

# The US Election Campaign and the Curse of McCarthyism

How a Kindly Senator from Vermont Helped Save America From Fascism. And What Wisconsin Can Do Now to Shake off the McCarthy Curse

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*“Joseph McCarthy is the only major politician in the country who can be labeled “liar” without fear of libel.” – Joseph Alsop*

*“The State Department is infested with communists. I have here in my hand a list of 205 names that were made known to the Secretary of State (Dean Acheson) as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department.” – Senator Joseph Raymond McCarthy, February 9, 1950, Wheeling, West Virginia*

*“If somebody would only smuggle me aboard the Democratic campaign special with a baseball bat in my hand, I’d teach patriotism to ‘Little Adlai’.” – Joseph McCarthy, mocking 1952 Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson). – Joseph R. McCarthy*

*“I call Marco Rubio, ‘Little Marco’. That frightened little puppy couldn’t be elected dog-catcher in Florida.” – Donald Trump*

“Joseph McCarthy was a disgrace to Wisconsin, to the Senate, and to America” – William Proxmire, Democratic Party successor to McCarthy. (Proxmire was elected US Senator in a special election in August, 1954 and was subsequently re-elected by landslides 5 times {71% of the vote in 1970, 73% in 1976 and 65% in 1982}. In his last two Senate campaigns, he refused to take any campaign contributions, and in each campaign he spent less than \$200 (out of his own pocket) — to cover the expenses related to filing for re-election and for return postage for unsolicited contributions. He was an early advocate of campaign finance reform.

*“There are significant analogies between the American fear of Communism during the McCarthy era and the American fear of Islam at the beginning of the twenty-first century.” — [Ben Daniel, The Search for Truth about Islam: A Christian Pastor Separates Fact from Fiction](#)*

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*Not too long ago, a mild-mannered, 73 year old US Senator from Vermont rose to speak on the floor of the US Senate and introduced Resolution 261 (read it further below). The senator had reached the limits of his patience with a name-calling, mocking, free-swinging,*

*demagogic, megalomaniacal, right-wing politician who had bamboozled thousands of Wisconsin voters to support him.*

*The name of the Vermont senator was Ralph E. Flanders, and the date was June 1, 1954. Flanders was a moderate Republican, and name-calling politician who had bamboozled thousands of Wisconsinites to support him, was Joseph Raymond McCarthy. Some Republicans back then were moderates and some of them agreed with Flanders that the far-right McCarthy was destroying the Republican Party while selfishly working to achieve his self-promoting agenda.*

*And so, just like the candidacy of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, the courageous, likeable Vermont Senator Flanders spoke up when it was his duty to do so in order to save America from fascist influences like the infamous Friendly American Fascist, Joseph R. McCarthy.*

Flanders and Sanders were and still are simply following a critically-thinking, justice-seeking and independent-minded Vermont tradition. There must be something in the still pure water and still pure air up there. Wisconsin – and my state of Minnesota – still have relatively pure water and air in the northern halves of their states; that is, unless extractive industries like the mining and industrial-strength pig farming industries have anything to say about it.

As an aside, I should mention that recent studies have shown that the drinking water in the eastern, more conservative part of Wisconsin has been contaminated for an unknown number of years with the non-nutritive metallic element strontium (for which there are no known positive health benefits) with undetermined adverse effects. I am certain that the agricultural parts of Wisconsin are probably as contaminated with the agricultural toxins Atrazine and Round-up as are the agricultural parts of southern Minnesota, whose drinking water has been contaminated for years with both toxic pesticides. Those realities are worth speculating about since brain-altering chemicals can affect one's personalities and politics.

But I digress. Back to Wisconsin politics and proto-fascism.

Before relating what Senator Flanders did to save America from another rightward lurch toward fascism and demagoguery back in 1954, I include some more background to the story.

The Late, Lamented, Friendly American Fascist from Wisconsin, Joseph R. McCarthy

Joseph McCarthy grew up on a Wisconsin farm in a large, poor Irish Catholic family. After growing up and failing at chicken farming, he got a law degree at Marquette University, a Jesuit college. After setting up what turned out to be a failed law practice, he served for two years in WWII and then, on returning home from the war, went into politics. In 1946, he just barely managed to get elected to the US Senate (by bamboozling Wisconsin voters to vote for him by campaigning on false stories of his "heroism" in the South Pacific (where he was a non-combat desk jockey)). The major hurdle in getting to the Senate was his upset primary election victory over Wisconsin's incumbent senator Bob La Follette, Jr.

La Follette had been a pro-farmer/pro-labor Wisconsin Progressive Party US Senator, but the Progressive Party had recently been dissolved so he had to run for re-election as a Republican in 1946. Having been advised that it should be unnecessary to run an active campaign against the unknown upstart McCarthy, he was narrowly defeated by just 5,000 votes.

McCarthy's first three years in the Senate were uneventful, except for the fact that he fell in with a variety of nefarious corporate interests that included Texas millionaires, the sugar lobby and real estate interests. He also became known for his proclivity for betting on the ponies, drinking too much and speculating in the stock market.

### The Beginning of the Proto-Fascist McCarthy Era

On February 9, 1950, eager to make a name for himself, McCarthy finagled a speaking gig at a Women's Republican Club/Lincoln Day event in Wheeling, West Virginia. In that speech he made the infamously false claim that he knew of the existence of 205 communists in Truman's State Department.

With that revelation, McCarthy suddenly began generating 24/7 media coverage from fawning right-wing newspapers, their reporters and their photographers, similar to how the media covers big city gangsters like Al Capone or narcissistic, megalomaniac wannabe politicians like Donald Trump. Significantly, McCarthy revised the 205 number down to 57 by the time he got back to Washington.

Tellingly, McCarthy never made his fake list available to the public, just as our modern-day Republican McCarthy "look-alikes" like Rafael "Ted" Cruz or "act-alikes" like Trump and Cruz refuse to say how they will deal with any number of the many complex foreign or domestic policy issues that real presidents have to deal with.



Sen. Joseph McCarthy

Sen. Ted Cruz

As one example of the similarities between the current GOP candidates for president, Trump has refused to talk about any of the details concerning one of his biggest applause lines, promising to build a wall along the entire northern border of Mexico and then having Mexico pay for it.

The entire world is laughing at a nation that will even tolerate such delusional thinking.

### The Conservative Media Went Gaga Over McCarthy - for About 4 Dangerous Years

Newspapers back in the Franklin Delano Roosevelt New Deal era (and they perform the same way today) consistently favored conservative politicians and their anti-labor union, pro-business, pro-banking and war-profiteering interests by 5 to 1 margins, and they covered those issues and candidates in a similarly disproportionate fashion. One only has to recall the huge "Dewey Wins!!" headline on the ultra-conservative Chicago Tribune's front page as President Truman proudly displayed it the day after his upset win over the conservative Dewey in 1948.

Starting with the Wheeling speech, and buoyed by the overweening press coverage he was given free of charge, the narcissistic far right wing senator from Wisconsin expanded his anti-communist agenda until he foolishly bit off more than he could chew and accused the US Army of harboring communists. It wasn't long before the hard-drinking, hard-gambling, paranoid demagogue was exposed as a total fraud, and he was justly humiliated out of power.

The final blow occurred on June 9, 1954, the 30<sup>th</sup> day of the televised Army-McCarthy hearings, when the chief counsel for the Army, Joseph Welch, ended his interrogation of McCarthy with the statement that finished the senator's destructive political career. Here is Welch's famous accusation of McCarthy - and the fatal question (which "went viral"):

"Little did I dream you could be so reckless and so cruel...If it were in my power to forgive you for your reckless cruelty, I would do so. I like to think I'm a gentle man, but your forgiveness will have to come from someone other than me...You've done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?"

Following that truth-telling statement, the press instantaneously lost interest in the spectacle of McCarthy, and the deluded, megalomaniacal senator drank himself to death over the next couple of years. Partly because the Republican Party had tolerated such a demagogue for as long as it had been to their political advantage, the Democrats regained both the House and the Senate in the 1954 mid-term elections. Justice sometimes does happen in politics, especially when a courageous person of influence does his duty.

So let's go back to hear more about the Flanders/Sanders resistance against Friendly American Fascism.

The Flanders/Sanders Connection: The Role of Independently Thinking Vermont Senators

Even before the Army-McCarthy hearings began, Senator Flanders had been concerned that even war hero president Dwight D. Eisenhower (who actually despised McCarthy) seemed to be reluctant to confront the bullying tactics of "Tail-gunner Joe" (aka the "Pepsi-Cola Kid" - because of his early efforts on behalf of the soft drink company's sugar interests). So on behalf of the better nature of his party and calling McCarthy "a Dennis the Menace", Flanders issued Resolution 261, which read as follows:

"Resolved, that the conduct of the Senator from Wisconsin is unbecoming a member of the US Senate, is contrary to senatorial traditions and tends to bring the Senate into disrepute. Such conduct is hereby condemned."

The GOP Habit: Fighting Communism with Fascism

Two days later, as part of the senator's continued efforts to persuade the GOP-dominated Senate to finally take action against McCarthy's hysterical anti-communist witch-hunting, he appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press" and proclaimed to the nation what everybody in Washington already knew (but nobody dared to say out loud): that McCarthy had become "*the sole private eye, prosecutor, judge, jury and sentencer* (of suspected anti-fascist, liberal, pro-democracy, so-called "communists"). *This is so clearly in the direction of fighting communism with fascism that I am seriously disturbed.*"

Two months earlier (March 9, 1954), well before the Army-McCarthy hearings began, the well-respected Flanders had spoken on the Senate floor, accusing McCarthy of trying to destroy the Republican Party. In the speech, Flanders said of McCarthy:

“He dons his war paint. He goes into his war dance. He emits his war whoops. He goes forth to battle and proudly returns with the scalp of a pink Army dentist [google the “Irving Peress affair”]. We may assume that this represents the depth and seriousness of Communist penetration at this time.”

What Wisconsin you can do NOW to Shake off the McCarthy Curse

This next week is the run-up to the 2016 Wisconsin primary elections scheduled for Tuesday, April 5. Bernie Sanders is running not just for president of the United States. He is also running for the sustainable future for the planet and for people all over the earth. The rest of the world understands that.

Bernie is arguably the most important politician coming from a number of independent-minded, justice-seeking, whistle-blowing senators (from Vermont or wherever), and he is coming off three impressive landslide victories over the center-right Wall Street and War Street-favored candidate Hillary Clinton in Washington, Alaska and Hawaii.

The mainstream media should be totally ashamed of itself for the way it has handled Bernie’s dramatic, ground-breaking news story.

Over the few days preceding the primary elections in those three states, there was absolutely nothing new to report from the Republican campaigns. The Brussels bombings had already been discussed, ad nauseum; but the 5 to 1 ratio held true to form.

On the three Sunday morning network TV shows the day after Bernie’s dramatic victories every panel member on every show was either covering Trump or Clinton or the campaign perspectives of Wall Street and War Street. Discussion about the Sanders campaign was shut out.

Trump and Terrorism totally over-shadowed the real important news about the Sanders revolution. No coverage of the amazing bird that hopped up on the podium and looked at Bernie was shown. Even most of the late-night talk shows gave short shrift to Bernie’s campaign.

So now Wisconsin, you who have the unusual checkered history of alternately producing or being governed by major Socialist Party politicians or major Progressive Party politicians or your embarrassing lapses into being governed by far-right, anti-labor, anti-democracy, proto-fascist GOP politicians like Joseph McCarthy and Scott Walker (whose paymasters were and still are big corporations and multimillionaires and billionaires who are seeking more privileges and wealth for themselves (like lower taxes and less regulations) and fewer privileges and wealth for the working class (like lower wages and poor access to affordable health care).

So from one of your neighbors to the west, please be aware that a lot of progressive young Wisconsinites are out there working for Bernie Sanders the next week. Please watch one of Bernie’s heartfelt rallies on YouTube, feel the Bern and join the anti-fascist revolution.

*Dr Kohls is a retired physician from Duluth, MN, USA. He writes a weekly column for the Reader, Duluth's alternative newsweekly magazine. His columns mostly deal with the dangers of American fascism, corporatism, militarism, racism, malnutrition, psychiatric drugging, over-vaccination regimens, Big Pharma and other movements that threaten the environment or America's health, democracy, civility and longevity. Many of his columns are archived at [http://duluthreader.com/articles/categories/200\\_Duty\\_to\\_Warn](http://duluthreader.com/articles/categories/200_Duty_to_Warn)*

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