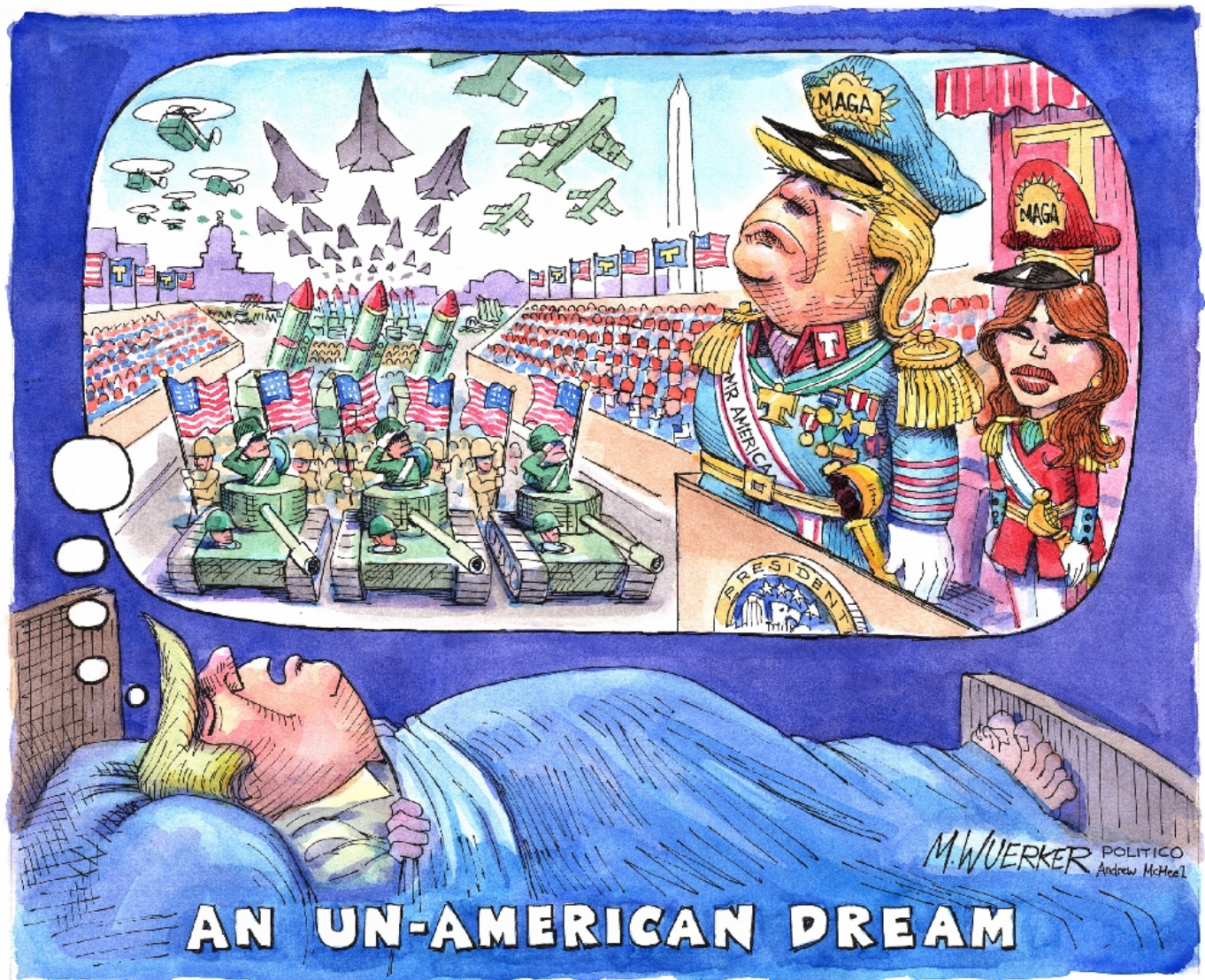


[Opinion](#)
[News](#)
[Editorial](#)



by NCR Editorial Staff

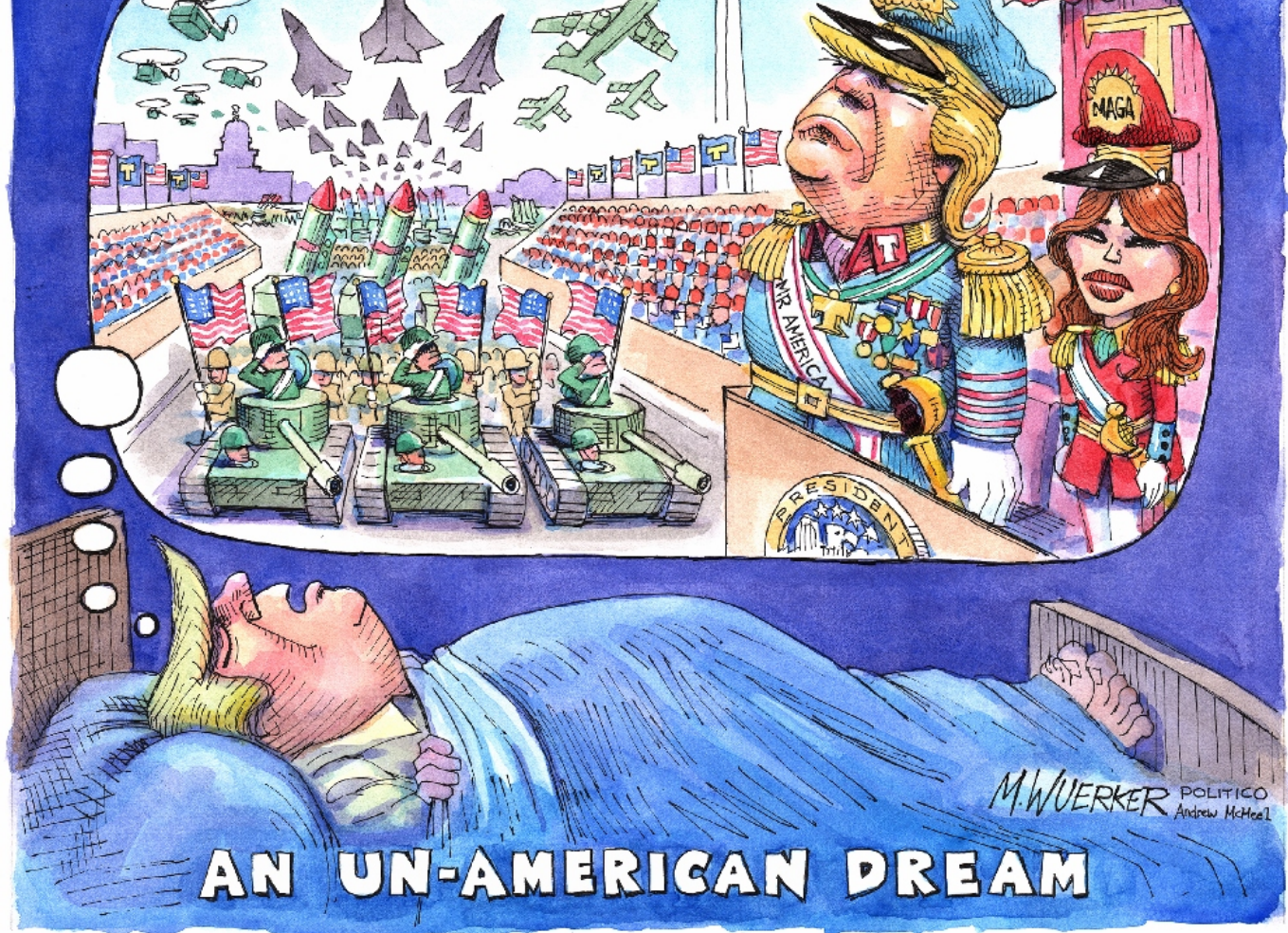
[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

February 20, 2018

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)



[For more Editorial cartoons, click here.](#)

President Donald Trump's desire for a military parade in the nation's capital was shocking for many reasons. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Illinois, a retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel who lost both her legs when a rocket-propelled grenade hit a helicopter she was piloting in Iraq in 2004, called it "ridiculous," an unnecessary show of bravado and a squandering of resources. It shows, she told The Hill, "his lack of judgment to think that this is appropriate."

Though military parades did mark the ends of the Civil, First and Second World Wars, and troops and missiles were part of the inaugural parades of John Kennedy and Dwight Eisenhower, presidents' reviewing military parades is rare in U.S. history, ending with James Polk in the 1840s. Glorifying brute, militaristic might is

antithetical to the founding principles of our democracy that rightly placed the military at the people's service.

It is an easy temptation to dismiss Trump's fascination with such a parade as a personal peccadillo, because it raises again the uncomfortable question of what vision Donald Trump has for America. His desire to see tanks and missiles paraded down Pennsylvania Avenue adds more evidence to the argument that — despite his portrayal as a friend of the forgotten — he is out of touch with the needs of the vast majority of Americans. He misunderstands what has made America great.

Sadly, congressional leaders — Speaker of the House Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell — who could check this wayward president instead aid and abet him because it suits their own narrow, stark vision of what America could be.

Historian David Goldfield's book *The Gifted Generation: When Government Was Good* explores the careers and legacies of three presidents who — despite partisan differences — had a deeper, richer vision for America. Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower and Lyndon Johnson, according to Goldfield, understood government as a beneficial force, and they "believed in the commonwealth ideal of mutual responsibility" or "a government that strengthened individualism by promoting equal opportunities for all its citizens."

Advertisement

These three presidents were pioneers, sometimes admittedly flawed, in advancing civil rights and equality. They worked to expand access to employment, education, housing, social services and health care, not to pander to a base, but because they believed, Goldfield writes, "that the nation could not be whole until everyone had the opportunity to succeed. They knew from personal experience that government was not only good but also necessary to address society's inequalities."

Given Trump's program to abandon the [middle class and poor](#), how else can we view his insistence to stage a grand, military parade as anything more than fiddling while the nation burns?

A version of this story appeared in the **Feb 23-March 8, 2018** print issue.