings to the post. Each of us would do the work in our own way while carrying out the responsibilities of the office. In my opinion, that is the genius of the founders work.

So, three observations to consider.

President Trump has employed the chaos style of governing. His biggest problem that I see is two fold. On the one hand, he seems unwilling to learn the basic responsibilities of the job. It is not all about him. This latest flap over what he may have told the widow of a serviceman killed in the line of duty could have been avoided by simply asking an aid to find him some sample notes on how other Presidents have handled this sensitive task. Find what you like about them and make it your own. Instead, we have another bad news cycle for us all.

McKinleyville High School had an unfortunate issue with some members of the football team making racist comments. The administration cancelled the season. Hopefully, for these students, this becomes a teachable moment that could improve the rest of their lives. A good call.

Finally, the Arcata Council needs to decide if the Community Forest is, in fact, a campground. Since I see campers there nearly every morning, I guess it is. Don't make me guess! If it is, find the money to do it right and protect the precious resource. Do your job.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.