

★ Guest Commentary

Waste-free holiday celebrations

By Lisa Catterall

Periodically our faculty comes together to review our school's mission statement and our three pillars of Academic Excellence, Positive Character Development, and Creative Self Expression.

Often during our discussions, the idea of Environmental Stewardship as a fourth pillar arises.

Whether it is a school pillar, a curriculum crossing all ages, or a shared value infused throughout the community, it is something we strive to model for our students and children.

While reducing plastic waste is a common goal in our homes and at our school, many of us deeply value the ability to bring our children joy during the celebrations of the holiday season.

Simply put, it can be easy to forget our commitment to stewardship of the Earth at this time of year. In 12 years of teaching thoughtful and curious kids at Mount Madonna School, I've noticed that they feel empowered when we model the environmental principles we're asking them to learn, uphold, and disseminate.

This year, I'm thinking more about how to balance my students' requests for holiday parties and activities with our school's environmental principles. I'm thinking about how to bring joy into my home this holiday season without plastic packaging, plastic ribbon, plastic food containers, and without being any part of the limited life cycle of a manufactured product.

On our annual freshmen trip to Catalina Island the students experience an institution that is very close to waste-free. It's a school and a camp that grows a good part of its food, and manages to cater to enormous groups of students without one single-use product. There is a large building where broken things that might be discarded on the mainland are saved and worked back into usefulness.

Once, when I was in Nigeria, I went to sit by the hotel pool and noticed that the cheap white plastic chair I was in had been repaired. In America, these types of chairs cost five dollars and are discarded when they break. This chair had been stitched together carefully with wires; it was painstakingly saved and cared-for,

then put back into use.

For whatever reason, economics or principles, these places showed me a mindfulness toward "disposable" objects that I rarely see around me in my daily life off the mountain. Our oceans need us all to embrace that kind of mindfulness, with every decision, every day. While some human effects on the environment are beyond our individual control, the cumulative effect of all of our daily decisions can make an enormous difference to our children's future.

Last spring at the USC Wrigley Center for Environmental Sciences on Catalina last spring, their Director of Operations, Sean Connor, talked to us about the future of environmental education.

The Wrigley Center hosts cutting-edge research that identifies environmental problems and finds solutions. Sean is on the forefront of the human mission to sustain our oceans, our air, and our planet, and lately, he's been thinking more and more about the importance of education.

Sean said that if you look at all that we know about the environment, the single most important solution to the plastic waste issue is changing the moment-to-moment decisions that are made by humans hundreds of times every second, all over the world. I think that making a split-second decision to act with responsibility to a higher cause such as the environment comes from an education that includes more than just science. It takes a powerful human being to change a personal habit. It takes an ethical one to act with a bigger cause in mind.

With this idea infusing my season, I find myself having a more difficult time reaching for a brand new gift or a roll of new wrapping paper. The habit is there; when I'm out, I'm looking-at the piles and piles of items there for me to buy and offer my family as tokens of how I feel about them.

But this year I've simply paused and then stopped. There has to be another way to express the love of the season, and to find moments of joy.

Will your family, and your class, make an effort to reduce waste this holiday season? If so, how will you do it? More importantly, how will we all do it together?

Lisa Catterall teaches STEAM, math, science, and art at Mount Madonna School.

Cartoonist's take



★ Guest Commentary

Shift needle focus to the end consumer

By Meade Fischer

The needle exchange issue is front and center again. We have Harm Reduction wanting to hand out more needles, local people complaining about discarded needles in their neighborhoods and then the people at the center of the debate, IV drug users.

The issue, according to Harm Reduction is that giving out more needles reduces the risk of the spread of diseases, such as HIV. However, most of the people who are concerned about discarded needles do not use them, unless they happen to be diabetic, in which case, they discard them in a Sharps Container.

There doesn't seem to be a meeting of the minds on this issue, so perhaps we should shift our focus to the end consumer, the needle user, the drug user. One way of looking at these folks is that they are hapless victims, people who cannot help themselves and who need to be given something that will keep them from harming themselves. In this view the drug is seen as controlling the user, who in contrast has no control over his or her situation. The question is whether this is true.

Alcoholics Anonymous meetings are filled with people addicted to alcohol, but who have remained sober sometimes for years. There are millions of people like myself who used to be

Ultimately, your behavior is a choice. We choose to eat junk food, knowing that it can shorten our lives. We choose to have one more drink at the bar, knowing that we could get a DUI and we choose to inject a drug, knowing that an unclean needle could give us a fatal disease.

addicted to tobacco, but who have simply quit cold turkey. While quitting an addictive substance isn't easy, it can be done. Ultimately, your behavior is a choice. We choose to eat junk food, knowing that it can shorten our lives. We choose to have one more drink at the bar, knowing that we could get a DUI and we choose to inject a drug, knowing that an unclean needle could give us a fatal disease.

This might seem a harsh point of view, but let's look at the opposite view.

We can choose to see everyone as a victim, a person with no control over his or her life, a pawn in a world designed to keep him or her helpless. We can say that society is unfair, that there are privileged people who are spared the bad things of life, and that there are those who lack privilege and are discarded by society. However, the children of millionaires often end up alcoholics or drug users, and people growing up in

poor, dysfunctional or addicted homes often grow up to be outstanding members of society, people who contribute.

I would rather not get into the game of either blaming society or blaming the victim. More importantly, I don't want to subscribe to the notion that the species that has gone from wearing animal skins and living in caves to walking on the moon are no more than B.F. Skinner's rats in a maze they cannot understand.

In a world where, in my opinion, the individual has agency, is capable of controlling his or her life, we offer these people a helping hand, a way out of their addiction. We make it clear that if they continue down this self-destructive road, they are on their own and are risking their lives. We have services that will help you get clean, but no services that will help you stay addicted.

Meade Fischer is a Santa Cruz resident.

★ Commentary

Impeachment articles are major retreat for Democrats

Marc Thiessen

Washington Post

WASHINGTON » That's it?

After three years in which Democrats accused President Trump of a host of criminal acts -- from bribery and extortion to campaign finance violations, obstruction of justice, conspiracy and even treason -- they have finally introduced articles of impeachment that allege none of those things. Not only have they dropped the charge of bribery, the words that gripped Washington -- "quid pro quo" -- don't even appear in the document.

This is a major retreat by Democrats, who have effectively admitted the president did not commit any statutory crimes. Indeed, if these articles are approved, this will be the first presidential impeachment in history in which no statutory crimes are even alleged. In that alone, Trump can claim vindication.

Instead, Democrats settled on two noncriminal allegations: obstruction of Congress and abuse of power. Both charges are farcical.

Take obstruction. Demo-

crats claim Trump engaged in "unprecedented" defiance of congressional subpoenas and "sought to arrogate to himself" the right to withhold documents and witnesses "as well as the unilateral prerogative to deny any and all information to the House of Representatives." Please. If anyone is "arrogating" "unilateral" power to themselves, it is House Democrats.

Democrats seem not to understand that the legislative and the executive are equal branches of government. They do not get the last word when a president invokes executive privilege. When a dispute arises between the two branches, the president has a right to appeal to the third equal branch of government -- the judiciary. Trump did that, as is his constitutional right. If he appealed to the courts and lost but still refused to cooperate, then Congress would have every right to charge him with obstruction of Congress.

But Democrats refused to wait for judicial review. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif, actually said, "We cannot be at the mercy of the courts." Excuse me? And Democrats are ac-

cusing Trump of being "a threat to the Constitution"? Democrats are doing exactly what they accuse Trump of doing. As Professor Jonathan Turley told Democrats on the Judiciary Committee "We have three branches, not two. ... If you impeach a president, if you make a high crime and misdemeanor out of going to the courts, it is an abuse of power. It's *your* abuse of power."

Democrats are also completely wrong when they declare Trump's invocation of executive privilege "unprecedented." In 2011, the House Committee on Oversight and Reform subpoenaed then-Attorney General Eric Holder to provide documents and witnesses related to the botched gun-running operation "Fast and Furious." Holder refused to fully comply. When the committee threatened to hold him in contempt, President Barack Obama stepped in and invoked executive privilege. The administration argued that "compelled disclosure would be inconsistent with the separation of powers established in the Constitution."

Guess what? The same Dem-

ocrats now seeking to impeach Trump for obstruction of Congress backed Obama's obstruction of Congress. Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., wrote, "The White House assertion is backed by decades of precedent that has recognized the need for the president and his senior advisers to receive candid advice and information from their top aides." Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., said the effort to hold Holder in contempt for refusing to comply was "politically-motivated." Pelosi called it -- wait for it -- worse than a "witch hunt." By the plain language of the Democrats' articles of impeachment, Obama committed an impeachable offense. And yet today, Holder -- the man at the center of Obama's obstruction scheme -- has the chutzpah to write that Attorney General William Barr is "unfit to lead the Justice Department." What a disgrace.

As for abuse of power, this will be the first presidential impeachment in history in which no violations of the law are even alleged. The justification for impeaching Trump without a statutory crime is that impeach-

ment is a political, not legal, proceeding. Fair enough. Democrats held weeks of hearings to convince the American people that Trump's alleged abuse of power rises to the level of impeachment and removal. Instead, their slipshod inquiry convinced Americans of the opposite.

In October, before the hearings began, the Quinnipiac poll showed that a 48 to 46% plurality of Americans supported impeachment and removal; today, after the hearings, voters are opposed by a margin of 51 to 45%. In key swing states, a Firehouse/Optimus poll found that impeachment and removal is now opposed by 51% of voters in Michigan, 52% in Pennsylvania and 58% in Wisconsin.

This is the definition of failure. Earlier this year, Pelosi said she was "not for impeachment" because "unless there's something so compelling and overwhelming and bipartisan, I don't think we should go down that path." She was right then. Democrats should have listened.

Follow Marc A. Thiessen on Twitter, @marcthiessen.