

'Warmamas' gives voice to mothers who wait for their children to come home from the battlefield



BY PATRICIA FIGUEROA SOWERS
Warmamas.com

The journey to the battlefield is a long one. It starts at home and usually ends at home. It is the neverending universal ritual of a mother letting go to send her child off to war and the same mother welcoming a new, changed, person back.

She understands what it is like to imagine late at night the sound a car pulling up, footsteps shuffling up the steps, and the knock on the door. She is the one who helps the war-weary son put himself back together and once again become part of the community.

She won't be spared her daughter's PTSD — or even suicide. And she might be a mother whose child never returns.

Although my son left for the Middle East during a dangerous period, he was not in the military, he was in the U.S. Diplomatic Corps. He stayed six years and spent part of that time in

northern Afghanistan.

During those years, I never knew a day without worry. I reached out to other mothers. I wanted to share my own experience, but I also wanted to hear their stories.

I was teaching literature at the time at a local college and came across Virgil's Aeneid, which tells the story of Euraylus, a young soldier who dies in the Trojan War.

Hearing the news, his mother rushes to his camp, wailing. She is loud and inconsolable until forcibly removed and returned home lest her lament affect the morale of the troops listening on the other side of

the wall.

What drew me to this story is how little we hear that woman's voice even today and how easily that voice can be silenced. Out of my own experience and a growing awareness that there were at least a million mothers in our country dealing with the consequences of war and its effects on their families, the Warmamas project was born.

Now there was a place where mothers could tell their stories in their own words, in their own voices. We interviewed one of our first mothers in a park by Biscayne Bay, a noisy place

full of children's voices. A veteran herself, she talked about the loneliness she felt when her son deployed and the eventual support she found in the most unlikely of places, her gym.

Another mother talked about a phone call her son made from Iraq when, suddenly, as they spoke, there was a missile attack. She waited for days to hear from him again.

In 2014 and 2015, Warmamas collaborated with StoryCorps, as part of its Military Voices Initiative. Both events took place at the University of Miami culminating in the StoryCorps/Warmamas Community Archive where all interviews are archived and available for academic research.

This week, the Warmamas project takes the stage, in a dance performance inspired by mothers' stories.

We live in turbulent times when the unspeakable realities of war get lost

in the rush to war, when families' sacrifices are forgotten and mothers' voices are rarely heard.

My work has been about undoing that silence by documenting and preserving each story told to me by a mother.

This one small story becomes many stories and I believe that if we listen closely, the larger and more brutal story of war emerges.

Patricia Figueroa Sowers, of Miami, is the founder of Warmamas.

The Karen Peterson and Dancers physically integrated company, in collaboration with video artist Maria Lino, having its world premiere May 4 and 5 at Wynwood's The Light Box. For more information on the performance visit karenpetersondancers.org. For more information on the Warmamas project visit Warmamas.com.

Get rid of the White House Correspondents' Dinner — it damages the media's credibility



BY MARGARET SULLIVAN
The Washington Post

The 2018 White House Correspondents' Association Dinner should be the last.

It never has been a particularly good idea for journalists to don their fanciest clothes and cozy up to the people they cover, alongside Hollywood celebrities who have ventured to wonky Washington to join the fun.

But in the current era, it's become close to suicidal for the press' credibility.

Trust in the mainstream media is low, a new populism has caught fire all over the Western world, and President constantly pounds the news media as a bunch

attend.

"Why would I want to be stuck in a room with a bunch of fake news liberals who hate me?" he asked in an email invitation to his supporters.

He said he would much rather "spend the evening with my favorite deplorable who love our movement and love America."

The reality is something quite different.

Journalists do not present false stories. When they get something wrong, they correct it.

They do their best to be impartial, and — contrary to what the president told his supporters — they aren't out to get him but to merely cover him. They are not the opposition party.

They are simply trying to do their jobs of informing the public, a job often made difficult by the obfuscation from the briefing room podium and the president's own lies.

As for Trump's touted allegiance to working-class

But this event sure doesn't look like truth to power.

Its defenders say that it's perfectly all right to have "just one night" to enjoy a break from the supposedly adversarial relationship between government and press.

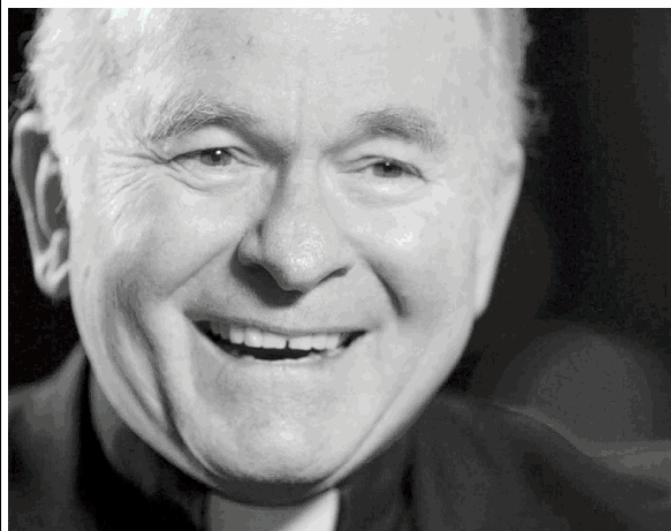
But that relationship isn't always as arms-length as it should be in a town noted for its mutual back-scratching.

Talev and her cohort certainly are dedicated reporters and editors.

But this festive night, always unseemly, is now downright counterproductive to good journalism's goals. It only reinforces the views of those who already hate the media elite.

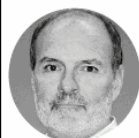
By Sunday morning, Fox News chief national correspondent Ed Henry was even calling for the WHCA to apologize to Trump spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders, who was in the audience as Wolf skewered her: "She burns facts. and

And let's get rid of the chaplain in the House, too



YouTube

Rev. Patrick Conroy, chaplain of the U.S. House, prayed that the new tax law would benefit all Americans. Speaker Paul Ryan didn't like that.



the prayer that opens House sessions. This practice dates back to our republic's founding, but it was controversial from the beginning. During the summer of 1787, the delegates to the constitutional

by maintaining a government-sponsored religious position.

Priests, prophets and preachers, unless they are merely insipid figureheads, are inherently political; they have things to say

of out-of-touch elites who don't represent the interests of real Americans.

The annual dinner — or at least the optics of the dinner — seem to back him up.

And while Trump rarely sets a good example for anyone, his decision to hold a campaign-style rally in Michigan on Saturday night might be an exception.

Trump got to look like a man of the people, a guy who talks the language of autoworkers and waitresses.

Journalists — whose purported mission is to “afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted” — were meanwhile partying with their sources at the Washington Hilton.

And Trump was more than happy to disparage them, just as he did when he declined the invitation to

values, solid reporting has shown that many of his policies and actions favor the rich (and his own business interests).

Journalists are trying to keep his administration and the Congress accountable to citizens. And the job of White House correspondent may be tougher than ever.

“What was once one of the most prestigious gigs in journalism has become a daily slog” now that there's no downtime in the Trump era, wrote Michael Calderone of Politico.

But far from highlighting that hard work, this annual event sends the opposite message. And it encourages an unfortunate, false impression that the president loves to cultivate.

The White House Correspondents' Association no doubt has good intentions. Its annual dinner is meant to recognize excellent reporting and raise money for scholarships.

“Our dinner honors the First Amendment and strong, independent journalism,” the organization's president, Margaret Talev of Bloomberg News, said as she announced Michelle Wolf, this year's main entertainer, praising the comic's Pennsylvania roots and her “truth-to-power” style.

then she uses that ash to create a perfect smoky eye. Maybe she's born with it; maybe it's lies. It's probably lies.”

A mini-dustup, at most, but more bad optics for the mainstream press — which doesn't need them.

“Unfortunately, I don't think we advanced the cause of journalism tonight,” tweeted Peter Baker, chief White House correspondent of the New York Times. (The Times, for the most part, has not attended the event in recent years.)

Happily, the dinner may be fizzling out of its own accord. In previous years, the buzz has been palpable, with the glitterati arriving for a five-day celebration, bringing a sense of that rarest of all things: glamour in Washington. Last year and this year, it felt downright subdued.

Can't the correspondents' association come up with better ways to do its good work, ways that show journalists at their best?

That they are in the trenches digging out the truth.

Not schmoozing in the swamp while the president hustles the heartland.

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BY JOHN M. CRISP
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May 24 will be the last day on the job for the Rev. Patrick Conroy, the chaplain of the House of Representatives. Recently Speaker Paul Ryan, asked Conroy to resign; he complied.

Little takes place in Washington that isn't political. And while Conroy doesn't know why he was asked to resign, he suggests that there are something to do with his session-opening prayer that asked lawmakers “to guarantee that there are not winners and losers under new tax laws, but benefits balanced and shared by all Americans.”

Conroy says that Ryan pulled him aside and said, “Padre, you just got to stay out of politics.”

All sorts of questions arise.

Do First Amendment guarantees of freedom of speech apply if your audience is a higher power?

Does Conroy's termination represent a clash between progressive Catholics like Conroy and Pope Francis and conservative Catholics like Ryan? Is the vacant chaplaincy an opportunity to replace a Catholic with an evangelical who represents a religious persuasion that has acquired some prominence by its support for Donald Trump?

Or maybe this unseemly episode provides an opportunity to ask this question: Does the House of Representatives really need a chaplain?

Besides certain pastoral duties, the chaplain's most public role is organizing

convention in Philadelphia were struggling to reconcile the disparate interests of the big states and small states. Tensions and frustrations mounted in the heat. Benjamin Franklin, already 81 and well into his dotage, suggested that the members begin each session with a prayer for heavenly assistance.

The Deists and skeptics among the delegates must have rolled their eyes. Ron Chernow's recounting of this episode in “Hamilton” reports the legend that Alexander Hamilton resisted Franklin's suggestion of a daily prayer for divine intervention by jesting that the convention did not need “foreign aid.”

But such was the respect for Franklin that his suggestion prevailed and — Who knows? — maybe it helped, though the godly hand did not reach so far down into details of our Constitution that it was able to do something about slavery.

We've lived with this strange anomaly ever since: Although the founders clearly intended for our revolutionary new form of government to embody an entirely different relationship between church and state than prevailed in England, we have spent many millions in taxpayers' dollars supporting chaplaincies in Congress.

In fact, the House chaplain makes \$172,500 a year, and operating his office — the chaplain has always been a man — costs around a half a million dollars.

But neither the House nor religion is well-served

about society. In the old days they called out governments that had gone wrong — this is where we get the term “jeremiad.”

But when Conroy made a very Christian plea on behalf of those who will suffer under the new tax law, he lost his job.

Chaplains serve vital roles in many American institutions, but leading government-sponsored public prayers shouldn't be among them. Jesus had some thoughts on public prayer: “And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are — for they love to pray standing in the synagogues. ... But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.”

But since our putative Christian nation has a tendency to ignore the inconvenient sayings of Jesus, let's give the last word to James Madison, who wrote: “Is the appointment of chaplains to the two Houses of Congress consistent with the Constitution, and with the pure principle of religious freedom? In strictness the answer on both points must be in the negative.”

Jesus and Madison seem to agree: Our nation would serve both government and religion better without a House chaplain.

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Getty Images

Trump spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders was not amused at the potshots comedian Michelle Wolf aimed at her at the White House Correspondents' Dinner.