

THE OPINION PAGE

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OUR OPINION

An overdue decision in Dickinson

Herald editorial board

Twenty-three years ago this month, the Dickinson School Board made a forward-thinking decision based on respect and common sense. That's when board members voted to move away from Dickinson High School's mascot, the Midgets.

There was backlash in the community and the nickname remained. Later, several of those board members were ousted in a recall election.

Things have changed from those very different times. Nicknames considered offensive are being phased out and replaced with kinder nicknames and mascots that do not use derogatory slang terms and that will have wider, lasting appeal.

Now, 23 years after that controversial board decision, mascot conversations have sparked anew in Dickinson. It's a debate that was the focus of a 1,100-word article earlier this month in The Washington Post. As Dickinson holds tight to the nickname, other schools in the nation have phased it out, including one this year in Wisconsin and another, in 2016, in McLaughlin, S.D.

Last week, Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk – president of Little People of Manitoba – drove from Winnipeg to speak to the Dickinson School Board. In an interview with the Post, she said “there is absolutely zero good defense for keeping this archaic, overdue term alive in public schools.” During the board meeting, she said “Midgets” has “a lot of hate.” No action was taken by the board.

Dickinson now should follow the path blazed by the School Board members from two decades ago and finally change its high school mascot. Those board members were right, and certainly ahead of their time – although in hindsight, their process was flawed. Back then, opponents of the change were disappointed by the lack of community input; one opponent said it was seven decades of tradition “taken away from us in 15 minutes.”

Interestingly, the term “Midgets” came about in an unofficial way in Dickinson. In Dickinson High School's early years, the sports teams were known as the Coyotes, which seems geographically fitting. In 1922, however, a sports reporter referred to a relatively small group of Dickinson athletes as “Midgets” and, over time, the name stuck.

And also over time, we have come to understand that the word is offensive and derogatory.

Now, the time is right for the Dickinson School Board to make the change. The board should consider using a template already created by another school that dropped the same nickname earlier this year.

Originally, the town of Hurley, Wis., planned to hold a communitywide referendum to decide whether to change its Midgets nickname. The School Board, however, chose instead to lead the effort and move forward, allowing time for ample community engagement and taking nominations for a new nickname. A committee of 36 people – including students ranging from fifth grade through high school, staff and others – helped steer the process. Seventy-six nicknames were nominated and, after a student and community vote, “Northstars” was selected.

It's a model approach that was inclusive and engaging, and it's one that could be used in Dickinson, where a change is overdue.

Two moon parties, no sun party

Here's a theory for why our politics are so confusing these days: Neither party wants to be a majority party.

From an ideological perspective, majority parties are, by nature, weird. For instance, the long-dominant FDR coalition included a strange mix of blacks and segregationists, corrupt city machines and the reformers who hated them.

Over the several decades that followed, most major policy questions were hashed out within the Democratic Party. The Republicans factored in mostly as stalemate-breakers. So, for instance, the great intra-Democratic Party fight between liberals and Southern segregationists was only settled when Republicans sided with the civil rights bloc. Eighty percent of Republicans voted in favor of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, while fewer than 70 percent of Democrats did.

Samuel Lubell, a Polish-born political analyst, famously described this dynamic as the “sun and moon” system of political parties. In our “political solar system,” Lubell wrote in 1951, “it is within the majority party that the issues of any particular period are fought out; while the minority party shines in reflected radiance of the heat thus generated.”

The Democratic sun started its long arc of descent in 1968. In 1972, Richard Nixon managed to pick off sizable support from the white



JONAH GOLDBERG
Syndicated columnist

working class for a massive landslide re-election victory. Ronald Reagan's victories and the subsequent GOP capture of the House in 1994 – after a 40-year Democratic reign – seemed to seal the deal.

But then, as New York Times columnist David Brooks noted in 2011, “something strange happened. No party took the lead.” The outcome, he wrote, is “both parties have become minority parties simultaneously. We are living in the era of two moons and no sun.”

Nearly a decade later, things are even more bizarre. We may be more partisan than ever, but the partisans tend to dislike their own parties – they just hate the other party more.

There are many reasons for this polarization, but one of them is that the most committed members of each party have a decidedly lunar mindset. Progressives and conservatives alike are convinced they are victims of the Powers That Be. One of the main arguments that propelled Trump to the White House and sustains his GOP support today is the feeling that the right has lost every important battle of the last 40 years.

The left is hooked on the same feeling. Each side

defines the Powers That Be differently, though there is some overlap when it comes to animosity toward economic “elites” (hence Fox News host Tucker Carlson's populist assaults and praise for Elizabeth Warren's economic program). Hillary Clinton was the candidate of the establishment, and even though she won the Democratic nomination, nearly all the passion in the party flows to some version of Bernie Sanders' or Elizabeth Warren's radical indictment of the system.

As political consultant Luke Thompson notes, minority parties tend to obsess about unity because without it they are even more powerless. This makes ideological purity a vital source of cohesion. Majority parties have both the luxury and the burden of power. To govern is to make policy choices, and choosing A over B will always disappoint the backers of B.

Writing in 2017, Thompson argued that the GOP needed to come to grips with the fact that it was the majority party and behave accordingly, stringing together disparate and often disagreeable factions. The Democrats, by betting on the “ascendant coalition” of minorities, immigrants and the young to get Barack Obama elected, had not realized that this coalition was good at voting for Obama but unreliable for other Democrats.

The problem is that the ideological purity dominating both sides is a kind of

righteous victimhood. The result is a Democratic Party suffused with a sense that it should be a majority party but is being denied its rightful status, making denunciations of “white supremacy” and the “oligarchy” simultaneously more intense and comforting. Voter suppression is a legitimate issue, but it is not the unified field theory for Democratic failures some want it to be – nor can voter fraud be blamed for Republican failures. Meanwhile, the GOP could be a majority party, but the perceived need to be a Trump party prevents it from even trying. Not only are Trump's politics fueled by culture war resentment and victimology, but his bottomless need for adulation is simply an inadequate rationale for a sun party to hold a majority together.

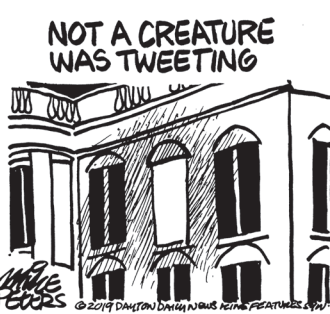
Both parties are weakened by decades of misguided reforms and the growth of a media industrial complex invested in telling its customers what they want to hear, making it impossible for either moon to achieve the escape velocity required to become a sun party.

As political scientists Steven Teles and Robert Saldin argue, the best way out is for new moderate political factions to organize and demand concessions for their support. But that will require a lot of work, made all the more difficult by the burden of toiling in moonlight.

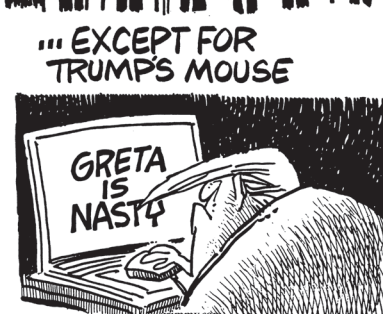
Jonah Goldberg is a nationally syndicated columnist whose work regularly is published in the Herald.

DOUBLE PLAY

'T WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE IMPEACHMENT...



AND ALL THROUGH THE HOUSE



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