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Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 We can squabble, or we can prepare

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 As national failures play out locally, Brattleboro faces a
3 choice: Blame one another for the fallout, or build the resilience
4 we will need

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 FOR THOSE OF US who engage with our democratic
7 process (and therefore can freely complain), competing concerns
8 are everywhere. We have the luxury of being able to focus our
9 attention on one or two pet peeves.

10 Not so for those who stepped up and successfully ran for
11 public office, if they take the role seriously. They have the

12 challenge of negotiating often valid, but seemingly incompatible
13 demands on government, in public. It doesn't look like fun.

14 Watching several successive Selectboards (and Town
15 Meetings) at work has inspired a great appreciation for our
16 system of governance, up to this point.

17 A recent meeting I attended was a master class in the
18 different approaches to difficult issues that face us. There were
19 those who had spent a lot of time looking at the issue from one or
20 another perspective. Some would want to find a compromise
21 between sometimes completely incompatible proposals. And at
22 least one was truly trying to understand what we are up against,
23 not just one or more of the symptoms.

24 In this case, the agenda item was the motel voucher
25 program — in effect, the intersection of housing, mental illness,
26 drug addiction, and likely other issues.

27 * * *

28 THESE ARE real problems, with real impacts on both
29 individuals and the community. That's the elephant in the room
30 (apologies for the metaphorical salad). That room is Brattleboro, a
31 small place with many precious and delicate things that could be
32 damaged, as in the proverbial china shop.

33 Whether we listen to the three blind men, each with a
34 valid perspective and premature conclusion, or try to understand
35 what we are really dealing with, satisfactory solutions are hard to
36 come by.

37 We can do something that satisfies one constituency or
38 another, regardless of whether it helps or not.

39 Not doing anything because the problem is beyond our
40 capacity to solve seems tempting but clearly doesn't satisfy
41 anyone, regardless of its merits.

42 * * *

43 ATTEMPTS AT harm reduction, often on a one-to-one basis,
44 is what we can do in the moment.

45 When I look at where we are and how we got here, I see
46 a long list of choices that we made nationally that left us an
47 unfortunate legacy.

48 Our impulses to sabotage ourselves as a nation didn't
49 start just a decade ago. We have just gotten much better at it.

50 Our "special military operation" in Vietnam was the
51 crown jewel on our quixotic military response to the cultural
52 competition with Russia. In the end, it was the inspiring
53 principles of our founding — and the prosperity that resulted
54 from a relatively functional democracy — that inspired many
55 around the world to look to us as a role model, ultimately
56 bringing down the Soviet Union.

57 What we did get out of our very expensive "excursion"
58 into southeast Asia was the a new and thriving "pharmaceutical"
59 business, with supply chains that reached around the globe. We
60 then were able to replace the fading Cold War with the war on
61 drugs.

62 Then came the "War on (of?) Terror," and now the war on
63 comedians.

64 Each of these "wars" has left scars on our society and has
65 taken away the resources that might otherwise have be used to
66 help heal those suffering from the trauma of the past wars.

67 * * *

68 UNTIL WE CAN wrestle our national government out of the
69 hands of special interests, whether financial or ideological, we
70 will be dealing with the fallout of this insanity.

71 It is in their interest that we squabble among ourselves
72 over how to deal with the fallout, rather than looking to the real
73 source of the problem.

74 I expect we are going to be facing far-worse problems
75 soon, at the rate things are going. The hard choices likely coming
76 our way will make our current challenges with budgets and
77 behavior look like a picnic.

78 The “good” news is that we have the option to come
79 together now to make our community more resilient and
80 prepared for whatever challenges come our way.

81 * * *

82 THESE SAME IMPULSES for self-induced injury are coming
83 for our national (and by extension, global) food supply.

84 With deportation of some of our most productive
85 workers and the effects of climate change, combined with the
86 direct and indirect impact of conflicts around the world, farmers
87 are facing huge challenges.

88 Without labor, fuel, or fertilizer, many farmers will go out
89 of business.

90 We have the opportunity to support our local farmers,
91 understanding that it’s not going to be easy. We need to resist the
92 urge to blame them for the inevitable increase in food prices.

93 As with the local repercussions of our nationally self-
94 inflicted drug addiction epidemic and our lack of mental health
95 care, the challenges we face will not be solved easily.

96 If we cooperate, we will do much better than we might
97 otherwise. Despite our best efforts, “better” still might not look all
98 that great.

99 It is possible that we can avoid a collapse of our food
100 system, but that’s going to take a miraculous turn around in
101 several areas.

102 In the meantime, we might do well to plant gardens, and
103 build stronger communities.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

104 **FRIC SPRUYT** is a property owner and property manager
105 in Brattleboro and a member of the town’s energy committee.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

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####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

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LINKS:

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####BEGIN LINKS####

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VIDEO:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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####BEGIN LOGLINE####

####END LOGLINE####