

Commentary on a Tale of Two Candidates

By Brian Riley

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Small corrections: July 5 and 10, 2016

Charles Dickens' novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, famously begins: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us..." At the present time in Deaf society it seems that we are also experiencing a historical moment that could be called both "the best of times" and "the worst of times" – "best," because of the phenomenal whirlwind of bottom-up, grassroots changes that are slowly building up, both in the Deaf-World, and also all over the globe, in *all* societies – "worst," because of the existence of those people who are clinging to the outmoded and outdated ways of the past who are part of an entrenched establishment. Thankfully, however, the entrenched establishment is crumbling, even at the moment that this commentary is being written. We have a brand new president at Gallaudet University who is causing lots of excitement. Not only that, but it's very possible that the United States Senate might switch after the next general election in November away from the control of regressive, obstructionist forces, to more progressive change.

Progressive change is also what is very needed at this juncture in history in the National Association of the Deaf. Toward that end we have two great candidates: David Reynolds as well as Melissa Draganac-Hawk. Only one person can be elected to be the next president of the NAD. Who should it be?

At this point, I should provide a brief disclaimer because I (BR, the author of this commentary) am a personal friend of David's, so it's possible that I might be biased. (We both grew up in Kankakee, Illinois and share a similar background in many respects. He even spent most summers visiting his aunt every day in my same [neighborhood](#), where I grew up from birth to age 6.) However, in this case, since the issue is only a case of determining which of two *great* candidates is *better*, this lessens the possibility of error, especially when very clear factors can be shown to be in play.

We have a very, very unusual factor in play during this election because, sadly, one of the candidate's spouses (MD's spouse) is [currently serving time in federal prison](#). It is very important to emphasize that MD should be accepted as being an innocent spouse, so no disrespect or inconsiderate behavior should be shown to her based on the actions of her spouse. On the contrary, she should be praised for displaying great courage in continuing to engage herself in public affairs for

the betterment of the community. However, this factor also creates the potential for severe issues of public perception on the part of those members of the public who don't know her and are unable to easily get to know her, since she can only be in one place at one time, and this is a delicate situation that requires personal contact with many people. She has a regular life to live and cannot spend 24/7 acting as NAD president, which is what such a complicated situation would require.

This is why the NAD has a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), so that the President and the Board can delegate certain responsibilities to the CEO. But if an issue of public perception exists with the President (if MD becomes President), then the CEO would be needing to spend an inordinate amount of time attempting to take care of that delicate issue, and valuable time would be lost that could be better spent focusing on achieving the critical political goals of the NAD that require urgent attention.

Many people who know David Reynolds know that he is an outstanding communicator who has very, very deep experience in issues of bilingualism, having been a pioneer on the issue through his work at the Indiana School for the Deaf. Also, very importantly, rather than feathering his own nest and becoming part of an entrenched establishment, he bravely decided to move to the West Coast in order to continue growing in a new milieu, including getting married and bringing his three sons with him to join Alyce's three sons. By marrying Alyce (then Slater Lentz), he found a perfect match, since she also had a lot of experience in leadership in the community. (For example, as Vice President of the Gallaudet University Alumni Association during Unity for Gallaudet, she announced at a public rally in Fremont that the GU BoT had failed to follow its own bylaws in selecting a trustee who had been nominated by the GUAA. Due in part to her valiant actions, she herself was later elected GUAA president and served for many years.)

I, personally (BR), have never seen David make a unilateral move on his own without having thoroughly threshed out a rationale and a plan with the relevant larger group involved. In short, he is a magnificent collaborator, as well as a being a gifted communicator. He would be more than a great NAD president. This is the main reason why he should be elected NAD president first, before Melissa. Secondly, if Melissa waits out two terms to run again later (after February 2019), then the problem discussed above will be resolved. So it makes good sense for her to wait.

The situation parallels somewhat the situation that existed when both James Madison and James Monroe were contemplating running for US president. Both were very well qualified, but Madison was exceptionally well qualified since he spearheaded much of the work that was done in creating the US Constitution. Fittingly, during the War of 1812, Madison became the only Commander in Chief in US history who took command on the field during battle. He was an

exceptional president during an exceptional time. In our time, too, as part of our (metaphorical) war against the Dark Forces of Audist Oppression, David can be our James Madison on the battlefield when needed, rallying everyone involved and inspiring great work and great political victories. (In this case, not as a “commander,” but instead as a good example and role model.) In that situation, Monroe deferred to Madison and decided to run for president after Madison served two terms. In our situation, it can be said that Melissa should defer to David and wait for David to serve as NAD president first, then her time will come.

(End commentary)

For an example of David's great communication skills and knowledge of bilingualism, see the classic UFG video, "Reynolds v. Fernandes":

http://saveourdeafschools.org/reynolds_v_fernandes.wmv

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