

Arrest for good deed sparks outrage, signals need for change



Ninety-year-old World War II veteran, **Arnold Abbott** was arrested in early November after feeding the homeless on a sidewalk in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., because of city feeding-site regulations.

"Why are you arresting him?"
 "Shame on you, shame on you."
 "The whole world is watching."

Earlier this month, these were the cries of people experiencing homelessness in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, as police wrongfully arrested 90-year-old veteran Arnold Abbott and two ministers for illegally feeding the hungry.

"One of the police officers said, 'Drop that plate right now, as if I were carrying a weapon,'" said Abbott in an interview with ABC

News.

Fort Lauderdale Mayor Jack Seiler insists the laws are in place to assure that public spaces are open to everyone, though these laws ultimately close off these same spaces for those experiencing homelessness.

"The media's ignoring the fact that there are daily feedings taking place in the city of Fort Lauderdale in full compliance with the law," said Seiler in an interview with the Sun Sentinel.

Of course, the city has not made it easy

for those feedings to happen.

"In Fort Lauderdale, the legislation will require feeding sites to sit 500 feet away from each other and from residential properties," according to PBS NewsHour writer Colleen Shalby. "Additionally, only one feeding site per city block will be permitted."

To make it increasingly more difficult for people to acquire basic needs is inhumane.

"These are living, breathing human beings with feelings just like you and I have," said Greensboro resident Amy Murphy, who provides food for those experiencing homelessness every Monday morning at the Interactive Resource Center.

The Fort Lauderdale government maintains that this is somehow helping those experiencing homelessness.

"Instead of helping them, you're passing laws prohibiting them from getting any kind of help," said first-year Hidania Pena.

Though Abbott knew he would likely get arrested, he persisted in his heroic efforts.

"He's gone to court and won," said Associate Professor of Justice & Policy Studies Will Pizio. "He knows what he's doing. What he's trying to do now is set up a run to get this to the higher courts."

Since 1999, Abbott has provided food for those experiencing homelessness every week in Fort Lauderdale after suing the city

for that right. Since the new laws have taken place, he has continued to do so.

Fort Lauderdale is not the only place with unfair laws concerning homelessness. In Lake Worth, Florida, panhandling is no longer legal on city-owned property. In Manteca, California, setting up encampments on any public or private property is illegal.

"Shelters aren't permanent (anywhere)," said senior Noelle Lane, Church Under the Bridge project coordinator. "If you really don't want people to be vagrant, provide resources."

In Greensboro, panhandling now requires a permit.

"Greensboro used to be more tolerant," said Murphy. "There are still a lot of kindhearted people who are helping, but the city has policies that indicate that Greensboro is not so friendly towards those experiencing homelessness."

Sadly, most local governments do not want to deal with people experiencing homelessness in their cities.

"The municipalities are trying to claim the city," said founder of Greensboro's Church Under the Bridge Kevin Carter. "They don't want to see those 'eyesores' on the street."

Though most Greensboro residents are

not policy makers, there is still much that can be done.

"We need to work towards getting funding for rehab programs and recovery programs," said Murphy. "We can get programs in Greensboro to take care of people experiencing mental illness."

Providing education is the next step, especially for larger businesses and organizations.

"Restaurants tell us, 'We can't donate to you because the food can go bad and we could get sued,' but that's not a reality," said Lane. "The Good Samaritan law protects restaurants from being penalized for giving free food."

Encouraging communities to take on the cause could end homelessness and hunger.

"If 200 faith communities adopted one person, we would have no more people experiencing homelessness (in Greensboro)," said Murphy. "It doesn't have to be an agency."

If we want to change things, we cannot wait for the governments to make the change.

"If the status quo is not to feed people who are hungry, we're not going to make it very far," said Lane. "We're so focused on our security that we forget about the people around us."

Republicans victorious in 2014, can easily take 2016 if willing to make sacrifices

Republicans captured massive victories in the midterm elections, burying Democratic candidates in key congressional races.

If the GOP plays its cards right, the party will roll that success straight into the presidential election.

Republicans can easily carry this success into 2016 if they negotiate legislation with Democrats and make even a slight amount of progress.

"Republicans are now in a position where President Obama can, and will, compromise," said Julia Mueller, chair of Elon College Republicans.

In this year's midterms, many conservatives won by using public dissatisfaction with Obama to their advantage. That strategy worked because voters hate the status quo of gridlock in Washington. Voters do not like a seemingly dysfunctional government.

The midterms did not justify a mandate for conservatism, as some GOP faithful have claimed. It just shows that voters grew weary of the current powers. Democrats held more power, so they took more of the blame.

"(The Republican victories) show a greater dissatisfaction with the job the president has been doing," said sophomore and president of Guilford College Republicans Harrison Houlihan. "It's worth noting that in states such as North Carolina the Democratic incumbent was often seen as ... in

cahoots with the president, toeing the presidential line as it were."

Just look at the North Carolina Senate campaigns. The race here developed a national reputation as one of the worst for attack ads. Neither side could tout their accomplishments to gain votes, so both made the opponent seem worse.

Kay Hagan had to distance herself from the Obama administration to even make the election competitive. Thom Tillis could play the blame game and win from voter dissatisfaction.

"(The Republicans) had one purpose: to embarrass

Obama currently holds a 54 percent disapproval rating. He has practically handed the GOP a rare advantage on a presidential silver platter. Republicans can take it by showing the nation that they can end gridlock in Congress and settle disputes with the president.

But Conservatives could just as easily squander the opportunity.

The GOP cannot see call for a conservative revolution in Washington and go whole hog for their platform. That could easily result in further obstacles in Congress and even presidential vetoes. Republicans just need to show that they can make more progress than when the Democrats held the wheel.

It sounds easy enough, but maybe not. The Tea Party has won most of their offices by pushing an agenda of strong conservative ideas and not backing down. The same goes for plenty of congressmen from the GOP.

However, if conservatives can show some restraint, and stomach the thought of giving up some ground on their positions, the party could benefit

enormously in 2016.

The Republicans would need to loosen their tight grip on conservative ideas and show that they can change. It might prove tough for some conservatives to manage, but the dividends could show up as voters for a Republican presidential nominee.

Republicans must make improvements on Capitol Hill if they want any chance of replacing President Obama with a conservative leader. Otherwise, the GOP can look forward to another four years of gridlock between Congress and a Democratic president.

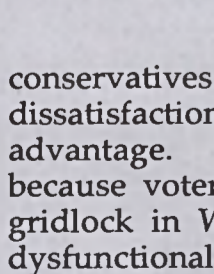
Obama, embarrass the Democrats (and) gridlock the government so that nothing would get done," said Robert Duncan, assistant professor of political science. "It worked for the midterms."

Republicans cannot use the same strategy in two years. Now that they succeeded in the midterms, they have to make improvement in Washington.

The GOP must capitalize on the chance it has. Voters want to see progress and feel that the country has found a path to greater prosperity. Conservatives have a perfect opportunity to take those voters.

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BY LANDON FRIED
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