

# Clumsy or not, violent talk is still violent

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When you express a half-baked thought in public or even among friends, here's what you do:

You apologize.

And when someone takes the forum at an organized event and says something ugly, the party responsible repudiates the statement. Depending on the offender's contrition, he may be rehabilitated after a period of time.

Civilized movements practice such protocols.

Otherwise, you're left with mob rule.

Which brings us to Dianne Capps of Clarkston.

Speaking at the Feb. 13 Tea Party meeting at the Asotin County Fairgrounds, Capps offered this line heard 'round the world - courtesy of the Internet and the Huffington Post:

"What happened to Jake when he ran with the wrong crowd?" Capps asked, referring to the "Lonesome Dove" character Jake Spoon. "What happened to Jake when he ran with the wrong crowd? He got hung. And that's what I want to do with Patty Murray."

Murray, a Democrat, is Washington's senior United States senator.

Tea Party members have flirted with this message, but subtly. You'll see one fellow who attends a rally carrying a sign of President Obama as a Nazi. Another wears a T-shirt referring to the "tree of liberty" - as in Jefferson's quote about refreshing the tree of liberty "from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants." Or a Tea Party parade float in Idaho Falls displays a tree of liberty and depicted on a nearby ax was Obama's name.

All of it has been background noise. So far.

This is new. Singling out an elected official for a violent end is shockingly overt.

So what did Capps do? She blamed the media. KLEW-TV, which aired the segment, "didn't print the whole thing."

But she wasn't ambushed in an interview, grasping for time to think or the right words to speak. Microphone in hand at the podium, she deliberately expressed her ideas.

Watch it for yourself.

What did the Tea Party promoters do? They excused it. Capps was an inexperienced public speaker. She was just trying to fill empty time. It wasn't a vicious statement. Besides, this is about the bad guys - the media and the government.

"We know the agenda and the direction of the general media," says Doug Schurman of Clarkston, who organized the event. "We're not radical, bomb-throwing crazies, unlike some people in our government."

Who got hurt?

Not Murray. She's using the incident to help raise campaign contributions.

Not the Tea Party, which continues to draw the GOP's interest and the right-wing media's attention.

What's damaged is that fragile political contract that says Americans will fight like hell during an election campaign but then rally for the common good.

What's damaged is the notion that we settle disputes with ballots, not bullets.

Most people still cherish that principle.

But not all.

What of them? How many find encouragement from a rural Washington woman who is willing to stand up in public and suggest a dispute about policy is reason enough to hang a politician?

It only takes one Timothy McVeigh, who blew up the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City.

It only takes one A. Joseph Stack, who flew his plane into the Internal Revenue Service offices last week in Austin, Texas.

It only takes one Lee Harvey Oswald. - M.T.