

Review & Commentary on Health Policy Issues for a Rural Perspective – Special 2024 Election Edition

For Your 2024 Post-Election Hangover

From “Life Will Go On the Day After the Election” by Eric Frydenlund in the *WI State Journal*, 10/25/24:

“Prairie Du Chien—In this Halloween season of ghouls and goblins, our favorite horror movies have been supplanted by creepy political ads. We fully expect our least favorite candidate to reprise the role of Freddy Krueger in a new sequel entitled ‘Nightmare on Pennsylvania Avenue.’ Or perhaps that politician will emerge as the new Mad Max, running down a desolate highway in a post-apocalyptic world of their own making.”

“If you believe the grim political ads appearing on our screens in the middle of our favorite shows—and why wouldn’t you—the world may come to an end on Nov. 5. What the campaign managers and producers of these dystopian advertisements fail to realize is that by dehumanizing their opponents, they dehumanize all of us, including themselves. Sinister characterizations make villains of us all.”

“According to the American Psychological Association, 73% of Americans are suffering from anxiety about the election. It’s natural and understandable to feel apprehensive. We’re not sure what the villains on the other side of the firewall will do if elected.”

“Voting on Nov. 5 is very important. The choice could not be clearer. I urge everyone reading these words to vote. And I urge everyone to vote based on reason, not resentment. Anger is an emotion, not a solution.”

“Yet life will go on the day after the election. Life may go on in a new political dynamic. But this state of political dysfunction has been going on for quite some time and is not likely to change anytime soon.”

RWHC Eye On Health



“... in sickness... and after elections.”

“On Nov. 6, we will get out of bed and drink a cup of coffee—orange juice for me. We will shower and dress and face the coming day with a sense of purpose. We will love our children and grandchildren with no less passion. We will attend to our jobs with equal dedication. We will give our dog a scratch behind the ear and follow him as he sniffs out his own daily purpose. We will greet our neighbors at the post office and have a conversation devoid of politics.”

“My neighbors, judging from their yard signs or lack thereof, are a diverse group politically. We do not discuss politics. Perhaps we should, but it seems that everyone has made up their mind.”

“We stop along the road and chat. We get together at least once a year for a neighborhood party. We discuss our family and friends and our travels, talking in excited voices about the latest revelations we have witnessed: the northern lights illuminating our night, the fall colors announcing a new season, the grandchild’s latest achievement.”

“Despite their political affiliations and beliefs, my neighbors’ lives and priorities are not much different than mine. We find common ground in our community, which exists just this side of politics. And we don’t have to travel as far to get there.”

“The son of one of my good friends recently came down with cancer. He lives on the other side of the political spectrum from me. But he also lives in our community. He goes fishing with us every year and is a much better fisherman than I am. He loves his children with an endless passion.”

“Opposing political signs will gradually vanish following Election Day, illuminating our connections to our neighbors and community.”

“He recently remarried. While talking to him at the wedding, he told me his cancer has given him a new perspective on what’s important in life. Probably not much different than what’s important in your life or mine—just with new emphasis.”

“That emphasis needs to be rediscovered from time to time, preferably through our intentions rather than illness. It’s a perspective that requires us to remove our partisan lens and see the world as it is, not as we imagine or fear it is. The world is filled with an intrinsic beauty that politics cannot touch.”

“Putting Freddy Krueger back in his place requires faith in life beyond politics. Even if we lose faith in politics, it is important not to lose faith in one another.”

Tips to Avoid Personal Partisan Gridlock

From ChatGPT on 10/27/24 re: “Why it’s important to not ‘shut out’ friends and family who supported a candidate you opposed in the last election:

1. **Fostering Dialogue:** Engaging with those who have different views can lead to productive conversations. Understanding their perspectives can help bridge divides and promote empathy.

2. **Building Common Ground:** Many issues resonate across political lines. Finding shared values can facilitate cooperation on challenges that affect everyone.

3. **Reducing Polarization:** Exclusion can deepen divides. Inclusion promotes a healthier democratic process where diverse opinions are acknowledged and respected.

4. **Encouraging Participation:** When individuals feel heard, they’re more likely to participate in civic activities, contributing to a more vibrant democracy.

5. **Addressing Root Causes:** Many supporters have concerns that can be addressed through policy changes or dialogue. Engaging with them can help identify and tackle underlying issues.

Promoting understanding and open communication is essential for a functioning democracy and social cohesion.

One Theory Why We Disagree

From “The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion” as discussed in *The Next Big Idea Club*, 2/4/22:

“Have we ever been more divided as a nation? At a time when American liberals and conservatives are at each other’s throats, it can seem like we’re caught in a sort of death spiral of polarization—not even able to hear each other’s opinions respectfully, much less come together to craft legislation or solve big social problems. But in truth, this tendency for people to split into oppositional groups runs deep in human history.”

“In 2012, Jonathan Haidt released *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided Over Politics and Religion*, the result of years of research into how unconscious moral systems color our worldviews and can lead to tribal divisions.” His five key insights:

#1-Intuition Precedes Reasoning: “Haidt’s first maxim of moral psychology is that *Intuitions come*

first, strategic reasoning second. In other words, while we may think our opinions are based on some conscious, rational *reason*, in most cases we're responding to an unconscious 'gut feeling,' and only later coming up with reasons to justify that instinct."

"The philosophical debate over whether reason or emotion rules the human psyche is an ancient one. While Plato argued for the primacy of reason, 18th-century Scottish philosopher David Hume thought that emotion was dominant, and the American founding father Thomas Jefferson suggested a middle path where both forces shared equal weight. In the end, drawing on numerous studies and experiments that he and other colleagues conducted, Haidt argues that Hume won the debate, and that reason truly is the servant of the passions."

"Haidt uses the metaphor of a person riding an elephant. While it might look like the rider is in control, the outcome of the ride is really up to the much more powerful elephant. Similarly, our intellect and reason *seem* to be driving our opinions, but our more powerful unconscious intuitions are really running the show, leading us toward particular opinions, preferences, and judgments. Our reasoning mind is really just along for the ride."



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"Reason is a tool used to 'further our social agendas,' agendas built on our largely unconscious moral foundations."

#2-Morality Has Multiple Dimensions: "The second part of *The Righteous Mind* describes the foundational values on which Haidt argues all of us build our moralities. **According to Haidt, our core values are: care, fairness, loyalty, authority, sanctity, and liberty.**"

" 'Liberals generally do place some value on loyalty, authority, and sanctity, but not much. Meanwhile, these three are often ride-or-die moral foundations for conservatives.' "

"The moral foundation of **care** is rooted in our parental instinct to look after children, as well as our aversion to harm done to ourselves. We don't like pain, and so anything that causes pain either to us or to others typically triggers our care responses. According to data that Haidt and his colleagues gathered over a ten-year period, while both American liberals and conservatives tend to value care, it is typically a higher priority for the left."

"**Fairness** is a value that Haidt initially thought was also largely associated with liberals. But this one is a bit more complicated. While fairness in the sense of equality (as in 'treat everyone fairly') resonated with many liberals that Haidt studied, he found that conservatives also valued fairness highly, although more in the sense of proportionality, as in 'do your fair share.' "

"The next three foundations—**loyalty, authority, and sanctity**—are almost exclusively the domain of conservatives. According to Haidt, overt patriotism, patriarchal hierarchy, and religious fervor are more common features of conservative worldviews, and people on the right tend to value all three of these moral foundations much more highly than liberals. This isn't to say that liberals don't value these foundations at all; for instance, a liberal reading of loyalty would be that each person is 'a citizen of the world.' You can contrast that view to the more conservative version of loyalty as loyalty to country or nation. To

Eye On Health is the monthly newsletter of the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative. Begun in 1979, RWHC has as its **Mission** that rural Wisconsin communities will be the healthiest in America. Our **Vision** is that... RWHC is a strong and innovative cooperative of diversified rural hospitals... it is the "rural advocate of choice" for its Members... it develops and manages a variety of products and services... it assists Members to offer high quality, cost-effective healthcare... assists Members in partnerships to make their communities healthier... generates additional revenue by services to non-Members... ongoing use of strategic alliances in pursuit of its Vision. Tim Size <timsiz@rwhc.com>, Editor, 880 Independence Lane, Sauk City, WI 53583

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give another example, Haidt points out that although liberals are more likely than conservatives to be atheists, the reverence for nature in the environmental movement is a version of sanctity that replaces religion for the left. So liberals generally do place some value on loyalty, authority, and sanctity, but not much. Meanwhile, these three are often ride-or-die moral foundations for conservatives.”

#3-The Conservative Advantage: “The sixth foundational value that Haidt describes is **liberty**. This value also has both a liberal and a conservative spin. For liberals, the ideal of liberty is focused primarily on underdogs, victims, and powerless groups everywhere, leading, for example, to the fight for civil rights. For conservatives, on the other hand, liberty is best defined as ‘the right to be left alone.’ ”

“If you’ve been keeping score, you’ll notice that there’s a clear difference in how liberals value each foundation versus how conservatives value them. Liberals tend to more highly value care, liberty, and fairness (in that order), and place very little weight on loyalty, authority, and sanctity. On the other hand, conservatives more evenly divide their foundations, placing relatively equal weight on all six foundations, at least for what Haidt calls ‘social conservatives.’ ”

“Because they engage all six moral foundations, Haidt argues that conservatives and Republicans, quite simply, ‘understand moral psychology’ while liberals and Democrats don’t.”

“He calls this gap the *conservative advantage*. Because conservative politicians actively use all of the weapons at their disposal, they are much better at motivating voters. Democrats, who disproportionately appeal to only two foundations, can engage an activist base well, but have a difficult time winning others to their cause.”

#4-Morality and Group Formation: “One key function of moral foundations is to show us who’s in our group and who is not. Who prioritizes the same moral

foundations as us, and is therefore trustworthy? And who prioritizes other foundations, or defines their foundations differently than we do, and is untrustworthy? Haidt points out that political psychologists and other pundits like to talk about voter motivations in terms of the question ‘What’s in it for me?’ However, based on his Moral Foundations Theory, Haidt argues that ‘[o]ur politics is groupish, not selfish.’ In other words, the more important question is ‘What’s in it for my group?’ ”

“ ‘We are brought together into our groups by our moral foundations, but those same foundations also make it incredibly difficult to even consider the arguments of the other side.’ ”

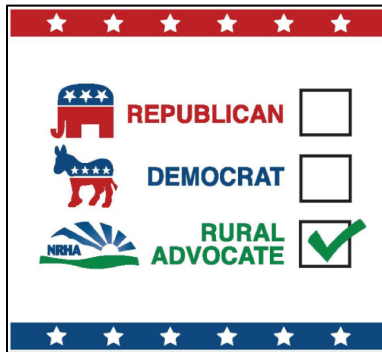


“Haidt begins his discussion by looking at evolutionary causes for our groupish nature. Natural selection—the process by which evolution is carried out—is a *multilevel selection*, meaning that it occurs at the level of the individual *and* at the level of the group. Individuals that are best-fit for their particular environment are more likely to survive and to procreate. Similarly, groups that are best-fit also survive. Those groups that learned to ‘cooperate and work for the good of the group’ edged out the competition. This idea is known as *group selection*.”

“Fast-forward to the 21st century, where our current highly partisan political climate is a result of group selection based along the lines of moral foundations. Haidt argues that our group moralities are so strong that they *bind and blind* us. We are brought together into our groups by our moral foundations, but those same foundations also make it incredibly difficult to even consider the arguments of the other side. The foundations are so deeply engrained that they’re automatic. So, we stay strong in our group and are blind to the perspectives of other groups.”

#5-Liberals and Conservatives Need Each Other—“Haidt argues that American liberals and conservatives form a sort of yin and yang, and as in that famous

Chinese symbol, a holistic worldview contains both elements. While much of *The Righteous Mind* is dedicated to explaining how we form and solidify our differing political groups based on instinctive values, Haidt also wants to offer tools to help us communicate and connect across those differences. Even though conservatives, liberals, and libertarians engage the six foundational values differently, somewhere deep down there is a shared coding—and if there is shared coding, there’s the possibility to come together.”



“At the level of policy, Haidt suggests that goals can be set out in ways that express both liberal and conservative priorities. For example, the effort to reign in multinational corporations could highlight both the goal of lifting up the world’s poor (care, fairness), and creating opportunity for small and medium-sized American businesses (fairness, loyalty, liberty). **Conversations about immigration policy should acknowledge the value of treating migrants decently (care, fairness) along with the importance of the rule of law and enforceable borders (authority, loyalty).** By acknowledging the values of each side, we have a better chance of communicating with one another and creating policies that are broadly acceptable to all.”

“Quality Hospital Care is an Economic Asset”

From “Quality Hospital Care is an Economic Asset” by Eric Borgerding in *Wisconsin Politics*, 10/25/24:

“Last month, the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) released it’s 2024 Wisconsin Health Care Quality Report demonstrating the significant commitment our hospitals make to improve care for Wisconsin workers and families. Nearly 70% of Wisconsin’s hospitals received a 4- or 5-star rating from Medicare, significantly ahead of the national average, and our top performing hospitals have patient experience scores that are 15% ahead of their peers.”

“When people decide where to raise a family and start a career, access to high-quality health care is often a top

consideration. Wisconsin’s high-quality care provides employers in all industries with a significant advantage in recruiting the workforce they depend on.”

“These quality results are due to the significant financial and human resources that hospitals dedicate to improving the quality of care in this state. But the mega insurance companies and so-called ‘third party administrators’ are making health care more complicated, more bureaucratic, more costly and more exhausting to provide.”

“An expanding and costly layer of middlemen are getting between patients, providers and hospitals, siphoning precious resources out of community hospitals while denying care to patients or refusing to pay for medically necessary care. A recent report from the American Hospital Association shows that administrative costs now account for more than 40% of total hospital expenses.”

“Health Partners, a health system that operates three rural Critical Access Hospitals in this state, including one of the last remaining inpatient psychiatric units in western Wisconsin, dropped out of UnitedHealthcare’s Medicare Advantage network due to claim denials that were 10 times worse than other insurance companies they contract with.”

“ ‘Unfortunately, some of UnitedHealthcare’s practices create unnecessary waits and delays for patients, and they interfere with our ability to provide patients with timely and appropriate care,’ said Health Partners in a statement following the announcement.”

“You might wonder why I’m writing about insurance company antics in a column about high-quality hospital care. Let me explain. In 2022, Wisconsin health system operating margins were -0.1%, meaning what hospitals and clinics were paid for care by insurance companies and government programs like Medicare and Medicaid (which are increasingly run by private insurance companies) was less than what health systems had to spend on the workforce, supplies and pharmaceuticals it takes to deliver patient care. This is simply not sustainable, and we are now seeing hospitals close and services shrink across parts of Wisconsin.”



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“Meanwhile, wait times for physicians have increased by 24% from 2004 to 2022, according to a survey by AMN/Meritt Hawkins, with some specialties such as orthopedics experiencing wait time increases of nearly 50%. Wisconsin hospitals and health systems are investing as much as they can into expanding access to care for one obvious reason: it’s badly needed. But they cannot expand access if they cannot cover what it costs to operate today. There are many reasons for these challenges, but one has become increasingly worse, and its toll measurable and growing.”

“Today more than ever before, hospitals and physicians are forced to spend scarce time and resources arguing with insurance companies for permission to provide patients with needed care, then followed by months of fighting with insurance companies to be reimbursed for that care. Unnecessary spending on insurance company hurdles and bureaucracy costs billions every year across the US, is burning out our nurses and doctors, and diverting resources and crucial care away from patients.”

“UW Hospital reports that insurance companies deny authorization for care about 45,000 times per year, with disconnected

reviewers or programmed algorithms deeming it not ‘medically necessary.’ That’s right, insurance companies having more power than your doctor or nurse practitioner, second guessing their training and knowledge and telling patients that the type of care they’ve been prescribed isn’t needed. Thankfully, and like hospitals across Wisconsin, UW fights for its patients and many of these denials are reversed, but it takes UW Hospital devoting 110 full-time staff and spending over \$20 million annually to get insurance companies to allow, let alone pay for, needed patient care.”

“We have over 150 hospitals in Wisconsin and they and their patients are all dealing with this growing burden of waste. I can assure you each one would much rather put those resources toward hiring more

clinical staff or investing in quality improvement efforts than fighting with insurance companies, for-hire networks and third-party administrators (aka “the middlemen”). Indeed, while polling shows Wisconsin voters remained split on their preferences for President, they overwhelmingly trust hospitals and health care providers over insurance companies to do what’s best for them and their families.”

RWHC Eye On Health



“It’s a great gig: we push some paper, deny the care and make ourselves double digit profits.”

“It’s time to put a spotlight on the growing number of middlemen in health care and how much of your and your employer’s health care dollar they take while denying care and pushing more and more cost onto patients. They’ll push back, try to turn the spotlight on others, but it’s time to shed some needed light. Enough is enough.”

Borgerding is president and CEO, Wisconsin Hospital Association.

Leadership Insights: “Merging Cultures”

The *Leadership Insights* series is by Jo Anne Preston, RWHC Workforce & Organizational Development Senior Manager. Back issues at www.RWHC.com.

When we merge cultures—be it two large corporations, two small departments combining, or even a physical move to a shared workspace with a new group of people—there are common fears as well as opportunities. The fears are natural. Will I be accepted? Will I feel confident with changes to *what* work I do, *who* I do that work with, *the way* I work? Will I be successful in the new environment? How can I get past being uncomfortable when I am quite comfortable where I am currently? Even the practical day-to-day changes can feel stressful—how will my commute or hours change, where will I park, and where can I eat lunch?

As we address our fears one by one, it helps to remind ourselves to see the opportunities that are there. When we join with others in new ways, it is an opportunity to expand our connections, and connection is what gives us influence as leaders. Get off on the right foot by thinking about building those new relationships proactively in these simple yet powerful ways.

Say hello and introduce yourself first. Don’t wait for others to make the first move to make you feel welcome. Be the welcomer. Learn

names of the new faces you will be interacting with and say those names.

Offer to job shadow. Show the new colleagues that you are interested in understanding what they do so that as you go forward, you will stay aware of how your work intersects with theirs. Even a one-hour job shadow can open our eyes to what others’ work entails. If a job shadow is not an option, have a couple of questions ready as you meet people such as, “What is the thing you like best about the work you do?” or “What is one of the biggest challenges you face in the work that you do?” You can learn a lot about how to prevent silos when you have empathy. Invite them to shadow your work as well.

Bring food. Potlucks always seem to work. Make them special by finding out the favorite foods of the new people you’ll be working with, and bring those foods to the potluck gathering.

Get to know people before duties. Find some way to incorporate simple ice-breakers so that people share a little bit about *who* they are when you first meet, not just *what* they do. Contact us for ideas!

Offer support. Ask, “How can I best support you in your work?” Rather than worry about if we will be supported, go first in the offering and set the stage for working well together.

Ask for what you need. People want to be helpful but they don’t automatically know what you need. When we don’t ask, we set up being disappointed when others don’t figure it out on their own and we don’t get what we need.

Be the light. Manage up your colleagues and quickly find ways to manage up the new people you meet as they help you with things. Start right out of the gate to build the reputation that you are someone who notices people getting it right and appreciates colleagues

for what they bring to the mix.

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The foundation focuses on community & economic development as well as the healthcare workforce.

Email timsze@RWHC.com to discuss how you might support this work.

Don't complain. We all have legit complaints. But really, what good is simply complaining? Earn a reputation as a problem solver instead of a complainer by bringing specific problems to the table coupled with solution suggestions. Be open to trying others' solutions and give them your best effort, even if you might not agree at first. You never know—they might work. And if they don't, you'll be in a much better position to offer an alternative approach if you really did give their idea an honest go.

Communicate clearly. Watch your acronyms. Ask for a "tip sheet" from the new colleagues about their most commonly used terms that might trip you up. Use reflective listening – the best possible way to make someone feel heard and respected; e.g., "This is what I understood from what you said...do I have it right?" Don't be afraid to ask questions if something is not clear.

Have a lead "joining" team. Select reps from each of the new groups to lead the way to a successfully merged culture. This team could be assigned to organizing some of the above. They could also pose "rounding" questions, where

team A reps go to team B to check in on, "What is one thing that is making this newly merged team feel connected, and what is one thing we could improve to make it feel more so?"

The good news is, most of our fears do not come true and most of the stretches that change asks of us help us to grow into even better leaders.

Contact Jo Anne Preston for individual or group coaching at jpreston@RWHC.com or 608-644-3261. For info re the RWHC Leadership Series go to www.RWHC.com/Services.aspx or contact Carrie Ballweg at cballweg@RWHC.com or 608-643-2343.

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