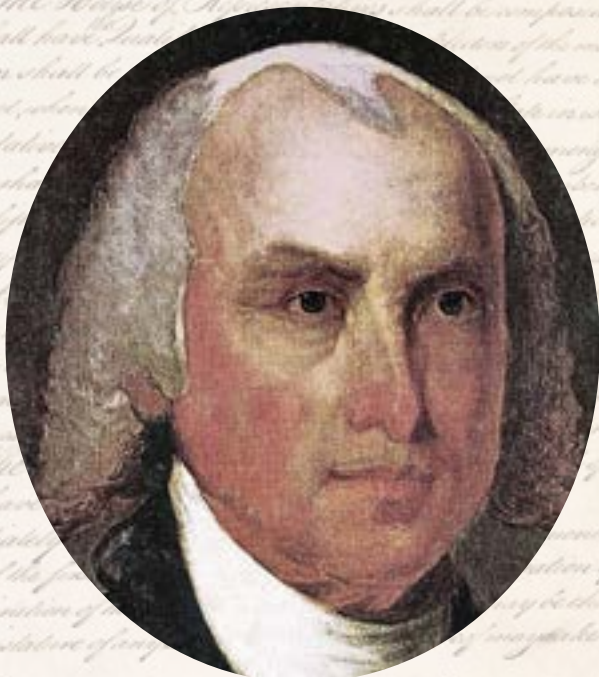


PERSPECTIVE

What would the Founders think?



If we insist on making criminals out of our political opponents, we will reap the destruction of our own democracy

By TYSON REEDER

As Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., urged the House of Representatives to draw up articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump, she implied that James Madison — the “Father of the Constitution” — would have demanded Trump’s impeachment for betraying the national trust to a foreign power. It’s no small irony, then, that congressional Democrats voted for an article of impeachment that would have imperiled Madison’s own presidency. Although the specifics differ, Trump’s dealings with Ukraine in 2019 closely parallel Madison’s engagement of France in 1812. The similarities offer a powerful lesson for today: Rashly accusing our political opponents of criminal behavior makes our nation vulnerable to foreign interference and creates a downward spiral that could

lead to catastrophic consequences. In 1812, Madison presided over a nation bitterly divided between two political parties — Federalists and Democratic-Republicans. As war raged between Britain and France in Europe, the parties disagreed over foreign policy and staked out opposing sides of the conflict. Federalists accused Democratic-Republicans of serving French interests, and Democratic-Republicans charged Federalists with inviting British dominion over the United States. Early in the year, John Henry, a former British spy embittered by his poor compensation, decided to exact revenge on Britain by selling secret British documents to Madison’s Democratic-Republican administration. The documents purportedly contained incriminating information about Federalists who conspired with the British government against the United States.

Henry worked through a French national named Paul-Émile Soubiron, a sleazy con artist who helped Henry recruit the favor of the French ambassador in Washington. Hoping that the documents would compel the United States to join France in war against Britain, the ambassador used Soubiron as a sort of shadow representative. Like Russian agents who peddle conspiracy theories of Ukraine’s collusion with Democrats, the ambassador hoped to convince the president that they shared a British enemy who cooperated with a supposedly debased opposition party in America. Madison took the bait, jumping at the opportunity to confirm his suspicions about his political adversaries. He spent \$50,000 of State Department money to obtain the documents. The administration asked Henry to write a

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CONSTITUTION: NATIONAL ARCHIVES VIA AP; MADISON, TRUMP: AP

Time for Connecticut to give ranked voting a serious look

It is time for Connecticut to take a serious look at changing to a ranked-voting system. It would give voters the opportunity to choose the candidate they really like without fear of helping elect the guy, or gal, they really don’t like. It would encourage more third-party and independent candidates. And it would discourage attack ads. We sure could use fewer of those. How does it work? Consider the last election for governor in Connecticut. You had three candidates running for an open seat after Gov. Dannel P. Malloy opted not to seek re-election. Ned Lamont was the Democratic nominee, Bob Stefanowski the Republican choice, and running a long-shot independent candidacy was Oz Griebel. Now, as a voter, you may have liked what Griebel was selling. He called for a more problem-solving centrist approach to governing. He wanted to aggressively attack the state’s underfunded pension plans to get the state back into fiscal health. Griebel

pitched himself as pro-business but saw tolls as needed to get the transportation structure in sufficient shape to make Connecticut economically competitive. A businessman and former Republican, he selected as his running Monte Frank — a lawyer, Democrat and gun control advocate. The ticket’s campaign slogan was: “No politics. No parties. Just solutions.” But even if you liked Griebel, you may have feared voting for him. A voter who leaned Democrat might conclude there was no way Griebel would win and therefore a vote for him would be wasted and help elect Stefanowski governor. Conversely, a voter who leaned Republican also would likely stay clear of Oz, not wanting to help get Lamont elected. But under ranked voting, if you were that Democrat leaner, you could rank Griebel as your first choice, Lamont as your second, and either Stefanowski as your third choice or ignore him completely.



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If, alas, Griebel finished last when first-ranked votes were tabulated, he would be eliminated. Your vote then would go to your second choice — Lamont. And if, in that second round, the total of votes ranking Lamont as their first or second choice surpassed 50 percent, Lamont wins. The same would hold true for Stefanowski. But something surprising could happen. Maybe so many ranked Griebel their first choice that a major party candidate, say Stefanowski, fell to last. Then Griebel, on the strength of his first-choice votes and Ste-

fanowski supporters who picked him second, would win the election. A video available on the Fairvote website well explains how the process works. This approach also assures the person who wins has the support of more than 50 percent of the voters, either as their first choice or in a combination of first, second and even third choices. In the 2018 Republican gubernatorial primary, Stefanowski won with only 29.4 percent of the vote in a five-way race. That couldn’t happen with ranked voting. And with ranked voting, candidates might think twice before besmirching their opponents in attack ads. A candidate will want their opponents’ supporters to consider making him or her their second choice. That’s not likely to happen if you’re lying in an ad about your opponent hating puppies and defunding orphanages. Last September, Maine became the first state to authorize ranked-choice

voting to decide Electoral College votes in this year’s general presidential election, and will allow the process for presidential primaries starting in 2024. The Democratic Party in four states — Alaska, Hawaii, Kansas and Wyoming — will use ranked voting in the upcoming presidential primaries.” And in this past election, New York City voters approved a proposal to use ranked-choice voting to elect the mayor, comptroller, public advocate, borough president and members of the City Council starting in 2021. Secretary of the State Denise Merrill, the top person in charge of state elections, last year pushed for a bill to study such a possible change in our voting. It passed the House but died in the Senate. It should be re-introduced and, this time, approved by both chambers and signed by the governor. Paul Choiniere is the editorial page editor.