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\*\* Alderman \*\*  
**Michele Smith**  
Chicago's 43rd Ward



## My Personal Lincoln

Dear Friends,

As I age (today is my birthday, as well as Abraham Lincoln's), I continue to have much to learn from our 16th President.

Now that I've been alderman for about 18 months, I've had the opportunity to make many decisions. Some of these decisions have been applauded, but of course, it's part of the job to take complaints and criticism.

From the moment he emerged on the national stage, and throughout his Presidency, Lincoln was barraged with personal and political attacks and misrepresentations of his views.

Lincoln was relentlessly lampooned as a country bumpkin, an inept military commander, and a supporter of miscegenation (the period term for race-mixing). He was attacked for supposedly taking his pay in gold, while soldiers received worthless currency; satirized for his wife's spending, and was endlessly criticized for his many decisions made during the Civil War. As noted historian Harold Holzer has written, "American humorists portrayed the Civil War, to paraphrase Lincoln, with malice toward one - Lincoln himself."

In many ways, times were not so different from today. Before the internet and email chains, rumors and misinformation were often spread - by telegraph. According to one observer, "A nation can be liable to no more insidious treachery than that of the telegraph, sending hourly its electric thrill of panic along the remotest nervous of the community, till the excited imagination makes every real danger loom heightened with its unreal double."

Lincoln occasionally fumed over the lies. "If I were to read, much less answer, all the attacks made upon me, Lincoln wrote, this shop might just as well be closed for any business," he said.

But he generally reacted with his characteristic sense of humor. Lincoln replied that the taunts were but a "fair specimen of what has occurred to me through life. I have endured a great deal of ridicule without much malice; and have received a great deal of kindness, not quite free from ridicule. I am used to it."

But Lincoln persisted in doing what he felt right. "Dogs will bark at the moon," he said, "but I have never heard that the moon stopped on that account."

This is not to say that Lincoln thought he was always right. But it took reason, not demands, to change Lincoln's mind. "I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views," he wrote in a famous letter to Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune.

Lincoln also extended his hand in friendship, even to those who criticized him. "A man has no time to spend half his life in quarrels. If any man ceases to attack me I never remember the past against him."

And he knew that a good outcome is a target's best friend. "If the end brings me out right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten thousand angels swearing I was right wouldn't make any difference."

Lincoln endured criticism in the throes of the life and death issues of the Civil War and slavery. Facing today's challenges, we all try to do our best, hopefully avoiding mistakes, and taking criticism with a sense of proportion, and perhaps, humor.

Sincerely,



Michele Smith  
43rd Ward Alderman

P.S. For the sake of brevity, I have omitted sources, but of course this is derived from many sources. If you'd like a footnoted copy, just email me.

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