

A novel way to make America great

Many people fret about the outcome of the next Presidential election, having convinced themselves the stakes are enormous. Trump has said that Biden was the worst President ever, and Trump's supporters believe that Trump can "Make America Great Again." Trump will undoubtedly start making outrageously negative comments about whom-ever the Democrats decide to nominate. On the other side of the political fight, Biden has said that Trump is a threat to democracy. Democrats were so panicked that Biden's poor debate performance would lead to a Trump victory that the Democrats put enormous pressure on Biden to step down (which of course he did).

Is there really so much at stake? I doubt it. In years past, voters helped usher in victories for candidates they really liked. The voters believed these newly elected presidents would solve our country's problems. After looking back on those Presidential terms, these same voters were almost always disappointed. The Presidents hardly ever solved major problems.

In fact, we have become lazy by relying on Presidents to make the world a better place. I am disappointed when I see people spend so much energy on Facebook and elsewhere defending their favorite political candidates. Their energy is misplaced and can be used in more productive ways, as my experiences over the last week have reminded me.

My extended family was getting together for a vacation in New Jersey. Three of us were flying from Arkansas to Philadelphia on three different flights from two

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different airports. We worried we might experience flight delays or cancellations, especially since a software glitch had caused many airlines to stop running flights for several hours during the previous day. I had trouble, but not because of software.

Just as I arrived at the Little Rock Airport, my flight was delayed from 7 am to 8 am. When I checked in, the desk clerk told me my American Airlines flight was delayed for maintenance and that if it got further delayed, past 9:30, I would miss my connecting flight. I asked him if there was another way I could get to Philadelphia. He barely looked at the screen and said that everything was booked and that I could go through Charlotte, but I could only get standby tickets for the last leg of my trip. He thought I would be stranded in Charlotte and said if there was another delay I should just go home and try again the next day. The clerk ended our conversation by saying I should hope for the best but that my situation did not look good.

As soon as I cleared security, my flight's departure time was pushed back to 11 am. According to the clerk, I was doomed. Undeterred, I went to a flight attendant, who was alone at her desk at a gate and asked her if American Airlines had an arrangement with United Airlines that would allow me to get on a United flight to get to Chicago, where I could get my connecting flight. She looked at her computer for an extended pe-

riod of time and then asked me if I would like to go through Charlotte. I said sure and she printed my boarding passes.

This flight attendant did some extra work that made a big impact. I was meeting two other family members in Philadelphia and the rental car reservation was in my name. If I did not get there, they may have had trouble getting to New Jersey, our final destination, because the rental car companies seemed to be completely booked – perhaps because of the flight problems caused by the software glitch.

That same week, I got some evidence that I may have helped someone in an impactful way, just as the flight attendant had helped me. I got an email from a former student who had just finished up a master's degree and was going to enter a PhD program in the fall. The student thanked me for the help I had given him as an undergraduate student and told me about his research projects, which were extensions of work he had done in my undergraduate classes.

My week has reminded me that many of us are wasting time, trying to make the world a better place by getting the best political candidate elected. If we used that time to make the world a better place by doing something good ourselves, then the world would really become a better place. My hope for myself is that I put in the extra effort, just like the flight attendant did. Maybe if I do this, I will get more emails from former students (and others) like the one I got this week.

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