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# Donald Trump and the Judge

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD MAY 31, 2016

Donald Trump's presidential candidacy presents decent people everywhere with a dilemma: Sprayed with an open fire hose of schoolyard insults, locker-room vulgarities and bizarre policy pitches by the presumptive Republican nominee, they must make hard choices. Is this latest comment so outrageous, so much worse than all the others, as to require its own response?

Speak up too often and you risk sounding like a car alarm, so urgent and yet so familiar that residents no longer hear it. But don't speak up often enough and you risk turning the unacceptable into the unremarkable.

At a rally in San Diego on Friday, Mr. Trump again steered his pirate ship into uncharted waters, firing off personal and racially tinged attacks against a federal judge hearing a case in which Mr. Trump is the defendant.

The judge, Gonzalo Curiel of the Federal District Court in San Diego, is presiding over a class-action lawsuit that accuses Trump University of defrauding and misleading customers who spent \$1,500 for three-day seminars that promised to teach Mr. Trump's secrets of success in real estate. Shortly after Mr. Trump's rally, Judge Curiel ordered the unsealing of about 1,000 pages of the company's internal documents. The release, which came in response to a request by The Washington Post, was standard procedure for a civil suit.

But Mr. Trump doesn't do standard procedure. In a rambling, 11-minute stream of vitriol, Mr. Trump, who has attacked Judge Curiel before, called him "very hostile" and a "hater of Donald Trump," and said he "should be ashamed of himself. I think it's a disgrace that he's doing this."

One would think Mr. Trump, whose sister is a federal appellate judge, would know how self-destructive it is for any litigant anywhere to attack the judge hearing his or her case. But Mr. Trump is not any litigant; he is running to be president of the United States — a job that requires at least a glancing understanding of the American system of government, in particular a respect for the separation of powers. When Mr. Trump complains that he is "getting railroaded" by a "rigged" legal system, he is saying in effect that an entire branch of government is corrupt.

The special danger of comments like these — however off the cuff they may sound — is that they embolden Mr. Trump's many followers to feel, and act, the same way.

For good measure, Mr. Trump added that Judge Curiel "happens to be, we believe, Mexican." False; the judge is from Indiana. But facts are, as always, beside the point for Mr. Trump, who reassured his audience that "the Mexicans are going to end up loving Donald Trump when I give all these jobs." (Presumably he was not referring to those he has promised to deport if he is elected.)

In a masterpiece of understatement, Judge Curiel, who is prevented by ethical rules from responding directly to comments like these, noted in his order that Mr. Trump "has placed the integrity of these court proceedings at issue."

On Tuesday, Mr. Trump turned his fire back to the media in addressing news reports that he had failed to give a \$1 million gift to a veterans' charity as he had promised in January. He said the donation had now been made, called one reporter "a sleaze" and complained that the news media "make me look very bad."

Mr. Trump has said so many irresponsible or dangerous things so often and in so many settings that there is a

real risk that many voters will simply tune out and his campaign will somehow be normalized.

So it is particularly important to note when Mr. Trump's statements go beyond the merely provocative or absurd and instead represent a threat to America's carefully balanced political system. This is such a moment. It is not too late for Republicans who revere that system to question how they can embrace a nominee who has so little regard for it.

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