Bizarro World: Cuba and Joanne Twomey revisited

By Fred Dolgon

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Editor:

Back when Kurt Vonnegut was alive and able to give us the benefit of his wisdom, he made an observation which I paraphrase: “The world is being run by my high school class.” The shenanigans that we are witnessing these days on a world as well as a local scale makes his observation pretty tame. If it’s okay with readers, I’ll stick to only two of countless issues that exemplify my premise.

1) After 55 years of our government’s insane policy against Cuba, our “hero” president is recommending that the Congress remove Cuba from our list of nations that support terrorism! We’re officially in BIZARRO WORLD, folks. After more than half a century of terrorist acts that the U.S. has committed against a tiny island for their “crime” of overthrowing a corrupt despot (Fulgencio Batista) and subjecting Cuba’s revolution to a murderous embargo — that incidentally forced Castro to seek help from the Soviet Union — our leaders are finally realizing that our Cuba policy (far from isolating the Castro regime) has actually isolated us from virtually all of Central and South America! Did our so-called leaders forget how we began? A little old revolution that overthrew an overbearing, overtaxing king? Let’s face it. Cuba overthrew an oligarchy that was far more brutal and murderous than George III.

After a shameful history of CIA-funded acts of real terrorism against Cuba (military invasions, bombings, swine flu virus airdrops, shootdowns of Cuban passenger airplanes and countless attempts to assassinate Castro) the U.S. should be on a Cuban list of nations that not only support terrorism — but perpetrate terrorism! My advice to Cuba: Beware of large wooden horses!

2) Now, let’s get local. I was honored to be seated next to JoAnne Twomey when our guv brought his traveling circus to Thornton Academy in Saco. LePage — who has parlayed his bully-boy persona into a vaudeville act — staged a show almost ready for prime time at the next Republican convention. And similar to the stacked crowd of idolators that filled the school’s auditorium five years ago, every attempt at humor and snarkiness was met with a predictable favorable response. Some of the applause erupted after a few of his coterie of “protectors” initiated the clapping.

The well-staged performance is always prefaced by a staff of aides who solicit visitors for questions that they would like to ask the governor. They then distribute forms on which the questioners write their questions. The filled-out questionnaires are then screened by aides to filter out any issues that they feel might embarrass the governor (I know my questions were never picked, and neither were Ms. Twomey’s). But the real issue concerns the mischaracterized “antics” attributed to Ms. Twomey when, after a previous member of the audience — questioning the fairness of LePage’s inclusion of nonprofits to be taxed, started a back-and-forth dialogue with LePage, thus changing the dynamics of the Q & A session, and inviting a sort of free-for-all. This inspired Twomey (who is noted for talking “Truth to Power”) to rise from her front row seat and attempt to denounce LePage’s fiscal policies as targeting Maine’s already-struggling poor and elderly. In fact, what was taking place was a real town meeting — not a scripted, choreographed love fest. Twomey’s conduct was neither “histrionics” nor “bad manners” nor “disrespect” — especially when LePage’s mantra has always been “Bring it on!” Except when someone passionate and courageous enough confronts the governor with really “tough questions.” That’s when the men in black move in — to strongarm the outspoken four-term State House rep and ex-mayor of Biddeford … out of the auditorium. Our tax money at work?
I worked on many of Ms. Twomey’s campaigns. I know her to be a strong force for the
underdog — especially her constituents, many of whom were mill workers and/or their
descendants. I watched her at council meetings vigorously condemning MERC and its toxic
effluent. I watched her at various demonstrations speak passionately for a Single Payer
Health Plan. And modernizing Biddeford High School her crowning achievement.

To me, JoAnne Twomey was (and still is) the embodiment of what a people’s representative
ought to be — always fighting for “her people” usually against tremendous odds, and never
backing down! And to be thrown under the bus — not only by the “R”s — but by the big
wigs of her own party — may well explain why Al Diamon correctly calls Maine politics a
MISTAKE.

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Editor’s note: For more on the Twomey incident, read Chris Shorr’s column, From the
Margins, in the April 8 Phoenix (http://portlandphoenix.me/2015/04/08/columns/from-the-
margins/giving-it-to-the-guv-with-vaseline/).

And a correction: Ryan Adams, winner of Best Graffiti Artist in the Portland Phoenix Best
of competition, has worked, as noted in our Best of edition (April 30), with the Maine
Center for Creativity “to identify wall spaces that are attractive candidates for artwork, and
MCC tracks down the owners to ask their permission” (the quote is from an April 2013
http://portlandphoenix.me/2015/05/06/features/letters-to-the-editor/bizarro-world-cuba-and-joanne-twomey-revisited/