

OPINION

The Muslims are coming

Wajahat Ali
Contributing Writer

The Muslims are coming!

For some Americans — those who support a travel ban, a wall along the Mexican border and increased restrictions on refugees, all while holding on to the ridiculous belief that the world's 1.8 billion Muslim hate America, despite the fact that it's home to nearly 3.5 million of us — that statement probably inspires fear.

But it's true: Nearly 100 Muslim political hopefuls have filed to run for elected office this year. Only a dozen or so ran in 2016. In July, The Associated Press interviewed Muslim candidates about this record number. The reporting revealed that it's precisely the bigotry and hate that has been directed toward Islam — including in remarks and tweets by President Trump — that has motivated so many Muslims to enter the political arena, where they now stand poised to advance policies that directly reflect their faith and also benefit all of their constituents.

Rashida Tlaib of Detroit, a former state representative and a daughter of Palestinian immigrants, would be the nation's first Muslim woman in Congress. Ilhan Omar, a Somali-American and refugee from Kenya, is predicted to win in November, replacing Representative Keith Ellison in Minnesota.

A majority of Muslim candidates are not running with their religion on their sleeves, but instead as Democrats promoting unabashedly progressive platforms.

"It is important that people recognize I am someone who is a public servant working to create a better society, who just happens to be a Muslim refugee," Ms. Omar told me in a phone interview. While she represents a district that is mostly Christian and white, she believes her constituents don't care about her religion or identity as much as they do about whether she'll champion their causes in Washington.

These Muslim political veterans and upstarts certainly aren't the first to demonstrate that deeply held religious beliefs can inspire a commitment to social justice. But at a time when the hypocrisy of many who claim to represent the Christian religious right is especially glaring, they provide the latest reminder that being devout does-

n't have to — and shouldn't — go hand in hand with attacks on women, minorities and poor people.

"It's not about just being out there and flaunting your faith," Ms. Tlaib told CNN in an August interview. "I always tell people that I'm exposing Islam in such a pivotal way, an impactful way, through public service." Ms. Omar beat her closest Democratic rival by more than 20,000 votes while calling for the canceling of student debt, raising the minimum wage and increasing the number of refugees admitted to this country.

"It is part of my Islamic teaching to make sure we are charitable," Ms. Omar told me. "A huge part of the Islamic faith is that you can't sleep with a full belly if your neighbors and those around you aren't sleeping with a full belly."

Abdul El-Sayed — who recently lost his race for the Michigan governor's nomination but started a PAC to support liberal candidates — echoed the senti-

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ment. Dr. El-Sayed calls himself

"openly, honestly and unapologetically Muslim" and told me he believes

"privilege begets responsibility." That Islamic value inform his progressive politics.

Nonetheless, both Ms. Omar and Dr.

El-Sayed said critics have tried to use their religion against them. "Islamophobia comes with the territory," Dr. El-Sayed said. They've each been hounded by the far-right activist Laura Loomer, who has been traveling the country "investigating" Muslim candidates running for office. This includes disrupting their talks and asking whether they support Hamas.

Ms. Omar refuses to be intimidated. "We say what we want to say," she said. "They cannot continue to instill fear in us and stop us from achieving critical conversations."

Unfortunately, many Christian Republican voters are still encouraged to fear Muslims. "Running on Hate 2018," a report by the nonprofit organization Muslim Advocates, examined 80 campaigns using anti-Muslim messages leading up to the midterm elections and found that almost all of the candidates engaged in these tactics are Republican. The evangelical leader Franklin Graham has said Islam is an "evil" religion.

After Dr. El-Sayed lost his race, a message appeared on the Twitter page of Corey Stewart, a Republican Senate candidate from Virginia, that read, "Michigan almost elected a far left ISIS commie." It was quickly deleted and Mr. Stewart said that it was sent by someone with access to his account. Duncan Hunter, a California Republican who has been indicted on a charge of campaign finance violations, said his opponent, Ammar Campa-Najjar, was a national security risk because of his Palestinian Muslim roots and because his grandfather was involved in the 1972 Munich Olympics terrorist attack. (Mr. Campa-Najjar is a Christian and his grandfather died 16 years before he was born, but who needs facts?)

These are reminiscent of the attitudes behind the anti-Catholic hazing of the 1950s that forced John Kennedy to assuage fears that he was "not the Catholic candidate for president" but instead the "Democratic Party's candidate for president who happens also to be a Catholic." But Kennedy won the presidency, and now a quarter of United States senators and six Supreme Court justices are Catholic.

Hana Ali, seeking a seat in the Tennessee legislature, is taking a cue from President Kennedy. She told me she's running as a Democrat, a proud Tennessean and an American who also happens to be Muslim.

In Tennessee, she has seen firsthand the damage of the opioid crisis and the dire consequences of her state's failure to expand Medicaid. She doesn't have the built-in progressive network of a liberal Detroit or New York or the luxury to ignore Trump supporters. Instead, Dr. Ali, a physician, health care executive and proud immigrant, is knocking on doors trying to win voters over with a Democratic platform, one smile and hug at a time.

Win or lose, she told me, she wants her campaign to inspire her children and the next generation. "If this woman who lives in the middle of Tennessee can run for office as a Democratic candidate, then it opens up a lot of doors for a lot of Muslim women, future generations and communities who are watching from a distance," she said.

Muslims are here, they're running for office, and a few are going to Washington, where they'll do something many members of Congress have failed to do: serve God by serving people.

WAJAHAT ALI is a playwright and lawyer.



George Washington for president



Thomas L. Friedman

Dear Reader: I think you know, after 23 years of my writing this column, that I'm not lazy. I always try to come up with fresh ideas. Today, though, I am fresh out of fresh ideas. More than any time in my career, I think the United States is in danger. It has a disturbed man as president, whose job description — to be a healer of the country in times of great national hurt and to pull everyone together to do big things that can be done only together — conflicts with his political strategy, which is to mobilize his base with anger and fear. And time and again he has chosen the latter.

When a person is promoted to a top job in life, usually one of two things happens: He either grows or he swells — he either evolves and grows into that job or all of his worst instincts and habits become swollen and just expand over a wider field. I don't have to tell you what happened with President Trump. He is a shameless liar and an abusive bully — only now he is doing it from the bully pulpit of the presidency.

When you have a president without shame, backed by a party without a spine, amplified by a TV network without integrity, reason is not an option and hope is not a strategy. The only restraint on Trump is a lever of national power in the hands of the opposition party that can force some accountability.

The stakes could not be higher. If the coming midterms reaffirm Trump's grip on every lever of national power — the White House, the Senate, the House and the Supreme Court — he will become

even more swollen and more dangerous to our institutions, which are now straining to contain his excesses.

Trump once boasted, "I am a nationalist." He surely is. And remember what President Charles de Gaulle of France once observed: Patriots put love of their own people first, while nationalists put hate for other people first. This is a time for every American patriot to do the only thing that can make a difference now:

In the midterm elections, vote for a Democrat, canvass for a Democrat, raise money for a Democrat, drive someone to a voting station to vote for a Democrat. I repeat: In the midterm elections, vote for a Democrat, canvass for a Democrat, raise money for a Democrat, drive someone to a voting station to vote for a Democrat. I repeat: In the

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Trump's greatest hits

DOUTHAT, FROM PAGE 1
won out over Trump's more populist promises.

The desire to wink at extremism has remained — witness his Charlottesville response — but it's been somewhat kept in check by staff and aides, and the mix of white nationalists and alt-right provocateurs who fastened onto him in 2016 have seen their stars dim and a much more conventional group of right-wing grifters take their place.

Still, it's not at all surprising that with the election almost here Trump would return to what seemed to work for him two years ago, and try to revive the mix of identitarian demagoguery and policy heterodoxy that helped him achieve a partial Electoral College realignment while his party held both the House and Senate.

The question is whether it will work again, and keep the House in Republican hands for two more years. If it doesn't, there will be two main explanations.

First, the voters who were won over by Trump's economic populism when he was running against Hillary Clinton — especially the kind of Midwestern Democratic voters who flipped the Electoral College — now have almost two years of policymaking to assess, rather than just a campaign's worth of promises. And on the evidence of a lot of Midwestern polls they believe the G.O.P. under Trump is still more plutocratic than populist.

This is a reasonable assessment. True, on trade and low-skilled immigration Trump can at least claim (however debatably) to be looking out for blue-collar workers more than past Republicans. But on taxes he delivered an unpopular tax cut for the rich, on health care he delivered a failed and hated Obamacare replacement, and on infrastructure, the big campaign promise, he delivered next to nothing.

If an infrastructure bill or the things he's suddenly pitching — lower prescription drug prices and a tax cut for the middle class — had been central to

his agenda in 2017 he might have been a much more politically formidable president. But bringing them up now would smack of political desperation even if voters were paying close attention to the new proposals — and they probably aren't, given the chaos of pre-election coverage.

So the return to economic populism is likely to be less effective in 2018 than the same message was in 2016. And then at the same time the wink to the conspiratorial extremes, the japes about body-slams and punching protesters in the face, have met the thing most likely to make them a political liability: actual far-right violence.

The idiosyncratic nature of lone-wolf attacks makes it a mistake to draw a line of direct responsibility from Trump's rhetoric to the would-be pipe bomber and the synagogue shooting. And the oft-repeated claim that the Trump era has produced a general surge in anti-Semitic

violence seems dubious or wrong.

But the events of last week are still a strong reminder that the politics of vilification and the paranoid style work darkly in darkened minds, and that having a president embrace both is simple wickedness, not just the WWE-style game that Trump may believe himself to be playing with his rhetoric. And voters who decided to forgive Trump's demagoguery in 2016, or treat it as performance art, have just been given a visceral reason to punish him for it instead.

Given our vertiginous style of politics there is still time for some unexpected development, some last-minute midterm twist. But with a week to go the safest bet is that in returning to the same strategy he followed in 2016, Trump will earn — and deserve — a more disappointing political result.

expressions of affection and esteem, I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport, from all classes of Citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet, from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good Government, to become a great and a happy people.

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my Administration, and fervent wishes for my felicity. May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.

G. Washington

Nationalism in Australia

BROPHY, FROM PAGE 12

The Ramsay Center's first suitor, The Australian National University, balked when it realized the constraints the center wished to place on its autonomy and the intellectual freedom of its faculty. Yet with much of the same proposal still intact, including a periodic review of funding and Ramsay participation in hiring decisions, administrators at the University of Sydney have been unable to resist the lure of the center's millions and — to the considerable disquiet of staff, including me — are plunging into negotiations. More preliminary moves are afoot at the University of Queensland.

In the face of administrative intransigence and the erosion of faculty governance, staff and students at the University of Sydney have mobilized strongly against the Ramsay proposal, and enlisted the support of colleagues from around the country and overseas. Several departments have issued open letters opposing the partnership, and some faculty have threatened to boycott it. An arm wrestle is taking place on our campus, and its outcome will have significant consequences for Australian higher education.

For universities to fulfill the critical role they were designed for, it's essential that they not simply serve as conduits for the viewpoints espoused by the loudest or wealthiest voices in the wider society. The values of pluralism and diversity that all Australian universities profess to represent shouldn't be reduced to mere advertising slogans — they're prerequisites for the participatory intellectual climate in which scholarly work thrives. It's time for our universities to live up to these promises and to reject Ramsay.

DAVID BROPHY is a senior lecturer in the department of history at the University of Sydney, and a member of the Staff Against the Ramsay Center group.

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