

# Chicago Tribune

OPINION/COMMENTARY

## John T. Shaw: During a dark presidential campaign, glimmers of statesmanship shined through



Mesa Mayor John Giles is part of Latter Day Saints for Harris-Walz and Republicans for Harris, on Oct. 2, 2024, in Mesa, Arizona. He also spoke at the DNC in support of Kamala Harris. (Gina Ferazzi/Los Angeles Times)

By [JOHN T. SHAW](#)

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*Editor's note: John T. Shaw's pieces, exclusive to the Tribune, will appear the last Monday of each month. He plans to focus on how statesmanship, typically associated with national and international figures, is evident in others who escape wide notice — mayors who craft bold plans and take political risks to bring their dreams to fruition, city planners who prepare creative long-term strategies for their communities, and state legislators who break from party orthodoxy and advance proposals to solve problems. He also will highlight leaders who squander opportunities for statesmanship.*

Americans and the rest of the world are still absorbing the impact of President-elect Donald Trump's decisive victory on Nov. 5. It's possible to acknowledge the scope of his win without admiring its grim and vengeful message — or the carnage that has been left in its wake and that is certain to grow.

Trump transformed Ronald Reagan's optimistic image of America as "a shining city on a hill" to that of an embattled fortress under siege. Hundreds of millions of people around the world, no doubt, are saddened and troubled by the joylessness and menace of Trump's America. They long for the nation that once projected optimism, energy and humanity.

There were, however, glimmers of statesmanship in this dark and angry election year. Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger risked and relinquished congressional careers to challenge Trump. Their courage has been amply chronicled and justly celebrated. History will treat them kindly — and perhaps American voters will reward them one day.

I also find hope in the courage of two mayors, both from "purple" states, who insisted on placing the public interest above their personal or partisan interest. This is the essence of statesmanship.

Shawn Reilly has served as the mayor of Waukesha, Wisconsin, since 2014. He entered office as a Republican who was lauded as a serious, approachable and collaborative problem solver.

Reilly was appalled by the Trump-inspired violence of Jan. 6, 2021, and the acquiescence, if not outright support, of many Republicans. The next day, he left the GOP and became an independent. "This will possibly be the cause of the end of my political career but I have to put this out because I am so upset," he [wrote on Facebook](#). "I am ashamed that I was a member of the Republican Party and I do not know how I can ever be a member again."

He continued to work in his community and was reelected in 2022 with nearly 65% of the vote.

Late last month, with Wisconsin at the epicenter of the presidential campaign, Reilly publicly endorsed the Democratic candidate. "It would be easier for me to stay quiet and vote my conscience privately, but the stakes of this election are so important that I feel compelled to share publicly that I am voting for Vice President Kamala Harris and I encourage other Wisconsinites who care about our country to do the same," [he said](#).

Reilly argued that Trump posed an unprecedented threat to our democracy, warning that a second Trump term would imperil the Constitution, rule of law and global respect for the United States.

John Giles became mayor of Mesa, Arizona, in 2014 after a special election. A lifelong Republican, he was reelected in 2016 and 2020 and worked effectively and creatively on climate, housing, education and economic development projects.

Troubled by the MAGA movement, Giles endorsed Democrat Mark Kelly in Arizona's 2022 Senate race, a move that earned him the enmity and censure of the local Republican Party.

In 2024, Giles decided he would actively oppose Trump and endeavor to persuade moderate Republicans to vote for Harris. In late July, he [wrote an op-ed](#) that implored Republicans to put their country over party. "We can't have a felon representing us on the national stage, let alone one who would threaten to abandon NATO and ruin our standing abroad," he said. Giles [argued the U.S.](#) was at a pivot point. "We are in a moment that only happens once every few generations, when we have to defend democracy, and stand up for the right to vote and our civil rights."

Giles worked actively on the Harris campaign through the summer and fall, even speaking at the Democratic National Convention. He quipped that at this point, he could not be elected dogcatcher in an Arizona Republican primary. But he was undaunted, [saying](#), "Silence is not an option when you're confronted with these types of moral dilemmas in life."

As we know, Trump won Arizona and Wisconsin, all the other swing states and the popular vote.

However, the valor of Reilly and Giles endures. They chose to risk their political careers, friendships, professional relationships and even personal safety, fully aware that Trump was favored to win.

John F. Kennedy as a U.S. senator wrote the book "Profiles in Courage" nearly 70 years ago. Being courageous, he said, "requires no exceptional qualifications, no magic formula, no special combination of time, place and circumstance. It is an opportunity that sooner or later is presented to us all." Kennedy added that summoning courage during critical moments requires each of us to look deeply into our souls.

Mayors Reilly and Giles looked deeply into their souls this election year, found ample courage and demonstrated admirable statesmanship.

Let their inspiring examples guide us in the difficult years ahead.

*John T. Shaw is director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute and the author of ["The Education of a Statesman: How Global Leaders Can Repair a Fractured World."](#)*

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