

I Love to Write About Real Estate, But This Week It's Personal

By JIM SMITH, Citizen

I'm writing this week's column from the woods near Kalispell, Montana, where we are visiting Rita's sister and her husband. Although I usually write about real estate, that topic is *not* top of mind for me this week.



Instead, I'm going to write about what's *really* top of mind for me these days — Donald Trump and the decline and fall of the America in which Rita and I grew up.

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The opinions I express herein are not those of the brokerage I own and manage. None of my broker associates were consulted about its content and I know that at least one would disagree with what I write below.

What's really on my mind as Rita and I take this 10-day road trip to Boise, Seattle and now Kalispell, listening to the national news and conversing with friends and relatives, is the sad state of our republic.

Since I am also writing this on Father's Day, I'm also thinking about my late father, Abbott Smith, an old-school proper New Englander to whom integrity was everything. I can still hear Dad saying, "Just because other people steal apples doesn't make it right for you to steal apples." I got my values from him.

Dad would be appalled that we have a president who, under the tutelage of his one-time lawyer, Roy Cohn, practices the principle that if you tell a lie long enough people will think it's true. Also, that you should never admit you're wrong. (Google the two names together to learn about Cohn's influence on Trump.)

Rita and I left on our vacation about the time that President Trump negotiated with his "new friend" Kim Jung Un after insulting other G-7 leaders, including the prime minister of our country's strongest ally and trading partner, Canada.

It was clear to me years ago that Donald Trump is a narcissist and bully, whose only interest is self aggrandizement and self promotion, even when it violates the emoluments provision of our Constitution. My lifelong Republican father would be turning over in his grave if he knew not only what this man is doing and saying but, worse, how the elected members of Dad's "Grand Old Party" — most of whom at one time proclaimed "Never Trump!" (Google that phrase to read the very long list) — have snapped into line with Trump because they think that's how they can maintain what's *most* important to them — their re-election.

How much further down this road must America go? The President, who says that military exercises with South Korea were "costing us a fortune," ordered a military parade that will cost millions of taxpayer dollars that would be better spent on almost anything else. He was inspired by a parade in France, but such parades are really the trademark of Russia, China, North Korea and other dictatorships. What's next?

Rotary's "4-Way Test"

Every Tuesday we begin our breakfast meeting at the Rotary Club of Golden by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by Rotary's 4-Way Test. I can't picture this president beginning cabinet meetings with this declaration of "**the things we think, say or do**":

- ◆ *First, Is It the Truth?*
- ◆ *Second, Is It Fair to All Concerned?*
- ◆ *Third, Will It Build Goodwill and Better Friendships?*
- ◆ *Fourth, Will It Be Beneficial to All Concerned?*

Try applying that test to such Trump policies as **separating immigrant children from their parents**, while falsely claiming the Democrats made him do it; Or how about **denying climate change** and removing all use of that phrase from EPA documents on the subject? What about **imposing tariffs on our closest trading partners**, while claiming falsely that trade

wars are "good" and "easy to win"?

Well-intended policies often need to be reversed, but Trump, as taught by Roy Cohn, will never admit he's wrong, so he allows bad policies to stay in place when they shouldn't, just to avoid admitting a mistake.

As offended as we have been by so many of this president's words and deeds, we're also saddened by the lack of an articulate opposition by both Democrats and those once-moderate never-Trump Republicans.

Also, as a professional journalist, I am saddened by the attacks on the mainstream media as the "enemy of the people" (a Stalinist term) and by the use of the phrase "fake news" to dismiss honest journalistic coverage. The complicity of Fox News in this process is disappointing to anyone who knows and appreciates real journalism.

So what can be done about this situation? Below are two "modest proposals" that I'd like to advance.

A Couple Modest Proposals for Saving America

It's easy to criticize President Trump and where he is leading us, but where are the proposals to remedy this situation? Here are mine.

The first is for the Democratic Party to create what the British Parliament has long had and which I learned about in the 7th and 8th grades — a "**Shadow Cabinet.**"

Wikipedia describes it as follows:

The Shadow Cabinet is a feature of the [Westminster system](#) of government. It consists of a senior group of opposition spokespeople who, under the leadership of the [Leader of the Opposition](#), form an alternative [cabinet](#) to that of the government, and whose members shadow or mirror the positions of each individual member of the Cabinet. It is the Shadow Cabinet's responsibility to scrutinize the policies and actions of the government, as well to offer an alternative program.

In most countries, a member of the shadow cabinet is referred to as a Shadow Minister. In Canada, however, the term Opposition Critic is more common. In the United Kingdom's [House of Lords](#) and in New Zealand, the term "spokesperson" is used instead of "shadow".

I retained the blue underlined type to show you that there are links which you might want to click if you search "shadow cabinet" yourself on Wikipedia.

I propose that the minority party (currently the Democratic Party) designate political leaders to serve as Shadow Secretaries for each Cabinet department. (How cool would it be if they recited the 4-Way Test when they meet as a group?) The Shadow EPA administrator could focus his or her attention on the unreported activities and pronouncements of EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt. The Shadow Secretary of Energy could monitor the actions and pronouncements of Secretary Rick Perry, and the Shadow Attor-

ney General could do the same regarding Attorney General Jeff Sessions. And so forth for every other Cabinet member. Their press conferences would be covered, including by Fox News, and provide information which is currently only being provided by investigative reporters who are readily dismissed by the president as "fake news." Good candidates for a current Shadow Cabinet would be former heads or deputies of those cabinet departments.

The Republicans could have had a Shadow Cabinet during the Obama administration. We'd all benefit from the perspective provided by a Shadow Cabinet.

My second proposal is that some newsworthy opponent of the current president (likely a Democrat) **announce his or her candidacy for President now instead of next year.** Doing so not only provides a mechanism for fundraising (which is working well for Trump), but it also makes it possible to have full-fledged rallies (also working well for Trump) that would garner coverage by all the media, providing yet another avenue for turning the mainstream media into **reporters covering newsmakers** critical of the Trump administration **instead of providing the analysis themselves**, which has only made them vulnerable to charges of partisanship (aka "fake news").

Lastly, I want to reiterate that these are my personal remarks and not those of my real estate brokerage or its broker associates. I'm not worried that speaking out on this subject will hurt my brokerage or me financially, but if it does, I am willing to pay that price, and I will understand if an agent wants to disassociate him or herself from what I have written and leave our brokerage. Our **democracy**, our **country**, our **future as a nation** are too important for me to remain silent any longer about this president, his denial of climate change, his assault on the free press, and his total disregard for telling the truth..