

Palo Alto Rotary Pinion

May 17, 2021

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President BEN THRELKELD called the virtual meeting to order, welcoming everyone to the meeting.

Because this was our quarterly membership campaign meeting, there were too many VISITING ROTARIANS and guests to introduce individually, so they were heartily welcomed as a group.

PATTY MCGUIGAN shared the Thought of the Day, challenging Rotarians to be the catalysts for change that we want to see, and not waiting on others. She focused on opportunities to create change through Rotary, including by supporting our endowment and fundraisers, and the numerous ways that Rotary supports our community and the world. This year in particular, due to needs arising due to the pandemic, we have an opportunity to make an even greater impact in our communities, and PATTY encouraged everyone to do so.



ANNOUNCEMENTS, REPORTS AND REMINDERS

President BEN conducted a Zoom poll to get a general sense of how member preferences for returning to in person meetings or continuing to meet remotely by Zoom. In person meetings would be as they were before, but with an opportunity to see and interact with Rotarians participating by Zoom on a screen with audio. Remote participants would interact with one another and those in the meetings via Zoom, but would meet in video breakout rooms prior to the meeting to mingle among themselves. The poll found that 61% of Rotarians would like to meet in person, 25% would like to continue to meet remotely by Zoom and 14% need a little more time to decide. Only vaccinated individuals would be invited to meet in person (honor code) and participation would be subject to then current guidance of the CDC.



President BEN shared the sad news that Chalmers Smith, a former dedicated and active Rotarian for over 30 years, passed away peacefully at Channing House on May 11, 2021, after an incredible life of love, friendship, accomplishment and service. President Ben acknowledged condolences from Palo Alto Rotary to CHALMERS' family

ANNOUNCEMENTS, REPORTS AND REMINDERS

President BEN announced that he is still seeking trivia questions for the upcoming Palo Alto trivia night on May 28, 2021, from 5:30 -7:00 pm. Please forward your questions to him as soon as possible.

TRISH BUBENIK joined President's Club in honor of our most recent Happy Hour during which nine individuals shared sterling conversation. According to TRISH, this type of experience represents the heart of Rotary.



NEXT WEEK'S PROGRAM

On May 24, 2021, Heath Packard, Major Gifts Officer of Island Conservation, will share stories of hope and innovation, including a discussion of how invasive species affect island ecology. The goal of Island Conservation is preventing extinctions.

TODAY'S PROGRAM

Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster earned a PhD in Military History at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He is now Fouad and Michelle Ajami Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution as well as a Fellow of the Freeman Spogli Institute at Stanford University. His May 17 presentation to the Rotary Club of Palo Alto took its theme from the title of



his most recent book, "Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World."

In recent years, America's understanding and management of foreign policy has been hurt by what McMaster calls "strategic narcissism," seeing ourselves in terms of our own role and our own needs. What we need instead might be described as "strategic empathy," a recognition that foreign policy is essentially competitive and a realization that other countries have their own needs and desire their own roles.

Our strategic competence has eroded as the result of overconfidence and hubris. We convinced ourselves that the "arc of history" guaranteed that Western democratic values would prevail in the long run, that there could be stable relationships among the great powers, and that American military prowess guaranteed our success. These ideas led to our undervaluing the risks and costs of both action and inaction. We made wars longer by imagining they would be shorter.

Among our mistakes: Essentially inviting Russia into Syria, which resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe, turning millions of people into refugees. Asking the Afghan government to do more for peace without asking the Taliban to do the same. What we need instead is something between overoptimism on one hand and disengagement on the other.

Among the challenges that we face: Vitriolic partisan politics are making it impossible for our country to achieve what we need most. We have vacated the spaces that could help us succeed in diplomacy.

We spend 3.7% of our GDP on the military, which sounds like a lot of money, but it's not letting us match Russia and China, which hide much of what they spend. China's military expenditures have increased by 800% since the mid-1990's. It's axiomatic in warfare that "you can't fight asymmetrically or stupidly." We assumed that China would play by the rules, liberalize its policies, and take its place among an orderly community of nations; they did not. Instead, they turned to things like industrial espionage and the theft of intellectual property. Huawei essentially stole its technology from Western companies, in particular Cisco, and then received \$20 billion in subsidies from its government to exploit that technology, driving all but a few Western competitors out of business.

If we look realistically at China, we will see a ruling party obsessed with control that is becoming more and more Orwellian, extinguishing freedom in Hong Kong and persecuting its Uighur minority in Xinjiang. Meanwhile, China is essentially poisoning the world by assisting the

poorest countries in building more coal-fired power plants. Similarly, if we look realistically at Putin – giving up the unrealistic pictures we have had of what we might expect from him – we would see a leader driven by a sense of lost honor who wants his country to be a world power funded by an economy the size of Italy's. The tactics he can most readily afford are not competing on a level playing field, but by dragging other countries down.

In response to questions, McMaster amplified what had said about "vitriolic partisan politics." The media, he said, are doubling down on the strategy of appealing to partisan audiences, enabling people to hear the news that they want to hear from the news organizations that they know they will like. Alongside this, "pseudo-media" are promoting crazy conspiracy theories. The largest social media companies are more interested in the revenue that they can earn from more clicks than in slowing the growth of extreme positions. "We need to educate ourselves – need to educate the public – to make ourselves less vulnerable to misinformation."

At the same time, McMaster said that "much of the academic community" had accepted what he called "a curriculum of self-loathing" that blames Western colonialism for everything that went wrong in the world before 1945 and blames capitalism for everything that has gone wrong since. It's unfair, said McMaster, to argue that America's overall impact on the world has been negative. The US has helped to lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, starting with the Marshall Plan. What would have happened to Bosnian Muslims without US intervention? National pride can be compared to individual self-respect; it certainly can be taken too far, but it makes growth and development possible.

ROTARIANS thanked Mr. McMaster for his time and thoroughness of his opinions. He was an excellent and enlightening speaker.

Thanks to Pinion Editor LYLE CONNELL and writers KIM BOMAR and HAL MICKELSON, and to Zoom co-host Dana Tom.