

**...West of 98**

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Governors shut down restaurants and then attended private parties at restaurants. Sadly, there are many other examples to list. As a community leader, I find them personally disturbing and infuriating.

I recently read Erik Larson's new masterpiece 'The Splendid and the Vile'. It tells the story of Winston Churchill becoming Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in the dark days of World War 2, then leading the British people through The Blitz, the brutal German aerial assault that lasted over a year, killed 40,000 civilians, and destroyed millions of homes. It is one of the best books I have read in years. To today's point, Churchill was an absolute master at reading the room. He understood the mood of the people and his constant radio addresses said what was needed in a given moment. Sometimes he was grim and brutally honest because the situation demanded it. Other times, the people were weary and he was rosy and optimistic to boost their spirits. Churchill was not the only such master in British leadership. King George VI and Queen Elizabeth famously stayed at Buckingham Palace throughout the War, even though the palace suffered NINE(!) direct hits from German bombs. The King and Queen constantly toured bombed areas to reinforce their care for the British people. I have written recently about Lincoln and the importance of empathy in leadership. The War was not won or lost because the royal family stayed in London, but their empathy surely mattered to the British people.

Not every leader is a Churchill or has historic levels of empathy. But there is a base standard we can expect and I'll leave you with a light-hearted description. On the NBC sitcom, "The Office" (a favorite of mine), clueless manager Michael Scott is preparing a speech to a business school class. He asks his top salesman, "what's the most inspiring thing I ever said to you?" The salesman, a deranged part-time beet farmer named Dwight K. Schrute, says, "Don't be an idiot. Changed my life." He then elaborates: "Whenever I'm about to do something, I think, 'would an idiot do that?' And if they would, I do not do that thing."

It sounds silly, but think about it. How many of our life decisions would benefit from us enacting that simple principle? How many leaders would benefit from it? Sometimes, leadership is just that easy. This world needs more Churchills and Lincolns. But at a very minimum, we need leaders who will read the room and abide by the Dwight Schrute Principle when they make decisions, especially in times of crisis. If they did, I bet we'd be a lot better off.

James Decker is the Mayor of Stamford, Texas and the creator

of the "West of 98" website and forthcoming podcast. Contact James and subscribe to these essays at [westof98.substack.com](http://westof98.substack.com).

**Biologists Examine Winter Weather Impact on Texas Wildlife**

As much of Texas has experienced historic winter weather, native wildlife populations throughout the state have also felt the impact. Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) reminds the public that many native wildlife species will be able to survive short durations of historic low temperatures and snow events. However, long-term impacts on a variety of wildlife and their habitats, especially on vegetation, may not be known for weeks.

Native Texas mammals, including white-tailed deer and coyotes, grow heavier winter coats that help them survive the colder weather. These winter coats are generally thicker and have a well-developed underlayer.

Other mammals, like bats, often migrate to where insects, a common food source, are or hibernate to wait out the winter, depending on the species. Bats that choose to hibernate will find a suitable cave or culvert to settle in. Squirrels will rely on food caches and nests to survive during winter months.

Birds have several strategies to help them survive cold weather. Multiple species will "fluff-up" their feathers to trap warm air. Birds will also flock to food sources to build up their energy reserves. Those that can build up fat stores and have had consistent, reliable sources of nutrition and suitable habitats are generally healthy and will make it through the winter. However, those that have little fat could have a more difficult time surviving the freezing temperatures.

The following observations have been reported by TPWD staff and the public regarding bird health and mortality due to the winter weather:

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