



MARK
BELLING

Goodbye, Charlie Sykes' radio career made Wisconsin better

It's my fault.

You can blame the whole Charlie Sykes saga on me. I had just started my talk show on WISN-AM and decided to end the week with one of those roundtable discussions that are now ubiquitous. I didn't know Charlie but was aware he had just left Milwaukee Magazine somewhat acrimoniously and was a smart and opinionated guy. One thing led to another. He started filling in for me as host of my show and was eventually given his own 90-minute show. WTMJ snapped him up and the next thing you know he was a full-fledged talk host morphing from a snobby liberal to an "intellectual conservative."

With Sykes now "retiring" from his radio gig it's time for me to end my 20-plus year policy of pretty much not commenting on him. While we worked at competing stations, Sykes and I came to be viewed by the mainstream media and the political establishment as ideological birds of a feather who were sort of flocking together: He was the "smart" one and the "nicer" one. I was the wild one. Together, we have been credited, or blamed, for the remarkable explosion of conservative power in southeastern Wisconsin and the ideological transformation of the state. There is truth to some of this and Charlie relished the notion that talk radio was the driving source of conservative power. This analysis ignored the very real impact of others like Jay Weber and Vicki McKenna but the short version is more or less accurate.

I am forever asked about our relationship but the reality is that we don't have one. There are no secret meetings or strategy sessions. He very publicly had my back when a bunch of liberals tried to get me fired over my use of an inappropriate term a decade ago. He asked me to author a major analysis of talk radio in a journal he edited. We've never had a significant public tiff and have expressed mutual respect for one another. At the risk of breaking the truce what follows is my honest analysis of him, his show and his impact.

Charlie departs the Milwaukee radio scene as a legitimate star.

His recent course reversal has him going out with the approval of the elitists whose ratification he has long craved. But his program's legacy will be its contribution to repudiating much of what that establishment believes in.

Charlie has always wanted to be an insider and has relished his close access with people like Scott Walker, Paul Ryan and other Republican powerhouses. He often seemed like a cheerleader rather than a commentator. He criticized me when I ripped one of these Republicans as if I had some obligation to join him in shaking the pom-poms. It often seemed like he thought of himself as a spokesman for a cause rather than an independent analyst. Self-serving as this sounds, I feel my influence has always been greater than his because our audiences never considered me to be in the tank for any Republican.

He has always seemed like a contradiction to me. I've seen him stand his ground in a couple of ugly scraps but also seen his need for acceptance by the "people who matter." All of this brings us to the recent end of his radio career which has been unfortunately ugly. In fact, all of Charlie's endings seem to be unhappy.

Charlie ought to be going out in a wave of glory. Republicans have taken total control of a state that was dominated by liberals when he and I got started. Donald Trump is naming the most conservative cabinet of all time and millions of disenfranchised Americans are being empowered in the name of conservatism. Charlie ought to be celebrating this. Instead, his loathing of Donald Trump has resulted in him feuding with his own audience and fueling speculation his retirement was not entirely his choice.

Rationalization being the second strongest human drive, I'm sure Charlie believes Trump is a goon who will disgrace conservatism. But it's undeniable that his recent stand has earned him star status with conservative intellectuals embarrassed by Trump and the mainstream media who is mortified by Trump. Charlie is now a go-to guy for MSNBC, the New York Times, the conservative magazines and the rest of the "respectable" crowd. I suspect that Charlie craves their belated approval more than he regrets the animosity he's getting from his own audience.

Charlie has been saying that much of his audience, and people like me who have embraced Trump despite his public buffoonery, are guilty of succumbing to what he calls "binary choice." He can pontificate about all the algorithms he wants but the fact is that those of us who support Trump have saved the country while dilettante conservatives held their noses up in the air. That sounds like criticism but it's not meant to be. It's my honest take.

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I suspect Charlie's third act with the coming book tour and new status as Trump-bashing "conservative" will mean that he'll be a royal pain in the butt to many of us who have been allies with him these last couple of decades. But the second act — the radio career — was awfully good and helped make Wisconsin a much better place.

(Mark Belling is the host of a daily WISN radio talk show. His column runs Wednesdays in *The Freeman*.)

GUEST OPINION

Now is time to discuss transportation solutions Region's economy requires working roads

By Suzanne Kelley

A thriving economy requires working roads. From small coffee shops to large manufacturers, businesses of all shapes and sizes are only successful when employees can make it work on time, or when products and services arrive in a timely manner.

The Waukesha County Business Alliance is a private, member-drive organization that represents 1,200 member businesses throughout southeastern Wisconsin. And while our center of gravity is certainly Waukesha County, about 15 percent of our members are located in Milwaukee County. I think this points to the inter-relationship and interdependence of our two counties. There is an incredible amount of commerce that flows throughout the region along I-94.

Regardless of where our members are located, they recognize the importance of a modern, efficient and safe transportation infrastructure for our region.

In August of last year, the Alliance, Waukesha County and the Waukesha-Ozaukee-Washington Workforce Development Board sent a survey to 1,673 area businesses. A total of 335 businesses, or 20 percent, responded to the survey. That survey showed businesses place a high value on infrastructure. A whopping 88 percent rated both local streets and highways as either important or very important to their success.

Our employees need to get to and from work. If you look at I-94 during rush hour, you'll see an equal amount of traffic flow heading in both directions. Many residents in Waukesha County work in Milwaukee and vice versa. And there are many job openings in Waukesha County, particularly in manufacturing, construction, health care, IT and retail. We need to be able to tap into the workforce in Milwaukee, and an inefficient freeway system only makes that harder.

The goods manufactured here need to get to market, and the raw materials necessary to produce them need to be transported to our member factories in Waukesha County and throughout the region.

Of course, I-94 is also the main gate-



Kelley

way for residents and visitors to attend cultural events, festivals, sporting activities and other forms of entertainment. Whether you're taking in a Milwaukee Brewers game, hiking at Lapham Peak in Delafield, shopping at Mayfair Mall in Wauwatosa or exploring at Wisconsin's first Total Wine store located in Brookfield, you're probably travelling on I-94 to get there, often through the East-West section of the freeway.

Because our Southeast Wisconsin freeway system is so critical to our region, the Alliance has made transportation one of our top issues. For the past few years, our Infrastructure Committee has researched the funding challenge and the current state of projects. We've brought in leaders from the Department of Transportation as well as legislators to better understand the challenges and facilitate discussions on what can be done to maintain and improve our transportation infrastructure, including this very important East-West leg of the freeway.

The business community understands the importance of a well-maintained infrastructure, and as the voice of these businesses, the Alliance continues to reach out to local and state officials to ensure it is responsibly funded. Just recently I testified on behalf of our members at a transportation hearing in Madison, and described how putting necessary infrastructure projects on hold will only hurt the economic momentum that we have been seeing since the great recession.

We are advocating for a funding strategy to be developed by Wisconsin instead of simply delaying projects for the next few years. Much of our infrastructure is beyond the 50- to 60-year life expectancy, and the longer we put these projects off, the more of an impact it will have on the local and state economy. Now is the time to come to the table and discuss solutions.

(Suzanne Kelley is the president & CEO of the Waukesha County Business Alliance.)

Feeling like a Grinch? Remember Seuss' message

By Mark A. Noon
The Philadelphia Inquirer (TNS)

Christmas can wear you out, and the stress and frayed nerves make you wonder why you go through the pretense of it all. Don't despair, though. That yuletide soul-searching can inspire — to quote one of the most-loved holiday stories — a "wonderful, awful idea."

One morning on the day after Christmas, Theodor (aka: Dr. Seuss) Geisel, the author of "The Cat in the Hat," "Green Eggs and Ham" and a host of other children's classics, felt disheartened, convinced he had lost the meaning of the holiday.

Geisel realized that his gloomy mood mirrored the attitude of a disagreeable creature he created a few years earlier — the Grinch. Thus, an idea for another book was born, one that could help him rediscover the truth about Christmas.

His work on "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" would not be complete until he joined forces with animator Chuck Jones, famous for his Looney Tunes shorts, and the celebrated horror actor Boris Karloff. When "The Grinch" made its television debut on Dec. 18, 1966, it became so popular that a new word was added to the holiday lexicon.

Even after a half-century, "The Grinch" has few detractors, even when considered in a cultural context. Take, for example, the annual "war on Christmas" debates, epitomized by arguments over wishing someone a "Merry Christmas" vs. "Happy Holidays." In the perceived divide over religious and secular holiday celebrations, "The Grinch" has a unique ability to satisfy both camps.

"The Grinch" is often described as secular: The program never mentions the birth of Jesus. In fact, a direct reference to Scripture would have been out of place among the peculiar, insect-like residents of Whoville and their Tah Tinkers, Floo Floobers, Bizzel Binks and Dafflers. Geisel even commented that he had a hard time finding the right note to end his Christmas tale because he did not want to make it a "religious tract." Concluding that "The Grinch" is theologically silent, however, is a mistake.

Anyone willing to risk falling into the trap of overanalyzing Dr. Seuss' books might begin by noting that they have often been used to teach Christian doctrine, even though Geisel did not consider himself a highly religious person. Still, he was steeped in Christianity while growing up in Springfield, Mass.

Geisel not only attended his mother's Episcopal church but his father's Lutheran congregation. His earliest experiences of Christmas came when he joined the other members of the town's German-American community to sing "Stille Nacht" and "O Tannenbaum." Later, at Dartmouth and Oxford, he participated in chapel services.

He was drawn to church in part by hymns and their use of rhyme and repetition. One particular hymn seems significant. He memorized "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty," including the final lines, "God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity." Perhaps Geisel recalled the song's numerical reference when he depicted the Grinch's conversion in the book:

"And he puzzled three hours, till his puzzler was sore.

"Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before

"Maybe Christmas," he thought, "doesn't come from a store."

The importance of three hours in the New Testament goes without saying. Two pages later, the Grinch's heart grows "three sizes" as Christmas' true meaning dawned on him, a point magnified — literally in the animated cartoon.

Geisel was reportedly a perfectionist who selected words with extreme care. If he sought to give his readers and viewers a concise, subtle reminder of the spiritual nature of Christmas — that God became flesh and dwelt among men — he called up the right number. In the Bible, three represents the presence of God.

Christian imagery is used to the same effect in the cartoon. As the Whos sing "Welcome Christmas" in the cartoon's climactic scene, they form a circle around a rising star — a clear reminder of the Star of Bethlehem in the Nativity narrative.

Ultimately, Christmas morning in Whoville provides a lesson for everyone, whether the holiday is approached from a religious perspective, a secular one, or, most likely, a combination of both. All the Whos have faith and know in their hearts that they have something that can never be stolen. And Geisel seems to emphasize their diversity — young, old, tall and small. No one is kept away from the celebration. Even the green guy whose burglary spree left the Whos' houses with nothing but hooks and wire is welcomed.

As the Grinch ends his descent down Mount Crummit, the Whos open their circle unconditionally. There is no protest over what he had done. No retribution. No questions asked. This holiday season could be happier if more people imitated this capacity for forgiveness.

This sense of harmony could be what Geisel was missing on the morning he first imagined "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." He certainly longed for it. One of his earliest commentaries on Christmas was an illustrated poem published in Collier's Magazine on Dec. 23, 1955. "A Prayer for a Child" describes a child's Christmas wish to God:

"Please tell all men

That Peace is good.

That's all

That need be understood."

As a year highlighted by division starts to close and we deal with the stresses of the Christmas rush, look for those moments of peace. It's what the Grinch found as he carved the roast beast. And, no, Dr. Seuss would not mind — not in the least.

(Mark A. Noon is an assistant professor of English at Bloomsburg University in Bloomsburg, Pa. Readers may send him email at mnoon-bloomu.edu)

TODAY'S INSPIRATION

"There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self."

— Aldous Huxley



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Keep the charm in downtown Waukesha

To the editor:

I seem to recall the promotional slogan, "Get lost in the charm of downtown Waukesha." In what way will the proposed condo/apartment complexes, one on Main Street and the other across from the Fire Station, add to the historic charm of our formerly grand resort spa town? What happened to the concept of an inviting river walk lined with cafes and shops where people will want to stroll and linger? Folks throughout the U.S. and Europe are drawn to historic town centers that retain their charm and authentic personality. What is deemed contemporary, cutting edge today may actually be visually jarring, cold and unwelcoming in context. Let's keep the charm!

Lynn Casper
Town of Waukesha

A terrific concert for a worthy cause

To the editor:

Last Thursday evening, my wife and I attended a concert at the Broadlands Golf Course that was a fundraiser for the Waukesha chapter of the Salvation Army.

The Sterling Brass Quintet, who had played for the president of the United States, provided truly wonderful

Christmas music. The musicians were top notch, as was a vocalist who sang "White Christmas" and later led a sing-along of holiday songs.

Besides the fine entertainment, Maj. Nelson De La Vergne described the amazing charitable work done by the Waukesha Salvation Army. I assumed going in that I knew the depth of their commitment to the needs of others, but I was wrong. Their efforts and yearlong work are incredible. I encourage everyone to avail themselves of this beautiful concert, but also take note of the endeavors of the Salvation Army. One show remains, 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Waukesha Salvation Army headquarters chapel.

Hats off to the Waukesha Salvation Army and everyone involved with this event.

Jeff Schlueter
Dousman

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