

# THE OPINION PAGE

In the Mail: letters@gfherald.com; Box 6008, Grand Forks, N.D. 58206

OUR OPINION

## Trump unwilling to disappoint his fans

There's not much left to say about last week's presidential debate, so I'll dispense with my verdict quickly.



**JONAH GOLDBERG**  
Syndicated columnist

Donald Trump fared poorly because he behaved poorly. Trump went in with the goal of forcing Joe Biden into a viral, game-changing meltdown. If Trump had succeeded, his bluster and interruptions — which may have prevented precisely the Biden “senior moment” Trump sought — would have been worth it (politically speaking).

Biden went in with a Hippocratic priority: First, do no harm to his lead in the polls. Score the performances however you like, but Trump failed to achieve his strategic objective, and Biden succeeded in securing his. Everything else is spin, distraction, blame-shifting or simply irrelevant.

If Trump were inclined to take advice from me (spoiler: he's not), I would tell him: “You have to be willing to disappoint your biggest fans.”

I've given this advice to young would-be pundits for years. And if I were a political consultant — a job I want about as much as a taste-tester job at an organic fertilizer factory — I'd give the same advice to clients.

The reasoning for this advice is twofold. First, I believe it's an ethical or moral imperative. If you conclude that the truth is X but your fans want to hear Y, you're obligated to tell the truth. You don't have to cram X down your fans' throats, but you can't feed them Y without losing your integrity. But if you define your job as simply saying what your fans want to hear, you're an entertainer or partisan activist, not a journalist or intellectual.

The second reason is more practical. If you want to make this your lifelong vocation, you need to protect your credibility. Fans can change their minds on a dime, and that's fine. But if you're a writer or commentator, you have something your audience doesn't have: a track record on paper, pixels or video. There's nothing wrong with changing your mind when warranted. But if you change your views solely to pander to your audience, the only people who will find you credible are the

people who don't care about credibility.

Now, in fairness, some folks to whom I've given this advice haven't followed it, and they've done quite well giving the customers what they want. I don't think these people are helping the country or their cause, but if you don't care about that and you're really good at fan service, you can make a nice living — indeed a much better living than I'm making.

Politicians are a little different, of course. For most of them, the top priority is getting elected. That changes the equation. I don't think it absolves them from the obligation to tell the truth but you can see how seductive it might be to tell voters what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear. That illuminates why so many people distrust and dislike politicians.

What does this have to do with the debate? Trump cares about his fans more than any president in my lifetime. He doesn't just care; he relies on them to give him ideas. Trump depends on rallies of cheering groupies to test-drive his slogans and priorities. They are a pool of Narcissus, reflecting back on him precisely what he wants to see.

When Trump can't

get sustenance from a crowd of superfans, he resorts to the next best thing: a coterie of TV and radio hosts and Twitter personalities who affirm and confirm everything he wants to be true. It's a massive feedback loop. They tell him he's the greatest and all the critics are evilly wrong, and in return he promotes and amplifies them. The result is that his worst attributes get amplified rather than corrected.

This is why Trump's best friends are often his worst enemies. They tell him he doesn't need to change even when they know his behavior is hurting him. Telling an unpopular politician to keep doing what makes him unpopular might make sense for a cable host who makes money pleasing the tiny sliver of the electorate that wants to hear that, but it's terrible political advice.

The Trump we saw last Tuesday night was a politician who takes advice from fans. If he were way ahead in the polls, that advice would still be wrong morally, but it would at least be sound politically. But he's not ahead in the polls. And doubling down on fan service won't change that.

Jonah Goldberg is a nationally syndicated columnist.

## For newest UND leader: Good so far

Herald editorial board

Recent events paint a portrait of Andrew Armacost's first few months as president at UND.

During a discussion with the UND Foundation and invited guests Armacost and his wife, Kathy, hosted a loose conversation during which he showed a hint of a grand vision.

A few days later, during his inauguration ceremony, viewers got a glimpse of how Armacost has interacted with employees and others since he took office in June.

When Armacost was hired, the campus was in flux. Various issues existed, but were dwarfed by concerns about campus morale. Enough time has passed that it's superfluous to dredge up the issues, but high turnover in the president's office — five leaders since 2015 — didn't ease the campus' frayed nerves.

Enter Armacost, whose chief task in the early months of his tenure, in our opinion, was to continue the stability begun by interim President Joshua Wynne. Coronavirus notwithstanding, it appears — judging from the anecdotal comments that always flow toward a local newspaper — that has been achieved.

And he has shown vision. During last week's UND Foundation meeting, for instance, Armacost outlined a dream for UND.

“I want to launch satellites from Grand Forks,” he said. “I'll say that again: I want to launch satellites from Grand Forks meaning, design them and control them.”

He later clarified that it's a long-term vision and not a short-term mission for the university.

But why not launch satellites from Grand Forks? UND has an aerospace program that's among the best in the nation, a nearby Air Force base and is located in a place with wide-open spaces and a crisp, clear environment. The university should be thinking in terms of its usefulness to the nation's burgeoning Space Force.

This week, at his inauguration event, he was lauded as collaborative and inclusive.

“You take our concerns seriously and you keep direct lines of communication open,” Staff Senate President Megan Wasylow said during the event. “You have an incredible ability to make people feel comfortable, energized and welcomed.”

So far, so good, but real work lies just ahead. It will be interesting to watch Armacost maneuver through difficult paths in the coming months.

The Legislature convenes in January, and UND and NDSU are expected to again push for big dollars for research purposes. This is an important initiative and Armacost must play a leading role. We've seen his inclusive personality at work within the community; can that kind of diplomacy play with state lawmakers who shunned the research idea in 2019?

Armacost also has several key positions to fill at UND, including provost, vice president for research and economic development, and dean of the aerospace school. His hiring decisions will impact UND for years. He simply cannot swing and miss on these important positions.

What skills will he bring to this process? Can he use his Air Force background to help target the best possible candidates for, say, the aerospace position?

In his first months, he has done well with inclusivity, collaboration and morale, all within the great shadow cast by the pandemic. That's the first chapter of his story at UND.

New chapters, and new challenges, await.

DOUBLE PLAY



BIDEN PLEADS THE FIFTH



OTHER OPINION

## Answers are needed in Taylor case

**The Washington Post**  
The process was broken from the beginning, on March 12, when a judge in Kentucky's Jefferson County signed off on the no-knock search warrant that led to the death of Breonna Taylor. It remains broken today. New questions have been raised about the actions of Louisville police as well as those of the state's Republican attorney general who declined to bring criminal charges against the two officers who shot and killed Taylor. Answers and accountability are still desperately needed, which buttresses calls for appointment of a special prosecutor.

Last week saw the release of grand jury materials in the case, a highly unusual move ordered by a judge after an unnamed grand juror accused Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron of duplicity in explaining why no one was directly charged in Taylor's killing. But the materials only added to the confusion and the controversy. Fifteen hours of recorded testimony were made public, including conflicting accounts

about whether police had announced themselves before breaking down the door to Taylor's apartment. But the release did not include the guidance or statements that prosecutors gave to the grand jury. The panel brought no charges against the two officers whose bullets struck Taylor during a botched drug raid but charged a third officer, since fired from the force, with wanton endangerment for firing his weapon indiscriminately and endangering neighboring residents.

Cameron said the two officers involved in Taylor's death were “justified in their acts.” This was unquestionably a complicated and fraught case, given the chaos of that night when Taylor's boyfriend (not knowing who had broken down the door) fired his gun in self-defense, apparently hitting one officer. But Cameron undermined his credibility and the inquiry with his shifting statements — first saying he walked jurors through “every homicide offense” and then acknowledging (after a grand juror hired a lawyer and went to court to dispute his

claims) that he only recommended the wanton endangerment charges. Why not be completely aboveboard?

From the start, there has been a troubling pattern of obfuscation and even duplicity in how authorities have handled this case. The initial police report on the raid incorrectly said that Taylor suffered no injuries. The ex-boyfriend of Taylor, the target of the raid, said he was offered a plea deal by prosecutors if he would name Taylor as a member of his alleged criminal gang; he refused because the only thing the 26-year-old ER technician was guilty of was being at home in her bed after working double shifts. According to recent reporting by Vice News, officers involved in the raid violated crime scene protocols that raise questions about the integrity of the investigation.

Taylor's family has called on Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, D, to appoint a special prosecutor. The FBI is also conducting a civil rights investigation. It is clear there are still many more stones that need to be overturned.

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