

Opinions

The times, they are a-changin'

By Leo Chappelle

The date is April 25, 2022, for the public hearing concerning redrawing the ward lines in Catahoula Parish after the 2020 census. It will be during the regular meeting at 6:00 P.M. in the Harrisonburg Courthouse in room 104.

This is the critical moment for Catahoula Parish. We have a recent census and a consultant firm, Strategic Demographics, to draw new parish ward boundaries. We have the undeniable evidence of the population trend over a period of decades. The unincarcerated population of the parish is now below 8,400 people. We have the testimony of our declining tax revenues in the recently created sanitation fund's \$12 per month garbage tax increase.

What we appear not to have at this point is the political will to reduce the size and expense of our government. This administrative overhead could be reduced by cutting the number of wards in the parish. That reduction in wards would impact not only the Police Jury but the school board. Now would be the logical time to do that. Instead, we should probably expect to hear the specious excuse that the consultant did

not recommend it.

Most probably, we shall continue as we have until we can continue no more. There has been no evidence, nor does one anticipate there to be any, that a serious thought has been given to what already has been written on the wall. That writing says: "More tax rate increases, more new tax schemes, fewer opportunities for local employment, and so fewer tax payers generating revenue through doing business in the parish."

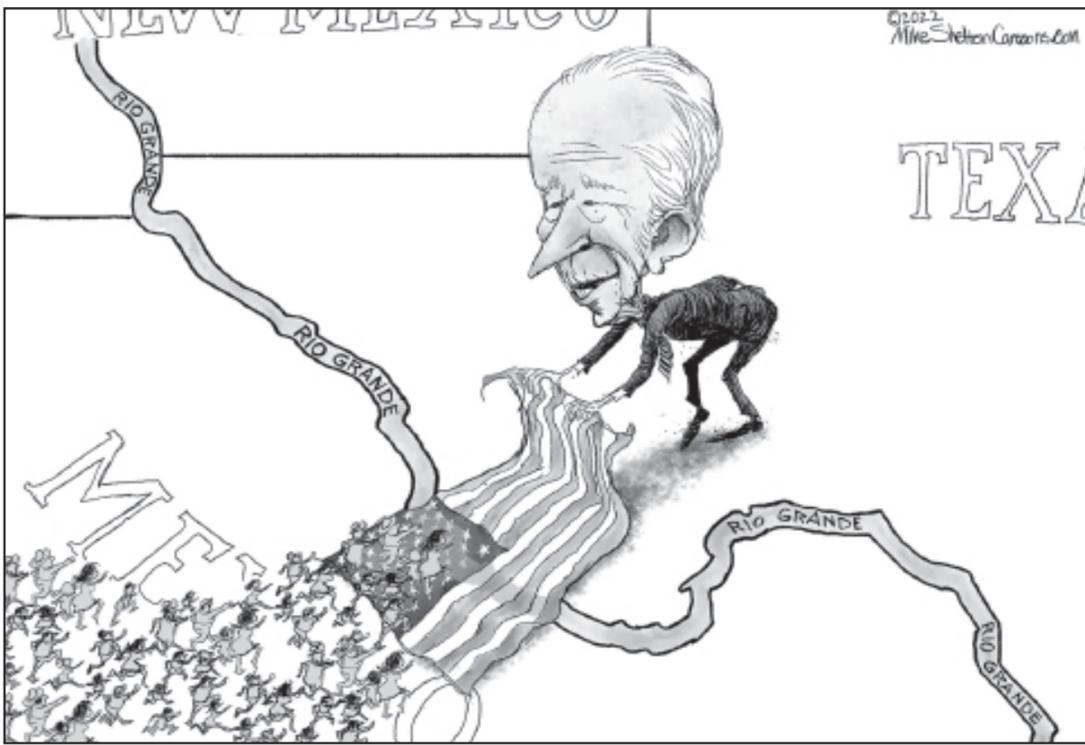
The people in our communities such as Enterprise, Larto, Harrisonburg, and Jonesville have all demonstrated their devotion to their community by organizing festivals and seeking grant money to create attractive places to live and work. But their authority is limited and their influence as unelected volunteers doesn't reach to Baton Rouge, much less Washington, D.C. In fact, it isn't at all obvious that it reaches above the basement of the Harrisonburg Courthouse.

Of course, a reorganized, more efficient and economically focused government could be created at anytime the Police Jury chose to do that.

One should probably not expect it, however, if the moment such as this one before us now passes as anticipated.

Catahoula Parish could perform miracles were more people to become actively involved in their government. The recent failure of a bond issue to build a new gymnasium and classroom building in Harrisonburg may have been partly due to the belief that people not benefiting directly would have to pay the proposed property taxes. Redrawing the taxing district lines (not to be confused with ward lines) may improve the prospects if the issue goes to the voters again. But neither that nor any other change will come unless we awaken to the importance of our own role in the community.

And that's a big problem. Temporarily we can somewhat get away with living our lives as if we don't count in the community or as if the community doesn't impact us. That's true to some extent. But it's you who will have to pack up and leave to get a job. They're yours whose children will be stuck in second rate schools. At that point no one can ignore what is happening.



THE RICH LOWRY COLUMN

Where Russia goes, brutality follows

Russia has found just the man to lead its ongoing assault on Ukraine, Gen. Aleksandr Dvornikov.

The top-level general takes over a war that had no single overall commander and as the Russian military has suffered embarrassing setbacks, retreating from its planned siege of Kyiv.

Dvornikov has led the Russian forces in the south and east of Ukraine, which Moscow will now make its main objective, and perfectly encapsulates the remorseless and long-running brutality of the Russian military.

He became known as the Butcher of Syria for his role leading the Russian campaign in Syria, most notoriously the reduction of Aleppo.

A United Nations human rights official called that city, after the Russians were done with it, "a slaughterhouse." He depicted "a gruesome locus of pain and fear, where the lifeless bodies of small children are trapped under streets of rubble and pregnant women deliberately bombed."

That ghastly description, of course, sounds all too familiar. Naturally enough, the Russian government honored Dvornikov for his bloody handiwork in Syria as a "hero of the Russian federation."

Bucha is another tragic place name in a long catalogue of Russians atrocities -- perpetrated against foreigners and its own people, perpetrated when the Soviets struggled for control during their rule, and afterward, perpetrated with relatively primitive military technology and with the most up-to-date modern firepower.

Where the Russian military goes, war crimes are sure to follow. It is a reflection of a twisted Russian political culture that has never devel-

oped an appreciation for individual worth, democratic accountability, or humanitarian norms. Vladimir Putin is not to be confused with Lenin or Stalin -- he paints his horrors on a much smaller canvas. But his cold-eyed brutality is characteristically Russian.

For the last 100 years, Russia has been a brutalized and brutalizing country. It suffered nearly 3.5 million deaths in World War I, another 8 million dead in the Russian Civil War, and then 27 million more in World War II.

The founder of the Soviet state, Lenin, was a theorist and practitioner of "mass terror." After the Revolution, the civil war between the Bolsheviks and their opponents was a series of atrocities. Then came the cataract of unspeakable violence in the death struggle with the Nazis.

The Red Army's decisive march to Berlin at the end of the war was one long, pitiless war crime. The Russians raped 2 million German women. According to historian Antony Beevor, author of "The Fall of Berlin 1945," one doctor believed that of 100,000 women raped in the city, 10,000 died as a consequence, many by suicide.

The English-speaking world features its share of shameful and brutal acts, but nothing on the mind-numbing scale of such depravities. And the crimes in the U.S. and elsewhere are looked back on with shame, whether slavery or the expropriation of indigenous people. In contrast, in the 21st century, when more civilized practices are supposed to have prevailed, Putin is adding more disgraceful blots to Russia's woeful record.

What kind of force considers a hospital a le-

gitimate military target? Terrorist groups -- and the Russian military.

In Syria a few years ago, Russia bombed four hospitals in 12 hours, a savage performance forecasting the treatment they'd mete out to Ukraine. According to The New York Times, Syrian health care workers believed that a United Nations "humanitarian deconfliction" list containing the locations of hospitals was used as a target list by Russian forces.

Of course, Russia leveled the city of Grozny in the late 1990s, killing thousands of civilians. Its soldiers raped and tortured.

What the Russian lacks in planning and proficiency, it makes up in barbarity and utter disregard for humanity. War is hell, but almost all advanced nations try to keep it within some bounds of decency. Russia is an outlier. For it, the cruelty is the point -- and the reflexive practice.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.
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