

## Trump — populist or venture capitalist?

To the editor:

A self-described extremely successful businessman, “the Donald” hails from a limited political background. As a graduate of Ivy League’s Wharton School of Business, at the University of Pennsylvania, he has certainly been afforded the luxury of networking with America’s super rich. Within five years of graduation, Trump assumed control of his father’s New York-based real estate and construction firm. The next 22 years of Trump’s business dealings are well-documented, leading to the 1995 establishment of his publicly traded Trump Hotels & Casino Resorts. Referring to it as “really just a technical thing” THCR filed for bankruptcy on Nov. 21, 2004.

In 2000, Trump briefly “ran” for president under Ross Perot’s 1995-founded Reform Party. Perhaps it was here that Trump acquired his anti-free trade predilection as Perot was ardently against the North American Free Trade Agreement. Regardless, Trump was occupied with his business dealings, renaming THCR Trump Entertainment Resorts after the aforementioned bankruptcy. Still unable to negotiate a buyout, by private or public firms, on July 2, 2007, TER announced it was off the market and would ostensibly reduce costs by laying off employees. Filing for bankruptcy once again in February 2009 and later in September 2014, TER exited bankruptcy in February 2016, becoming a subsidiary of corporate raider Carl Icahn’s Icahn Enterprises. Icahn’s 1968 formed securities firm had focused on hedge funds and options trad-

ing. (1985’s TWA acquisition and 1995-2000’s RJR Nabisco stock dealings.) More lessons for Trump?

Populism in American politics has a checkered past, dating back to the pre-Civil War dissolution of the Whig Party. The late 1840s saw the short-lived Free Soilers, who were not against slavery but rather did not want said institution to expand. The 1850s had the Native American Party (renamed the American Party in 1855) — commonly referred to as the Know Nothings. A semi-secret group of white, Protestant males, the Know Nothings were right-wing nationalists who advocated anti-immigration and anti-Catholicism in response to the influx of Germans and Irish. From 1874-1889 the Greenback (Labor) Party stood for agrarian (later workers’) rights and were against returning to a bullion-based monetary system. Left-wing social democrats, the Greenbacks were replaced by the People’s Party.

Huey P. Long Jr.’s 1918-35 political career was short but vibrant. The “Kingfish” was a rural, poor Louisianan with a law degree from Tulane who became governor, then U.S. senator before being assassinated. On the stump he railed against Standard Oil and the Baton Rouge elitists. Best-known for his 1934 “Share Our Wealth” program, he was responsible for getting charity hospitals, highways and bridges built. Long always took his “case” to the people as an anti-wealth candidate but was he a dictator, demagogue or populist?

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Erik Eisele

# God, science and wonder

A few weeks ago I woke up to a bear in the yard. He wasn’t doing anything really, just milling about. I watched him through the window as he sniffed, coursing back and forth over the grass lazily, painted orange in morning sunlight. When he lumbered off to the next yard, I packed my things to go swimming.

I’m not much of a swimmer. I did a lap across the Echo Lake, pausing in the middle to rest, lie on my back and float. I could feel my heartbeat in my ears as I stared upwards, leaving my wetsuit to buoy me. My arms and legs hung in the water. When I exhaled I sunk. When I inhaled I rose. Clouds tracked overhead and ripples brushed my face. I closed my eyes, floated.

I stayed like that, motionless, just breathing. It may have been a minute, maybe five; I lost track of time. After a time I turned, rolled into the water and aimed for the near shore.

On the drive home my phone rang. I didn’t recognize the number, but I answered anyway. On the other end was Gene Likens, the scientist who 50 years ago discovered acid rain. An ecologist and former Dartmouth College professor, his most recognized work took place at the Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest, a site an hour drive the Mount Washington Valley. Likens co-wrote a book on the forest, and I wanted to write a story about it. We spent 20 minutes talking, and he described the surprise of discovering acid rain: “Nobody knew there was a problem,” he said, but “the very first sample of rain we collected was very acidic,” up to 100 times the normal levels.

What got them to look at rainwater? I asked. Intuition? Some indication something was wrong.

Nothing like that, Likens replied. It was simple curiosity.

“It was purely serendipity,” he said. “So much of science is this way.”

“We didn’t set out to discover acid rain,” he said, but “it was there and we ran with it.”

They were just looking at raindrops. Because raindrops are amazing.

I’ve had a quote saved on my desktop for several years: “The beauty of science is not in the answers it provides, but in the act of questioning. And each question leads to more questions. There are no answers, only infinite questions.”

It’s not from some book or from anyone famous. It’s just some musings I scribbled down one day, the noise inside a writer’s head, something I didn’t want to forget even though I’ve forgotten what inspired it.

But like a tuning fork it sprang to life again, driven by that phone call: Likens was not studying stream water to prove some point. He was there to learn, driven by curiosity. It was a search of wonder, only a few

steps removed from the child growing tadpoles from frog eggs she found in a puddle. It is innate inquisitiveness, a joyous exploration.

Science is built on such wonder. It is the act of questioning, of unveilings and discovery and reexaminations and answers so tenuous they are subject to constant revision. It is a process more than an outcome, something built over the soft passage of time, through

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the constant brushstrokes of curiosity. And in the process the truth emerges, the heart and soul of our world, something foundational. It is both the how and the why, with no part so sacred it cannot be discarded. In science everything is open to more questions.

There is something beautiful in that. Something

simple, elemental, pure. And I can’t help but wonder if religion is born from the same roots. Maybe at one point humans looked at the majesty of the universe and couldn’t help but exclaim, “Who could have made such a beautiful thing?!” Maybe the answer they came up with was God.

It is a perfect question: Who could have created such a beautiful thing? What could have led to this world, all its life and all of us? It is the question scientists still ask today, one of curiosity and wonder. Look into the heart of the everything, and whether your launch point is science or religion it is impossible not to be overcome by the ants and oceans, by the volcanoes and the hurricanes. How is it that the Earth spins around the Sun? How did life come into being? How did so much order grow out of seemingly infinite chaos?

Those questions are everywhere. They were in the bear sitting outside the window, in my heartbeat in my head as I stared at the sky, in the cradle of water that held me up, in the clouds that traced the sky as I watched. Wonder. Beauty. Grace. These are the heart of science, and they are the heart of religion. Indeed, they are perhaps the heart of everything. The magic of creation is captured in music, in a van Gogh painting, in Shakespeare and Hemingway. It is in the movie that speaks to us, in the play that touches our hearts, in the book that we come back to and back to. Science, religion, music, art — it is all the same. It is all one thing, different versions of the same performance.

I wrote the piece on Likens. It ran a few days later. It relayed the facts of what he told me, but it missed the heart of his quest, the simple wonder on which his research began. Any written snapshot is guaranteed to be far too brief to do his story justice.

But then again his answers were not the point. He is a scientist; the point is always the questions.

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Mt. Washington Valley’s DAILY Newspaper

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“Seeking the truth and printing it”

THE CONWAY DAILY SUN is published

Tuesday through Saturday by Country News Club, Inc.

Dave Danforth, Mark Guerringue, Adam Hirshan Founders

Offices and Printing Plant: 64 Seavey St., North Conway, NH

Box 1940, North Conway, NH 03860 (603) 356-2999

Newsroom Fax: 356-8360, Advertising Fax 356-8774

Website: <http://www.conwaydailysun.com>

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CIRCULATION: 17,100 distributed Tuesday through Saturday

FREE throughout Mount Washington Valley