

Search for someone ‘good’ nearly reaching a crossroads

It may be hard to fathom, but there once was a time when there was a sense of civility in the political world, when compromise, cooperation, and constructive discourse were the operative words of the day.

It was an era when patriotism was a unifying force, and where respect for others was ingrained in our collective DNA.

Now, due largely to the disruptive tone set by a former president, the prevailing political mood is shaped by name-calling, mudslinging, and backbiting, the likes of which are instantly amplified by the unsettling and growing influence of social media as a political battleground.

The disturbing trend has only deepened the political divide in this country and leaves us to ponder the question, “Where have all the good people gone?”

In a somewhat different form, the question was posed by folk artist Pete Seeger in 1964 with his hit song, “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” which became an anthem for the anti-war movement during the Vietnam era.

At that time, like now, the country was split into two camps, bitterly divided over which political party was better equipped to bridge the divide without causing further calamity. It would take years to find some common ground, as Presidents Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and then Ronald Reagan each took a turn at striking a more congenial and conciliatory tone, attempting to reach across the political aisle to find bipartisan solutions to some of the most difficult economic, social, environmental, and military problems of the day.

President Reagan, who most

historians rank as one of the greatest communicators to ever occupy the Oval Office, was particularly skilled at the art of political compromise, regularly using his oratorical talents to convince a wary opponent of the wisdom of his legislative programs.

His skill at disarming an opponent was never more evident than during the 1984 presidential debate against former Vice President Walter Mondale. When pressed with repeated questions about his age, the 73-year-old Reagan displayed his comedic chops, responding that “I made a promise not to make age an issue in this campaign because I don’t want to use my opponent’s youth and inexperience against him,” prompting laughter even from the 56-year-old Mondale.

The willingness to use wit and wisdom, unfortunately, has given way in recent years to taunts and insults as the new means of political communication, further corroding the democratic process and threatening our moral values.

Much of the blame for that development rests at the doorstep of right-wing media outlets that revel in twisting the truth and stoking fear for the sake of boosting their TV ratings. Evidence of that has been unfolding over the last few months as damning e-mails and text messages from some of the biggest names at Fox News – Rupert Murdoch, Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson, and Laura Ingraham – have been made public as part of a \$1.6 billion defamation suit brought against the media giant by Dominion Voting Systems.

Dominion filed the case shortly after the 2020 president election when far-right Americans on social media and heavy hitters in the news media began making



baseless assertions that the company’s technology contributed to widespread voting fraud that deprived Donald Trump of a second term in office.

The e-mails and text messages make clear that Fox News and its anchors repeatedly and knowingly pushed the false claims, creating political and legal illusions at a scale seldom seen. It’s likely that more of their chicanery will be on display in the coming weeks when the case goes to trial in a Delaware court.

All this nonsense heightens the need for change and reform in an effort to restore truth and decency as the primary underpinnings of our political system so that policy debates and real governance can take place. Otherwise, we run the risk that extremists will continue their efforts to stifle dissent, roll back individual rights, eliminate fair elections, and consolidate power in the hands of their chosen few.

In his 1961 inaugural address,

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President John F. Kennedy issued a call to action, uttering the immortal words, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country."

His challenge helped inspire the creation of the Peace Corps, the transformational agency of American volunteers who over the past six decades have worked hand-in-hand with residents in impoverished areas around the world to create a better life and to foster a greater cultural understanding.

Kennedy's words also spurred man's exploration of space, highlighted by a lunar landing on July 20, 1969 that was celebrated globally as a stunning scientific and engineering achievement.

Those two milestones for mankind helped America become a hero to the world, a nation bound together by a unity of purpose and spirit that awaits a reawakening when those who are determined to do good emerge again.

Best regards,

Jack Buchanan, President