

Palo Alto Rotary Pinion

July 22, 2019

Reporter HAL MICKELSON

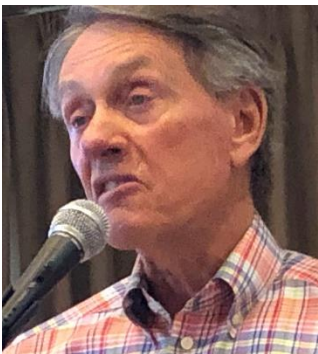
Editor: LYLE CONNELL



Dana asked CHESLEY DOUGLAS to settle us down with the Pledge of Allegiance....

A Rotary-connected visitor was DEVANKAR MUKHI from Wayne State University, who is District Director for D6400 Rotaract in Michigan.... Guests of Rotarians were JEFF BYRON, hosted by CHARLIE WEIDANZ; former member ANDY COE, hosted by DAVE THORNTON; Dave's "life partner" MARY ALICE; and DANA's wife NANCY....

BRUCE SWENSON shared a bit of the inspiration he finds in the words of poet JACK GILBERT: "We must risk delight. We must have the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world." By the way: Bruce is leading our Endowment Fund in 2019-20.



GLORIA HOM noted with pride and pleasure that we'll have a TGIF on Friday, July 26, from 5:30 to 7:00 at the home of TOM and HELEN GRACON in Palo Alto. We have ample supplies in reserve, so please don't worry about bringing provisions.



JULIE JEROME reported that DICK BUSH is severely ill, expecting surgery....A card to cheer DICK was signed by all. DANA reminded us that our club needs everyone's T-shirt size for the Rotary-insignia shirts that we'll be wearing for service projects....



President's Club donors were led by ED DANGLER, celebrating many good things relating to his granddaughter in Colorado....

KAREN ROHDE spoke proudly of her daughter, pursuing a master's in social work....



RALPH ADAMS reflected solemnly on what we should be doing, saying and standing up for as citizens when so many things around us are moving the wrong way. Ralph noted that the military oath requires obedience to lawful orders, key word "lawful"; at Dachau, Auschwitz, Andersonville and My Lai, illegitimate orders should have been resisted. TRISH BUBENIK echoed Ralph's message: We simply must find ways to speak up.



President DANA presented a video relating to one of Rotary's six areas of focus: Peace. Through service projects, fellowships and scholarships, Rotarians are addressing the underlying causes of conflict, including poverty, inequality, ethnic tension, and lack of access to education and resources.

Volunteers who made the meeting possible were recognized and thanked: Pinion editor, LYLE CONNELL; Pinion writer, HAL MICKELSON; greeter, GINNY LEAR; welcoming cashiers, KATIE SEEDMAN and REBECCA GERALDI; setup and AV, STEVE MADSEN and RICHARD KELLER; microphone wranglers TOM GRACON and LAURIE LISTON.

DIANA DIAMOND introduced the day's speaker, LARRY DIAMOND (no relation!) of Stanford University, where he is Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and coordinator of the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law at the Freeman Sogli Institute.



Larry said he thought this was his fifth or sixth visit to Palo Alto Rotary. He said he found his visits “quietly inspiring” based on Rotary’s commitment to civic engagement, toleration, and building bridges.



Democracy, said Larry, is “not unassailable.” In the final 30 years of the 20th century, it was in the ascendancy: In every part of the world except the Middle East, the majority of countries had democratic institutions, and the majority of people lived in those

countries. In the last fifteen years, however, democracy had been rolled back in places like Egypt, Bangladesh and Kenya, following the lead of Russia, Venezuela and Turkey.

Autocrats have been following a predictable program: At the start, they go after news outlets and journalists as “enemies of the people.” They argue that no one has a right to print news reports that they and their backers call inaccurate. They purge the courts of judges alleged to be disloyal. Civil servants, the military and police are required to show allegiance to the autocrat, at the risk of being outed as a “deep state” that doesn’t serve the national interest. NGO’s and universities are forbidden to accept international assistance unless they register themselves as foreign agents.

Businesspeople are warned not to advertise in disfavored media; “crony capitalists” become agents for keeping the autocrats in power.

What sustains democracy is a commitment to individual liberty and democratic processes that overrides differences of opinion. Supporting democracy means embracing tolerance, self-restraint and respect for competing points of view. Silence and complacency are dangerous and potentially fatal when there’s still a chance in a given country to oppose what Larry calls “the siren song of authoritarianism.”

As Larry sees the world, Russia and China are leading in the wrong direction. Russia appears determined to pervert our electoral processes. The Chinese are projecting influence in hidden ways in much of the world while continuing repressive practices at home, notably the detention of perhaps a million members of the Uighur religious minority in re-education camps in Xinjiang.

What can we do? First and foremost, we must defend our democratic culture. Larry believes strongly that it’s simply not OK for a leader to accept a crowd chanting “Send her back!” to demean a member of Congress. We have to take risks in standing by our principles.

Larry added: If you want to inspire yourself, read what Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine had to say in her Declaration of Conscience on June 1, 1950. Look at (<https://americanrhetoric.com/speeches/margaretchase-smithconscience.html> .)

Institutional reform may help. In Larry’s opinion, “first past the post” elections in single-member districts combined with low turnout primaries have resulted in Democrats moving farther and farther to the left while Republicans move farther and farther to right. Larry contends that ranked choice voting could produce better results, and it’s something that can be adopted on a local basis. But – According to Larry, Electoral College reform may be too much to hope for.

Larry’s recent book addressing these issues is [Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency](#), published by Penguin.