



SO TO SPEAK

Leadership exists only in land of TV drama

Geena Davis doesn't really play the president of the United States on *Commander in Chief*. She plays the National Adult.

That's why I watch the show now and then.

I've longed for a National Adult since I lost my youthful idealism about politics at, oh, I'd say age 4 or so. The National Adult (a fantasy position I've written about before) would be the big boss who steps in when

infantile politicians stray too far into make-believe. The Adult would spank politicians as needed, set the record straight and talk to voters as if they weren't idiots.

Ideally, the National Adult would be the president, but I see no prospect of that. Lest you sense a partisan rant, I hasten to say that neither the current resident of the White House nor his immediate predecessor would come close to qualifying for the position.

So, for comfort, I must turn to a TV president.

Here's the back story: Davis' character, Mackenzie Allen, ascended from the vice presidency to the Oval Office when the chief executive died. She's an independent with abundant enemies in both political parties. But she keeps throwing the weasels off-balance by doing the right thing when the rules of politics call for doing the expedient thing.

In a recent episode, she became embroiled in controversy when word leaked that the former president, on his deathbed, had asked Allen to resign rather than assume the presidency. How did she deal with it? She walked into the White House press room, pulled up a chair and told the truth.

In another episode, she refused to take the easy way out by sinking a leaking oil tanker because, she argued, it would create a pollution problem for our grandchildren.

Can you imagine? If you took lying and foisting problems on future generations out of the Washington playbook, the place would be paralyzed.

I know, I know: The show is fiction, and the plots are implausible. But I still suspect that *Commander's* success indicates that many Americans yearn for a National Adult. (Granted, *Commander* has been bested in the ratings lately by *House* — which I guess indicates that even more Americans yearn to be verbally abused by an ill-tempered doctor.)

Much has been written about the novelty of a TV show that puts a woman in the White House, but that's the least interesting part of *Commander*.

When the president finds herself torn between her roles as mom and as leader of the free world, I root for her to tell the kids: "Go do your homework. I've got a country to run."

I can observe family tension anytime; it's courageous leadership that's so rare it seems to exist only in fantasy.

To me, President Allen represents virtue, principle and hope. Her nemesis — the slimy speaker of the House, Nathan Templeton (Donald Sutherland) — represents Washington as we know it.

Templeton has designs on the White House — an ambition guaranteed to go unfulfilled because it would be the death of the show. If viewers wanted to watch people put their ambitions ahead of the national interest, they would just tune in C-SPAN.

Could a National Adult ever get elected president? Would voters accept a candidate who told uncomfortable truths and didn't play them for fools?

I don't know, but I think I'd turn off the television to watch the campaign.

Joe Blundo is a Dispatch columnist.
 jblundo@dispatch.com



The Old Trail Inn on W. Broad Street: "It's the best place to come for loving abuse," according to a regular customer.

JAMES D. DeCAMP | DISPATCH

Trail's end

Far West Side fixture a welcome stop for the hungry, a second home for the regulars

By Aaron Beck
 THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

When the original Old Trail Inn opened, Rt. 40 was a narrow two-laner headed for the West Coast. "We were the only thing out here," said owner and manager Valentine "Val" Boehm, 87. Nearly 60 years later, the unassuming, antique-stuffed bar, lounge and restaurant is tucked off W. Broad Street near I-270 among the usual Anywhere, USA, suspects: Home Depot, Speedway, Waffle House, Holiday Inn.

Boehm can't recall the details of the first day of business in 1947.

"All I remember is sitting outside in a chair all afternoon, waiting for any customer to stop by," he said.

Now, every day from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m., many folks make time to stop by the Old Trail.

Some come to be humored. "Val greets us every morning with 'Good morning, gentlemen' — which we're not," said Bob Gentile, who works the graveyard shift at Pactiv Corp.



Valentine "Val" Boehm

Others come for an atmosphere suited to their needs.

"It's the best place to come for loving abuse," said "Redskin Steve," a native of Washington, a Redskins die-hard and a dump-truck driver who "made a wrong turn years ago and ended up in Columbus."

Some come to find good times, which sometimes get too good.

One recent evening, two regulars bordered on R-rated dancing in front of the country-stoked jukebox.

A bartender, cigarette bobbing between her lips, barely lifted her head while washing a glass.

"Aw, now, come on, Cassie, Junior," she said: "Keep it clean."

Still others come for the simple, hearty food made in a kitchen open whenever the Old Trail is.

"You gotta have good food to keep people coming back," Boehm said.

"Working third shift," said Gentile, 55, "I don't



Back in the day: the original restaurant, on Rt. 40

WILL SHILLING | FOR THE DISPATCH

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PROFILE

At 75, international jewel thief might have to slow down

By Angie Wagner
 ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAS VEGAS — When she went to work, Doris Payne stepped into a fancy dress and high heels, put on a wide-brimmed hat and picked up a designer handbag.

Her creamy mocha skin was made up just so.

Always she looked immaculate, well-to-do.

She worked by herself, with few people knowing what she did.

New York, Nevada, California and Colorado all beckoned, and so, through five decades, did France and Greece, England and Switzerland.

At age 75, she remembers with amusement.

Yes, she says, she did that — throwing back her head and laughing.

Eight years ago, one day in February,

she strolled into the Neiman Marcus store on the Las Vegas Strip.

An employee, Linda Sbrocco, showed her several diamond rings — this one; no, this one; how about that one?

Soon, Sbrocco was swapping jewelry in and out of cases at a dizzying pace. Payne slipped rings on and off, and had Sbrocco doing the same.

Then, Payne was gone. And so was a \$36,000 marquis-cut, 2.48-carat diamond ring.

And so Doris Payne went about her work as an international jewel thief.

She glided in, engaging a clerk in one of her stories, and easily slipped out with a diamond ring, usually to a waiting taxi.

Gail Riddell, a retired Denver police detective, likens Payne to a character

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Doris Payne, in her cell in Las Vegas: "I don't know. I think the whole thing just got out of hand. It kind of went amok."

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